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## The Lifestyle of Jesus According to the Gospel of Mark

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# THE LIFESTYLE OF JESUS

According to the Gospel of Mark

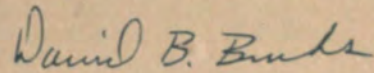


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David B. Burks, Ph.D.  
President, Harding University

THE LIFESTYLE  
OF JESUS

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# THE LIFESTYLE OF JESUS

According to the Gospel of Mark

*Harding University's 1988 Lectures  
Searcy, Arkansas*

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## FOREWORD

What greater study could arrest and hold our attention for three days than the lifestyle of Jesus according to Mark? How needful, yet how interesting and breathtaking! In this series (to use the title of Joe Schubert's new book), we are saying, "Mark, introduce us to the Master."

Such a theme as this takes us in two directions: in the direction of scholarship and in the direction of service. Both directions are vital and necessary for balance in the pursuit of genuine Christianity.

Scholarship is stressed as capable, Christian men bring the text of Mark to our hearts for the acceptance of truth, for Christian living which is not grounded in truth is disconnected from reality and divine authority. The obscure as well as the obvious passages of Mark are confronted in expository and topical studies.

Humble service in a world of need is accented by the lifestyle of Jesus. Scholarship without service is selfish and impractical. If sincere service of mankind does not emanate from what we do in our studies, our study has been faulty and our commitment has been shallow. The life of Christ stands before us not only as an inspiration but also as an indictment. Jesus will have nothing to do with a life of ease and indifference to a hurting world.

May Harding University's 65th annual lectureship lead us all to follow the teachings of the text and the ideal of the Servant of men.

Eddie Cloer  
Lectureship Director

# AN INTRODUCTION TO MARK

ALLEN BLACK

During the past one hundred years, the Gospel of Mark has entered the limelight of scholarship due to the widespread scholarly consensus that Mark was the first Gospel and was used by Matthew and Luke. However, in preaching and teaching in the church, Mark is commonly overshadowed by Matthew and Luke, which contain parallels to all but a few verses of Mark. This neglect is unfortunate. Mark's Gospel provides an exciting and challenging portrait of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.

For some purposes, Mark may be considered all the more powerful for its brevity. It can easily be read in a single sitting (ninety minutes or less), leaving the reader with a succinct portrait of Jesus' ministry and a powerful summons to take up his or her cross and follow.

This sort of reading is the best introduction to Mark and what I have to say here is only ancillary to it. Without such a reading, the following comments on Mark's historical setting, purpose, structure, themes, etc., will be incomplete.

## MARK AND PETER

The traditional title, "The Gospel According to Mark," receives early and strong support in ascribing this account of Jesus' ministry to Mark.<sup>1</sup> Especially important in this respect is the testimony of Papias, a leader in the church in Asia Minor, who attributes his information to "the elder" (presumably the elder John). Papias wrote in the first half of the second century, and "the elder" may take us back into the late first century. According to Papias, the elder said:

Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down

carefully, but not in order, all that he remembered of the Lord's sayings and doings. For he had not heard the Lord or been one of his followers, but later, as I said, one of Peter's. Peter used to adapt his teaching to the occasion, without making a systematic arrangement of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark was quite justified in writing down some things just as he remembered them. For he had one purpose only—to leave out nothing that he had heard, and to make no misstatement about it.<sup>2</sup>

Although Mark was a common name, Papias identifies this Mark as the companion of Peter. Peter speaks of him in 1 Peter 5:13 as "my son Mark." Presumably, this is the same Mark who is mentioned in Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39 and in three of Paul's letters (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11). In Acts, Mark, whose other name was John, first enters the picture as the son of Mary, a Christian woman whose house in Jerusalem was a place where Christians gathered to pray when Peter was imprisoned (Acts 12:12). Mark went with Paul and Barnabas on part of Paul's first missionary journey, but became a point of dispute between Paul and Barnabas at a later time with the result that Barnabas took his cousin Mark to Cyprus while Paul went another route. Paul's letters indicate a later reconciliation and appreciation for one whom he identifies as "very useful in serving me" (2 Timothy 4:11).

In spite of Mark's apparent residence in Jerusalem, Papias is probably to be trusted when he says that Mark neither heard nor followed Jesus, but received his information from hearing Peter. If this is correct, then to a certain extent we may justly consider this Gospel to be Peter's account. This link between Mark's Gospel and Peter's preaching is made repeatedly in the extant ancient testimony.<sup>3</sup> Peter is, of course, a prominent figure in Mark's Gospel. It is notable that we often see his weak side, although he is one of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples (Peter, James, and John) and he is the one who makes the well-known confession in chapter 8.

### MARK'S SITUATION

We can be rather confident that Mark wrote with a predomi-

nantly Gentile audience in mind. The most convincing evidences of this are his occasional explanations of Jewish customs. A key example is Mark 7:3-4: "For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands. . . ." Mark assumes his audience does not know this information, which would be commonplace for Jews. Further evidence is found in Mark's Greek translation of Aramaic or Hebrew words (e.g., Mark 15:22, "Golgotha, which means the place of the skull"). Some also see Mark's use of Latinisms as evidence for a Gentile audience. However, most of these involve military terminology that might be expected anywhere there were Roman soldiers.

The traditional location for Mark's Gospel is Rome, although the earliest clearly datable evidence for this tradition comes from Irenaeus, near the end of the second century.<sup>4</sup> It is hard to decide how much confidence to put in this tradition. However, most scholars accept the old tradition (probably traceable even to 1 Clement in the nineties) that Peter was martyred in Rome and consider Peter's reference to Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13 to be a cryptic reference to Rome. First Peter 5:13 would then seem to place Mark in Rome with Peter and, therefore, give some support to the traditional location.

Mark's Gospel is commonly dated in the sixties. For those who accept the connection with Peter and the Roman location, this date is commonly tied into Peter's martyrdom in the mid-sixties. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, both writing within a couple of decades of A.D. 200, provide support for a date in the sixties, although they differ as to whether Mark wrote after Peter's death (Irenaeus) or before it (Clement).<sup>5</sup>

To sum up, internal evidence within Mark itself strongly indicates a predominantly Gentile audience, while significant external evidence suggests that Mark wrote in Rome during the sixties. The key element in evaluating this external evidence is the likelihood of Mark's connection to Peter and of Peter's martyrdom in Rome.

It is possible that Mark may have been partially addressing the situation in Rome after the disastrous fire of A.D. 64. The fire destroyed nearly a quarter of the city, and many of the people blamed Nero, suggesting that he ordered the fire set in order to provide space for his own building projects. Nero

shifted the blame to the Christians and subjected large numbers of them to cruel and inhuman punishments ending in death. Tacitus says some were dressed in animal skins and torn apart by dogs, others were crucified, and others were used as torches to light up the night.<sup>6</sup> Nero conducted this slaughter as a public display, inviting large crowds to his gardens to watch the spectacle. Peter and Paul were probably among those killed in his scourge of the city.<sup>7</sup>

It is often suggested that Mark wrote in response to this persecution. There are, in fact, several features of Mark that can be viewed in this light. Of course, the plot of Mark's work focuses on the journey to the cross, with six of sixteen chapters given to the last week of Jesus' life. Furthermore, the major turning point in Mark's narrative occurs when Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ and Jesus begins to point to the cross and to call on his disciples to follow him by denying themselves and taking up their own crosses. In addition to these broad features, several individual passages would be clearly appropriate for encouraging those who suffered for Christ's sake (e.g., Mark 4:17, 8:34-38, 10:43-45, 13:9-13). Other instances, such as Peter's denial of Jesus, Judas' betrayal, or the presence of the wild beasts with Jesus in the wilderness, may take on a new light from the viewpoint of this possible background.

There are, however, two major drawbacks to this attractive view. One is that many parts of the book, such as the teaching on divorce in chapter 10, do not have direct relevance to encouraging persecuted Christians (although a high proportion can be loosely and indirectly related). Second, the Neronian persecution was apparently localized and perhaps fairly short-lived. Christians were not being killed empire-wide for being Christians *per se*, but rather in Rome for the charge of setting fire to the city.

The first observation suggests that Mark was concerned with more than encouraging persecuted Christians. The Gospel writers apparently wrote with the interests of preachers. Preachers are interested in a variety of spiritual situations found in the churches they serve, and even most modern twenty-minute sermons are not monolithic in their

concerns. Even though encouraging persecuted Christians was likely a chief concern of Mark, we should speak of his purposes in the plural.

The second observation (about the scope of the Neronian persecution) indicates that those features of Mark that suggest a situation of persecution may be better understood against a wider background than the Neronian persecution alone. Tacitus, in describing Nero's outburst against Christians, indicates that he was able to take advantage of already existing widespread anti-Christian sentiment in Rome.<sup>8</sup> Acts describes periodic outbreaks of persecution against Christians in various areas. First Peter indicates the presence of persecution in Asia Minor.

The fact that 1 Peter also focuses heavily on encouraging persecuted Christians may be especially pertinent in light of the traditional association of Mark's Gospel with the preaching of Peter. Peter himself responds to persecution with a letter rather than a Gospel. In one part of the letter, however, he refers to the life of Jesus, calling on Christians to endure their suffering "because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 4:21). This is the very point which Mark makes through the course of his narrative.

## THE SUFFERING SERVANT

One of the pervasive concerns of Mark is to portray Jesus Christ not only as the authoritative Son of God, but also and fundamentally as the Suffering Servant of God and of man.

From the opening verse, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1), it is clear that Mark wants to paint a portrait of Jesus. Although it is an obvious oversimplification, it is useful to look at Mark's portrait by emphasizing the key word in the first half of the book, "authority," and the key word in the second half, "service." But first we must see where the turning point is.

The pivotal center of Mark's Gospel is the confession by Peter in Mark 8:27-30 and the crucial discussion that follows

in 8:31-38. This section completes the first half of the book and begins the second. The turning point is the disciples' confession that Jesus is the Christ. The first half of the book leads to this confession; the second half builds on it and defines the role of the Son of Man as that of service unto death.

In Mark 1:1-8:30, the focus is on the authority of Jesus as exhibited in his miracles and teaching and in the testimony of others. John the Baptist says, "After me comes he who is mightier than I" (Mark 1:7). God declares, "Thou art my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11). Jesus summons fishermen, and they drop everything to follow him (Mark 1:16-20). When he teaches, the people are "astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority" (Mark 1:22). When he casts out demons, they declare, "With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27). The first eight chapters are permeated with features like these examples from the first chapter. Jesus' authority is repeatedly emphasized.

The question underlying most of these stories surfaces plainly in Mark 4:41, "Who is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" Who, indeed, is this one with such authority that his teaching transcends that of the scribes and the Pharisees, that he forgives sins, that he controls sickness, disease, demons, nature, and even death?

The resounding answer is already given to the reader in Mark 1:1, but is finally clear to the disciples in Mark 8:29. At this point a new stage is opened up: "And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things..." (Mark 8:31). The disciples do not readily grasp this understanding either. Peter immediately objects (Mark 8:32). Throughout the remainder of the book, Jesus repeatedly works with the disciples to try to get them to see that the Son of Man "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The fact that this authoritative figure who commanded nature, disease, demons, and death would submit to death in suffering service is a key theme permeating everything after Mark 8:31. Even though this second half of the book continues to emphasize Jesus' authority, the focus turns more and more

toward the cross. This focus is explicit in Jesus' own statements about his coming suffering (Mark 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:32-34, 45; 14:18-21, 24-25, 27, 41). The shadow of his death lies over the second half of the book in other ways as well. One thinks, for example, of the fate of the son in the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:6-8) or the anointing at Bethany (Mark 14:1-9) and of all the events from the Lord's Supper to the end of the crucifixion (Mark 14:12-15:47). In this second half of the book, Mark underscores the fact that the powerful, authoritative Son of God willingly submitted himself to the most shameful and inhumane of deaths because he had the heart of a servant.

## DISCIPLESHIP

The theme of Christology carried out in the emphasis on Jesus' authority and then his suffering service is brought to bear on Mark's readers' lives through the emphasis on discipleship. To submit to Jesus' authority involves following in Jesus' footsteps in suffering service.

This point is first enunciated in Mark 8:34-35 and then driven home by repetition, especially in Mark 9:33-37 and Mark 10:35-45. It is no accident that these sections of vital instruction on discipleship immediately follow three repetitions of Jesus' predictions regarding his own death in Jerusalem. Disciples are to be like their master.

In each of these three instances, Jesus' prediction is followed by immediate indication that the disciples are out of step with their Lord. In Mark 8:32, Peter even "rebukes" Jesus for what he said would happen. Having rebuked Peter, Jesus calls all the people together with his disciples and explains that what he plans to do bears not only on him but on what it means to be a follower: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

In the second instance, we are told that the disciples did not understand Jesus' prediction concerning himself (Mark 9:32), and we immediately see they did not grasp its implications for themselves. They are interested in establishing which of them is the greatest (Mark 9:33-34), but Jesus tells them that

followers of one who takes the role of a servant must be servants themselves (Mark 9:35).

The third instance is similar. Here, again immediately following a prediction concerning Jesus' death, James and John seek the chief places in the coming kingdom (Mark 10:35-37). Jesus' reply is explicit in the way it ties discipleship to Christology: "... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45).

If Mark wrote partially to encourage those who were threatened by persecution, the relevance of both the Christology and the discipleship themes here described is obvious. Mark's audience may have been faced with an only-too-literal opportunity to deny themselves and take up their crosses as servants of God and others. Mark's narrative-style sermon repeatedly encourages them not to be like the rocky soil in the parable of the sower, like those who "have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away" (Mark 4:17).

Even if the setting were not one of persecution, it is easy to imagine a situation in which Mark might wish to emphasize the nature of discipleship as willingness to follow Jesus in servanthood even at great personal sacrifice. In our own situation, we do not live with physical persecution, but we certainly need the same emphasis.

### READING MARK

What has been said here is meant to be preparation for reading Mark. I would like to conclude with specific suggestions about how to read in a more profitable way.

Mark's Gospel ought to be read as a sermon. It is useful to think of Mark as a divinely inspired preacher whose goal is to preach the gospel (cf. Mark 1:1) in a way that brings out important features for his congregation. There is no reason a sermon should not be cast in the form of recounting the story of

Jesus. The preacher then selects and arranges the events told according to the needs of the situation at hand. (That is why we have four Gospels, not just one.)

Mark's sermon has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is written as a unified story and should be read that way (at least some of the time). We would never consider studying the pieces of any other story without first reading the whole into which the pieces fit. Unfortunately, we generally read Scripture in a piecemeal fashion. Mark should be read in a single sitting as a unified whole with two main parts, hinging around Mark 8:27-28.

When Mark is read as a unified sermon, we can see the forest as well as the trees. Mark's Gospel then becomes a powerful summons to accept Jesus' authority and to follow him in the path of self-denial and service to others, whatever the cost. For Mark's original readers, the cost of such discipleship may have been the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, he did not hesitate to call on them to make it; for in the words of Jesus, "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8:36).

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See the evidence cited by William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 7-10.

<sup>2</sup>Papias' *Exegesis of the Lord's Oracles* is lost. The quote is preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 3. 39. 15.

<sup>3</sup>See Lane, *Mark*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>4</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3. 1. 2. Depending upon when one dates the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, it may provide slightly earlier testimony to a Roman origin.

<sup>5</sup>Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3. 1. 2; Clement of Alexandria as cited by Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 6. 14. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>Tacitus, *Annals* 15. 44.

<sup>7</sup>On the Neronian persecution and Peter and Paul, see F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1969), pp. 399-410.

<sup>8</sup>Tacitus.

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## JESUS, THE HAPPY SERVANT

LONDON SAUNDERS

For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

Why?

For centuries the question has been the same. For centuries the answer has been illusive. The question, a two-part one, is simple to frame: What is a person, and what should a person do?

The church struggles with the same question: What is a church, and what should a church do?

The question is important because it is central to every human being and every church. Because it is central to everyone, it is within everyone's reach.

But why does the answer seem so hard? Why does it take so long to understand? Perhaps it is because of blindness, or pride, or selfishness. Perhaps it is because our *experience* of the answer has been unattractive, ineffective, even manipulative.

What is the answer? Of course, the answer is contained in one word—*servant*.

No idea ever held so much hope for every human being in every walk of life. The idea is revolutionary in business, education, politics, professions of all kinds, is central to rich, enduring marriages, creates the environment for greatest growth in families. The word *servant* describes what we are and how we may become the greatest people we could ever be.

### THE GROUND OF SERVANTHOOD

Servanthood grows out of two great biblical stories: the creation and the incarnation.

### *The Creation Story*

The story of creation is presented in Genesis 1—3. Man is made in the "image of God" from the "dust of the ground." He is placed in the Garden of Eden "to till it and keep it." This sets the stage for the most royal presentation of man known in history.

In what way is man like God? He is like God in that he is master over a great estate. He imitates and mimics his Creator in his *responsible* care over creation. In this fascinating picture we have the ground set for seeing human beings as responsible stewards, as servants.

But this is not easily grasped in the Western world, particularly. It is hard for us to see *master* and *servant* in the same mix. We fail to see the rich implications of the polarity suggested here. In our approach, these two ideas are forever moving away from each other, even moving in opposite directions.

We tend to elevate the "master side" as the preferred one. Everything gravitates toward that—being the boss, the ruler, the king, the commander. The Western world regards this side of the question as the successful side. Human beings are successful when they wind up on the "top."

We have a hard time seeing the great master, king, general, commander, president, leader in *service* to the very thing he presides over. We fail to see that the master is truly great when he is in touch with the lowliest acts of mercy. The great commander may be called on to give his life for his troops. He is not there in service to his own praise; he manages his estate *for others*.

Failing to see this has made us view the Bible wrongly. When we read that man was given "dominion" over the earth, we have taken this as our "right" to exploit the earth. We exploit the land, the water, the air, the creatures. We take our being made in the image of God to mean that we can do anything we please.

We have carried such an approach to our treatment of human beings as well. The order of the day is to manipulate, exploit, lord over anyone or anything we can. So distorted has become our vision that we are no longer able to bring meaning

to the word *servant*.

*The servant concept of human beings really means that we are most in His image when we are behaving most responsibly as stewards or servants over all that we have been appointed over. Our basic work is to care for the people and things around us.*

The entire theology of the Old Testament grows directly out of this idea. It formed the basis for the development of the servant nation of Israel. And it lies at the very core of the message of the prophets: we have not done well in our stewardship of creation—not with our treatment of the land, not with our treatment of the human beings around us. Kings and common citizens are offenders alike. And for things to be righted again, we must return to the core story of man's place in the world—at all levels of existence he must act *responsibly*.

When we fail to grasp this, we become increasingly unhappy . . . and cynical . . . because we have missed the central concept that fulfills our lives.

#### *The Incarnation*

With this understanding of Old Testament background we are better able to appreciate Jesus' coming as *servant*. How appropriate!

Jesus was the Master who became servant in order to care for the estate over which he reigned.

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:5-7).

Nowhere is Jesus' self-understanding made any clearer than in John 13.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded (John 13:3-5).

Here is the perfect blend of master and servant, king and subject. Here is human wholeness. Here is the paradox of humanity finding expression in a beautiful, gracious act of kindness. Here is God. Here is man.

Again, we ask why. Why did Jesus do this?

Jesus did this because God cares so much for the earth and all that is in it. His "estate" had been devastated. He sent his Son as servant "to till and keep it." (Cf. Mark 12:1-12.) His Son gave his life in order to save the estate.

Jesus' view of nature reflects the beauty seen in Eden. He spoke lovingly of the birds of the air, grass, and lilies (cf. Matthew 5). His words re-enforced the importance of everything his Father had made. Earth itself mattered greatly to Jesus.

His servanthood extended to the "least" of human beings (compare his dealings with the poor widow, the blind and halt and maimed along with his comments in Matthew 25). He cared for those whom the "tenants" had rejected and cast out. His touch was gentle; his reach included all.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Jesus, then, acted in continuity with the Father's original vision for humanity and earth.

#### THE PROMISE OF SERVANTHOOD

What meaning does this have for us?

*First, Christians today need to serve out of a great vision that includes all the earth and everything in it. It is all God's. We are stewards over it all. In this stewardship we act as creatures made in his "image." We carry out that image when we imitate*

and mimic him in his care for everything he has made.

When we act out of a smaller vision, we "sectarianize" and "secularize" ourselves. It is even possible for us to be so deeply imbedded in the concerns of the church that we miss the glory and happiness found in fulfilling God's purpose for us as stewards over all his earth.

Christians care about whether our air is polluted. We care about the wanton destruction of God's creatures. We are concerned about keeping our streams pure for the creation God put there. We care about beauty, health, music, and ecological faithfulness to all that the Lord our God has made.

Christians care about what happens to *all* human beings. We care about hunger, disease, fear, nakedness, imprisonment, drugs, and AIDS. We care about those who have no voice. We care about every human being and deeply believe there is no insignificant human life.

We encourage people to serve at every level of society. Our universities, like Harding University, care about *all* the curriculum. Those preparing for service in business, in environmental issues, in medicine, in the arts, in evangelism—all of these serve mankind. Those who serve in these areas are all stewards of the Most High God. None is more significant than another. We sever these tasks from God's purpose for all creation to our peril.

*Second, we find happiness and fulfillment in our identification with the servanthood God gave us.* Too many people feel less important to God because they are not in "full-time ministry." Too many feel that the contribution they make to humanity—whether through farming, medicine, manufacturing, or child rearing—is somehow less important than the work done by those who have offices in our church buildings.

As a result, churches today are filled with people who feel empty and insignificant, people who are not experiencing the intensity of *feeling alive* in what they do every day. This is a great energy loss, a distortion of biblical understanding, a great injustice to Christians.

A human being is most happy when most imitating the God in whose image we are each made. We are most happy when we take our places as stewards and servants in the Garden of

God's beautiful earth. We are most happy when we see ourselves in the midst of our everyday work, carrying out our Father's intentions. We are his children. We work for him. There is a lot involved in keeping and tilling the earth. And everything that is involved is loaded with significance. And so we find our happiness . . . at every conceivable level of human life and society.

*Third, servanthood is the way through the natural dilemmas, confusions, and mysteries that characterize human life.* Life is confusing.

Because Jesus was a servant, he knew what he should do for the paralytic. The scribes, on the other hand, misconstrued the entire situation, believing Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy for saying, "Your sins are forgiven." We complicate many situations by not understanding, instinctively, the behavior of the servant (Matthew 9:1-8).

Later, he ate with tax collectors and sinners. Servants do this naturally. Only those whose religious orientation is based on law or tradition misunderstand. The servant understands the words, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:10-13).

The servant heart does not misunderstand picking grain on the Sabbath to alleviate hunger. This becomes a problem when we forget what is most important in this world—serving people (Matthew 12:1-8).

So often, lives are passed over, abused, mistreated, neglected because we cannot figure out all the ins and outs of this Scripture or that one. Human lives fall through the cracks of our biblical discussions.

When relationships become extremely difficult, the Christian centers on one thing: how to keep on serving. It is always right to serve. Our service is not based on the behavior of another. We serve because that is who we are. And our service extends to the ungrateful and the unjust—just as our heavenly Father's does (Matthew 5:43-48).

Servanthood describes our nature. When we seek to realize this nature, we come to know ourselves. We find happiness.

May the day come quickly when God's people recover the power and beauty of servanthood. God speed the day when the

world will see once more God's children taking the lead in caring for the earth, in caring for the people of the earth, in caring for the future of the earth.

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## THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL

(Mark 1:1-15)

ROGER JOHNSON

Mark is perhaps the earliest of the Gospel writers. His writing has all the vitality, directness, and pace of a twentieth-century newspaper. Using information supplied by Peter, Mark speaks as graphically as an eyewitness of the events that took place. Names, numbers, times, and locations spring from each page at breathtaking speed. Mark's main thrust is to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who serves man and the Son of Man who saves man.

Mark's opening sentence is reminiscent of the profound and awesome opening line of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Mark wastes no time in announcing "the beginning of the gospel" (Mark 1:1). While Matthew begins with the pedigree and nativity of the Messiah, Luke with the parentage and nativity of the forerunner, and John with the pre-existence of the Messiah, Mark begins with the early work of the forerunner.

It is uncertain whether the opening verse is a general title for the entire book or whether it indicates what immediately follows. Lenski and others believe that these words must be considered the title of the entire Gospel. The absence of the definite article preceding "beginning" is cited in support of this position. However, Mark may not be thinking so much of a title for his book or even a heading for its initial section as of the actual commencement in time of the things themselves. The life of Christ from the preaching of the forerunner to the resurrection of Christ was the beginning of glad tidings which spread rapidly and widely.

The message of the Gospel centers in a Person whom Mark identified with a threefold designation. "Jesus" means Jehovah is salvation; that is, the one through whom Jehovah effects His

salvation. "Christ" is equivalent to "Messiah," meaning the Anointed One. The designation "Son of God" expresses Jesus' unique relation to God. Some early manuscripts omit this latter designation from the text of Mark, but it is certainly in harmony with the fact that Mark constantly ascribes divine qualities and activities to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Following the prologue, Mark shifts from announcer to advocate. In verse 1 he puts his purpose on the line. Can he prove his case? He begins his case with the presentation of character witnesses whose testimony leaves no doubt that Jesus has the credentials to begin his ministry as the servant Lord.

#### ANNOUNCED BY MAN (Mark 1:2-8)

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mark 1:2-3).

The transition between Mark's prologue and his test is a quotation from the prophecies of Malachi and Isaiah. It is interesting that Mark nowhere else personally quotes Scripture, with the exception of 15:28, which is omitted in the oldest manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Mark was not in the habit of pointing out the fulfillment of Scripture because the Gentile readers for whom he wrote were not familiar with the Old Testament.

The prophecy in these verses is a composite of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Both are apt pictures of the kind of preparatory work which John was to do for Jesus by kindling a mood of expectancy and calling men to repentance. The quotation from Malachi speaks of a herald going on ahead of the king to summon people to make ready for his coming. The reference to Isaiah is taken from that section of the book which initially referred to Judah's return from Babylonian captivity. Mark applies Isaiah's words to the Messiah. There is, also, a slight difference of emphasis in Mark's quotation of Isaiah. In Isaiah the text reads, "Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord," as though the herald were summoning the king's subjects to repair the rough track across the wilderness. In Mark

there is a modification. "In the wilderness" becomes the place where the voice is heard, rather than where the road needs repair. This slight variation emphasizes the fact that John's preaching took place in the wilderness. He did not go to the people in their crowded cities, but they went out to him as he spoke near the fords of the river Jordan.

Why did Mark only refer to Isaiah when there are two prophecies quoted? Eusebius believed that the word "Isaiah" was an erratum which should have read "Malachi." Porphyry, an early enemy of Christianity, cast it in the teeth of Christians that Mark had made a mistake. Meyer thinks there is a mistake and that the evangelist's memory must have been at fault. Cole believes that Mark takes his quotation from an early Jewish collection of texts relating to the Messiah. Hendriksen says that this method of quotation, namely, mentioning by name only one source when the reference is to two, is not peculiar to Mark. He cited Matthew 27:9-10 as another example. Morrison's solution of the case is that the passage from Malachi is strictly preliminary. It is the mere porchway through which the reader is ushered into the quotation from Isaiah.

The suggestion that Mark was erroneous or mistaken questions the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. The ultimate consequence of such a position would be to discount the Bible as God's word altogether.

The second character witness who provides testimony regarding the credentials of Christ is John the Baptist. Mark's gospel is a greatly compressed account of John's work (Mark 1:4-8). He omits all reference to John's birth and ancestry, and at once begins with his preparatory ministry. John's ministry took place "in the wilderness." Mark adds no further description. Matthew identified it as "the wilderness of Judea" (Matthew 3:1), the rugged area west of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. This is the district in which David wandered when pursued by Saul. In later times its numerous limestone caves were the abode of many hermits.

John's message had a sense of urgency and imminence concerning the coming Messiah. He prepared the Jews for the coming of Christ by preaching "a baptism of repentance"; that

is, a baptism characterized by repentance. His baptism was not intended to induce repentance, but rather was administered to those who were penitent (cf. Matthew 3:7-10). Repentance is more than grief or regret for sin; it is a deep change of mind, an altered attitude toward sin which has its fruit in a deliberate change of conduct for the better (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10). The spiritual end in view in submitting to John's baptism was "the forgiveness of sins." Such forgiveness is based on the vicarious sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The widespread impact of John's ministry was profound. Everyone in the area rushed to hear this unusually dressed individual whose unique message was spoken with such power and conviction. It is difficult to estimate the enthusiasm caused by the hope that, after centuries of silence, Jehovah was again speaking to his people through a prophet. Mark pictures a continuing procession of candidates, one after the other, coming to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. At the time of their baptism they confessed their sins, which marked the reality of their repentance.

John's plain and simple dress and diet marked him as being in the rugged tradition of an Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 1:8). He was a Nazarite from birth (Luke 1:15), and his lifestyle was consistent with the ascetic character of a lifelong Nazarite. His diet of locusts is still eaten in the desert. Prepared in various ways, they are said to taste like shrimp.

John was overwhelmed by the feeling of unimportance when compared with the Coming One, but he continually pointed to him (Mark 1:7-8). His personal feeling of unworthiness to perform the most menial service for the Lord is strongly stated in verse 7. He also noted the superior character of the coming baptism. John's was with water; Christ's would be with the Holy Spirit. This promise of the Spirit was a well-known feature of the prophecies concerning the Messianic age (Joel 2:28-29). Visibly fulfilled at Pentecost, Peter in his sermon used the evidence as proof that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Acts 2:32-33).

Mark appeals to the prophetic utterances of Malachi and Isaiah and the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist to announce the appearance of the Messiah. Man's testimony

alone, however, would be insufficient; hence, Mark next describes the divine affirmation of Jesus as the Christ.

### AFFIRMED BY GOD (Mark 1:9-11)

Having skillfully pictured the preparatory work for Christ's coming, Mark briefly records the beginning of his ministry. In his eagerness to press on to the story of the actions of the Messiah, these preliminary events are given in the barest detail. Mark simply records the fact of Jesus' baptism by John (Mark 1:9) and relates two attendant events which confirmed his identity as the Messiah (Mark 1:10-11).

The readers of Mark have been brought very early to a peak of expectancy. John had announced the imminent appearance of the Mighty One, and at once he appeared. Mark writes nothing of his birth or childhood. He came, as a grown man, from Nazareth in Galilee, ready to begin his appointed work. His first public act was to be baptized at the hands of John.

Jesus came to John "in those days," a rather vague note of time. It is supposed that the Lord's baptism occurred during a Jewish sabbatical year, when the people, being freed from agricultural duties, would be specially at liberty to follow a new teacher. Hendriksen, however, suggests that this phrase probably indicated the height of John's baptizing activity (cf. Luke 3:21). In either case, Jesus came to be baptized of John; not through any consciousness of sin, but through a desire to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15), that is, to fulfill every ordinance of God for his people.

Immediately after Jesus came up out of the water there were two significant events which confirmed Jesus' identity as Messiah. The first event was visible (Mark 1:10), the second audible (Mark 1:11).

The first of two things seen by Jesus was the heavens being torn apart. What, if anything, Jesus saw beyond the rending heavens is not indicated. The second visible experience of Jesus was the Holy Spirit, as a dove, descending upon him. It was customary in ancient times for a king or priest to be anointed at the time of his appointment to office. Jesus was now being anointed by God through the Spirit (cf. Luke

4:16-19).

This visible experience was followed by an audible one. A voice from heaven spoke: "Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11). The Speaker is made clear by what the voice says. On two other occasions, at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:7) and the Lord's last week (John 12:28), such an audible voice spoke to Jesus from heaven. All came at great turning points in his life.

In no uncertain terms the Father confirms the incarnate Christ to be his Son in contradistinction to all others. The term "beloved" is used at times with the sense of "only." That would be doubly appropriate here.

It is interesting that the entire Godhead is revealed in this scene. At the moment when the Son came up out of the water, heaven suddenly opened wide and the Spirit descended on him. The Father then made his heavenly proclamation of Christ's sonship. It is little wonder that no shadow of doubt ever obscured the Lord's consciousness of his identity at any time during his earthly ministry. Jesus' credentials now include the affirmation of God to go along with the announcement of John the Baptist and the prophets.

#### ACKNOWLEDGED BY SATAN (Mark 1:12-13)

Immediately following his baptism, Jesus was "impelled" to go into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. There is no time to bask in the glorious presence of his Father. Turned in his tracks as soon as he stepped out of the water, Jesus found himself compelled to leave the glory and the glamor of the cool and crowded banks of the Jordan River for the heat and loneliness of the desert. Mark's expression that Jesus was driven into the wilderness does not mean that he was forced against his will, but that he went with a strong sense of the Spirit's compulsion upon him.

A fuller account of the temptation is given in Matthew and Luke. However, Mark is the only one who mentions the wild beasts. Basically, the temptations were attempts to make Jesus doubt the truth of the voice he had just heard, or to misuse the powers committed to him. To the insidiously

attractive suggestions, Jesus must say "No." He could triumph as the Messiah only if he were willing to suffer as a servant.

The victory having been won, Christ's actual ministry of preaching, teaching, healing, and casting out demons could now begin. Mark's account of Christ's ministry begins with his work in Galilee. There may well have been an interval of about a year between Christ's temptation and his arrival in Galilee. It is the Gospel of John which provides the details of this "year of obscurity."

Mark suggests that Jesus began his public ministry only after John had been put into prison. He had refrained from any action that might suggest rivalry, but John's arrest was the signal for him to step out into the open. The summary statement of Jesus' message is found in verse 15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel."

Announced by man, affirmed by God, and acknowledged by Satan, Jesus has his credentials in order for the opening of his public ministry. No one can dispute his qualifications or his references as Christ, the Son of God.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The phrase is omitted by Sinaiticus and some Oriental versions. Tischendorf likewise omitted it in his 8th edition. It is lacking in an important quotation of the passage by Irenaeus, as also in five distinct quotations of Origen. In support of its inclusion in the text, the phrase is found in Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, Codex Bezae, and in the great mass of the manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup>The earliest and best witnesses of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text lack verse 28.

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## AS ONE WITH AUTHORITY

(Mark 1:16-45)

JACK REESE

In the closing years of the twentieth century, America seems less religious than it used to be. That is not to say that this country was ever an overtly Christian nation. But our national roots are firmly planted in religious soil. Religious concerns have helped determine the course of national affairs. The sheer number of church buildings built over the past two centuries speaks of a high interest in the practice of religion. But those buildings are emptier now than they were even a few years ago. Americans are just not as interested in religion as they used to be.

Citizens seem less and less concerned with religious values and practices. Our nation has become increasingly immoral. It is difficult to adhere to moral principles and rear morally-upright children in such an environment. And as Christians we are deeply concerned.

Those of us who are committed to Christian values have learned to treasure our religious experiences even more highly. We who meet here today are consciously religious. Most of us have an extensive religious background. We have strong religious ties. We are willing to defend our religious heritage and practices.

We have many religious habits and participate in a variety of religious practices: We go to church every week (and may even be leaders in our congregations), we have well-nurtured consciences, we consider religious values when we make decisions, we get married in religious ceremonies, and we are buried after religious funerals.

Being religious is part of our identity—and rightly so. We cannot imagine life without our religion.

All of this helps us to understand the religious environment

of Mark's Gospel. In this Gospel (as in the others), almost everyone is religious. The people are concerned with religious things. They participate in religious festivals and are a part of synagogue and temple life.

Throughout Mark we encounter many religious functionaries: priests, teachers of the Law, religious leaders who are respected in their communities and who are highly influential. They lead the people in the way of religion. They call them to religious values, urge them to purer religious practices.

It is clear that the world into which Jesus entered at the beginning of his public ministry was very religious. The people have a distinct religious consciousness.

But somehow in that world, Jesus' words and actions were incredible. They were amazing. The people in Mark's Gospel were constantly astonished.

Simon, Andrew, James, and John follow Jesus immediately when asked (Mark 1:16-20). Any way you look at it, this is a strange and unexpected response. There is something compelling about this man.

In Capernaum, Jesus teaches in a synagogue, and the people are amazed (Mark 1:22). He casts out an evil spirit from a man there in the synagogue and again they are amazed (Mark 1:27), and the "word spread quickly."

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law. The people begin bringing their sick and troubled. On one occasion, Jesus escapes the crowds in order to pray. But his disciples find him and remind him, "Everyone is looking for you." That is the story of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee.

But why are they so amazed?

Look carefully at what Mark is saying throughout this Gospel. Mark is constantly addressing the problems inherent in religion: the ineffectiveness of religious practices, the powerlessness of religious leaders.

In Mark, perhaps the greatest symbol of religion is Jerusalem. In this Gospel, nothing good happens in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the symbol of empty, powerless religion. Jerusalem ultimately kills Jesus. The disciples mostly come from Galilee, not Jerusalem. They are the outsiders, the dispossessed, not the powerful religious leaders.

So as Jesus teaches and performs mighty works among the people in Galilee, they are amazed. Mark makes the contrasts clear: Unlike the religious leaders in Jerusalem, unlike the doctors of the Law, Jesus spoke "as one with authority" (Mark 1:22, 27). In the midst of impotent religion, Jesus acted with power. He radically changed whatever he touched. That is why they marveled.

To see that unfolding story in Mark ought to frighten us a bit because we are also religious people. We are involved in all kinds of religious practices and behavior. If Jesus' teaching and ministry stands in such vivid contrast to the religious establishment of his day, we ought to be concerned.

This is not to say that religion is inherently dangerous or that it is ultimately irrelevant. Mark is certainly not advocating that any of us should be irreligious or abandon the church. Our involvement in the church is crucial to our salvation. We will never be saved apart from it.

But Mark's message is clear. Jesus' life and teachings are too apparent: *Religion simply will not save you.* Your participation in the activities of the church will not save you. Religion is powerless. It has no authority in directing and changing your life.

If you rely on your religion—your religious life, religious practices, religious ties, religious experiences—your spiritual life is destined to failure. Religion is not capable of sustaining you.

Religion will not keep you sexually pure before marriage.

Religion will not keep you from experimenting with alcohol and "recreational" drugs.

Religion will not prevent you from pursuing life in the wealthy, white, *yuppie* suburbs. (In fact, it may call you there.)

Religion will not blunt your drive to think of yourself first, before all other things and people.

Religion will not dampen the fires of racism within your life or within your church.

Religion will not prevent a young mother from destroying the life of her unborn child.

It will not be religion that keeps your marriage from dissolving during the difficult times.

Religion is concerned with appearances. It is concerned with respectability. Religion views the outside of a person and establishes appropriate rules of behavior. That is all religion can do.

There is no power, no authority in religion.

You can teach every week in Bible school, lead songs and pray, be a Bible major at a Christian college, teach evangelistic Bible studies, preach, or even be an elder—you can do all this and more—and still have no real power, no spiritual authority for your life.

The world is full of all kinds of people, religious people, who do many good works but who have no power to cope in difficult circumstances, whose lives have not been significantly affected by their religious practices. Until you are encountered by the living Christ, your involvement in religion will guarantee nothing.

But within the walls of religion Jesus comes. He teaches us as he taught in the synagogue that day. He speaks to us with the same authority as he did to the evil spirit: "Be quiet." He releases us, changes us, and gives us a new identity so that we are not merely religious—we are followers of Jesus.

He transforms our religion into the very kingdom of God. So we marvel. We are amazed at one with such power, such authority. And we are changed.

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## GROWING CONTROVERSY IN GALILEE

(Mark 2:1—3:6)

RICHARD ROGERS

Today there is a nearly psychopathical fear of controversy. We are afraid of any conflict. We compromise, give in, give over, give up our convictions to avoid all dispute. Paul did say, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:24-25). The resources to overcome conflict are kindness, gentle living and teaching.

### THE CONTROVERSIAL CHRIST

There was always a storm of controversy and conflict about Jesus after he was baptized and began his work. It began in the wilderness, where for forty days Jesus fought for his life, not with wild beasts or angels (Mark 12—13), but with Satan himself. The conflict in Eden with the first Adam is now begun again with the second Adam. Watch! The outcome will be different this time! From this moment to the place of the skull, the storm will increase.

The Prince of Peace is constantly at war. He was comfortable riding on a lowly donkey (Matthew 21:1-11) and is naturally fitted to a white charger of Judgment (Revelation 19:11-16). A crown of thorns fit well his head, but ruling diadems are rightfully his (Revelation 19:12). He is the meek and lowly Galilean; he is also King of kings and Lord of lords, leading his army into battle against hell's dread foe (Revelation 17:14). He was in controversy over the misuse of the temple (John 2:12-22; Matthew 21:12-13), his relationship with God (John 6:25-59; 8:48-59), his miracles (John 10:19-21), his deity (John 10:22-39), and every other thing about his nature, human and divine.

This controversial character of Christ is still being discussed hotly today. To some, Jesus is only a wise teacher, to others, a fine example, to some, the best of God's sons. Some want Jesus as their Savior but are not interested in him being their Lord. Some accept his teaching but deny his miracles. Others follow his examples of benevolence but refuse his commission to tell all men his story. To those who truly want to honor him as Lord, to follow his example and believe his claims, the resurrection proves him the Lord and not a liar or lunatic (the only other two alternatives).

Our text is one of the many examples of the controversy surrounding Jesus' ministry. This one is the first conflict in Mark's book. This section deals with four areas of contention: (1) Jesus' claim to be God, (2) his acceptance of sinners, (3) his joyous lifestyle, and (4) his concern for people above the rules.

### JESUS CLAIMS TO BE GOD

Even a cripple has friends! In Mark 2:1-12, four men come bearing their crippled friend on his mat. The crowd around Jesus has now filled and overflowed the house where Jesus was staying. No one will give way and let the four in to see Jesus. Being blessed by Jesus was more important to them than seeing to it that the most needy were first served. But the four are resourceful. They decided the roof offered the best access to the Healer.

The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It was regularly used as a place of rest and quiet, and so usually there was an outside stair which ascended to it. The construction of the roof lent itself to what this ingenious four proposed to do. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. . . . It was the easiest thing in the world to dig out the filling . . . it did not even damage the house very much, and it was easy to repair the breach again. . . . When Jesus saw their faith that laughed at barriers he must have smiled an understanding smile.<sup>1</sup>

The Lord is a friend too! The theology of Israel would declare this man to be a cripple because of his sins (cf. John 9:1-5). Jesus wanted him to know that God was not punishing him. So he said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). Now, he had no sin, but he was still a cripple. Notice Jesus' words: "*Son!*" How intimate! You and I are cut out of the same mold! That is what Jesus tells him. "*Forgiven!*" How divine! His greater need has now been met. He is right with God!

Religion is not always a friend! "Why does this fellow talk like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7.) There is absolutely nothing wrong with their theology. Only God can forgive sins. It is their Christology that is wrong! Jesus is God! He is not just man. This questioning spirit will grow into doubt, then into hate, and finally into a plot to kill Jesus.

Jesus is a friend who knows! He knows, first of all, the hearts of the critics. "Why are you thinking such things?" He knows, then, how to get to the bottom of things logically. "Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?'" By the critic's stated belief the man could not be healed unless forgiven. So either of the actions stated, healing or forgiveness, would be impossible unless Jesus be God.

Jesus is a divine friend!

"But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all.

The critics were hung on their own gallows. He *was* cured; therefore, he *was* forgiven; therefore, Jesus is God! Of course, by claiming this, even more by proving it, Jesus has signed his own death warrant, but he did not care. This friend was more important than life. A man lays down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

Jesus gains more friends! "This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" This is the beginning of the crowd's move toward saving faith. Of course, it is immature! But is that not how all great faith

begins? In time this group will become the church in the book of Acts and shake the Roman Empire off the throne!

### JESUS ACCEPTS SINNERS

We turn from those who were only thought to be sinners to those who were renown to be sinners.

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

Jesus associates with one of society's outcasts. He not only associates with him; he calls him to the highest position in Jesus' party—the apostolate! Compare Matthew 9:9 to see that Levi is Matthew the apostle.

What a thrill this revelation is! Jesus intentionally chooses the hated and lowly for his loving and high work. Notice how immediately magnetic this approach is.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

These were Jewish people like himself who did not follow the Law or appear to have much interest in religion. These were the very people Jesus has come to seek and save (Luke 19:10). Somehow, we need to reach this strata of people today, and they will be anxious to share their faith.

The critics are still there!

When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

Still more concerned with their rules and traditions than with hurting people, they will be excluded from the benefits of the Messiah.

Jesus is the Great Physician! "It is not the healthy who need a

doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners," was Jesus' reply to the Pharisees' unbelief. These "sinners" may have been withdrawn from by Jewish religion, but they were still Jesus' "patients." He would heal them from all their "soul diseases" by his marvelous death. He comes to us in our need. He effects total healing. He sends no bill. It is paid in full! It is without cost! But he cannot heal the Pharisees. They refuse to know him. They refuse to trust him. They will not admit they need him.

### JESUS BRINGS JOYFUL LIVING

Religion, even when it is of God, does not normally bring abundant joy to life. It had not to the Jew who was trying with all his heart to live up to the Law. It had not, even, to those Jews who accepted the preaching of John the Baptist. "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" The Pharisee fasted to call attention to his righteousness (Matthew 6:16-18). John's disciples probably fasted in imitation of their teacher. Remember, there is only one fast day commanded in all the Bible—the Day of Atonement. All other fasting is a matter of human need and/or tradition.

Jesus is the Bridegroom! So feast, not fast!

How can guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

Jesus makes again a claim to be God, their Lord, Jehovah. Read Isaiah 54; Hosea 1—3; Jeremiah 3:14, 31:32. These passages plainly state that Jehovah is the bridegroom of his people. When a Jewish couple married, they did not hurry away on a honeymoon. They remained at home, and their closest friends were invited to feast and rejoice with them for an entire week. Many times those seven days were the happiest days that couple would ever know. Even if the Day of Atonement was in that week, they all would still feast. They were exempt from fasting.

However, there is still a cloud on the horizon. In this descrip-

tion of great joy there is still a shadow—cross-shaped. At the very beginning Jesus saw the cross just ahead. He counted the cost. He chose the way. He moved toward the hill. What courage! What love! He would sing the whole song—even the last verse—on the tree!

We need to stay young in mind to be joyous of heart!

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one puts new wine into old wine skins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.

There is a veiled threat in this passage. If our minds are set and settled, then there is no way that God can pour the new wine of his unsettling, life-changing gospel into our hearts. Old ways seem good (Luke 5:39). There is a way that seems right unto man (Proverbs 14:12). While loving the old, we must be open to the new, even new ways of doing old things. Read Hebrews 11, and see that all these great men and women were “new wine” folk.

### JESUS IS CONCERNED WITH PEOPLE MORE THAN RULES

The Sabbath was only given to Israel. It was a day to remember that they had been delivered by God from Egypt's tyranny and bondage (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). When Jesus began to openly violate their Sabbath traditions (not God's Sabbath law), it was an open declaration of war on the religious establishment. He did not do so because he loved conflict, but because he loved people. Their traditions were making void God's law of love (Matthew 15:7-9).

As his disciples pick grain on the Sabbath, the critics are there again. “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” On any other day this would be totally permissible but, in their eyes, not today. In Jewish traditions, work had been defined under four headings: reaping, winnowing, threshing, and preparing a meal. The disciples had done all

four and were, therefore, law breakers.

On another Sabbath, with the critics looking on hoping he would violate the law, Jesus calls for a man with a withered hand to “stand up in front of everyone.” Jesus does not intend for anyone not to see what is about to occur.” He then asks the critics, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” He intends to do good—heal the man. They intend to do evil—trap and judge Jesus. He intends to save this man's life from continued frustration. They intend to kill Jesus no matter the cost. “But they remained silent.” So Jesus heals the man. They stomp away in anger, make an unholy alliance with the irreligious Herodians, and plan Jesus' death.

Jesus makes three arguments to justify these two actions on the Sabbath day. First he shows that David's action in eating the shewbread at Nob was unlawful yet allowed because a man's hunger takes precedence over ritual requirement. Second, he states the general principle that the Sabbath (i.e., the Law) was made for man (to benefit him) and not man for the Sabbath. All of God's rules are made for the benefit of God's sons. Third, Jesus boldly states that it is always right to do the good for the benefit of the most. God never wrote a law that was intended to enslave or endanger man, his greatest creation.

### CONCLUSION

There is so much in this section of Scripture that we have glossed it over. Please read and re-read these paragraphs, and let God's Spirit through them open your heart to deeper understanding.

The main points to remember so that we can endure all conflicts are: (1) Jesus is God, (2) he accepts sinners, (3) he wants us to live joyfully, and (4) people are ultimate—not rules. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ.”

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*. The Daily Study Bible Series, 9th ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1969), p. 39-40.

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## THE UNFORGIVEABLE SIN

(Mark 3:20-30)

JIMMY ALLEN

Years ago, I read a tract dealing with the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I do not have exact recollection as to who wrote it, but I think it was done by Perry Cotham. I refer to the tract to acknowledge that some of the thoughts presented here were derived from it then.

## WHAT THIS SIN IS NOT

Many different interpretations have been given to the Lord's remarks which will not fit into the context of his discussion with the scribes of the Pharisees (Mark 3:22; Matthew 12:24). A few of these are mentioned below.

First, it is clear that Jesus did not have murder under consideration. Moses murdered a man (Exodus 2:11-12), but we know he was eternally saved because he appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord in glory (Matthew 17:1-7). Those who committed blasphemy against the Spirit were never forgiven (Mark 3:29), but Moses was forgiven of murder; therefore, murder is not the unforgiveable sin. This same conclusion can be reached by noting that Paul was a murderer, and he was forgiven (Acts 7:58, 8:1, 22:16, 26:10). Furthermore, Jesus prayed for his killers (Luke 23:34), and some of them were forgiven (Acts 2:23, 36-41).

Second, this sin is not suicide. Nothing in the context indicates that self-destruction is what Jesus had in mind. As a matter of fact, the Lord's statement about such people not being forgiven in this age or in the age to come (Matthew 12:32; RSV) implies they continued to live after committing the sin. If, in the taking of his life, one is in rebellion to the will of God (and this would appear to be the case in most instances),

his sin would not be pardoned as there would be no opportunity for repentance. However, suicide is not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Third, the unforgiveable sin is not simply backsliding. In the history of the Christian movement, some have taken the position that a child of God who falls away can never be restored to his first love. This view likely grew out of the fact that some Christians fell away during a time of persecution and wanted to get back into the fellowship of the church after the hardship ended. Those who remained loyal to Jesus during the persecution did not want to allow them to return. (It is easy to sympathize with this attitude.) Tertullian championed the concept that a backslider could not return to Christ. Hebrews 6:4-6 is sometimes appealed to in support of this position. Of course, it is true that some go so far in their flight from the Lord, they cannot repent. However, this does not mean all backsliders reach the point of no return. We know it is possible for a brother to err from the truth and again be converted to the Savior (James 5:19-20). The apostle Peter was restored (Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-17). It may have been possible for Simon the Sorcerer, a fallen disciple, to find forgiveness (Acts 8:5, 12-13, 20-24). Just because a sin is unpardoned does not mean it is unpardonable.

Fourth, this sin does not appear to be a continual rejection of the gospel of Christ until death. One can harden himself to the love of God and be eternally lost (1 Timothy 4:1-2; Hebrews 3:12-13; Ephesians 4:19; 2 Peter 2:14). A continual rejection of Jesus as the Savior and blasphemy against the Spirit are alike in that each will lead to eternal condemnation. However, I think it is possible for one to harden his heart and reject the truth without committing blasphemy against the Spirit.

Fifth, nothing in the context of Mark 3:20-30 which even remotely hints that the unforgiveable sin is sexual immorality. The woman taken in adultery was not condemned by the Lord (John 8:1-11). Some in the church at Corinth had been guilty of fornication, adultery, and homosexuality prior to their conversion (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). However, they were washed, sanctified, and justified.

Sixth, this sin is not simply blasphemy. The name of God

was blasphemed among the Gentiles (Romans 2:24), but it would appear that some of them were saved. Christ can be blasphemed (Matthew 12:32). The word of God can be blasphemed (Titus 3:5). Before he turned to Christ, Paul was a blasphemer (1 Timothy 1:13). Blasphemy of God's name is an extremely serious matter (Leviticus 24:10-16, 23). However, blasphemy of the Father, the Son, and the Word can be forgiven (Mark 3:28).

### WHAT IS BLASPHEMY OF THE SPIRIT?

Blasphemy deals with speaking. It is a combination of two words—*blapto* which means to hurt and *phemi* which means to speak. Hence, blasphemy means to speak to one's hurt. In this context, it seems to be an intentional railing or speaking against the Holy Spirit. (Some say it can be committed in ways other than by speaking.)

Contextually, the Pharisees said the miracles of Christ performed by the Holy Spirit were actually done by Satan through an unclean spirit which dwelt in the Master (Matthew 12:24-28; Mark 3:30). Obviously, the sin is an outgrowth of hardness of heart. The Pharisees knew of the Lord's good life. They admitted he was performing miracles (John 11:47, 12:9-11). They agreed he was casting out demons (Mark 3:22). But they had so hardened themselves to his life, work, and claims, they attributed his miraculous activity to Beelzebub, the prince of demons. This is blasphemy of the Spirit or the unforgiveable sin.

### WHY IS THE SIN NEVER FORGIVEN?

On the basis of the language in Matthew 12:32, Roman Catholics have striven to establish the view of forgiveness in the next life and thus have a basis for the doctrine of purgatory. They say if blasphemy of the Spirit will not be forgiven in this world or in the world to come (i.e., life after death), it is implied that other sins will be forgiven in this life or in the next life. "World," as it appears in the KJV, can be translated as "age." (See RSV.) Jesus was saying that anyone who committed the sin would not be forgiven in the Jewish Age or in the

Christian Age which followed. He had time, not eternity in mind. No sin of any kind will be forgiven after this life is over.

Still the question remains, "Why is the sin never forgiven?" Surely, the answer is not found in a lack of love, mercy, and willingness on God's part. The whole tenor and spirit of the New Testament is God's readiness to forgive and receive fallen humanity. The answer is probably found in man's unwillingness and inability to repent once he has gone so far as to blaspheme the Spirit. (See Hebrews 6:4-8.)

### IS IT POSSIBLE TO COMMIT THIS SIN TODAY?

Some contend the sin was never committed in the first place. They think the Savior was simply warning the Pharisees lest they commit it. In other words, they were getting close to a kind of rebellion from which men cannot return.

Others believe the sin cannot be committed today since there are no miracles being performed now. If the sin dealt with the denial of the Lord's miraculous power by the Holy Spirit and if these miracles are no longer occurring, how could it be committed in the explicit way set forth in the context? Frankly, this is my view of the matter.

The position of another group is that the sin was committed then, and it can be committed today. They appeal to Hebrews 6:4-8, 10:26-31 and 1 John 5:16-17 for support. If they are correct in their contention, it seems they must also accept the conclusion that only children of God can commit the sin. All of the passages above deal with those who experienced the new birth. Even in the context of Mark 3:20-30, those who blasphemed the Spirit were children of God in that they had been born into the old covenant.

It can be safely said that anyone who is concerned about having committed the unpardonable sin has not. I have counseled with a few who were fearful of having blasphemed the Spirit. In every instance, the person was deeply religious or emotionally unbalanced. Do you suppose the Pharisees ever worried about the Lord's saying they would never be forgiven? They had gone too far in their defiance to become unsettled by what he said on this occasion. If this sin can be committed

today, which I doubt, the one who does it will never look back; he will never repent.

### THE LORD'S REPLY TO THEIR CHARGE

First, Jesus said if they were correct, Satan would be divided against himself (Matthew 12:26; Mark 3:23-26). If Satan were divided against himself, his kingdom would fall. The fact that it remained powerfully in place was proof that his kingdom had not fallen and that Christ was not exorcising demons by the power of the devil.

Second, the Savior wanted to know how the sons (i.e., pupils) of the Pharisees were casting out demons (Matthew 12:27). This is known as an "ad hominem" or "to-the-man" argument. Jesus was turning their position on them. He did not mean their pupils were actually performing miracles. He meant the Pharisees were obligated to show how their pupils cast out demons by the power of Satan. When the two were studied together, it would have been clear that Christ was in the right or that the pharisaical students were also under the power of Satan.

Third, the Lord showed that instead of being allied with Satan, he had overthrown him (Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27). He had bound Satan, "the strong man," and spoiled his goods. Incidentally, this proves that the one in us is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:4).

Fourth, Jesus affirmed the truth that the miracles wrought by him through the Holy Spirit were a demonstration that the kingdom of God was imminent (Luke 11:20). The establishment of the Messianic kingdom a short time later on the Pentecost Day proved he was correct in what he did and said on this occasion.

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## JESUS TEACHES IN PARABLES

(Mark 4:1-34)

DON SHACKELFORD

The Master Teacher drew deep spiritual lessons from the ordinary events of Palestinian life. These lessons are called parables. A parable has been called "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."<sup>1</sup> A purpose of parables was to allow those who were willing to follow Jesus to apprehend spiritual truths which were hidden to others.

The Holy Land of Jesus' day was primarily an agricultural economy. It is not surprising that most of the parables and illustrations used by Jesus were drawn from this background. He spoke of the sheep and shepherds, the vine-dresser and vineyards, and the sowers and reapers.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record some thirty parables of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> The Gospel of Mark has four parables, three of which occur in the text which we are studying.

The setting for this text is Galilee, near Capernaum. Jesus was teaching on the seashore, but the multitude who pressed around him to hear was so great that he got into a boat and sat down to teach.

All three of the parables of Mark 4 involve the planting of seed. Each one gives significant information concerning the kingdom of the Lord to the one "who has ears to hear."

### THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

This is the first of Jesus' parables in both Matthew and Mark. Since Jesus' teaching method was oral instruction or preaching, it is significant that the first of his parables sounds a note of admonition concerning "how we hear."

This parable has been more appropriately titled as "The

Parable of the Soils" by some. The sower and the seed are constants whereas the "soils" represent different responses by the human heart to the message preached. Although Jesus does not always explain the meaning of his parables, he does in this case.

#### *The Seed Beside the Road*

"... Some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up."

The Lord explains that this soil or heart is like the heavily trampled pathway marking the limits of each plot cultivated by the farmers of Palestine. This packed earth was so hard that the seed had no opportunity to penetrate below the surface to begin to grow.

It is sadly true that some people will not hear! Jesus says that this is the work of Satan! He "comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them." The archenemy of the Lord knows the mighty power of the word if it is allowed to lodge in the heart. He will do anything to see that the seed does not gain a foothold in the heart.

#### *The Seed in Rocky Places*

"And other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away."

Much of the hill country of Palestine has a thin veneer of soil covering the limestone rocks. After the rains of early spring these hills are covered with beautiful vegetation. However, when the hot days of summer come, this vegetation rapidly dies because there is no depth of soil for the plants to survive.

Jesus is saying that some who hear his words will gladly receive them for a short time, but when opposition comes, they will fall away because of lack of depth. J. Alexander Findlay is quoted by William Barclay as saying: "It is not easy to be a Christian; but it is easy to start."<sup>3</sup> Those of us who have done mission work in Italy can think of many who fit the description given here. Their zeal and enthusiasm upon first hearing the word caused an immediate positive response. But in a short time, they fell away. They could not stand the "heat" of the

persecutions they received from family members and friends, so they fell away.

### *The Seed Among the Thorns*

"And other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop."

Jesus describes the hearts of "thorny soil" as those who allow "the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things" to crowd and to choke the implanted word from their hearts.

Someone has said that the second best is the worst enemy of the best! It is right and proper to earn a living to support our families. However, some have so dedicated themselves to their jobs that they leave no time for cultivation of the spiritual aspects of life. We all need to be reminded to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness."

Certainly the "thorns" are present in our lives today to stifle our growth as Christians. If we are not careful, our lives become so crowded with other things that Christ is crowded out!

### *The Seed in the Good Ground*

"And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good ground; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty and a hundredfold."

The "good ground" describes that person whose heart is open and receptive to the truth. The seed is implanted in his heart. It goes down deep. Its roots take a firm hold. In due time the fruit is evident in word and deed.

It is interesting that the receptive heart is described with a slightly different shade of meaning in each of the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew says that "the one on whom seed was sown on the good ground, this is the man who hears the word and *understands* [Gk. *sunieis*] it" (Matthew 13:23a). Here the emphasis is on gaining insight or comprehension. Luke says that "the seed in the good ground, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and *hold it fast* [Gk. *katechousin*]. . . ." (Luke 8:15; emphasis mine). The faithful retention of what is heard is here emphasized. Mark places emphasis on *accepting* (Gk. *paradechontai*) what is heard. The

hearer takes it right into his mind and affirms its veracity. William Barclay gives an excellent summary:

... This parable means that if we bend our minds to find the meaning of the word of God, if we accept it in such a way that it becomes part and parcel of our very being, if we hold fast to it at all times and in all places, then it will enable our lives to bring forth very wonderful fruit.<sup>4</sup>

## THE PARABLE OF SILENT GROWTH

The second parable involving seed in Mark 4 emphasizes a fact amplified by Paul when he said: "I planted, Apollos watered, but *God was causing the growth*" (1 Corinthians 3:6; emphasis mine). Joe D. Schubert entitles this parable "The Silent Work of God."<sup>5</sup>

The disciples of Jesus needed the message of this parable to realize that the kingdom would come in God's time, not theirs! This was at the very heart of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness after his baptism. Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would only fall down and worship him. Jesus' reply is true today: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10).

There were always men around Jesus like the multitude which he miraculously fed by the Sea of Galilee who "were intending to come and take him by force, to make him king" (John 6:15).

This parable teaches us to have patience and to have confidence in God. The kingdom is his! As faithful workers, we must sow the seed. He will cause it to grow and to mature. He will give the increase. Although the process may be slow, it is sure.

## THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

The final parable in this chapter concerns the proverbial "mustard seed." In both Matthew and Mark the point emphasized is that one of the smallest of seeds produces one of the largest of herbs. From a tiny seed grows a plant in whose

branches the birds of the air may lodge.

Two lessons emerge from reflection on this passage. Many times one may become discouraged by the "little bit" he may do. A Bible class teacher may look at the small children and wonder if they are learning anything worthwhile. I fondly remember one such teacher. Sister McGee seemed ancient to me as a child. She faithfully taught her class for many years in the church at Miami, Oklahoma. Many times, I imagine, she was discouraged. Yet, from her Bible classes have come several men who are now preaching the gospel. Let us never be discouraged by small beginnings and by the apparently small amount we can do to change things. Remember the mustard seed!

The second lesson is that we must have confidence in the power of God. He will accomplish his work in due time. While preaching in Dallas, Texas, in 1961, I had a conversation with an elderly brother who could remember when there was only one congregation of the Lord's church in all of Dallas County! Those of us who have spent many years in the mission field need to be encouraged by this parable to realize that those small beginnings will reap great dividends in God's time.

### CONCLUSION

We have examined three parables that have in common the sowing of seed. The first one indicates that not all soils will be receptive. Satan is at work to hamper the reception of the word of God by men. Yet those who do receive the seed into their hearts and keep it will bring forth fruits of righteousness. The second emphasizes the need for patience. God will surely give the harvest in time. The third parable teaches us to "not despise the day of small beginnings." Since 1946 the seed has been planted by faithful sowers in many nations of the world. May we pray the Lord of harvest to send forth sowers and reapers into his harvest!

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *And Jesus Said, A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>This is the number discussed in the classic work by R. C. Trench, *Notes on*

*the Parables*. William Barclay lists thirty-three in *And Jesus Said*.

<sup>3</sup>Barclay.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>5</sup>Joe D. Schubert, *Mark: Introduce Us to the Master* (Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 1987), p. 68.

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## JESUS OVERCOMES HOSTILE POWER

(Mark 4:35—5:43)

KREGG HOOD

### THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT

Thomas Costain's book *The Three Edwards* describes an intriguing chain of events in the life of Raynald III, a fourteenth century duke in what is now the country of Belgium. Raynald was not known for his prowess as a ruler as much as for his extreme obesity. He was so large that his subjects gave him the scornful nickname, "Crassus," meaning fat.

Unfortunately for Raynald, he had a younger brother named Edward who was quite aggressive and interested in being the ruling power. After defeating Raynald in conflict, Edward seized the throne and imprisoned his brother in a room in the Nieuwkerek Castle. Interestingly enough, the doors and windows of Raynald's cell were always open, but the former duke was too fat to squeeze through any of them.

When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty to his brother, he simply replied, "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." But, to insure his brother's continued confinement, Edward made certain that his brother continued to be well fed. Raynald remained in his prison for ten years, enslaved not so much by the stone walls as by his appetite.

Raynald's story illustrates how we can be enslaved by something that can destroy us. In the spiritual realm, nothing enslaves us in a more deadly way than sin, yet, like Raynald, we often find ways to excuse our unspiritual thoughts, attitudes, and behavior.

For example, remember the quip made famous a few years ago by a well-known comedian? This entertainer was fond of rationalizing sin by saying, "The devil made me do it." While the devil does not "make us" do anything that we do not choose

to do, he does tempt and incite to evil. His hostile power of influence needs to be overcome, and that is the major point of Mark 5:1-20. The story of the demoniac is actually an account of a "face-off" between Jesus and the devil. It shows us a profile of the devil's power as well as a profile of Jesus' greater power. Jesus has the power to overcome evil. He did it for the demoniac, and he can do it for you.

### A PROFILE OF THE DEVIL'S POWER

Examining the profile of the devil's power over the demoniac results in the description of a "textbook case" of demon possession. This man, who was controlled by a legion of demons, isolated himself socially, retreated to the simplest form of shelter, had a total disregard for personal dignity, shouted violently at all hours of the day and night, cut himself with stones and had extraordinary strength. It is probably fair to say that he was one who really could say, "The devil made me do it." He was under the devil's power and in big trouble.

This part of the story tells us three scary truths about evil and its power.

#### *Evil Can Ruin Your Life*

First, evil can ruin your life. Mark 5:3 indicates that he "lived in the tombs." Obviously, the man had not always lived in the tombs. The parallel account in Luke 8 also points out that he was "from the town." It is a good possibility that he had once been a respectable citizen. Perhaps he had a wife and family, friends, and even a job. Whatever he might have been at one time, he was now a pitiful picture of failure. Sin had put him "in the gutter."

Nowadays, we have a tendency to underestimate the power of evil to ruin our lives. Famous politicians get trapped in a scandal and are forced to step down from their posts. Even highly visible religious personalities get trapped in immorality and lose their places of ministry. Evil does not *always* ruin *everyone's* life, but it does enough damage to enough people that it should be avoided at all costs.

For example, if someone were to tell you that ten rattlesnakes were loose in the foyer of this building, how many of you

would choose to exit through the foyer? Probably none of you! Someone could claim that many of you, perhaps most of you, could make it past the snakes without being bitten, right? But you still would not try. Why? You do not want to take the chance!

Evil is the same way. By giving in to its practices, so many lives have been ruined that none of us should play around with it. Evil can ruin our lives.

### *Evil Can Control You*

The second scary truth about the power of evil is evil can control you. When the demoniac called himself, "Legion," he was telling us that six thousand demons had invaded his body. This legion of demons caused him to become a masochist, cutting his own body with stones. He also lived in a cemetery. It is hard to imagine sinking to such degradation, except for the destructive control of evil. When Satan has you in his clutches, you will do things you thought you would never do.

While the specific behaviors of the demoniac seem bizarre to twentieth-century man, the root problems caused by evil are still with us. Today, people who are controlled by evil may not hurt their bodies with stones, but they hurt them with drugs. A current television advertisement against cocaine shows an egg and a skillet on the stove. The narrator holds up the egg and says, "This is your brain." The focus shifts to the skillet, and the voice continues, "This is drugs." Then the egg is broken, and the contents are dropped into the skillet. The solemn voice concludes, "This is your brain on drugs."

When enough evil gets into our lives, it will control us, and when the control begins to take hold, it may be too late to stop its effects. Paul, in Ephesians 4:19, talks about the Gentiles who are controlled by their evil behavior and concludes with this chilling statement, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more." If your sin does not hurt any more, you are in big trouble. You are incapable of feeling what sin has done to you. Evil controls you, and you have nowhere to go but down.

### *Evil's Destructive Power Must Go Somewhere*

While the first two scary truths about evil are bad enough, the third truth is the scariest of all. This story also tells us that the destructive power of evil has to go somewhere. For generations scholars have been puzzled by Jesus' willingness to allow the demons to go into a herd of pigs which would later plunge over a cliff and drown. While that part of the incident is somewhat puzzling, the reason for the result is not. Evil is so destructive that it must find an outlet somewhere. The demons were so wicked that if they could not have people, they would settle for pigs! If humans were "off limits," these demons would go after animals. That disgusting conclusion is a chilling commentary on evil. Evil is restless in its pursuit of someone or something to destroy. Like a spreading flame, if it is blocked in one location, it moves to another and to another and to another. As Peter put it, "Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The most important question you should ask is this: "Where does evil go when it is around me?" It will go somewhere to work its destruction.

This graphic summary of the power of evil reminds us of the grip that the devil had on the demoniac and that the devil can have on us. A profile of the devil's power indicates that he is an extremely dangerous attacker. But, as dangerous and powerful as the devil is, he is no match for Jesus. That is the "Good News" in Mark 5. Jesus overcame the hostile power of the devil for the demoniac, and he can do the same thing for you.

### A PROFILE OF JESUS' POWER

Even when the demoniac was completely enslaved by the demons, verse 7 indicates that he still recognized the deity of Christ and submitted to his sovereign power. The result is obvious. When Jesus confronts the devil, Jesus always wins, and the devil always loses. Here is a profile of Jesus' power.

### *Jesus Can Overcome Your Failures*

This text gives us convincing proof that Jesus has the power to overcome your failures. This poor man who had been ruined by evil did not stay ruined. When Jesus' power hit his life, the

man had gotten dressed and was in his right mind (Mark 5:15). The change was radical and complete. The man was ready to learn and ready to tell others about his experience with the Savior.

Scripture is full of stories that are designed to convince us that no problem is too big for God and no person has failed too miserably that he or she cannot be forgiven and restored. For example, think of David, the Prodigal Son, and Paul. Each one of these failed in major, terrible ways. But God, whose power and mercy is unlimited, brought each one of them back.

#### *Jesus Can Change You From the Inside Out*

The change that took place in the demoniac occurred because the evil that was inside him actually left. Jesus changed the man from the inside. He did not try to reform his behavior; he transformed his being. By driving a legion of demons from inside the man, Jesus proved that he can overcome any problem in any amount.

Remember how Peter, the cursing, disloyal, liar of Matthew 26 became the loving, gentle, elder of 1 Peter 5? The difference was not just one of learning not to swear. The Lord changed Peter on the inside. He did not just clean up his act; Jesus cleaned out his heart. Peter became willing to suffer for the Lord. If Jesus could handle six thousand demons in one person or the problems of Peter, he can surely handle you and me.

### JESUS' POWER WILL NOT WORK UNTIL YOU SAY, "YES"

But, in spite of the magnitude and the effectiveness of Jesus' power, Jesus is limited. He is limited by our willingness to let him work in our lives. He will not work until we say, "Yes." Again, the story of the demoniac tells us how to do just that. If you want Jesus' power to overcome your failures and change you from the inside out, then take a lesson from the demoniac. The following four steps will help.

#### *Step One: Acknowledge Jesus as Lord of Your Life*

Even in the depth of satanic control, the demoniac still recognized Jesus as the Son of God and the Master of creation.

The devil's power simply cannot keep you from responding to the Lord. You are the only one who can reject Jesus and keep him out of your life. Even the demons knew that they had to obey Jesus, but they were so bent on being wicked that they wanted the pigs. They did not change their behavior. That is why Jesus cannot be Lord of your life unless he is also Lord of your behavior.

#### *Step Two: Realize the End That Awaits the Followers of the Devil*

In verse 7 the demons cry out to Jesus pleading to him not to torture them. This request is expanded in the parallel passage, Matthew 8:29, where the demons cry out in opposition to torture that is "before the appointed time." Also, in Luke 8:31, the last parallel passage on this story, the demons beg Jesus repeatedly not to order them into the abyss, the home of the devil (Revelation 20:1-3). Taken together, these three passages indicate that the demons knew and feared their ultimate destination: hell.

When a person is making up his mind to follow Jesus, it is easy to treat the blessings of faith in Christ as a joy to be experienced "some day." The problem with the shortsighted view is that "some day" might never come. The longer a person continues without Jesus, the less likely it is that he or she will ever respond. We must realize that unless we respond in faith to Christ, we will wind up in hell with Satan. But please remember, God did not prepare hell for people; he prepared it for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). However, we can choose to join them in destruction.

This truth provides us with a slap in the face to help all of us to see the importance of turning our hearts over to Christ. We must never forget the end that awaits the followers of the devil.

#### *Step Three: Learn From Jesus How to Live*

It is obvious that the man was ready to change because he was ready to learn. Verse 15 not only mentions that he was dressed and in his right mind, it also points out that he was "sitting there," waiting for Jesus to teach him. In the first-century world, students sat at the feet of their teachers. They

were ready to learn. Now the demoniac was no longer the demoniac; he had started to become a disciple of Jesus.

This part of the decision to let Jesus' power work is essential. Change away from the power of the devil does not happen overnight, but it takes a solid start. Sometimes, when I am helping people to learn to let Jesus bring about needed changes in their lives, I tell them about a formula that I think explains how the Lord works. When the Lord is in your life, willingness + effort + time = change. If Jesus can be patient with us as he waits for us to respond in faith to him, we can be patient with him as he works his plan in us. In reality, we will always be growing to become more like him, so let us never get too worried about the timetable.

#### *Step Four: Talk About the Changes Jesus Has Brought To Your Life*

The final part of the decision to let Jesus work is also the most enjoyable. When Jesus' power has come into our lives, we need to talk about the changes that he has brought. This was the Lord's desire for the demoniac after the demons had left him. When the man wanted to join Jesus' band of disciples, the Lord had other plans. Jesus told him, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19). The man went away and told people in the towns and villages nearby how the Lord's power had changed him.

There are at least three reasons why changed people should talk about how God has changed them. First, when you talk about a good change that has occurred, you confirm the change for yourself and are less likely to revert to your old ways. Second, when you talk about your new life to others, you help them to see that you really have changed; they are encouraged to give you a "second chance." Third, and most importantly, talking about the Lord's positive impact on your life gives God the glory that he deserves. He is the source of this change, so he should get the credit.

Never stifle your desires to talk about the changes that the Lord has brought to your life. I have been thrilled personally to hear of the conversion stories of Christians. Their messages

are true testimonies to the power of God.

#### DO NOT BE ENSLAVED BY EVIL

These are two pretty striking profiles of supernatural power, are they not? On the one hand, we see what the devil can trick us into, a life controlled and ruined by evil. On the other hand, it is also obvious the devil is no match for Jesus—when you let him into your life. Unfortunately, most people think they can handle the devil's power on their own. They think that the devil will not get them.

Several years ago, a major television news program reported on a piece of unusual modern art. This "artistic" creation consisted of a chair that was attached to a loaded shotgun that was set to go off at some unknown time within the next one hundred years. The prescribed method of viewing the shotgun was to sit in the chair and gaze down the barrel. However, the most incredible part of the news report was not the "work of art," but the fact that a long line of people were waiting to sit in the chair. What a foolish choice!

As foolish as that may sound, it is not as foolish as playing games with the devil. Do not do it. He will win. Instead, take advantage of the power of Jesus to overcome evil and take you to heaven.

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## THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

(Mark 6:30-52)

EDWIN WHITE

Those who deny miracles find great difficulty in the presence of these narratives. The miraculous feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle performed by Jesus which has the distinction of being recorded in all four Gospels, and in each case the incident is guaranteed by sources which rest upon eyewitness accounts. Nevertheless, the critics try to explain away the miracle involved in feeding the five thousand by arguing that the numbers were exaggerated, or that the whole incident was a mere psychological experience. "The crowd was hungry," they say, and Jesus "did nothing" more than take a boy's small contribution, pointing out his willingness to share, shaming all the rest into sharing their provisions as well.

The fact remains, however, that when the multitude saw Jesus multiply a boy's small lunch, they were convinced that a miracle had been performed, were fully persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah, and wanted to make him king to move against the Romans. It is not possible, therefore, to give a rational explanation of the miraculous feeding. Furthermore, those who attempt to give a rational explanation of the miraculous feeding find great difficulty in explaining how Mark came to describe it as a miracle, how John, who was present, came to describe it as a miracle, and how Jesus, if it was not a miracle, described it as such (Mark 8:19; Matthew 16:9).

### A DIFFERENT KIND OF MIRACLE

Unlike Jesus' miracles of healing, the skeptics cannot explain away the miraculous feeding by arguing that it is merely the powerful effect of mind over mind, or of mind over

body. The miraculous feeding is truly a wonder because it is a distinctly physical miracle incapable of natural explanation. A well-proved axiom holds that the two fishes were broken into as many as fifteen thousand portions. Twelve baskets of fragments were taken up. Barley loaves were not the large loaves which we buy at the local grocery; they were small flat cakes which were a common part of the diet of the poor, and the fishes which a boy would carry in his lunch-sack would necessarily be of the small variety. With such small provisions, Jesus fed a multitude. The power of Jesus is such that he was able to feed thousands with a few saltines and two sardines, and there is no natural explanation for such an accomplishment.

### INSUFFICIENT FOR THE PURPOSE

At first, the loaves and fishes did not fare well. Andrew said, "What are they among so many?" The disciples took the human method of solving their problem. "Send the multitude away," they said (Mark 14:15). The next approach was to count their pennies and declare that it was impossible for them to do anything about feeding the hungry. How often have we asked, "Where is the money coming from?"

If the early Christians had been the type of people who always count the pennies they do not have, if they had been like those who always calculate the needs, count the cost, and then decide resources are insufficient, the widows would never have been cared for, there would have been no collection for the poor Christians at Jerusalem, and the gospel would never have spread over the world through the New Testament missionaries and evangelists. For the most part, first-century Christians were poor, but they achieved magnificent results because they did not consider their insufficiencies.

If the miraculous feeding of five thousand proves anything, it is that Jesus can handle any situation. When will the church learn that God can take the little we have and make it more than enough? Jesus took a lunch which was barely enough for a small boy, and in his hands the loaves and fishes became pregnant with food for a multitude.

Times are hard, and more people are suffering from physical and spiritual hunger than ever before. While we may justifiably argue that our brains are dull, our tongues slow, and our resources deficient, the fact is that if we will associate with Jesus and allow him to use us, our brains can be sharpened with the teachings of his Spirit, our tongues can be touched with the live coals of the altar, and our deficiency can become our surplus.

### DIVINE MATHEMATICS

God is able to achieve his divine purpose with our humble resources if we will but be selfless and transfer them to his possession. Jesus multiplies our gifts and then divides them among those who are in spiritual and physical need. Christ has no interest in multiplication without division. Consequently, Christ's addition means subtraction. Our gifts are gloriously increased and then given away. Christ's subtraction also means addition, however, for after our multiplied gifts are given away, we have more remaining than when we started. Twelve baskets of fragments are more than enough for another meal.

If we will but give ourselves to Christ and allow him to use us to his glory, we will be more able to serve him in the future than we are now. Bunyan's famous story of a man with a roll of cloth illustrates God's willingness to multiply our gifts. The story is of a man with a roll of cloth which he unrolled, and as he cut off more for the poor, it grew longer. Bunyan remarks:

There was a man,  
and some did count him mad;  
The more he gave away,  
the more he had.

Without question it is true that the more we use our talents, the more talents we have to use. And a Messiah who could feed five thousand with a boy's small lunch can, if it pleases him, also take our humble offerings and feed five billions who suffer from spiritual and physical starvation.

### THE GLORIFIED JESUS

When the people saw Jesus feed so many with so little, they said, "He is a prophet." Perhaps the miracle of the loaves carried them back to the wilderness wanderings, the miracle of manna, and the words of Moses, who said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Not only did the people declare Jesus to be a prophet, but they actually wanted to make him a king.

Sadly, the crowd that Jesus fed misunderstood the nature of his mission. However, we are told to let our "lights shine that others might see our good works and glorify" God. We should all commit our possessions to Jesus' use with the desire that our good works will make men praise him and actually want to make him king of their lives.

### CONCLUSION

Many truths are seen in the story of the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, but two facts emerge from the story which both overwhelm us and make us grateful.

First, Jesus was deeply compassionate and sympathetic toward the multitudes. In Luke 19:10 Jesus clearly stated his purpose for coming into the world. He came to meet the needs of the multitudes.

We are indebted to Matthew, especially, for the insight he gives concerning Jesus' attitude toward the lost multitudes. When Jesus saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion (Matthew 9:36), called them (Matthew 15:10), commanded them to sit down (Matthew 14:19), and taught them (Matthew 5:1).

The multitudes stood to hear Jesus teach (Matthew 13:2), heard him and marveled (Matthew 22:22), followed him and were healed (Matthew 12:15), and spread their garments before him (Matthew 21:8).

Sadly, at the end, the multitudes cried out for Jesus' death (Matthew 27:20). Even so, Jesus said to his faithful few, "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in. . . ." (Luke 14:23). He commanded them to go into all the

world preaching the message of salvation (Mark 16:15-16).

Indeed, who can deny that the love of God seeks the highest good for the undeserving multitudes?

Second, because the Lord remains our helper, multiplying our gifts, we are empowered to achieve victory. In the Old Testament, there is the story of a vast army of Moabites and Ammonites that marched against Judah. Outnumbered, Judah was hopeless to defend itself. Alarmed, Jehoshaphat the king proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came from every town to seek help from the lord. Jehoshaphat stood in prayer at the temple of the Lord with all the men of Judah, and their wives and children. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, son of Zechariah, who said, "Listen king Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15; NIV).

The Judahites were instructed to take up their positions, but were told they would not have to fight the battle (2 Chronicles 20:17). Due to God's intervention, the invading armies destroyed each other (2 Chronicles 20:22-23). Fear came upon all the nations when they heard how the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. We read, "And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for God had given him rest on every side" (2 Chronicles 20:30).

Today, an older enemy than Moab and Ammon has marched to attack God's people. Satan battles us for the souls of men. The enemy is powerful, and he overwhelms us with fear and doubt. Given what we perceive to be limited talent and resources, we doubt that we can ever make any significant progress in reaching a lost world with the saving message of the gospel. We fear that the task of evangelizing the world is too large for us to accomplish. But let us not despair, for the battle is not ours, but God's.

All we need is to take up our positions. God will then multiply our gifts. God will give us "rest on every side."

The miraculous feeding of five thousand is a story which clearly illustrates the willingness of our Lord to be with us and help us. And "if God be for us, who can be against us?"

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## WHEN RITE IS WRONG

(Mark 7:1-23)

RICK ATCHLEY

A number of years ago, my grandfather began to experience some severe pains in his lower back. A visit to a doctor resulted in a diagnosis of some sore muscles, so he spent the next several weeks taking pain pills, getting his muscles massaged, and sitting on a heating pad. When the pain persisted, he decided to get a second opinion. The second doctor did some more testing and discovered that my grandfather had colon cancer. Surgery was immediately ordered, and what could have proved to be fatal was corrected in the nick of time. The surface symptoms were never the real problem. The real problem was below the surface, and dealing with it required radical surgery.

That incident can provide insight into how to assess spiritual health. Satan, the prince of darkness, is most effective when he can disguise or conceal his evil work. One of his favorite tactics is to get us to focus all of our attention on surface symptoms, thus overlooking the real problem. Jesus had much to say about this, and one place where he does so most clearly is in Mark 7. There Jesus declares that a focus on externals, and on the traditions of men in particular, can keep one from getting to the "heart" of the problem. Let us consider his powerful message in Mark 7:1-23 together.

### ONE ISSUE INVESTIGATED

The issue in Mark 7:1-23 goes deeper than the tension between truth and tradition. What it really represents is two divergent views concerning sin and holiness. In other words, the real debate is over how a man is viewed to be clean or unclean before God.

The Jews, and the Pharisees in particular, had very definite ideas about how a man could be clean before God. In their eyes, the key was in the observance of certain ceremonial rituals. Eating with clean hands and serving clean foods was not just a matter of good manners or personal hygiene, but it was their way of displaying their distinctness as the people of God. Although such practices were external in nature, it was the way the Pharisees especially determined an individual's personal purity. So strongly was this believed that many Jews gave up their lives instead of abandoning such practices. To do such was not just to be Jewish, but to be right with God.

Jesus, on the other hand, had a quite different view concerning personal purity, and our text is the revelation of that view. Removed as we are from that particular time and culture, it is probably difficult for us to appreciate how radical his thoughts would have sounded to his hearers. Few Jews believed them then, and no orthodox Jew believes them today. Matthew makes it clear in his account that Jesus' words were very offensive to the Pharisees (Matthew 15:12). Indeed, sermons like this cost Jesus his life.

His words were shocking because he was wiping out in one stroke the rules for which Jews had been martyred. Jesus was setting in radical opposition material and moral purity. He was saying, in effect, that things are neither clean nor unclean in any real religious sense of the term. Only persons can be really defiled, and what defiles a person are his own thoughts and actions which originate in his heart.

In one sweeping pronouncement, Jesus declared their whole theology irrelevant, for it only dealt with surface matters. Jesus asserted that any biblical understanding of personal purity must realize that sin does not originate in the stomach, but in the heart. To fail to comprehend this is to continue to massage muscles while the cancer grows unchecked.

Now we do not struggle today with the issue of clean and unclean foods (although this was a major issue in the early church), but Jesus' main point is still refreshingly relevant for the contemporary church. Every generation must struggle with the temptation to identify pure religion with outward observance. Now the external forms of religion can be helpful,

but Satan can also use them to conceal a fatal cancer. The real question for us as believers is: How is my heart towards God and towards my brother? For if the heart is not "clean," a man's religion can never be pure.

## TWO LESSONS IMPLICATED

Our text thus provides two important implications for personal purity that should be noted. The first is that *godliness* is necessary for true *cleanliness*. What makes a man "stained" in God's eyes is not the failure to keep the traditions of men, but the failure to deal with his own internal lusts. External cleanliness is absolutely irrelevant if the heart is polluted. Notice how many of the vices Jesus mentions in verses 21 through 22 are of an internal nature—evil thoughts, greed, malice, deceit, envy, arrogance. Because such sins are not always visible, and because external observances are so easy to notice, it would be quite possible for one to be considered most religious, while in God's eyes he is most filthy. After all, the God who made the outside made the inside too.

This truth was made clear by our Lord in an incident recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you (Luke 11:37-41).

We must never forget that we serve a God who sees beneath the surface. "... for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

The second implication of our text is perhaps even more significant than the first, and it is that *rebirth* is necessary for

true *godliness*. Though the new birth is never mentioned in this passage, our text is one of the greatest arguments in Scripture for its absolute necessity. After all, we have already seen that to be clean in God's eyes, we must have pure hearts. The problem is that "the heart is more deceitful than all else" (Jeremiah 17:9). We must change our hearts to change our lives, yet it is beyond our ability to do that. What we need is a new heart!

That is, in essence, what Jesus told Nicodemus, who represented the best that Pharisaism could produce. The way to enter the kingdom of God is to be born again, of water and the Spirit. For those who have had much experience with the formalities of religion, this should be readily understandable. Indeed, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:7). We, too, should not be surprised at such a solution. After all, this was the promise of the New Covenant. God had said, "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you. . . . I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes" (Ezekiel 36:26-27). God has promised to do what we could never do for ourselves—give us pure hearts that want to follow him!

When we are born again through the waters of baptism, we not only receive forgiveness of our sins, but we receive a new capacity for holiness (Acts 2:38). God's own Spirit comes to dwell within us, producing a holiness that mere external observances could never do. It is a cure that gets beneath the surface to the real problem. The heart has been made new and is now filled with love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The new birth is a profound inward change, the implantation by God of a new life, the bestowal of a new nature, the gift of a new heart. This is what every man and woman needs to hear if they want to be clean in the eyes of the Lord.

Let us, therefore, be on guard against preaching or practicing any approach to religion which focuses only on the externals. Traditions can be meaningful. They can give us a sense of security, of continuity, and of identity. But traditions can never cleanse a heart. Whenever we forget that and begin to

view the observance of our traditions as a valid way to assess personal purity, our rites have become wrong.

### THREE TRUTHS ILLUMINATED

Let us consider, three situations in which traditions become harmful. First, rite becomes wrong *when it displaces the Scriptures*. Traditions can be meaningful, but they are never to be bound as burdens on other believers as though they were as authoritative as the word of God. This is what the Pharisees had done (Matthew 23:4). In the case of washing hands, for example, the Law did require the priests to do so before entering the tabernacle (Exodus 30:19, 40:12). This ritual possessed value as a symbol of a deeper truth: that God demands spiritual and moral purity of those who would enter his presence. But the Pharisees went beyond the Law by demanding such washings of all Jews in all sorts of circumstances, even specifying in great detail exactly how such washings were to be done. Thus, they came to focus more on questions like "Who?" and "When?" and "How?" than they did on "Why?" The deep spiritual truth behind the call to wash had been lost. They had come to major in minors and to minor in majors. When that happens, religion always becomes open to charges of hypocrisy.

We must be careful not to let that happen. The acid test of any tradition is that it serves to fulfill the basic purpose of all of God's commandments—to love God and to love people (Mark 12:28-31). People who revere man-made traditions above the word of God eventually lose the capacity to be convicted by the power of the word.

Second, rite becomes wrong *when it disgraces the needy*. Again, the practice of the Pharisees sadly illustrates this principle. While the Law was quite clear that children should take care of their aging parents, the Pharisees had come up with an obviously hypocritical interpretation which allowed a man to ignore his own parents' needs, enjoy what he had accumulated for himself, and all the while think himself spiritual for declaring that his property had been dedicated to God. They had missed the clear teaching of the Scriptures that all of life is to be dedicated to God, and that the best way to devote

something to God is to use it to meet a human need.

We must at all cost see that we do not make the same mistake. Remember what brother James said about "pure" religion? Does it not have a lot to do with taking care of the less fortunate? (James 1:27). Have we not already observed Jesus saying that giving to the poor is one way to be clean? (Luke 11:41). Could it be that the dirtiest man of all, in God's eyes, is the one who cares more about traditions than people?

We must never worry about violating a tradition if a life needs mending. God can handle that even if some in the church cannot.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, rite becomes wrong *when it dismisses the heart*. Traditions can be meaningful, but we must always remember to look beneath the surface. Indeed, Jesus did not come to replace a set of old traditions with a set of new ones. He came to get at the cancer that is destroying men's souls—sin. Too much time is wasted in the church today arguing over the place of tradition versus innovation. The call in Mark 7 is to go beyond what is old and what is new to what is vital. The real question we should ask of everything we do is, "Does it deal with heart trouble?" After all, the heart of Christianity is the heart.

Have you looked beneath the surface recently? It could be painful, but it could also save your life. Radical surgery is serious business, but is life not worth it? Maybe it is time for you to "clean up your act."

Keep me from secret sin,  
Reign Thou my soul within;  
Purer in heart,  
Help me to be.

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## PETER'S CONFESSION

(Mark 8:27-31)

WILL ED WARREN

The confession by Peter, "You are the Christ," made near Caesarea Philippi, is the central point in the Gospel of Mark. Peter's confession begins the second major division of Mark. From this point everything looks forward to the cross, the final consummation of Jesus' ministry on earth. Up to this point the Gospel has been concerned mainly with the divine authority of Jesus; that is, his authority over demons, disease, death, and the hostile powers of nature. His authority, as it related to the Law, expresses itself on this occasion in his dispute with the Jewish leaders. Because of this conflict, the Jewish leaders were already plotting Jesus' death (Mark 3:6). Therefore, there is a certain urgency surrounding these events.

### CAESAREA PHILIPPI

The narrative begins in Caesarea Philippi, in the jurisdiction of Herod Philip, progresses in stages through Galilee (Mark 9:30-50), through Perea and Judea (Mark 10:1-31), and finally ends in Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-52). Caesarea Philippi was located twenty-five miles north of Bethsaida near the source of the Jordan River on the slopes of Mount Herman. The region was known for its beauty and fertility. Originally, this area had been called Paneas, the mythological birth place of Pan, the god of nature. It was Herod the Great who erected a temple in honor of Caesar Augustus. There was an emperor cult here. The city was rebuilt by Herod Philip who renamed it in honor of Caesar. It is amazing that here, and not in Judea or Jerusalem, Jesus is confessed to be the Christ. It may be that this was the proper place for Jesus to be acknowledged as the Christ because here, unencumbered by Jewish nationalistic

misunderstandings, and in contrast to those gods, Jesus would clearly stand out not only as the Christ or the Messiah, but also as God's Son (Matthew 16:16).

### "WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I AM?"

Probably the most asked question in the Gospels is, "Who is Jesus?" In Jewish practice, it was the rabbi who was questioned by his disciples. Here it is Jesus who was questioning his disciples. The questions of Jesus in Mark often lead to a new teaching (cf. Mark 9:33, 12:24, 35). The double question in these verses demands a sharp distinction between the opinions of men and the affirmation of faith by the disciples. It is interesting to note that Luke says that Jesus was praying just before he asked his disciples these questions (Luke 9:18).

Mark records three opinions of men about who Jesus was. First, some were saying that Jesus was John the Baptist. Earlier Herod had said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised" (Mark 6:16). Evidently, this was the opinion held by a number of others (Mark 6:14). Herod may have been experiencing guilt feelings about what he had done to John, and now his worst fears were being realized. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached in the prophetic tradition. Both spoke out against the sins of their day. Both were killed by those who opposed their teaching.

Second, some were saying that Jesus was Elijah. Based on Malachi 4:5-6, the Jewish expectation was that Elijah would precede the coming of the Messiah. Jesus endorsed this idea by saying that John was Elijah and that he, Elijah, had already come (Mark 9:11-13). By definition, both John and Elijah were forerunners of the Messiah, and not the Messiah himself.

Third, others were saying that Jesus was one of the prophets. There is a tension in the Gospels as to whether Jesus was "a" prophet or whether he was "the" prophet. Moses had predicted earlier that "the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed. . . ." (Deuteronomy 18:15). Moses quotes the Lord as saying, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he

shall speak to them all that I command him" (Deuteronomy 18:18). In John's Gospel, Jesus is "the" prophet because he fed five thousand (John 6:14). In the immediate context of our study Jesus is simply "a" prophet. On other occasions the crowds thought of Jesus as being "a" prophet (Matthew 21:11). At any rate, Jesus was more than a man, and if a prophet, much more than a prophet (Mark 6:4; Luke 13:33-34; Matthew 23:37).

In Mark's Gospel, the demons know who Jesus really is (Mark 1:24, 34, 3:11, 5:7) and later, the centurion knows who Jesus is (Mark 15:39), but the crowds do not know him. Furthermore, up to this point, even his disciples do not understand who he is (Mark 8:21).

All the various opinions about Jesus are significant because they are held in the context of the coming Messiah. What is especially interesting is that no one seems to have thought of Jesus as the Messiah.

### "BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM"

To this question, Peter responded by saying, "You are the Christ," the Anointed, the Messiah. For the first time in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is acknowledged to be the Christ, that is, the Messiah. In Matthew's Gospel Peter's confession is stated, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16), while in Luke's Gospel it is, "the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). Peter's confession in John's Gospel should be compared (John 6:68-69) with those in the other Gospels. Matthew's Gospel records Jesus' response to Peter's confession as, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). There is no reference in Mark of Jesus making any promise to Peter or of his building his church. This is especially significant because the Gospel of Mark is thought to have been written for Christians in Rome where Peter has been thought by some to have been the bishop.

The basic meaning of "Messiah" is the anointed of God. In the Old Testament, both the priests and the prophets were associated with an anointing oil which symbolized consecra-

tion to God's service (Exodus 29:7, 21; 1 Samuel 10:1, 6; 1 Kings 19:16; Isaiah 61:1-2). The expectation of a future special anointed leader was based on God's promise to David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:16). Judaism became filled with numerous Messianic expectations. In the first century there was a very strong Messianic expectation of a nationalistic hero who would come and drive out the hated Romans and would sit on David's throne and rule from Jerusalem. This was one reason the crowds followed Jesus, expecting him to usher in the Messianic age. This was also the reason it was so dangerous for Jesus because Rome would crush any uprising and would consequently slaughter many innocent people. Therefore, Jesus cautioned his disciples not to tell any one that he was the Christ.

Jesus was the Messiah. This he accepted as true. But in the disciples' minds, what kind of Messiah was he? Although Peter had been revealed this truth by divine revelation (Matthew 16:17), he obviously did not comprehend all that he said, any more than he understood that the Gospel was to be preached to all men (Acts 2:39, 10:1-34). It was only after the events of Caesarea Philippi that Jesus could reveal the true nature of his Messiahship. The true Messiah was a suffering Messiah (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). All who would follow him, who would be his disciples, would also follow the path of obedience, suffering, and the cross. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34-38).

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## JESUS "UNNERVES" HIS DISCIPLES

(Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34)

ALLEN BLACK

Charles Sheldon first published *In His Steps* in 1896. Since that time, Sheldon's novel has sold over thirty million copies and been translated into more than twenty languages. The basic story line of this book has captured the imagination of millions and challenged them to re-evaluate their lives in the light of its simple message.

The story is about a preacher, Henry Maxwell, and a group of church members who participate with him in a one-year experiment. Maxwell and his group make a one-year commitment to ask themselves, "What would Jesus do?" in every situation and then to do just that, regardless of the consequences. Maxwell's plan is based on a serious reading of 1 Peter 2:21: "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

The plot of Sheldon's novel is determined by the group's commitment, and the rest of the book follows the lives of Henry Maxwell and other key people involved in the experiment. Unfortunately, Sheldon's commitment to the "social gospel" movement distorts his imagination of what Jesus would do. Nevertheless, the story is a moving demonstration of how serious commitment to following Jesus can reorient people's lives. Many readers have come away from the book determined to take up the same quest in their own lives.

Centuries before Sheldon, another author wrote a powerful book with a similar theme. It, too, tells of how a group of people committed themselves to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and how they gradually developed in their understanding of what that might entail. It, too, has been translated into numerous languages and influenced millions of lives. However, it has

several advantages over Sheldon's novel, including the fact that it is a true story, that Jesus himself guides these followers in their development, and that God's Spirit guided the writing of the book.

In the Gospel of Mark the introduction of the disciples occurs in 1:16-20. In this initial scene of Jesus' ministry, Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be his disciples. The words of the summons are dramatically brief: "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." Their response is radical both in its immediacy and in its completeness. James and John even leave their father in the boat with the hired servants. They do not even finish the day's fishing and clean up.

There is a parallel here to the response to Henry Maxwell's plan in that this group of men were entering a pact involving a radical commitment of Jesus. To a large extent they were signing their names to a blank contract. The later portions of Mark's narrative make it clear that they had hardly an inkling of where they were going. Much of the book is given over to how their understanding developed.

The first half of Mark moves steadily toward 8:29, the confession by Peter that Jesus is the Christ. Every miracle Jesus performs, every encounter with the demons or the Jewish authorities, and every instance of his authoritative teaching contributes to building the answer to the question, "Who is this?" (Mark 4:41).

The reader of Mark knows who Jesus is, beginning with 1:1, but the disciples, even though they recognize his great authority and follow him, do not fully grasp his identity from the beginning. This is especially emphasized in the three boat scenes in chapters 4, 6, and 8. These rare times alone with Jesus become occasions for Mark to reveal the disciples' lack of understanding. In the first such scene (Mark 4:35-41), when Jesus calms the sea the disciples are "filled with awe" and wonder: "Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?" In the second (Mark 6:45-52), they are startled at Jesus' walking on the sea and calming of another storm. Mark tells us that "they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened." What

should they have understood from the loaves? Apparently, the mystery of Jesus' identity. The third boat scene (Mark 8:13-21) involves a discussion of both miraculous feedings (of the five thousand and of the four thousand). It ends with the question, "Do you not yet understand?"

Very shortly, they would reveal a new level of understanding—but it, too, would be incomplete, as is parabolically indicated by the "double-take" healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26. In this unusual healing, the blind man is at first only able to see vague images. After a second laying on of Jesus' hands, he is able to see clearly. It is most unlikely that Mark presents Jesus as having a power failure. More probably, Jesus is enacting a parable about the disciples' evolving understanding of his identity. They are beginning to see that he is the Christ, but their vision of what that means remains blurred until the resurrection.

Peter's confession, "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29), is the climax of the first eight chapters of Mark but only the beginning point of the second stage of the disciples' development, a stage which occupies the rest of the Gospel.

Those who committed themselves to Henry Maxwell's plan only gradually came to fully understand the full implications of that commitment for their lives. The same is true of Jesus' disciples in Mark, although their understanding develops in clearly marked stages.

"And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things. . . ." (Mark 8:31). After Peter's confession, Jesus began to unnerve his disciples in two ways: by explaining to them that he was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die in service to others and by explaining the implications of his plan for their own role as disciples.

That the disciples themselves had other plans is immediately clear. Right after Jesus makes his first clear prediction concerning his suffering and death, "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him" (Mark 8:32). Whatever Peter expected Jesus to do, Jesus was not living up to those expectations.

Jesus, of course, is not swayed by Peter's rebuke, but proceeds to explain what his plans entail for his followers: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up

his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

The disciples must have been shocked. They had given up everything to follow Jesus, but they had not understood where he was leading them. Here was the first reference to a cross, that odious and painful means of Roman execution. Here was the clear possibility of martyrdom as a basic part of what it means to follow Jesus. From later incidences, we may, in fact, suggest that what Jesus says at this point is so shocking that at that time it was incomprehensible. It will take the rest of Mark's Gospel to drive home the point.

In the next chapter Jesus makes another clear prediction about the events to come in Jerusalem (Mark 9:31). In spite of the clarity of the statement, the disciples still do not understand, but they are afraid to ask (Mark 9:32).

Unfortunately, the disciples' failure to understand Jesus' mission is mirrored in their lack of understanding of their own. In the next scene (Mark 9:33-37), the disciples dispute with each other over who is the greatest, clearly revealing their failure to follow their Lord in the path of service. Jesus tries to teach them that "if any would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." He uses a child as an object lesson. The next chapter demonstrates that the point still did not stick.

In chapter 10 Jesus returns a third time to the theme of his suffering, death, and resurrection.

And taking the Twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise" (Mark 10:33-34).

This time Mark does not tell us explicitly that the disciples do not understand, but the next incident (vv. 35-45) implies that they still failed to grasp Jesus' mission and their own. When James and John ask Jesus, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory," and when they

readily volunteer to drink the cup he is to drink and be baptized with the baptism he is to be baptized with, it is clear that they do not understand the basic points of his predictions. Not only do they not understand what Jesus himself is about to do, but they also fail to understand the implications of Jesus' behavior for their own role as his disciples. The jealous reaction of the other disciples in verse 41 suggests that they had come no further.

Jesus' reply in verses 42 through 45 repeats the point made in Mark 9:35, but in an expanded form that relates discipleship clearly to Christology. If "... the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," then among those who follow him "whosoever would be great ... must be your servant, and whosoever would be first ... must be slave of all." Disciples are to be like their Lord.

At this point in Mark we are nearly down to the last week of Jesus' life, which begins in chapter 11. The sleepiness of Peter, James, and John during Jesus' praying at Gethsemane suggests that the disciples' lack of understanding persisted even to the night of Jesus' arrest. The idea of a suffering Messiah and the implications of that idea for their own roles as followers were simply beyond their comprehension.

They did, of course, finally grasp these concepts after Jesus' resurrection. Acts provides plenty of examples of how the disciples denied themselves, took up their crosses, and followed Jesus.

But the burden of Mark is to show how Jesus kept teaching his disciples persistently, transforming their perceptions not only of his own role but also of their's. Mark's repeated emphasis on this point identifies it as one of the major themes of his book and suggests that he wrote for a church or a group of churches that needed encouragement in this regard. It is often suggested that Mark's audience was even threatened with physical persecution and that one of Mark's basic purposes was to encourage his fellow Christians to be willing to take up their crosses and lay down their lives in service to Christ and others.

Mark's Gospel, however, also speaks well to those who are not faced with persecution by the authorities, including

twentieth-century Americans. In his book *Mark: The Gospel as Story*, Ernest Best argues that rather than addressing a situation in which Christians were being persecuted, Mark probably addressed Christians who were drifting into a life of self-indulgence. Mark summons them to deny themselves and follow the path of service laid down by Jesus. Although I consider it unlikely that Best has correctly analyzed Mark's original situation, he has shown a way in which Mark's story can be brought to bear on our situation.

Mark reminds us that our Lord's purpose was not to be served, but to serve and that He poured himself wholeheartedly into service of others, even to the point of death. He then calls on us to follow, to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses, to put ourselves last rather than first, and to seek to be servants rather than the served.

It is not an easy lesson. The principle of denying ourselves and putting God and others first has far-reaching consequences. Who knows where it will lead? As in the case of Jesus and his disciples, it affects every area of our lives. It affects our major life choices such as whom to marry or whether to marry, where to live, and what sort of work to engage in. It affects our daily distribution of energy, talent, time, and money. Because of this principle, a Christian may stay up all night with a hurting friend despite a major deadline the next day, spend large portions of one's only day off with an underprivileged child, deny oneself a new car in order to help purchase food for the starving, leave a successful career in the business world to become a preacher, or leave the comforts of the United States to proclaim God's word in the jungles of some third world nation. Throughout Christian history, different individuals have grasped Jesus' vision for their lives in varying degrees and in varying ways.

In one sense it is unnerving to consider the possibilities involved in adopting Jesus' principle of discipleship. We do not normally sign contracts which will be filled out later. However, many who have followed in the steps of Jesus have an entirely different viewpoint of the matter. A few years ago, Bruce Larson and Keith Miller expressed this viewpoint well in the title of their book *The Edge of Adventure*. This book

(which has significant weaknesses theologically) is their autobiographical account of their own journeys in faith. Both of them experienced major changes in their lives when they got serious about Jesus' demands. Rather than viewing these changes as something to be feared, they learned to look upon life in Christ as life on "the edge of adventure."

In Mark 1:16-20, when four fishermen first set out to follow Jesus, they embarked on one of the greatest adventures of all time. They did not know where they were going, but they followed in confidence that they would be thankful when they got there. They were. And we will be too.

## THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

(Mark 8:34—9:1)

STAN BRATCHER

Discipleship is costly. Never forget it. Christ paid a dear price with his life to make our salvation possible. We want to be saved. We want what Christ has to offer. We want to be his disciples. But are we ready to pay the price? Discipleship is costly. Never forget it. Never underestimate the demands of discipleship.

The events that lead into our study of Mark 8:41—9:1 are interesting. Jesus asked his apostles who others thought he was. They replied that some thought he was John the Baptist, some Elijah, and some, one of the prophets. He then asked the penetrating question, "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

Jesus tells his apostles that he must suffer many things and be killed but in three days he would rise again. Peter rebuked him and reacted strongly against the idea of Jesus' sacrificial death. He did not want Jesus to die. He was excited about the idea of Jesus being the Christ but did not like the cost that was demanded.

Peter did not understand that the entire plan of God hinged upon the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of mankind.

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

[He] was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4:25).

[He] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and

Father (Galatians 1:4).

When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5).

[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14).

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Peter wanted the end results without anyone paying the price. Later he was ready to fight to prevent it from happening (John 18:10-11). Today some want salvation without paying the price. This is Satan's way of selling the Christian faith cheaply.

Just as demands were placed upon Christ to become our Savior, he now tells us of the demands of discipleship placed upon his followers.

### "DENY SELF"

The denial of self is fundamental to our relationship with Christ as his disciples. When self rules, there is no room for Christ. Paul describes the condition of man before conversion as "following the course of this world, following the prince of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." He further says, "Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Ephesians 2:2-3).

For one to put an end to "self rule," he must die to self. Paul speaks of this spiritual death by saying, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). The expression, "I no longer live," is a wonderful way of saying

that the Christian should no longer live under the control of his carnal, fleshly nature. Peter speaks of "those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:10). Jude 16 describes carnal men as "following their own passions."

A dead man no longer makes any response to the things of this life. So it is to be with the Christian and sin. We die to sin. We no longer make any response to sin. It no longer has any power over the disciple. This becomes our goal in Christian living. Even though we may fall short of this lofty aim, we continue to develop the spirit of denial of self.

Paul develops this thought more extensively when he says to the Galatians, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). This denial of self is made possible by the surrender of our hearts and lives to Christ. We can only conquer self by inviting Christ to rule and reign in our lives. There is no other way. We will be able to deny self when we put Christ in control.

Denial of self and giving up the control of our lives to Christ is a foundational step in discipleship. If we learn this lesson, all other matters of the Christian faith will come easier.

### "TAKE UP YOUR CROSS"

Jesus teaches that each disciple will have a cross to carry. He adds the word "daily" in Luke 9:23. Just as the cross of Christ speaks of his sacrifice for us, the cross we must bear tells of our daily sacrificial living for him. We are called to be "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1).

Sometimes we are surprised that the Christian life is not always easy. One says, "I thought I would have no problems when I became a Christian" "I have been living the Christian life to the best of my ability, and now this has happened to me. Why?"; "Where have I gone wrong after all I have done?" Be careful! You may be fussing about your cross. Remember Peter's attitude. He wanted Christ to be the Savior . . . without having to go to the cross. We can easily have that same attitude. We may want to be disciples without carrying our crosses. It cannot be done. Jesus said that such thinking was of

the devil. Be careful, for you may be fussing about your cross.

Remember! No cross, no Christ, no salvation. No cross for me, no discipleship for me. He bore a cross; I must bear a cross.

### "FOLLOW ME"

The call of the disciple is to follow Christ. This is the development of the mind of Christ in us (Philippians 2:5). It is the development of a Christ-like nature in the "forming" of Christ in the disciple (Galatians 4:19). We are called to believe in Christ and to let Christ live within us, to be like him, to follow him.

This is one of the unique qualities of Christianity. We are called to walk in the footsteps of our Lord. It is so much more than just adopting the moral code that he taught. It is more than embracing his high and lofty teachings. It is more than just being part of a movement. It is joyfully walking in the steps of our Lord.

What will happen when we follow Christ?

Following Christ will lead us to holiness in life. He is our high priest "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Hebrews 4:15). In following Christ we will not be led into sin. There is no sin in his pathway. Those who follow the Lord will be led into the way of holiness. If we are having problems with sin, we should take a close look at whom we are following.

Following Christ will prepare us to serve our fellowman. Christ taught his apostles a powerful lesson in John 13 as he washed their feet. The message was simple. If he, their Lord and Teacher, washed their feet, they should be willing to wash one another's feet. When we follow in the steps of Christ, we will learn to be sensitive to people as he was. We will be willing to serve as the need arises.

Following Christ will cause us to have a genuine interest in the lost. When Jesus saw Peter and Andrew casting a net into the lake, he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). This will happen to those who answer his call and seek to walk in his steps. You cannot let Christ live in your heart and pass by lost humanity.

Concern for the lost is not an option for the Christian. It is not just part of a well-rounded program of work in the church. Jesus came into the world "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). This will be our concern when we walk in his steps. Our lack of action in the brotherhood in evangelism is frightening. Does it reveal our relationship with Christ? What does it say about following him?

What can get in the way of following Christ?

### *Our Possessions*

Jesus told the young man in Matthew 19:16-22 that he would have to sell all that he had and give to the poor to be saved. The young man went away sorrowful because he was rich. He could not part with his wealth. Jesus knew this was the young man's problem. His wealth was his god. It was first in his life. It had to change for him to follow Christ.

This was not a general command for all people to obey. It was commanded to destroy the one thing that had captured the young man's heart. Our possessions can be a hindrance in following Christ. We either own our possessions or they own us. Materialism is a tremendous problem in modern America.

### *Our Loved Ones*

In Matthew 10:37-38, Jesus warns that one cannot love his relatives more than him and be his disciple. Relatives may encourage or discourage our being his disciples. But they must not be the reason we either become Christians or reject Christ. It is a difficult matter when we learn that following Christ will not always please our loved ones.

### *Our Love for This Present World*

We cannot love the world and the Lord at the same time. We cannot serve God and mammon; a choice must be made. Demas made such a choice: go back into the world (2 Timothy 4:10). How sad. This present world can easily cause us to never consider the claim that Jesus has on our lives, or not take it seriously. Some have too much of the world in them to really enjoy the Christian life and just enough of Christ in them to not really be happy in the world. How sad!

Jesus gives three statements about the demands of

discipleship. First, he proclaims that the soul is more valuable than anything else in the whole wide world. Nothing, absolutely nothing, compares in value to the soul. No matter what you gain or attain, it means nothing if you lose your soul. In giving up claim to your soul, you find it. Consider what God gave in exchange for your soul: his Son! The cross is God's statement of the worth of your soul. How much value do you place on your soul? Are you tempted to sell it cheaply? Do not make a bad bargain. Nothing in this life is worth going to hell over.

Second, he says that discipleship is not for the timid (Mark 8:38). Peter was ashamed of the idea of Jesus going to the cross. He was ready to fight to keep it from happening. In contrast, Paul states that he was not ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16). Our entire relationship with Christ rests on a strong faith, a bold faith. The Christian life is not for the weak-hearted.

Third, discipleship is for the sake of the kingdom. To those listening, Christ told them it would come during their lifetime. When the gospel was preached in Acts 2, those who obeyed its teachings were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). Those early disciples were translated into the kingdom from their lost condition (Colossians 1:13). So it is with those who become Christians today. The kingdom of our Lord, his church, is a people redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is to come first in our lives (Matthew 6:33). As Christ died to purchase the church with his blood, let us in the kingdom or church live lives worthy of that sacrifice.

A missionary went to preach in the Fiji Islands years ago when cannibalism was still practiced. The captain of the ship said, "You will risk your life and the lives of all those with you if you go to live among such savages." The missionary simply replied, "We died before we came here"—a great illustration of the meaning of discipleship. Dying to self prepares us for a full life in Christ and makes easy our response to all that Jesus has taught us to be and do in our lives. We quit arguing with Jesus when we die to self. We no longer have any rights. We have surrendered completely to his control. We are not our own. We belong to him. We are willing to pay the price. We are willing to take up our crosses daily and live for him.

A native of the Congo prayed, "Dear Lord, You be the needle, and I'll be the thread. You go first, and I will follow wherever you may lead." Is that not beautiful?

The demands of discipleship prepare us to either live for Christ in humble service or pay whatever the price is that persecution may bring upon us. One denominational missionary union uses a seal having an ox standing with a plough on one side and an altar on the other side. Beneath these are the words: "Ready for Either." So should it be with every disciple—ready to serve the Lord, ready to die for him!

This poem contrasts our view with God's view.

#### God Counted Crosses

I counted dollars while God counted crosses;  
I counted gains while he counted losses.  
I counted my worth by the things gained in store,  
But he sized me up by the scars that I bore.

When we genuinely come to the Lord to be his disciples, we close down our former ways of life and eagerly walk in his steps. Antisthenes, when he heard Socrates, shut up his own school and told his pupils, "Go, seek for yourselves a master; I have found one." He then sold all that he had to become a disciple of Socrates.

In 1896, Charles Sheldon wrote a little book, *In His Steps*. By 1935 it was stated that the book had more circulation than any other book except the Bible. It is simply the story of a preacher who challenged his congregation to pledge earnestly and honestly for an entire year not to do anything without first asking the question, "What would Jesus do?" And, after asking that question, each would follow Jesus no matter what the results would be. The book deals with the adventures in the lives of those who made such a pledge. It became exciting for them to live such lives. They joyfully shared their many experiences and encouraged one another. It shook the entire town.

May it be so with us today—not for a year, but for a lifetime. Let us be willing to surrender to the demands of discipleship, no matter the cost, and to do this joyfully.

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## THE TRANSFIGURATION

(Mark 9:2-32)

RONNIE NORMAN

If you were the richest person in America, where would you live, what would you drive, and how would you dress? As your imaginative wheels are turning, think through that question and describe the scenario in terms of lifestyle.

Sam Walton, co founder and C.E.O. of the 900-odd Wal-Mart chain, bears the distinct honor of being America's wealthiest man. Yet, his title and his lifestyle do not mesh! Unless changes have occurred recently, he still drives the back roads near Bentonville, Arkansas (pop. 9,901), in his 1979 red and white Ford pickup truck. His truck comes completely equipped with bird dogs during quail hunting season.

Visitors to his home could be surprised to see the truck in the carport and the muddy dogs in the backyard. One could think incorrect directions had been given were it not for the mailbox that reads simply, "Sam and Helen Walton." The local Wal-Mart manager says Sam waits in line just like everyone else, occasionally asking, "How's business?" One morning, the wealthiest man in America forgot to take his wallet to his haircut appointment. John Mayhall, his barber of twenty-five years, said, "Forget it. Take care of it next time!" No dice. The wealthiest man in America went home and immediately returned to square the bill! While I am impressed with Sam Walton, I must also admit that his title and lifestyle do not mesh!

To some degree, perhaps we can identify with the feelings of the disciples concerning Jesus. They have covered many miles with him, heard much teaching, and seen countless acts of divine compassion and power. On two occasions, they have verbally confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 14:33, 16:16). Yet, in spite of their faith in his claim, they

cannot fathom the Christ as a suffering servant. They cannot imagine the awaited Messiah, the Son of God, experiencing rejection, trauma, and a despicable death. A Messiah on a cross is not exactly their expectation. Peter even rebuked Jesus for speaking of such rejection and death (Mark 8:31-33). The disciples love the Lord, but his title and his lifestyle do not mesh.

It is against the backdrop of his rejection and death that Jesus makes the following assertion:

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with his holy angels. . . . I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 8:38—9:1).

Put yourself in the situation. With an aroma of death hanging over the heads of his disciples, Jesus seeks to renew the perspective of his followers. He is not a victim, but a victor. His glory is of the Father, and his kingdom is soon to be established. He even promises that some present will see the kingdom come with power. I believe that promise had a double fulfillment. The second fulfillment occurred in approximately seven months when the kingdom was born on Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). But the first fulfillment of Christ's promise was to occur in six days when Peter, James, and John were to receive a glimpse of Christ's glory. In essence, the Father would retract the veil of flesh and reveal the innate glory of King Jesus—a glory that all will see when he comes to receive his kingdom in the last day (Mark 8:38).

### THE MOUNTAIN OF MAJESTY

#### *The Transfiguration*

Six days after Jesus promises that "some who are standing here will not taste of death before they see the kingdom of God come with power," he takes his inner circle of Peter, James, and John into a high mountain. Early tradition holds that the mountain was Mount Tabor; later tradition holds that it was

Mount Hermon, but it is very possible that the Transfiguration occurred on Mount Miron. Mount Miron has an elevation of 3,926 feet and is located on the way from Caesarea Philippi to Capernaum.

The important note, however, is not the location but the event which transpired. The text plainly says, "There he was transfigured before them." The word translated "transfigure" is a word from which we get the term "metamorphosis." As a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, so did the physical characteristics of Jesus change. And dramatically so! This word (*metamorphote*) occurs but four times in the New Testament, but the only time it is used to describe a change in physical appearance is in connection with the Transfiguration.

What an amazing sight it must have been! Matthew says his "face shone as the sun, and his clothes became as white as light." Luke says that Christ became "bright as a flash of lightning." Mark, who received his information from Peter, stated that "his clothes became dazzling white, [how white?] whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."

What we are witnessing in the Transfiguration is a theophany, a visible display of the glory of God. Although the Synoptic writers use differing terminology, they are united in describing the Transfiguration as an event accompanied by a dazzling, bright display of light. That is not too surprising since God has often manifested his presence as light. For example, when Moses was in the midst of his overwhelming responsibilities as Israelite leader, God allowed him to partially see his divine glory. Such a partial display of God's glory caused the face of Moses to become radiant (Exodus 32, 33). At the birth of Jesus, the wise men were led to the babe through a "shining" not a literal star. Obviously, this is another illustration of God's presence being manifested as light. Perhaps the most pointed statement relating the glory of God to light occurs in Revelation 21:23: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

#### *The Conversation*

I met a gentleman on one occasion who told me that he had

slept through some of the best preachers in our brotherhood! Peter could make a similar claim. Although Mark does not tell us this detail, Luke informs us that the disciples were "very sleepy." Yet, they were fully awakened by "the sight of his glory and two men standing with him" (Luke 9:32). The two men conversing with Jesus were Moses and Elijah!

Somehow, Peter immediately sensed who these men were and in his state of awe combined with fear, he originated that classic preacher statement: "It is good to be here." Peter really meant it! In essence, he was saying, "Lord, it is great to be here! In fact, this is the most excellent sight, the most fantastic event of a lifetime!" He went on to suggest the building of three shelters in honor of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Mark must have chuckled when Peter told him years later that he "did not know what to say, [he] was so frightened."

Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the Prophets) had come to salute Jesus. Jesus was the one to whom the Law and the Prophets had pointed. He was the one to receive glory and honor. He was the one worth the shelving of any ego. What was their topic of conversation? Luke tells us their conversation centered around "his departure [literally, his exodus], which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem." I long for more details and specifics of the conversation! I long for quotes from the three participants! But, for all I do not know about their conversation, this one truth was reaffirmed: No one would take the life of Christ; he would lay it down of his own will. Only the Christ could speak of bringing his death "to a fulfillment."

Although it is pure conjecture on my part, I believe the presence of Moses and Elijah was partially designed to provide encouragement to Jesus. He was now six months away from the cross and was ready to "set his face to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). But before the final stretch of his ministry began, the Father provided another episode of heavenly fellowship and affirmation.

### *The Confirmation*

Beginning in Exodus 13:21, whenever you see a cloud, guess who is in it. Exactly. As Peter was rattling on in his fear, a

cloud enveloped the small group atop the mountain. From within the cloud came the voice of God confirming the sonship of Jesus. It is an affirmation reminiscent of Christ's baptism, except for the additional phrase, "Listen to him." It is as if the Father were saying, "There was a time to hear Moses, and there was a time to hear the Prophets, but their message of promise has now been realized in Jesus. Listen to him!" What did the voice of God sound like? Those who heard the Father's voice on another occasion said it sounded like thunder (John 12:27-29).

This is a majestic sight and the epitome of a mountaintop experience! Peter, James, and John, who had been frightened before, were now terrified and were sprawled facedown in the dirt. They were experiencing the trauma of holiness, something we desperately need to recapture in our churches. There is a divine, healthy tension that exists between joy and respect. I want the joy, at times even the levity that occurs because of my security in Christ; yet, I still need the "trauma of holiness" engendered through an awareness of his majesty, holiness, and glory.

### *The Explanation*

During the descent from the mountain, Jesus again instructs his disciples not to tell who he is. But now he adds a clarifier, "... until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." It is most likely that the disciples understood Christ's comment about resurrection as a reference to a final resurrection when all would rise. This misconception, at least for the moment, led to their discussion about rising from the dead.

One thing the disciples definitely did not understand was how the Son of Man could have been on the scene long before an appearance of Elijah (Malachi 4:5, 6). The Jews had long understood that Elijah would be the predecessor to the Messiah. Jesus again explained that John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah, was that forerunner (Matthew 11:11-14, 17:11-13; Luke 1:17).

## PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

*First, the Transfiguration helps to restore our perspective.*

On one occasion when Peter wanted to offer the church a word of encouragement, he alluded to the Transfiguration as a reminder of Christ's power and nearness (2 Peter 1:16-18). Although Christ's title as Lord did not match his lifestyle, he was Lord, nonetheless. In spite of the mockery, the rejection, the disbelief, and the cross, Jesus was indeed Immanuel. It is almost beyond our comprehension—and most certainly was a challenge to the eyewitnesses—that the “suffering servant” was in reality the image of the invisible God.

As the Father pulled back the veil of flesh in order to reveal the reality of glory, so we need to take the time to ponder the realities of life and be like David who, even in the midst of harrassment from his own son, reflected on realities such as these:

I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory . . . On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings (Psalm 63:2, 6, 7).

Christianity is more than church buildings and preachers. It is a relationship with the Lord of lords and the King of kings! He is our Father, and we are his children. At times we lose our perspective, and in those times, we need a fresh glimpse of his holy majesty and strong right hand. We need a reminder that the Christ of the Mount is not past tense! How often we speak of Christ only in terms of what he did. Do we really believe he is living, interceding, and empowering his church today? I suggest to you that the church has not been decapitated! The Lord Jesus Christ is her head, and he is alive now and forever more as her sustenance.

Anne Ortland, in *Up With Worship*, pictures an interesting scenario. Suppose a little boy looks through the knothole of a fence to see a parade. If he sees a clown pass by, he is tickled. If he sees a lion, he is afraid. If someone blocks his view, he may think there is no parade at all. But suppose a man picks him up. He puts him on his shoulders above the line of the fence. Then he can see a good part of the parade all at once, and he gets the idea! Indeed, if he were even higher up, he might see

the whole parade in one view. Many of us are viewing through a knothole. All we can see at one moment is our empty checkbook, a staggering church, a non-responsive community, a sick friend, or a hypocrite, and we get thoroughly discouraged. We need to be lifted above the knotholes! We must pause and seek a fresh glimpse of his glory and in finding, increase our trusting.

*Second, we learn that the valley of reality often follows the mountain of glory.* Jesus and his disciples had come from a place of worship, a place of glory, a place where the presence of the Lord was so very real. Now, they must return to an arena where unbelief was the norm (Mark 9:14-29).

Emerging from the pressing crowds and critical lawyers was a man with desperation written all over his face. He was a man many of us have met. He is a father whose child is in dire need of the Master's touch. Although the disciples lacked the faith necessary for exorcising the demon, Jesus responded to the father's admittedly imperfect faith with compassionate power.

What a contrast between the mountain and the valley! From a place of secure worship and harmony to an environment of hostility, failure, and disbelief. You know the feeling! Yet, the purpose of “mountaintop experiences” is to prepare us for the valleys. We need both. We need the mixture of worship/adoration and worship/service.

*Third, the Transfiguration of Jesus is a physical parallel to our own spiritual transfiguration.* The word rendered “transfigure” occurs in only two other passages outside of Matthew 17 and Mark 9. The occurrences are as follows:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind. . . . (Romans 12:2; emphasis mine).

And we, who with unveiled faces all contemplate the Lord's glory, are being *transformed* into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18; emphasis mine).

Although Paul wrote Romans and 2 Corinthians before

Mark penned his Gospel, it seems that the Transfiguration tradition was an event used illustratively by Paul. His two uses of the verb "transformed" are identical to "transfigured" in Greek. Although the transfiguring of Christ was an event, for us it is a process. For Christ it was physical; for us it is spiritual. For Christ it was a revealing of his innate glory; for us it is a reflection of Christ's glory.

For the person in whom the Spirit of God and the word of God are working, a transfiguring is happening. A divine process is occurring wherein God is creating a work of art (Ephesians 2:10). A caterpillar is emerging into a butterfly. As a sculptor, it was said that Michelangelo addressed each piece of stone with the following words: "I am about to release the angel captured within you." Through the renewing of our minds and the Spirit of the Lord, our worst can be suppressed and our best released. As the moon reflects the glory of the sun, so we are being transfigured to reflect the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. What an honor!

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## JESUS' TEACHING ON HUMILITY

(Mark 9:33-50)

PAUL ROGERS

Of all the parts and pieces in the teaching of Jesus-Christ, the one least likely to stir the imagination of modern man is his instruction on humility and service. He set a child in the midst of the apostles and insisted that receiving him was receiving the Lord. He declared that a single cup of water given in his name would never lose its reward. He even warned that those desiring to be first would necessarily be last! The last would be first and the first be last in his kingdom.

Such teaching carries with it in the minds of many an aura of spinelessness, subservience, and submission, the apparent opposite of aggressiveness and assertiveness. The slogans and jingles of a world gone wrong declare: "You deserve a break"; "Do yourself a favor"; "I did it my way." Among the best selling books of recent years have been those which outline the proper strategy in looking out for number one!

*Extravagance has gone to seed, and nothing is too good or too expensive for ME.* A department store recently advertised a pair of shoes for \$1,000, a dog collar for \$1,900, and a \$150,000 Rolls Royce with leather, leopard, and velvet interior. Like the wealthy of Jesus' day, the rich spare no expense in serving themselves and flaunting their possessions. Julius Caesar bought for Servillia a single pearl valued at \$180,000. The emperor Caligula provided for his wife a dress covered with pearls and emeralds costing in modern currency over \$1,000,000. Nero, not to be outdone, had a room whose walls were covered throughout with pearls. His porches were a mile long and his mules shod with silver. He wore a crown worth \$500,000.

It is tragic, but true, that those often admired most in Western culture are the self-centered who line their own pockets,

toot their own horns, and do their own thing. As someone said to me several months ago, "If you don't toot your own horn, no one else will!" But whoever said it ought to be tooted in the first place?

A thought-provoking book, *Habits of the Heart*, has appeared recently. It is the result of a five-year study of American attitudes and aspirations. The author sadly concluded that the community spirit is dying in our land, with more and more of us becoming "private" citizens, concerned only with those things which directly affect "me and mine."

### HUMILITY AND GOD'S WORD

The word "humility" has as its root *humus*, the word for earth. The humble person knows that he is of the earth and shall someday return to it.

Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud (Proverbs 16:19).

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8).

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:12).

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up (James 4:10).

*Humility is not having an inferiority complex or self-contempt.* As C. S. Lewis wrote, humility does not consist of handsome people trying to believe they are ugly and clever people trying to believe they are fools. It is rather a lowly estimate of self and an awareness of our true state in God's sight. It is rooted in a sense of indebtedness, reverence, and need. It is the response of a heart awed by the greatness of God. Humility has been called "love with a bowed head."

Few things are so needed in this late twentieth century as a spirit of meekness and humble service.

### THE LOWEST TASKS

*Humility leads us to undertake the lowest and meanest of tasks.* David, the greatest of kings, expressed his willingness to be a "doorkeeper" in God's house. Stephen, a powerful preacher with the capacity to move multitudes, gladly served the penniless widows of Jerusalem. Paul, the greatest author of his age, humbly picked up firewood at Melita to warm shipwrecked survivors. He later involved himself with a poor runaway slave, Onesimus, and made him the theme of an entire book.

It was humility which enabled the King of kings to identify himself with the least, last, lowest, and lost of the community. In Jericho, he did not visit Herod's summer palace or leisurely bathe in the ever-flowing springs. But he did find time for blind Bartimaeus and sinful Zaccheus. In Samaria, there is no mention of his touring Mount Gerizim or exploring the Samaritan temple site, but he did devote time and energy to a much-married woman who needed to understand true worship. At Gadara, he hired no sightseeing pleasure craft for a view of the shoreline, but he did find a demon-possessed, wild, naked man and left him "clothed and in his right mind."

It was our Lord's obsession with service to "nobodies" that so stirred the imagination of ancient—and modern—men. Celsus, the second-century critic, sneered at the meek and lowly Jesus for attracting the very "dregs of the population—the peasants, mechanics, beggars, and slaves . . . the downtrodden and beaten . . . the ragtag and bobtail of humanity." Origen, in the third century, responded: "Yes, Christ does attract the dregs of the earth to him, but he does not leave them dregs. Christ fashions and transforms men, giving them back their self-respect; enabling them to stand on their own feet and to look God in the eye."

### PASSING BY UNNOTICED

*It is humility which enables us to do our work while passing unnoticed through the world.* Many of God's greatest servants have labored in a quiet corner, unknown and unapplauded. The mother of T. B. Larimore was a poor, badly married, farm

girl in the Sequatchie Valley of Tennessee whose husband often abused her. Yet she gave to the world the prince of preachers among Restoration leaders. Many a tried and true minister has devoted himself for a lifetime to the service of uneducated backwoods people.

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:13-14).

### NO NEED FOR BOASTING

*It is humility which delivers us from the need to boast, strut, and vainly assert ourselves.* On the night of his betrayal, Jesus "took a towel and poured water into a basin" for the purpose of washing his disciples' feet. The roads of Palestine were unpaved and unclean, in dry weather covered with inches of dust, and in the rainy season with deep mud. The common people wore sandals held on their feet by straps and providing little protection from the dust or mud. Consequently, kept at the door of the house were large waterpots for guests to wash their feet. Often this was done by a servant. But on that awful night of betrayal, Jesus "laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself . . . he began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." There was no more menial, degrading task than that of washing the dirty, stinking feet of grown men. Yet, this is precisely what our Lord did. And it is made all the more remarkable by the fact that within six weeks he would be seated at the Father's right hand, far above all principality and power, having all authority in heaven and on earth. Yet he is found on his knees in lowly service to lesser people.

Where there is true greatness, boasting becomes unnecessary. The nations of this earth tend to identify themselves with ferocious animals. England is symbolized by a lion, Russia a bear, China a dragon, and the United States an eagle. But Jesus is likened to a Lamb, who lives only to give of himself to others.

There is a revealing story about Ida Eisenhower, mother of

Dwight Eisenhower. During World War II, while General Eisenhower was Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe, his mother was traveling by train to Washington. Seated next to her was a woman who talked incessantly of her son who had been recently promoted to the rank of captain. Unaware of Mrs. Eisenhower's identity, she finally caught her breath long enough to inquire, "And what does your son do?" Her quiet reply was, "He's in the army too." Where there is true greatness, no boasting is necessary.

### FINDING FAVOR

*It is humility which enables us to find favor in the sight of God and man.* Our heavenly Father "giveth grace to the humble" and exalts all those who humble themselves under his mighty hand.

The only use God can make of an arrogant, self-sufficient individual is to show his power. Thus did he drive Nebuchadnezzar from his Babylonian throne to "eat grass as oxen . . . till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4:25). Proud Haman was last seen swinging from the very gallows he had built for meek Mordecai (Esther 7:10). Boastful Herod was smitten by an angel "because he gave not God the glory" (Acts 12:23). The self-inflated Pharisee of Luke 18 went home unjustified while the sin-confessing publican was received and rewarded.

The late Howard Hughes was the second richest man in American history, with an estate estimated at 2.5 billion dollars. To spend that amount of money would require spending \$1,000 a day for more than 7,500 years! Yet his wealth brought no happiness or contentment to Hughes. None of his marriages lasted, and only sixteen people attended his funeral. According to one commentator, "Not one of them cried." There is only one way to happiness, and that is through humble service to God and man.

*The Natural*, a popular movie of recent years, portrays Roy Hobbs as a young baseball player with incredible natural ability. His ambition was simple: "One day I'll be walking

down the street and people will say, 'There goes Roy Hobbs, the greatest there ever was.' Unfortunately, a bizarre set of circumstances prevented him from breaking into the majors until well into his thirties. He became an overnight sensation only to be struck down again just before the playoffs. Lying in his hospital bed, he laments, "I could have been the greatest." *Actually, we all can be the greatest:* "But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:26-27).

The humble shall be blessed, the lowly shall be lifted up, the meek shall inherit the earth, and the servant of all will be greatest of all. In fact, the only thing we will possess on the day after the day of the Lord will be what we gave to God and to others.

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## "THEN WHO CAN BE SAVED?"

(Mark 10:13-31)

MIKE LEWIS

Adults meet for the first time, and the game begins. The game is called, "Can you prove you are somebody important?" When adults meet, names are routinely exchanged, but that is not enough to play the game. You must provide a statement of what you do if people are to have a sense of your identity. It is the American way that individual identity and value are almost always connected to titles or what a person can do. The difference between "This is Tom" and "This is Tom, three-time state track champ" is all the difference in the world. Honor without accomplishment seems unfair in a competitive culture. So the game goes on.

Children seem to be unaware of the game when they are only four or five. When asked who they are, they are simply, "Tommy." No resume, no disclaimers, no regrets are given. Having no idea of what they own and do not own, they simply offer themselves and depend on others for their lives. Of course, it is not long until it is, "Hi, I'm Tommy, the fastest runner in my class!" It is the beginning of the loss of innocence.

## THE CONTEXT

When Jesus walked from Galilee to Judea, he was already thinking of Jerusalem and the cross (Mark 10:32-34). The attempts by the Pharisees and others to trick and trap him were increasing as in their attempts to catch Jesus in a controversy concerning marriage (Mark 10:2-12). Jesus knew it would only be a short time until their staged concern over such questions would give way to the rage and hostility that controlled them. The trumped up charges and brutal cross were coming. The disciples, who are portrayed in Mark's

Gospel in the most ungracious manner of all the Gospel accounts, are about to erupt in ego-crazed argument over their greatness almost in the shadow of their future desertion (Mark 10:35-45). It could have been a very frustrating time for Jesus, but it was also time to teach one of his most important lessons about the basis of salvation. It was time to take on the game played by those older; so he began with the younger.

### EMPHASIS GIVEN TO THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF THE SPIRITUAL CHILD (Mark 10:13-16)

In the closing sections of discourse from the Galilean ministry, Jesus takes a child to provide insight into the nature of the kingdom (Mark 9:36-37). The kingdom is composed of those who share the qualities of children. The same principle is now emphasized early in the Judean ministry.

The text in chapter 10 uses the Greek term for young children; Matthew uses the term for infants. The exact age may not be critical except to note that Jesus seems to have referred to the qualities of children at their most vulnerable, innocent, and dependent stage of life.

It is interesting to notice that after Jesus introduces the principle of learning about the kingdom qualities through little children in chapter 9, the disciples seem to exhibit an insensitivity towards children and their parents in chapter 10. So Jesus proclaims the principle again with even greater force, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all" (Mark 10:15).

The burning question becomes "What childlike quality was Jesus referring to when he said, 'Receive the kingdom like a child'?" Over the years, commendations have had many far-ranging creative responses. However, Jesus does not simply allow the mind to run wild concerning the principle, as if to say, "Here is a key concept; now you decide what it means on your own." It seems that Jesus provides two applications of the principle immediately following in verses 17 through 31. One might well question the connectedness of verses 13 through 16

with verses 17 through 31, but consider that in Mark 9:35, just before Jesus first mentions children, he teaches the principle, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all." Now notice the concluding thought of Mark 10:31. It is, "Many who are first, will be last; and the last, first." Jesus and Mark seem to be taking a principle thought in Galilee and giving it even greater emphasis in Judea. Understanding the principle, however, is related to learning from two conversations that follow immediately in Mark 10. The applications provide flesh on the bones of the principle.

### APPLICATION ONE: THE RICH MAN HELD PRISONER BY WHAT HE HAD ACHIEVED (Mark 10:17-22)

Other Gospel accounts are required for a more complete portrait of the rich man. From Mark, we know he was rich, from Matthew that he was young, and from Luke that he was a ruler. Therefore, the rich young ruler is the first application of the principle, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child, shall not enter it at all."

The rich young ruler demonstrates some childlike qualities himself. He is full of energy and runs up to Jesus. He is full of enthusiasm—so much so, that he kneels before a poor Galilean rabbi, perhaps temporarily forgetting his station in life. The rich young ruler is also full of simplistic confidence as he quickly dismisses the Law as something he had kept from his youngest days.

There is a play upon the word "good" in verses 17 and 18. Jesus asks, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." This verse troubles some, as if Jesus is denying his deity. However, the intent is that Jesus is reminding the enthusiastic young man that if he believes the one he is talking to is good, then this young man is calling this Galilean, God. Jesus questions the rich young ruler as if to ask, "Do you know the implications of what you are saying?"

The man's youthful manner with quick decision, confident boasts, eagerness, and spontaneity seem to especially strike Jesus. As Jesus watched and listened to him, he felt love

toward him (Mark 10:21). Even though some of the things the rich young ruler was saying from a theological point of view were "a little off," there was no debate or condescending words from Jesus. The childlike characteristics were quite enduring, and the young man was on the brink of the kingdom, knowing something was missing from his life.

In love, Jesus said, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21). At that point the text says, "... his face fell. . . ." What happened was that he suddenly fell from his childhood and remembered he had power and status. He was a man of property. The cost of giving that all away was to lose his identity and value in the world. Such thinking does not belong to a child; only adults play the game that value equals that which can be touched and banked.

#### APPLICATION TWO: THE DISCIPLES WHO THOUGHT SOCIETAL LIVING MADE THEM IMPORTANT (Mark 10:23-31)

Mark 10:23-31 consists of two movements: the reaction of shock toward what Jesus said about the wealthy, and the personal implication of the words of Jesus upon the disciples themselves.

The first movement concerns the wealthy and the kingdom (vv. 23-27). Continuing the theme of the kingdom after the rich young ruler leaves, Jesus turns to the disciples to further push the principle of childlike reception of the kingdom. It is interesting that this is the only time that Jesus refers to the disciples as his children in the Mark account. Like a storyteller trying to trap the great imaginations of children, Jesus provides a stark image of a camel trying to go through the eye of the needle as something that is easier than a rich man going to heaven. The example has made many an adult squirm over the years. Children only listen to the story and smile.

The gymnastics people go through to lighten the "bite" of the camel/needle image of Jesus, suggesting such things as a gate called "eye of a needle," has more to do with rationalization than reality. The camel was the largest animal known in

Judea. It was not tough for a camel to go through the eye of a needle; it was impossible. Therefore, what is the point of the image?

Jesus is not making a physical point, but a spiritual one. Just as it would be wrong to draw from the text that only children under age five can receive the kingdom of heaven, it would be wrong just to see a surface meaning that no rich man can go to heaven. There will be only one type of economic group in heaven from a spiritual point of view. It will be those who were once spiritually impoverished, realized it, and gave themselves to God. In the context of Mark 10, Jesus is talking about the kind of rich person whose identity, value, and trust are bound up in what can be achieved, purchased, and worn. Jesus is speaking of every human endeavor that people can point to and say, "You see what I did? I deserve the kingdom." It is impossible to take that kind of journey, like a camel going through the eye of the needle. The disciples recognize some of the implications of what Jesus is saying and in shock ask, "Then who can be saved?" If you cannot point to your life as some sort of record of what you deserve, or if what you have done is not a measure of your value, how can anyone be worthy of the kingdom? Who can be saved? It is the key question to understanding what it means to receive the kingdom like a child.

Jesus said with men it is impossible, but not with God. The little children and the rich young ruler provide insight into a message of grace. It takes a childlike dependence to realize, "There is nothing I can do to care for myself, and I must seek to give myself to another." A child of two will never speak those words, but he can live them. When one becomes older, independence and achievement set the agenda of life. Yet no person can independently enter the kingdom of God or point to deserving achievements for admission. The very things that people hold on to so tightly as a symbol of their value are the very obstacles to receiving the kingdom like a child. There is nothing a person can do to earn or deserve the kingdom: "With men it is impossible, but not with God. . . ."

The disciples, now challenged by Jesus, next look inward in the second movement in this section (vv. 28-31). "Peter begins

to say, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed you' " (v. 28). It is a touch of jealousy on the part of Peter. He is thinking perhaps that he can see the unworthiness of a rich man who refuses to surrender his possessions as his means of righteousness, but surely people who have left everything in order to follow Jesus are worthy. Quite often those who choose a sacrificial lifestyle are most conscious of their sacrifice. Grace does seem unfair at times, but only when measured by human standards of competitiveness. Jesus simply encourages his disciples that they are not being ripped off. Their sacrifice will be rewarded (v. 30). However, most of all, the disciples must try to take on a new childlike identity. Jesus reminds them again, "Many who are first, will be last; and the last, first" (v. 31).

### CONCLUSION

In a world where people compete most of their lives to be first, it is hard to be shaped by a totally different perspective. It is hard to realize that he who sins least is not necessarily best. It is hard to not totally dismiss your value as a person because your shelf is free of trophies, your wall blank of plaques, you are never asked to stand up and take a bow, your title is not impressive, and if you died tomorrow, only a handful of people would notice, and not even they would miss you long. It is hard to understand how anyone in such circumstances could know meaning and peacefulness in life. It is hard to understand, unless, of course, you are a child . . . a child with nothing to prove, but everything to give to those whom he loves . . . a child who does not know how to keep score between the haves and the have-nots and is, therefore, unaware if the world says he is winning or losing the game.

The grace of God is the greatest gift of mercy and love ever offered. However, it takes a child to receive it. Who can be saved? Only a child of God.

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## SERVANTHOOD

(Mark 10:35-45)

CHARLES B. HODGE, JR.

MARK! The great "Good News" of Mark. Tell beginners in Bible study not to begin in Genesis and keep reading. They will only "bog down" in the wilderness! Tell them to read Mark twenty consecutive times . . . this is Jesus. Jesus is the key to Scripture. Grasp Jesus. Then read James twenty times. This is practical wisdom. Know Jesus, and practice wisdom. Read the four Gospels before Acts. You cannot reap Acts by planting Acts. Master John before studying Romans. Most major errors have been lifted from Romans. John is Jesus. Jesus will keep you honest in Romans. Study Romans 5-8 as a unit. In these chapters Jesus is revealed as the answer to wrath, sin, law, and death. But it all begins with Mark. "It is one thing to go through a book; it is another thing for a book to go through you."

## SERVANTHOOD

Mark 9 precedes Mark 10. Mark 9 has the glorious Transfiguration, the disciples' failure to cure, then the cross announced by Jesus. It is a "roller-coaster" chapter. But excitement or heartache cannot prevent discussion over "Who is the greatest?" Man is never too happy or too hurt to argue about power, title, or recognition. The disciples had the "shame of silence" when Jesus asked about their quarrels.

The arresting conclusion is that power is a problem for the very best! The disciples were "good guys." Only Judas was rotten. Preachers, elders, deacons, and generous givers have a unique temptation. Few can handle it. I keep repeating to myself, "I am the preacher; I am not the exception; I am the example."

We now come to Mark 10. James and John were involved. Matthew focused upon "Mama" protecting the apostles. Mark was honest. Another arresting conclusion is that James and John were "in the elite three." They were among the first called. They were "kinfolks." They allowed their ambition to control. They sought three things men seek: (1) *Pre-eminence*. As said, to a degree, they already had that. They did have special privileges. Man wants to be known for having more religion than he has. Reputation not character. It is trouble when church officers want to be church officers more than Christians. (2) *Proximity*. Man likes "to know": "I know celebrities"; "I am in the know." Certain brethren wish to know first. (3) *Power*, raw human power. Men fight for thrones but not for towels. Coercion, manipulation, exploitation—men "bully" with power. Jesus simply said, "It will not be so down at church." Christians have a different concept. Christians have greatness in servanthood not recognition.

Another arresting conclusion is that the remaining ten disciples "got into it." They were upset because they had not thought about it first. They were angered with James and John. Our anger with others is usually over what we would do!

The final arresting conclusion is that Jesus was kind to all! He firmly stated his case. But he did not shout or threaten. The poise, the mercy of Jesus! Mark expresses/exposes our humanity. We all have "feet of clay." God uses ordinary men to do his work. Men consider "high station" as success. God values the worker, not the work; he values love, not the achievement. This is a hard lesson for us to learn.

## SOME STATEMENTS

God's church is a "Servant Church" not a "Success Church."

The crucified Savior can only be communicated by crucified servants.

Preach the most gospel to the most people in the best way in the shortest time.

I am a servant of the servants of The Servant.

The sequence . . . grace, gratitude, humility, servanthood.

"God, make me honest, humble, and holy."

### AUTHORITY NOT POWER

Speakers and writers are privileged to define their terms. Jesus spoke with authority. He has all authority in heaven and earth. Yet, Jesus never served men with force. Jesus did not come with size, money, prestige, politics, or power. Actually, Satan's three temptations involved a misuse of power. There is no pyramid-power, position-power in the church. When men resort to power they are admitting their lack of authority. Love and power are opposites. The answer to the love of power is the power of love. When you use power, you lose authority. When you have authority, you have a higher power. A shepherd with authority leads sheep. A dictator with power drives goats.

It is called "The Pecking Order." Man strives to dominate. At home, at church, among friends—someone rules. Pilate had power; Jesus had authority. Who won? The Mafia has power; Mama has authority. Who wins? Only love will conquer where power fails. Love is a greater force than power. Jesus could have called ten thousand angels—but he did not. The gospel is a call from love not force. God gives us Jesus that we may give him back! The power of the church is in the pulpit, not in politics. Preachers are to be "gospel preachers." Some "scold" and do not preach. They are creedal. Some truth is truth but not gospel. Some brethren, actually, have not heard the gospel! We have taken for granted the idea our members, outsiders, already know the gospel. The Great Commission is founded upon the gospel.

Since World War II, business and the church have stressed management not leadership. We have made leaders managers. Managers control; leaders create commitment. Sheep are led not managed. This idea has come from our "macho" complex. John Wayne dominated. Men have been taught not to touch, not to cry, not to appear weak. Psychology categorizes people either as "winners" or "losers." Even Christians are not allowed to cry. We are independent, self-sufficient, and strong. We cannot confess weaknesses, needs, or failures. The

church is now open only to the strong—not the weak. Sinners are not welcomed. Preachers who can ridicule and put down others are idolized. We have been seduced with the "success syndrome." Organization is promoted at the expense of people.

### DEACONS

Jesus was a servant. Christians are servants. Elders are servants. Preachers are servants. Workers are servants. Select all church leaders from servants. Gene Street made millions in a restaurant chain. He sold out. In an interview he said, "If a man does not have the mentality of a servant in the cafe business, he will go broke." How much the more down at church! Make servants not leaders. Select your leaders from servants. In the world, men cannot grasp leaders and servants together. God's leaders are all servants. Worldly organizations and goals work only so far in the kingdom. The church lives in a totally different dimension. Success is totally different in the kingdom.

Jesus simply said he was a "deacon," a servant. "Why don't more deacons become elders?" This is not the question! "Why don't more deacons become deacons?" We have a worldly concept among us. The eldership, the diaconate are rewards, titles, "power offices." One is the "biggie"; the other is the "littlie." Said offices fuel our pride. This violates our text. Deacons are not "junior elders," little popes, critics, church experts. They are simple servants. "I am a servant of the servants of The Servant!" The diaconate is not "The Brass Ring." It is not a necessary nuisance in climbing up the ladder to the eldership. Deacons are servants, *period!* They submit, serve, give, unite, encourage, and build up. Deacon deacons become deacon elders! Power hungry deacons become power hungry elders.

The crux of church work does not reside in preachers or elders—it is in the diaconate. Serving is at the heart of Christianity. Deacons symbolize Christ. We need servants that lead—not leading servants. Leaders are followers before becoming leaders. Any man too big to be a deacon is too small to be an elder. When men stop serving they start griping. God

calls us to be servants not sensations.

Why are more of us not servants? One simple answer. We wish to be recognized as a servant but not treated as one. Servants get "took," used, and abused. Servants have no position or power. The only thing servants have are towels. Servants are not celebrities. God will not bless a selfish church.

The church that will not bleed cannot bless.

The church that will not serve cannot save.

The church that will not suffer cannot redeem.

The church that will not die cannot live.

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## JESUS IN THE METROPOLIS

(Mark 11:1-26)

STEVE FLATT

The book of Mark is a fast-paced Gospel. As you read it, there is no convenient place to lay it down. It hurries through at a breakneck pace, desiring to quench the Roman readers' thirst for action.

But by the time Mark gets to chapter 11, it seems his Gospel draws a deep breath, and the pace slows considerably. Compared to the furious rush of the first ten chapters, it is as if the life of Jesus goes in slow motion. Chapter 11 starts with Sunday of the week when Jesus will die on Friday afternoon. Chapters 11 through 16 focus strictly on the last week of the Lord's life, looking particularly at his crucifixion and resurrection.

It is noteworthy that all the Gospel accounts devote a disproportionate amount of space to that same time period. Led by the Holy Spirit, the writers deliberately draw our attention to that crucial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. After all, that collective event is not just the cornerstone of our faith; it is our faith. As Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 15:14, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith." So the passage we examine is the entry to the zenith of human history.

As Mark 11 begins, Jesus declares the Messiahship which he has ordered many others to keep silenced. Recall the numerous episodes where the Lord concluded a miracle by saying (in essence), "Now don't you tell anyone what I have done or who I am." That admonition to muzzle the good news of the Messiah surely puzzled all who heard it.

By contrast in Mark 11, Jesus keeps nothing secret any longer. The time is here for him to declare himself openly! He does so by beautifully fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Read the story once again in Mark 11:1-11. The full significance of the festive entry into Jerusalem was not apparent to the disciples at the time. They did not immediately recall the prophecy from Zechariah 9. In fact, John 12:16 says it was only after the resurrection, while reflecting back over the events of Jesus' life and especially the events around the last few days, that they were able to make the connection with what Jesus did here. By entering Jerusalem like this—declaring himself openly and accepting the praise and emotional adoration of the crowd—Jesus was hurling down the challenge. He was saying to the religious leaders who had been viewing him as something as a challenge that he, indeed, had come among them to claim the allegiance of the people. If need be, in order to have that allegiance, he would challenge them and their traditions, their self-seeking interpretation of law and their use of religion to manipulate people. It is as if Jesus were saying by entering Jerusalem this way, "I claim to be the Messianic King, and I call you to choose now whether you accept or reject me!"

The people who came out of the city to meet him did so in a fevered pitch of enthusiasm. "Hosanna!" they cried. (That term literally means "Saved now!") Surely their cry had not so much to do with the saving of their souls from sin as it signified their expectation of the Messiah appearing in their time. Their cries for salvation must have been appealing to a salvation from Roman dominion, oppressive taxes, or a crumbling economy. (Interestingly, that is the same sort of thing people would like a Messiah to do in our Western world today, is it not?)

Jesus arranges the situation by sending the disciples on ahead as he was approaching Jerusalem, instructing them to find an animal at a certain place. If anyone were to challenge their acquisition of the beast, they were to say, "The Lord wants him. We will bring him back immediately."

Some have suggested that the events that followed represent

a miracle, but more than likely, they symbolize forethought and proper arrangement. Jesus must have already talked to someone about having an animal available. In the first place, it is not likely that anyone would have a colt with its mother tied in front of the house. You just do not keep animals that way. Nor if a stranger came along and said, "Hey, I want to use your animal for a while," is it likely that request would be granted? No, Jesus must have arranged for all of this to transpire, and the prearranged signal would be the sending of some men who would tell the owner, "The Lord needs the animal."

At any rate, in accordance with Jesus' instructions, the animal was where he said it would be. As expected, they were challenged, and they explained just as Jesus had told them. Without further interruption, they completed their duty.

Now notice—this is a colt on which no one has ever sat. It is an animal that has not been broken, an animal that is not used to being ridden. We have all seen parades where trained horses have balked in the presence of large crowds cheering and making a great deal of noise. Perhaps you have seen them rear and even be pulled from the procession. The paradox here is that this colt has never been ridden or broken, and it is going to head the delegation right through the midst of a terribly unruly crowd. People will be throwing objects right down in front of the animal. People will be screaming in the ears of Jesus. Yet the account seems to indicate that the animal responds in the manner of the most trained and disciplined of steeds.

If Jesus can exert that kind of influence over an animal's will, how much more are we supposed to believe in his power to take the unbroken wills of some of us. By virtue of our faith in him, he is able to take our sinful and undisciplined wills and mold and train them under his control.

But the point of the whole episode is to see this as a fulfillment of prophecy. Just as Zechariah had said, the King appears, coming from among them. His arrival is in a lowly fashion, riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Jesus would not come on the back of a magnificent stallion or behind a team of white horses leading his chariot. Rather his entry into Jerusalem is upon the foal of a donkey, not the sort of steed expected

to lead a parade.

Jesus comes wearing the same peasant garment he has always worn. He comes accepting the adulation of the people, understanding all along that they are acclaiming him for something other than what he is going to do. They are expecting him to save in a way that he has not come to save. Accepting their screams of "Hosanna," he knows full well that before the week is out, some of these same people will be in a mob yelling, "Crucify him!"

Human loyalty is a fickle thing, is it not? You never know from one moment to the next who can be counted on when the going really gets rough. People can be whipped into an emotional fervor like this and be led to say almost anything. Oh, in this scene, it is the right thing to say, though they likely did not understand the implications of it. Still, they can say the correct things, and even scream at the top of their lungs.

Let us be cautious of the commitment which may be made in a supercharged, emotional atmosphere. Frankly, I have avoided situations that tend to get something out of me in that context because I know how human emotions work. In the frenzy of a moment that is packed with electricity and emotion, many of us will sign or say things that otherwise would be against our better and proper judgment. That is simply a part of human nature to which all of us are vulnerable to a degree.

It seems to me that the Lord warned about that kind of thing repeatedly in his ministry. In the parable of the soils, Jesus spoke about some seed falling on the shallow ground. That seed springs up quickly. But even as it does, it is dried and scorched by the sun because there is no depth of earth to support its growth. In like fashion, faith dies quickly, and adulation passes easily when generated by latching on the bandwagon in an atmosphere of shallow and emotional enthusiasm.

Jesus seems not to take any of this too seriously. He does not talk to them about what is going on, and he does not praise them for what is being said or done in this context. Instead, he keeps his head pointed straight toward the city. He rides through the crowd, eyes staring forward. He enters Jerusalem and goes straight for the temple.

The significance of that action appears to be the most important thing related to this entry. Jesus enters Jerusalem and goes straight to the place of sacrifice. At any festival day in Judaism, the primary purpose for the people coming to the holy city was to offer some appropriate sacrifice—a sacrifice to put things right between themselves and God or themselves and a brother. Jesus went directly to the temple because he had sacrifice in mind. But it was no lamb or bullock that he planned to offer. Jesus went to the temple, looked around, saw everything there, and was reminded of its meaning—sacrifice! If anyone ever understood the concept of atonement for sin and what is needed before God to settle the sin problem, this man did.

Jesus goes in, and knowing what will happen to him within the next few days, he must have looked around very soberly. In walking out of the temple grounds, he heads back to Bethany. There he spends the night and comes back the next morning.

Look now at verse 15. Upon returning the next morning, Jesus goes right back to the temple. With his consciousness being so keen about what that temple means regarding sacrifice and one's approach before God, he enters. But Jesus was made to be indignant by what he saw going on in the bright light of early morn:

And they came to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple (Mark 11:15-16).

When one thinks of the temple, there should be the image of a large compound of about twenty-five acres. The temple proper was just a relatively small building in the center of that compound, but the temple complex is considerably larger. It is much like envisioning a university setting. The administration building sits centrally in the campus, but the university is entered when you go into the campus area from any side.

Jesus enters the temple compound, and on the outer reaches of it, he is distracted and alarmed by what he sees. Outer areas

contain sheltered porches where teachers and students meet. When Jesus was twelve years old, he sat in those and made conversation with teachers of the Law. The outer areas of the compound were also places where Gentiles could enter, and a number of pious, God-fearing Gentiles, much like Cornelius, would come to Jerusalem and kneel in the outer precincts of the temple area because they were allowed no farther. In fact, the entire temple compound was a progression of pilgrimage privilege. Gentiles were allowed to go to certain boundaries. Women could go slightly farther. Jewish men were allowed to a point, and only priests were permitted full access.

In this outer area, many pious Gentiles would come to pray to the God in whom they were led to believe. A number of women would be praying there as well.

But also in the outer courts, there was considerable peripheral activity. Sacrifices were being bought and sold. Some of this was likely necessary, but a great deal of that commerce was superfluous and dishonest.

The Sadducees controlled this temple traffic because they controlled the priesthood at this time. They would raise animals and keep them blemish-free so they would be appropriate sacrifices. Obviously, they would sell them for a fat price. If an animal was brought from home, they would inspect it for sacrifice, and usually they could find a flaw. Once, a visitor left town, that same animal might be put in their pens for sale. One can see how corruption was rampant.

Those Sadducees were also there to help with temple tax. One could not use Roman currency to pay the temple tax because it was unclean. So they were "money changers." This function was much like the currency exchange desks that are located at major international airports. When a worshiper would enter into the temple compound, he would need to swap Roman coinage for temple coins to pay the temple tax in an appropriate manner. Needless to say, there was usually some haggling over the exchange rate.

So all of this business is going on in the compound. It is almost a bazaar or street fair! Can you not imagine? Here are women and Gentiles—pious individuals—trying to pray. They are as far into the temple compound as they are allowed to go,

seeking to draw closer to God. Yet right beside them would be the screams of the man who claims that a Sadducee sacrificial lamb was too expensive, or the tirade of another haggling over the rate of exchange for the temple tax.

Mark even says that on top of this, they were using the temple area as a shortcut between locations in the city. Vendors and salesmen with donkeys and other beasts of burdens were carrying burdens through the holy temple complex as a path.

Jesus sees all of this and is incensed. Why? Because he sees the temple for what it is supposed to be—a place of approach to God. He sees it as the place of sacrifice. He sees the sacrifice he is getting ready to offer himself. And when he watches these people prostitute religion, make a mockery of sacrifice, and turn the temple into an open-air market, we see a side of Jesus one seldom considers. His eyes flash, his face gets red, and he is as mad as a wet hen. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, becomes an indignant, robust avenger. Jesus put a stop to those who would use the temple grounds as a shortcut. He turned over the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves because this was a place of worship.

This is not the first time such an event happened. Three years before, almost to the day, Jesus had done the same thing while viewing similar atrocities. We should not be surprised. When our Lord sees religion being dragged down to the level that is presented in Mark 11, there is no disguising his anger. Verse 17 says, "He taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but you have made it a den of thieves."

I wonder what Jesus would say about the modern religious scene? Would he draw a similar conclusion? Could it be that Christianity is not so much for the poor and penitent to approach God as it has degenerated to a situation of a manipulative clergy and a self-seeking enterprise for a few? I view the vast majority of television preachers and read of the power brokerage and denominational conventions, and I cannot help but believe that this whole thing has been turned aside from what the Lord intended for it to be. It is not a priesthood of all believers, but a priesthood of a clergy, a chosen few, some of

whom extort and manipulate.

Religion should still be thought of as a place, a plan, a means by which sacrifice is made for sin. God has always wanted sinful people to be able to come before him and have their cases pleaded by the Lamb who makes atonement for the sins of the world. That is the religion of Christianity. It is not getting caught up in the trappings and charlatans, but to see true religion as what it has always been intended to be—God with an individual, one-on-one, to take care of the sin problem.

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## CONTROVERSY IN JERUSALEM

(Mark 11:27—12:40)

JIMMY ADCOX

Jesus was no stranger to controversy. He did not seek it, but neither did he avoid it. He was a man on a mission, and that mission would be carried out regardless of its lack of popularity. With the authority of God, he pressed his claims and their implications so that all the world could examine them. The Gospel of Mark presents those claims with a fast moving account of the works and words of Jesus. They are presented powerfully and publicly. Men might accept him or reject him, but they could not ignore him.

Jesus' entire ministry was one grand display of the authority and love of the Son of God. While his love drew men unto his heart, it was his authority that challenged men's lives and forced them to grapple with his identity and message. He did not speak like other men. There was no need to cite the rabbis or establish his credentials. He spoke with authority and people were amazed (Mark 1:22). With the authority of his power he could demand the obedience of demons, overcome human illness, buck the tradition of the fathers, exercise control over nature, and even raise the dead! (Mark 1—11). Mark used generous descriptions to depict the unexaggerated response of those who saw him. They were *amazed, terrified, completely astonished, and overwhelmed with amazement and wonder!* It was not unusual for them to exclaim, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:12).

He also made some strong claims for himself. He claimed the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:10), called himself Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), accepted assertions that he was the Son of God and the Christ (Mark 3:11-12, 8:27-30), and promised his devoted disciples eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

He was a man who went about doing good, but he was more

than a good man. He claimed to be God made flesh. At first he discouraged the public proclamation of his identity, preferring not to rush the outcome of his ministry. But by Mark 11, Jesus was publicly pressing his claims in the temple court against the vicious attacks of his opposition—before the watching eyes and listening ears of all who cared to see and hear. The time of the cross had come. Pressing his claims before friends, enemies, and bystanders would both further his ultimate cause and seal his immediate doom.

The enemies of Jesus had been planning to kill him for some time. They were looking for a way to turn the people against him. Jesus' last days at the temple gave them the ideal opportunity. They hoped to incriminate him before everyone.

### THE OPPOSITION TO JESUS

The first challenge to Jesus came from *the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders* (Mark 11:27-33). By clearing the temple the day before, he attacked their sacred precinct and challenged their cherished authority. The chief priests were the highest of the religious aristocracy in the land. They controlled the temple guard, the temple treasury, and as part of the Sanhedrin, possessed judicial authority over the Jews. The scribes were the experts in the Law, while the elders were the lay leaders of the aristocratic families in Palestine. The Jewish Sanhedrin was made up of representatives of these groups. As leaders entrenched in their own religious system, they were much more concerned about preserving their political-religious connections than they were in sincerely doing the will of God. Jesus was a threat to them. So they decided to destroy him (Mark 8:31).

Together they formulated a question they thought would trap him: "By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" If he were to claim authority from God, they would accuse him of blasphemy. If he claimed secular authority, they would accuse him of insurrection. Jesus answered with an offer they could not refuse. He promised to answer their question if they would answer one for him. "John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me."

They could not answer. If they acknowledged that John's baptism was authorized by God, they would incriminate themselves for rejecting it. If they said his baptism was only by human authority, they would arouse the opposition of those who believed John was a prophet. All they could say was this: "We do not know."

Next, Jesus was challenged by *the Herodians and the Pharisees* (Mark 12:13-17). They were a strange alliance. The Herodians were in favor of paying homage to Rome for reasons of expediency. The Pharisees, eager to maintain ritual purity and separation from pagan influences, quietly opposed any compromise with Rome. They were anxious to rid themselves of Jesus because he had opposed their commitment to tradition over God and rebuked their hypocrisy. Strange forces can sometimes unite when threatened by a common foe. Together they designed a question they thought would trap Jesus. They cloaked their deadly question with flattery and pretended to want a sincere answer: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or should we not?" If Jesus answered, "Yes," he would alienate large numbers of the people. If he answered, "No," word would reach the Roman officials that he was an insurrectionist.

Jesus knew their hypocrisy and exposed their motives before the crowd. Then he answered their question. With a Roman coin before them, he asked, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Finally, *the Sadducees* tried their hand at trapping Jesus (Mark 12:18-27). The Sadducees were the minority party in Palestine, but with their wealth and power were able to control the Jewish Priesthood and Sanhedrin. Strangely enough, the Sadducees were in some ways both the liberals and the conservatives of their day. As conservatives they rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees and believed only in what they understood to be taught in the Torah. But it was also for this reason that they tried to justify their liberalism. They rejected the resurrection, angels, and demons—claiming that they were not taught in the Pentateuch. In order to belittle Jesus, they asked him a trick question about the resurrection that

had probably stumped their Pharisee counterparts repeatedly. They questioned the resurrection by attempting to reduce it to absurdity. They posed a question based on the law of Levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5. According to this law, a man was to take the childless wife of his deceased brother as his own wife. In this way she could have children to carry on the family name and assure the line of inheritance for the family property. Suppose, they conjectured, that this happened through seven brothers, each dying, all marrying the same woman, and none producing children. The question was this: "At the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

Jesus accused them of knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. In questioning the resurrection, they doubted God's power. While claiming to be rooted in the Pentateuch, they demonstrated their ignorance of it. From their own Scriptures, Jesus proved the resurrection they denied (Exodus 3:6). Cutting through their pride, Jesus said, "Have you not read in the book of Moses, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

The opposition Jesus faced was manipulative, closed, dishonest, self-serving, vindictive, and hypocritical. Genuine Christians will face similar opposition today. Strangely enough, this opposition will often come from those who otherwise seem to be the most religious. It is not unusual for the greatest enemies of Christ to project a front of religious commitment and concern. Meanwhile, an attitude of dishonesty and self-preservation causes them to reject truth and do everything possible to discredit the one presenting it.

### HOW TO HANDLE OPPOSITION

One of the greatest tests a man can face is the fire of controversy and opposition. How can one maintain a proper spirit, reject temptations toward compromise, and handle controversy in a way pleasing to God? Here are some observations about how Jesus dealt with dishonest opposition to himself.

*First, Jesus often answered questions with questions.* He wanted people to think. Only when a person is forced to grapple with the big issues of life will he struggle through to the realities that are life-changing. It is in facing the implications of thought-provoking questions that one discovers how willing he is to be honest and allow truth to be transformed into life. In this case, asking questions put the burden back on the opposition. Being forced to answer pointed questions, they showed their true colors of dishonesty and hypocrisy.

*Second, Jesus let them discredit themselves.* He did not allow himself to become like his opposition. How easy it is to return evil with evil, become filled with bitterness and vindictiveness, and respond in the same spirit with which we have been abused. Jesus instead responded with integrity, fairness, and openness. He knew if he behaved in a godly way that it would serve as a vivid contrast to the manipulation and dishonesty of the opposition. The manner and lifestyle of the Son of God stood as another testimony to the truthfulness of this claim.

*Third, Jesus did not always feel compelled to answer all their questions.* In Mark 11:27-33 Jesus agreed to answer their question if they answered his. His question exposed their dishonesty and false motives. Having demonstrated their lack of sincerity to learn or listen, he was under no obligation to respond to them. Many today will ask questions only to trap or gain some bit of information to use against you. You have a right to know why they need or want the information. If their motives are pure, we should try to help in every way possible. If it is obvious that their motives are false, we are under no obligation to aid them in their ungodly endeavors.

*Fourth, Jesus confronted them with pictures they could not misunderstand.* In Mark 12:1-12 he told a story to his opposition that was like a mirror before which they could see themselves. They were like the farmers to whom the owner rented out his vineyard. After going away on a journey, the owner sent back a servant to collect his share of the fruit. They seized him, beat him, and sent him back empty-handed. He patiently continued to send others. Some were beaten. Others were killed. Finally, he decided to send his son whom he loved. He thought surely they would respect his son. But the self-serving

tenants saw an opportunity to kill the son and seize the inheritance. They wanted to own and control what was not theirs. So they killed the son and threw him out of the vineyard. Then Jesus said, "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Through this vivid story, Jesus had confronted them with their unfaithfulness to God. Unfortunately, they were so hardened that they were only more determined to destroy the one they would not receive. In closing he informed them that though they would reject him, they could not overcome God's plan. The stone the builders rejected would become the cornerstone in God's purpose (Mark 12:10).

*Fifth, Jesus did not take sides.* He was concerned with truth, not party preference. While the Herodians and Pharisees wanted him to come down on one side or the other of their ongoing debate, Jesus refused. He would not become entangled with ongoing wars. He was not willing to sanction one side against another. He wanted to stand with God and truth. He would not reinforce party spirit and rivalry. It is tempting in the heat of controversy to align ourselves with certain groups or issues. Our concern must only be for Jesus and his cause, not our issues and their constituents.

*Sixth, Jesus skillfully used the Scriptures.* He was loyal to the word and will of God and confronted them with the biblical truths they refused to see. The Sadducees pretended to be knowledgeable and concerned about the Scriptures. But like many, they used the Scriptures only to reinforce their preconceptions and to discuss minute and nonsensical theological arguments. Their question about Levirate marriage and the resurrection belongs with the medieval game, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" and the contemporary quip, "Where did Adam get his navel?" They were wrong on two counts. First, they could accept only what they could rationally grasp. They failed to comprehend the power of God. But second, they did not know the Scriptures about which they had arrogantly boasted. God had exclaimed to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). Though these men had passed from the flesh, they were very much alive. For God is the God of the living, not

the dead.

*Seventh, he courageously pressed the truth.* While the opposition tried to discredit him in every way, Jesus refused to be intimidated. He continued to teach the people who heard him gladly. In Mark 12:35-37 Jesus attacked the common misconceptions of the scribes about the coming Messiah. With typical tunnel vision, the scribes saw the coming Messiah through the glasses of their own political and national interest. While concentrating on the lineage of the son of David, they missed the fulfillment of the Lord of David in the coming of Jesus Christ. Their blindness caused them to think of the kingdom as political rather than spiritual, as nationalistic rather than universal. When the Messiah actually came, they accused him of blasphemy for claiming to be the very thing the prophets had predicted. By citing Psalm 110:1, Jesus showed that the Messiah was more than a descendant of David—he was David's Lord.

## THE HEART OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the midst of controversy promoted by dishonest men, Jesus discovered a bright spot. It came from among the scribes about whom Jesus warned (Mark 12:38-40). But this scribe was not there to trap Jesus. He seemed to be listening objectively to the debates. He was impressed with Jesus' answers and decided to ask an old question, either in search of truth for himself or to see if Jesus shared his perspective. His question was, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

The primary task of the scribe was to meaningfully interpret the Law. Their efforts to interpret the Law had led to countless laws to explain the Law. A huge legal casebook was ever expanding, and a more complex and burdensome legalism was being imposed upon the people. This created another need—one that called for a simplification of the Law. Overwhelmed with its magnitude, they debated what was most important in the Law. What should be the most pressing focus of a man?

Jesus responded first from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. "The most

important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Whatever was most important had to come from unabashed devotion to the only true God. God can tolerate no rivals. For men of old, those gods might be Baal, Pharoah, Caesar, or the hundreds of idols of the Greeks. For these religious leaders and for us today, the battle of the gods goes on without names and faces, but under the banners of ideas, attitudes, and movements. We, like them, are tempted to make human ideas, religious systems, and traditions more important than God. Jesus cut through to the heart of the matter. Loving God keeps us open to his leading, committed to his priorities, and obedient to his will. It keeps us from the entanglements of religion, power plays, and humanly devised agendas.

But Jesus Christ combined with this commandment another one (Leviticus 19:18). Since God is one and God is love, and since to give love back to God is the heart of the Law, it only follows that his love will also be directed toward our fellow-man. Jesus said, "The second is this: Love your neighbor as you love yourself." The Jews had minimized this commandment, but Jesus forever exalted it as being at the heart of true religion. Through self-seeking, religious politics and tradition, the religious leaders had run roughshod over the people. They had used people instead of serving them. They had exalted the Law and forgotten the people it was intended to serve. Jesus, in life and in word, had turned things around (Mark 2:23—3:6).

When Jesus finished, the scribe enthusiastically agreed. To Jesus' statement he added, "To love him, . . . and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33). Jesus was thrilled with his response. He exclaimed, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Through this beautiful insight, he stepped away from his colleagues and up to the threshold of letting God truly rule his life. He understood that God was not after ritual, but relationship. He did not want routine, but love. He did not just want man's service. He wanted the man.

## CONCLUSION

The controversies of Jesus remind us of the threat we all face. Will we become caught in the web of false religion—turning meaningful service into empty religious systems? Will we forget the meaning of genuine service to God and man—becoming ministry professionals committed to self-promotion, career satisfaction, and brotherhood politics? Will we tend to become defensive, cold, and legalistic—determined to save face, maintain control, and keep the status quo at all cost? Will we, like these religious leaders, become so steeped in our religious achievements that we cannot see the Christ and the real meaning of the kingdom?

When we commit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus and press the implications of his life and kingdom, we can be assured that controversy and opposition will arise. Sometimes it will come from sincere brothers and sisters who only need instruction, patience, and love. At other times it will come from people whose hearts are not after the kingdom, but their own cherished religious system and power. In either case, we must be true to the Christ, faithful to his word, genuine in displaying the spirit of the Master, persistent in seeking the wisdom of the Lord, and prepared to lay down our lives for the advancement of his cause. May God keep us so near to his heart that we can only live with the spirit of his Son!

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## JESUS' TEACHING ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

(Mark 13:1-37)

MIKE ARMOUR

To be honest, I ignored Mark 13 for years, perhaps subconsciously avoided it. To say the least, my view of it was superficial; it was a strange chapter filled with strange language in an otherwise simple book. Only in the most general ways did I see a connection between this passage and the rest of Mark's story.

But no longer is this so. Today, when I survey Mark, chapter 13 dominates the landscape. The earlier chapters point toward it; the later chapters draw from it. Its paragraphs embody the major themes of the book. To miss its import, in my judgment, is to miss Mark's purpose altogether.

We refer to this chapter as the Olivet Discourse, named for the hillside on which it was set. The most striking feature of the speech is its style. Parables intermingle with apocalyptic imagery. Urgent exhortations punctuate imprecise warnings of calamities to come. Obscurities abound. One moment Jesus speaks of near-term events, the next of the end-time, with no distinct signal that he has moved from one time frame to the other. In a word, the chapter is enigmatic.

Equally striking, however, is the length of this speech. Mark characteristically puts little emphasis on what Jesus taught. Normally no more than three or four verses are given to the Lord's statements. But here, in the longest discourse of the Gospel, he devotes an entire chapter to what Jesus said.

For years I overlooked the significance of that statistic. Then the question struck me: Why is this speech so long? Of all the lessons from Jesus, why did Mark highlight this one? Why did he draw further attention to it by choosing such unusual language?

I had long viewed the chapter as an oddity, a section which,

omitted, would hardly be missed. Now I had to consider another possibility. Could the very uniqueness of the Olivet Discourse signal its importance? Could Mark have intended his entire account to pivot around this episode? Is it possible that the themes of this chapter hold the secret to Mark's purpose for writing? In time I came to believe the answer to those questions is, "Yes!"

My reassessment began when, for the first time, I recognized the basic thrust of the chapter. It is not apocalyptic description. It is not esoteric future-telling. It is exhortation! The discourse averages one imperative every two verses: "Do not be misled" (v. 5); "Do not be frightened" (v. 7); "Be on your guard" (v. 9); "Do not be anxious" (v. 11). In all, nineteen imperatives punctuate the Lord's remarks, including the chapter's final words, "Be on the alert!" No other section in Mark approaches this hortatory fervor.

By its very nature, exhortation aims at the practical, not the obscure, at promoting faithful obedience, not intellectual speculation. Moreover, in New Testament studies we use exhortation as a primary clue to underlying purpose. With Paul, for example, we gain our deepest insight into why he wrote by examining the exhortations in his letters.

What if we brought that same examination to Mark? Since the Olivet Discourse is his most hortatory section, what does it tell us about Mark's purpose in writing? First and foremost, the discourse suggests the presence of imminent danger. Four times in the chapter Jesus urges his disciples to watch out (*blepete*), three more times to be on the alert (*agrupneite*, *gregoreite*). In addition, these warnings center on four concerns: the need for proper understanding, the urgency of proclamation, the certainty of persecution, and the requirement for perseverance. Although we cannot treat these themes in depth, we can briefly notice how Jesus develops them.

First, he warns of misleading persons and misleading events. Men would arise, claiming to be the Messiah returned. Political and natural disasters would evoke outcries that the end of the world was at hand. Christians should understand that these things are not the end. Otherwise, they might be tempted toward some willy-nilly fanaticism that would take

tion which that teaching engendered. He wants Christians in Rome to see their own affliction in proper perspective, as nothing more than what Jesus himself both experienced and foretold. In Mark's account, persecution always attends proclamation, whether in the life of John the Baptist, the ministry of Jesus, or the envisioned work of disciples.

Consequently, in a book little given to his words, Jesus speaks of his impending death on ten separate occasions. In six more episodes, he warns of the adversity which awaits his disciples. He minces no words about the cost of their service. Preaching will invite persecution (Mark 4:14-17). Following will invite a cross (Mark 8:34). To deny him will mean eternal shame (Mark 8:38). Greatness will come through servanthood (Mark 9:33-37), but servanthood may mean death (Mark 10:43-45). In a word, everyone will be salted with fire (Mark 9:49).

To embattled saints at Rome, these statements will hit terribly close to home. And when they come to the discourse at Olivet, they will surely feel as though Christ is speaking directly to them. Persecution is not their only problem. They must also make sense of the great fire itself. Is God inaugurating his Judgment by striking the pagan capital? Is this a sign that the end is at hand, that Jesus is soon to return? For a people struggling with such issues, Mark 13 is tailor-made. Its encouragement to endure, its warning about false hopes, its caution against confusing disaster with the end of the world is urgent counsel. As though inviting his readers to identify with what Jesus said at Olivet, Mark concludes the chapter with these words from the Master: "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert'" (v. 37).

If time permitted, we could detail the intriguing ways in which Mark heightens the impact of chapter 13 by foreshadowing its themes in earlier passages. It is as though he does not want us to miss its message. For instance, the warnings about misunderstood events do not appear from nowhere. In episode after episode, Mark has already documented the disciples' penchant for misunderstanding (Mark 6:52, 7:18, 8:17, 21, 8:31-33, 9:10, 32). The Lord's imperative, "Don't be afraid!" (v. 7) recalls the previous scenes in which he responded for

fearful disciples with those same words (Mark 5:36, 6:50). The call to faithful proclamation (vv. 9-10) follows naturally in a book in which, though it records few sermons, stresses preaching from the very first paragraph. Betrayal by family in verse 12 is the obverse of giving up family and farms in chapter 10. The parable of the fig tree, which Jesus uses to teach the importance of reading portents properly (vv. 28:29), brings to mind another fig tree, withered in chapter 11 for holding out the false promise of fruit.

The Olivet Discourse is clearly central to Mark's purpose. But what is its message to us? The same, I believe, that it was to the Romans. Avoid end-time predictions and the claims of would-be prophets. They only take you away from your vital task of proclaiming Christ. Let nothing deter you from that task. Not intimidating power. Not family pressure. Not the greatest calamity on earth. Nothing. Be vigilant always. Remember that God is in control, working everything in keeping with his own timetable. When he indeed comes, be sure you are ready and waiting.

Our circumstances may not be nearly as dire as those to whom this Gospel was first written. But the urgency of Mount Olive's message is just as great now as it was then.

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## THE LAST SUPPER

(Mark 14:1-31)

JAY LOCKHART

The events of the upper room on the night of Jesus' betrayal demonstrate his self-forgetfulness in the shadow of his cross. He is not unconcerned about his approaching passion, as the Garden of Gethsemane would soon disclose, but in the upper room, Jesus shows his wondrous concern for his disciples as he devotes himself to their needs. Being fully aware of what this occasion would mean to his disciples and to all future generations of the church, Jesus lovingly met with them. The story is told in Mark 14:1-31, Matthew 26:17-29, Luke 22:7-38, and John 13:1—17:26.

### THE BACKGROUND

*The Plot of the Jews (Mark 14:1-2)*

The chief priests and the scribes, determined to be rid of Jesus, laid plans to put him to death, but were fearful of acting during the Paschal season lest a riot break out among the people. Matthew shows us that the elders and Caiaphas, the high priest, were also involved (Matthew 26:3-5), so the plot was laid by the Sanhedrin, the high court in Israel. While the rulers plotted to kill Jesus, the people kept coming to the temple to hear him (Luke 21:37-38). The determination of the Jews to kill Jesus began at least three months earlier at the raising of Lazarus and continued because of the Triumphant Entry and the cleansing of the temple.

*The Anointing by the Woman (Mark 14:3-9)*

An unnamed woman anointed the head of Jesus with a costly ointment—the head that was soon to be crowned with thorns. While the disciples were indignant at the apparent waste, Jesus said the woman had anointed him for his burial and that

her act of love should be told throughout the world.

*The Treachery of Judas (Mark 14:10-11)*

Judas went to the chief priests and agreed for thirty pieces of silver (the price of a slave) to betray Jesus to them (see Matthew 26:15) in the absence of the multitude (Luke 22:6).

### THE PREPARATION

*The Time (Mark 14:12)*

The preparation for the Last Supper was "the first day of unleavened bread when they killed the passover lamb." The Passover was the fourteenth of Nisan, the first month of the sacred year, or Abib, the seventh month of the civil year, corresponding to our March or April. However, the "days of unleavened bread" lasted seven days with no leaven allowed in Jewish houses from the fourteenth to the twenty-first. It was a time of thanksgiving, peace offerings, and rejoicing. (See Exodus 12:18; Leviticus 23:6; 2 Chronicles 30:21-22.) It was Thursday of the final week.

*The Place (Mark 14:13-16)*

Jesus carefully prearranged for "a large upper room furnished and prepared," no doubt with a disciple. Two of his disciples, Peter and John (Luke 22:8), were instructed to make preparations by providing the necessary foods. They would know the place by going into the city and following a man "bearing a pitcher of water," quite unusual since women usually carried water pots.

### THE PASSOVER

*The General Law of the Passover*

The Passover was by far the most important of Israel's feasts. The place was determined by God (Deuteronomy 16:5-6), so in Jerusalem there must have been hundreds of thousands of people gathered with as many as 250,000 lambs slain.<sup>1</sup> Instruction for the Passover observance is found in Exodus 12:1-28, 43, 46 and Leviticus 23:5-14.

*The Details of the Meal<sup>2</sup>*

The blood of the slain *lamb* was taken into the temple court and dashed against the altar, while the carcass was taken home to be roasted and eaten, reminding the people of how they had been protected in Egypt. The *unleavened bread* reminded them of their hasty departure from Egypt and the corruption of bondage. (See Deuteronomy 16:3; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.) A *bowl of salt water* reminded them of the tears of affliction in bondage and the waters of the Red Sea through which they escaped. The *bitter herbs* reminded them of bitter slavery. A paste called *Charosheth*, a mixture of fruits and nuts with sticks of cinnamon, reminded them of the clay and straw with which they made bricks in Egypt. *Four cups of wine* reminded them of the four promises of Exodus 6:6-7.

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*The Preceding Events*

At least three events accompanied the Passover which preceded the institution of the Lord's Supper.

A *Quarrel* (Luke 22:24-30). In the comparative readings of the Gospel accounts, it seems that Luke gives the events of the evening without stating them in chronological order. Luke tells of the institution of the Lord's Supper before Judas leaves, while Matthew and Mark permit us to believe Judas was absent. (Luke also tells the temptation story stating the facts but not necessarily in chronological order, cf. Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11.) Assuming that Luke, guided by the Holy Spirit, gave attention to the events of the evening without being concerned with chronology, he tells us of a quarrel between the disciples over who was greatest. According to Edersheim,<sup>3</sup> the quarrel came about because of the seating arrangement. He supposes that Judas, feeling a bold action was the safest, took a couch at Jesus' left hand, a place usually occupied by Peter. Angered, Peter took a couch across the table from Jesus, Judas, and John. This would explain why Peter would later tell John, reclining at Jesus' right with his head near Jesus' chest, to ask Jesus who would betray him (John 13:23-25).

*The Washing of the Disciples' Feet* (John 13:1-17). If the foregoing conclusions are correct, Luke's statement of Jesus' response to the quarrel, "I am in the midst of you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27), fits in perfectly with the lesson on service taught by the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus.

*The Traitor Unveiled* (Mark 14:18-21). Following the washing of feet (see John 13:18ff.), Jesus revealed that one of the disciples would betray him and that it would have been good "for that man if he had never been born." The disciples began to ask, "Is it I?" Mark says that Jesus replied, "It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish" (Mark 14:20). Matthew has Judas asking, "Master, is it I?" and Jesus replying, "Thou hast said" (Matthew 26:25). John has Jesus saying, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop," and he gave it to Judas (John 13:26). Then Satan entered Judas, and after Jesus said, "What thou doest do quickly," he went out to perform his dastardly deed without the others knowing why he left (John 13:27-30). If Judas went out immediately after his treachery was unveiled (John), he was not present for the instituting of the supper.

*The Lord's Supper* (Mark 14:22-25)

After the departure of Judas and during the Paschal meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then, "He took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them; and they all drank of it."

*The New Covenant.* Jesus said the cup was (represented) "my blood of the new testament [covenant, JPL]." A covenant is an agreement involving promises between two parties. Matthew's "for the remission of sins" indicates the promise. The shedding of Jesus' blood would seal the old covenant and usher in the new testament (Hebrews 9:15-17).

*The Bread.* Since leaven was not allowed in Israel's houses from two days before the Passover week, we know the bread was unleavened. When Jesus said, "This is my body," he meant the bread *represented* his body, since his physical body was yet before them.

*The Cup.* Mark says Jesus "took the cup . . . and they all drank of it." Therefore, the cup referred to the contents. Jesus

said the cup was his blood, but in the next verse called the cup "the fruit of the vine," indicating that the cup was emblematic of his blood (Mark 14:24-25). Foster<sup>4</sup> argues that since all leaven was removed from Jewish houses during Passover, both the bread and the fruit of the vine were unleavened (unfermented).

"For the Remission of Sins" (Matthew 26:28). This clearly means "in order that sins may be forgiven," not "because sins have been forgiven." In Acts 2:38, "for the remission of sins" means we repent and are baptized "in order that sins may be forgiven."

"In the Kingdom" (Mark 14:25). This shows us that the observance of the Lord's Supper, as Paul calls it (1 Corinthians 11:20), is communion with Christ in the kingdom (1 Corinthians 10:16).

### *The Significance to Me*

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-30 Paul explains the meaning of the supper.

*A Memorial.* "In remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25) shows that I contemplate the Lord's broken body and shed blood as I partake.

*A Proclamation.* I "proclaim the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). I look back to the cross and forward to the Second Coming.

*A Self-Examination.* "Let a man examine himself" (1 Corinthians 11:28). I examine my sin and God's provision. We do not examine each other or practice closed communion.

*A Worthy Manner.* "Unworthily" in 1 Corinthians 11:27, 29 does not refer to my personal worthiness, but to the *manner* of my taking the supper—"discerning the Lord's body." I am to think about him as I partake.

*A Communion.* As I partake of the broken bread and the poured out cup, I participate with my brothers in the body and blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:16; Luke 22:14-16). I will not miss this communion if it is within my power to be with my brethren. I will not have to be begged to be present. My brethren will not have to look for me. I will find them. I will be there!

## CONCLUDING EVENTS

### *The Teaching of John 13—17 and on the Way To Gethsemane (Mark 14:26-31)*

After the little group "had sung an hymn," perhaps Psalms 116—118 (customarily sung at Passover), it moved throughout the darkened streets of Jerusalem toward Gethsemane. As they journeyed, Jesus said that all of them would be offended in him that night. Peter denied it, but Jesus tenderly said, "Before the cock crows twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." More vehemently, Peter denied it, saying he would die with Jesus but never deny him. "Likewise also said they all."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>R. C. Foster, *The Final Week* (Grands Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1962), p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*. The Daily Study Bible Series, 9th ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1966), p. 350.

<sup>3</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. II, 8th ed., rev. (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1905), pp. 492-96.

<sup>4</sup>Foster, pp. 165-66.

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## AGONY IN GETHSEMANE

(Mark 14:32-42)

JOHN D. GIPSON

When I read, "And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane," I reluctantly follow. There is born within me a feeling of awe, forboding, and holy reverence. I am treading upon ground too sacred for me. What transpired there that night is too profound for my limited understanding. Therefore, I come before this text with fear and trembling.

The Garden of Gethsemane was located only a little more than half a mile from Jerusalem, and only a stone's throw from the brook Kidron, situated on the western slope and near the foot of the Mount of Olives. It was an enclosed garden where aged olive trees cast their somber shade. "Gethsemane" means "oil-press." It was a place where Jesus and his disciples had come many times before. Undoubtedly, it had offered peace, rest, and quietude for Jesus and his band of disciples on those other occasions, but tonight it will become one of the greatest scenes of agony the world has ever witnessed.

Leaving his disciples, Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John. These three men had stood with him at other times in the presence of death. They had been in the house of Jairus when Jesus took a dead child by the hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41). Immediately, the twelve-year-old child got up and walked. There they had seen Jesus as the Master of death. Then upon the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus was to be seen in his own person absolutely superior to death, transfigured, and yet conversing with Moses and Elijah about his death which was to be accomplished at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Yet in Gethsemane he bowed and yielded himself to death. What a strange progression Peter, James, and John witnessed: Jesus—the Master of death, superior to death, and finally yielding himself to death. How many times they must

have turned these things over in their minds.

In this lesson, we focus our attention upon the struggle which Jesus confronted and his willingness to submit himself to death. There are three words which will occupy our attention: sorrow, solitude, and submission.

### SORROW

It is to a scene of sorrow we come as we enter the Garden of Gethsemane. It is the sorrow of the Son of Man, and there is no sorrow like this sorrow. Shortly before this, Jesus had eaten the Passover with his disciples. Though he knew what lay before him, he spoke with quiet confidence, instructed his disciples, and prayed on their behalf. He had calmed their troubled hearts and promised, "And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:3). But as he took Peter, James, and John with him into the Garden, he "began to be greatly distressed and troubled." He knew what awaited him.

Before him lay physical distress and pain. He would feel the lash upon his back, the blood trickling down his face from the crown of thorns pressed upon his brow, the flesh being torn as the soldiers drove nails through his hands and feet, and then the agony of crucifixion—a slow and tortured death of shame. A cursed death! From such physical suffering any person would shrink.

But there is more to consider. How can we sound the depths of the emotional distress which was to come upon him? He would be called upon to endure the insults of his foes, the desertion of his friends, and the ingratitude of the people for whom he had labored and whom he had benefitted. He would face the hostility of the Jewish leaders, the treachery of Judas, the fickleness of the people, and the mockery of religious and civil justice. I am reminded of the words of Lamentations 1:12: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger."

Yet the story of that sorrow is not fully told. In the words of

Alexander Maclaren, "We shall not understand Gethsemane at all, nor will it touch our hearts and wills as it is meant to do, unless, as we look we say in adoring wonder, 'The Lord hath made to meet on him the iniquity of us all.' It was the weight of the world's sin which he took on him by willing identification of himself with men that pressed him to the ground. Nothing else than the atoning character of Christ's sufferings explains, so far as it can be explained, the agony which we are permitted to behold afar off." He is sinless, but is made to hear the sins of the world (2 Corinthians 5:21). He is one with the Father but will endure the separation caused by sin. Before him lies that hour when he will cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Can anything be more trying or more painful to a child of God than the loss of divine fellowship for a season? You can feel the pain of Job when he cried out, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand I seek him, but I cannot behold him; I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him" (Job 23:8-9). In a similar vein, the Psalmist cries, "O Lord, why dost thou cast me off? Why dost thou hide thy face from me?" (Psalm 88:14). If Job and the Psalmist could feel such pain, how much more the Son of God! Sin which was so abhorrent to the pure nature of Jesus had now been laid upon him, a burden which staggers our imagination, and brings separation from his father. How can that anguish be measured? Jesus confessed, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." Think of it! A little more and Jesus would have died. It was sorrow "even to death." One has well said, "All points to the conclusion that his sufferings were not like those of Job, or Jeremiah, or Paul, or Stephen, but were unique in the world's history. He, the sinless One, was the Representative and Substitute of the sinful world." With all of the sorrow of Gethsemane, it is invested with a sacredness that makes it precious to every Christian heart.

Gethsemane can I forget,  
And there thine anguish see,  
Thine agony and bloody sweat,  
And not remember thee?

## SOLITUDE

In the midst of sorrow we also observe the loneliness and solitude of Jesus. On this occasion, he fled from the teeming crowds of Jerusalem to the quietness of a secluded garden. Yet there seems to be a desire for companionship. He took his disciples. He told them, "Sit here, while I pray." Yet in that moment he took with him Peter, James, and John. But even these three were not permitted to follow him all of the way. He told them, "Remain here, and watch." Jesus went a little farther before he fell on the ground and prayed. He had to be alone. Godwin has observed, "Sympathy and solitude are both desirable in severe trials."

The solitude of Jesus can be measured in the physical distance between himself and his disciples, but is seen even more graphically in attitude. While Jesus was in agony and prayer, his disciples appeared to be so little affected that they slept. He was truly alone. Three times Jesus interrupted his prayers and came back to his disciples. And three times he found them asleep. Surely there was disappointment. "Could you not watch one hour?" Earth rejects him, man despises him, and his disciples sleep. So he turns to heaven; he cries to the Father. As far as this world is concerned, he is treading the winepress alone. But lest we condemn the disciples too harshly, Luke, the beloved physician, tells us why they slept. He reminds us that Jesus found them "sleeping for sorrow" (Luke 22:45). But even this insight does not take away from the solitude which Jesus experienced. He was "alone, alone, all, all alone."

## SUBMISSION

It was in prayer that victory was won. Jesus wrestled in the Garden that he might conquer the cross. So great was the agony, so intense his prayers that "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44). What a night was this when Jesus prayed three times!

The text plainly sets the human will over against the will of the Father. The will of Jesus is that the cup be removed. And surely we can understand this. "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me. . . ." That was his

desire. But something else was even more important: "... yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." The will of the Father had been his law throughout his life and was still his chief concern. Here we have the two archetypes for responding to the tests of life. In one, the weakness of the flesh dominates. In the other, commitment to the will of God dominates. In such a mighty struggle prayer was the refuge of Jesus and must be ours. Man's archenemy wrought sin and death by asserting his will against God. Christ wrought salvation by submitting his will to God. The submission of Jesus was both his victory and ours. The man who lay prone in anguish beneath the olive trees gave himself up to death for us all. His agony was endured for us.

The battle was won. The will of God would be his will. When the betrayers came, he went forward to meet them. Instead of seeking escape, he offered himself to his foes. He put forth his hand to take the cup from which he had been shrinking. He had now no will but his Father's, no aim but our salvation.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5:7-9).

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## THE ARREST AND TRIAL OF JESUS

(Mark 14:43—15:15)

JAY LOCKHART

Jesus brought out the best in people but also exposed legalism, hypocrisy, and heartless human tradition wherever he found it. For this reason, countless lives were changed for the better as the multitudes flocked to him to hear the message of God, to discover their worth, and to find mercy and healing. On the other hand, many took offense to Jesus, refused to be changed, and rejected him as Messiah. Soon their offense turned to criticism, and criticism bred hatred, and hatred plotted his death.

### THOSE WHO OPPOSED JESUS

Three groups of people in Israel particularly were offended by Jesus.

#### *The Scribes and the Pharisees*

The first opposition to Jesus by this group in Mark's Gospel is found in 2:16 where the scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for associating with tax collectors and sinners. As early as Mark 3:6, the Pharisees are plotting with the Herodians (a political party supporting the dynasty of Herod and which felt Jesus' ministry was antagonistic to their interests<sup>1</sup>) to put Jesus to death.

In addition to the Law of Moses, the scribes and the Pharisees had their oral law, their human rules and regulations based upon the Law (Mark 7:3). In the third century A.D., these rules were written down in the Mishna, and later commentaries were written on the Mishna called the Talmuds. (There were twelve volumes in the Jerusalem Talmud and sixty volumes in the Babylonian Talmud.) These rules soon

became more important than the Law of God. The scribes determined what the rules would be, and the Pharisees gave their lives to keeping them.<sup>2</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees were legalistic and were filled with pride because of their rule-keeping. (See Luke 18:9-14.) They opposed Jesus because he was untrained in their eyes and supposedly knew nothing of God's way (John 7:15; Mark 6:1-5), yet he invaded their territory and presumed to teach. He also broke their traditions because he believed human need was more important than their rules (Mark 1:21-27). Additionally, Jesus associated with the wrong kind of people. (See Mark 2:15-17; Luke 15:1ff.)

#### *The Sadducees*

These people, smaller in number than the Pharisees, were the aristocrats in Israel who were happy with their prosperity, even under Roman rule, and wanted to keep the status quo. They saw in Jesus a threat to their security (Luke 23:2; John 11:48-50).<sup>3</sup>

#### *The Priests*

The priests saw in Jesus a threat to their whole system. They occupied a unique position in that they stood between God and man, yet they believed Jesus challenged their priestly power (e.g., the cleansing of the temple). The priests were fully involved in opposition to Jesus (Mark 14:1, 10, 43; 11:18, 27ff.).<sup>4</sup>

The opposition of these groups eventually led to hatred and to the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus.

### THE ARREST (MARK 14:43-52)

#### *The Arresting Mob*

Those who came to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus, sent by the chief priests (the high priests, past and present, who headed the twenty-four courses of priests, 1 Chronicles 24:1-19), the scribes, and the elders (the most influential non-priests), included a multitude (Mark 14:43), a band of soldiers (six hundred Roman soldiers<sup>5</sup>) and officers (the temple guard) (John 18:3), and the chief priests and the elders (Luke 22:52).

#### *The Betraying Judas*

Judas led the mob into the garden and kissed Jesus, the sign

which indicated the one who was to be arrested (Mark 14:44-45). Jesus had earlier said, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born" (Mark 14:21).

#### *The Courageous, Yet Cowardly Disciples*

One of the disciples (Peter, John 18:10) drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest (Mark 14:47). John tells us the servant's name was Malchus (John 18:10), and his right ear was cut off. (Peter, who must have been left-handed, went for his head.) Luke says Jesus healed the ear (Luke 22:51), but the miracle had no effect upon the blinded mob. Jesus resisted the effort of Peter to defend him, stating that he could call twelve legions of angels (seventy-two thousand) to defend him, but the Scriptures must be fulfilled in his passion (Matthew 26:52-54). When Jesus was arrested, his disciples forsook him and fled (Mark 14:50). The "certain young man" of Mark 14:51-52 might have been John Mark. Peter followed afar off (Mark 14:54).

### THE JEWISH TRIAL<sup>6</sup>

#### *The House of Annas (John 18:12-14)*

Annas was the ex-high priest. During Israel's independence, the high priest served for life, but under Roman rule, he was replaced according to the will of Rome. Annas served six or seven years and was still the power behind the high-priestly office, now held by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Annas was a wealthy Sadducee. Not overly troubled by Jewish religious rules, he might have acquired his wealth from the temple booths.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Before Caiaphas*

Jesus was soon taken to the house of Caiaphas, the current high priest, where a hastily called meeting of the Sanhedrin took place (Mark 14:53-54; John 18:13-14, 11:49-51). The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of Israel composed of seventy-one members (Numbers 11:16), including priests, scribes, and elders of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, with the high priest presiding. Capital cases had been taken away

from the Sanhedrin by the Roman government, which would necessitate a Roman trial. Surely all the members of the court were not present, or someone would have protested the proceedings. Recall that Nicodemus (John 7:50-51) and Joseph (Luke 23:50-51) were members of the Sanhedrin and disciples of Jesus.

Jesus was asked about his teaching and his disciples. He answered the first question and ignored the second (John 18:19-23). False witnesses were called against Jesus, but no two could agree (Mark 14:55-71). Finally, two witnesses agreed on the charge, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands" (Mark 14:58; Matthew 26:61). This charge meant nothing but would later be helpful before the Roman governor because the Jews could show that Jesus was an insurrectionist who would destroy the city. Jesus ignored the charge.

Finally, the high priest asked Jesus, "Art thou the Christ, the son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61). Jesus answered, "I am; and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). If this was a quotation of Daniel 7:13ff., it must refer to his present reign as King of kings at God's right hand. (See Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33.) Caiaphas tore his garment (it was unlawful to tear the garment, Leviticus 10:6) and condemned Jesus as worthy of death for blasphemy (Mark 14:63-64). Then Jesus was abused (Mark 14:65).

#### *The Denial of Peter (Mark 14:66-72)*

During the Jewish trial, Peter was outside the high priest's palace warming himself by a fire. He was accused of being with Jesus, and over the next several moments he would deny with cursing and swearing that he knew Jesus. Luke says that when Peter denied the third time, Jesus turned and looked at him (Luke 22:61), and Peter went out and wept bitterly. (See also Mark 14:27-31.)

#### *The Formal Meeting of the Sanhedrin*

In Mark 15:1 we are told that early in the morning "the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the

whole council." This meeting was the formal meeting of the Sanhedrin designed to condemn Jesus.

### THE ROMAN TRIAL

#### *The First Appearance Before Pilate (Mark 15:2-5)*

When Jesus was born, Herod the Great ruled the land of Israel as a puppet king of Rome. Upon his death, Rome honored his request that his kingdom be divided among his three sons.<sup>8</sup> Thus Galilee and Perea were given to Antipas, Judea and Samaria to Archelaus, and Ituraea and Trachonitis to Philip.<sup>9</sup> The territory of Abilene was given to a certain Lysanias about whom we know little (Luke 3:1; Matthew 2:22). However, Archelaus fell into disfavor with Caesar and was deposed in A.D. 6. A series of governors, of whom Pilate was the fifth, then ruled Judea and Samaria.<sup>10</sup> So Pilate represented Roman authority in Jerusalem. Since Rome had taken capital punishment away from the Jews, it was necessary for the leaders in Israel to bring Jesus to Pilate for the sentence of death. (See John 18:31-32.) It should be noted that had the Jews put Jesus to death, he would have been stoned. But the Romans crucified victims, and Scripture stated that Jesus would be crucified (Matthew 20:19, 26:2; John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32; Psalm 22:16). Pilate heard the charges brought against Jesus, including these: He stirred up the people, he would not pay taxes, and he said he was a king (Luke 23:1-5). The Jews knew these charges were false, but Pilate would not hear a charge of blasphemy. Pilate found no fault in Jesus, and hearing that Jesus was from Galilee and that Herod Antipas, king of Galilee, was visiting in Jerusalem, he sent the Lord to Antipas (Luke 23:4-7).

#### *Before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:8-12)*

Herod was glad to see Jesus, hoping Jesus would perform a miracle for him. Jesus did not say a word to this murderer of John the Baptist and after being mocked, was sent back to Pilate.

#### *The Second Appearance Before Pilate (Mark 15:6-20)*

Pilate wanted to release Jesus for several reasons: He knew

Jesus was innocent and was delivered up because of envy (Mark 15:10, 14), he was aware of the dream of his wife (Matthew 27:19), and he was afraid (John 19:8). On the other hand, Pilate knew there was the possibility of a riot if he released Jesus (Matthew 27:24). He believed he had the responsibility to please the people (Mark 15:15), and he might be in trouble with Caesar again (John 18:12).

However, Pilate made at least four attempts to release Jesus. First, he gave the people a choice between the release of Barabbas, a thief, a murderer, and an insurrectionist, or the release of Jesus (Mark 15:6-11). He must have been surprised when the people chose Barabbas. Second, Pilate presented a pitiful sight of a scourged Jesus to the people (John 19:4ff.). Third, Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" (John 19:15). Fourth, he asked, "What shall I do then with Jesus?" (Matthew 27:22). The poor, blinded Jews cried, "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:13-14) and "We have no king but Caesar" (John 18:15). Further, they said, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). Pilate, seeing he could prevail nothing, but that a riot was about to break out, washed his hands of the matter, declared he was innocent of Jesus' blood, released Barabbas to them, and delivered Jesus to be crucified (Matthew 27:24-26).

#### *Jesus Scourged (Mark 15:15)*

The Gospel writers do not dramatize the suffering of Jesus. Mark simply says he was scourged. However, many men did not survive the Roman scourging. The "cat-o'-nine-tails" whip, with bone or metal in the ends, could literally rip the flesh from the victim leaving bare the bones. They scourged Jesus and . . . crucified him.

### CONCLUSION

When we remember that Jesus suffered for us, the most vital question which all must contemplate becomes: "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Orr, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 3:1383.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), p. 161.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 166-69.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 170-74.

<sup>5</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*. The Daily Study Bible Series, 8th ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: the Saint Andrew Press, 1965), p. 260.

<sup>6</sup>Earle L. Wingo, *The Illegal Trial of Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: Baird-Ward Printing Co., 1954). (For discussion of irregularities of the Jewish trial.)

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 16-19, 30.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>James Orr, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 3:1378-1382.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:2396.

## THE CRUCIFIXION AND BURIAL OF JESUS

(Mark 15:16-47)

NEALE T. PRYOR

The incident where the soldiers mocked Jesus was the culmination of the sixth and last trial of our Lord. He was carried first to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then to the Sanhedrin, where He was officially condemned and charged with blasphemy. The fourth trial was before Pilate. He was then sent to Herod and finally back to Pilate. When Pilate yielded to the wishes of the crowd, he had Jesus scourged, washed his hands, and delivered Jesus into the hands of the soldiers.

### JESUS MOCKED BY THE SOLDIERS

Pilate's judgment hall was in a fortress called the Antonia, which was adjacent to the temple. The exact location of this pavement, Gabbatha, as John calls it (John 19:13), has been found. It is possible to look at the very stones on which Jesus stood when he received the scourging and the mocking.

Since Jesus was a king, they dressed him up in purple, which was the color befitting a king. They gave him a crown of thorns since a king wore a crown, and since a king had a scepter, they gave him a reed. The reed was probably a plant that had a large knob on the end. To be hit with that reed would raise quite a welt on the body. Even more than that, they spat on him and mocked him by kneeling and bowing before him.

### THE JOURNEY TO CALVARY

Since a criminal could not be killed inside the city, Jesus was led out the north gate to the hill known as Golgotha. As a part of his punishment, he was forced to carry his own instrument of death. It is likely that the load of the cross was too heavy on

his bruised and bleeding back. No doubt there were several times he fell under the load of the cross. Otherwise, they would not have compelled Simon of Cyrene to help Jesus carry it.

Perhaps there were many times when the human side tempted him to give it up and leave it on the street where it lay, but each time Jesus picked the cross up and went a bit farther with it.

It is interesting that Mark refers to Simon of Cyrene as the father of Alexander and Rufus (Romans 16:13), who seems to be a faithful Christian in the church at Rome some twenty years later.

### THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus was crucified on the hill Golgotha. It is called the place of the skull probably because the stone formation in the side of the hill resembles that of a skull. Others have suggested that there were human skulls lying around, but this is unlikely.

The wine mingled with myrrh was a sedative, which was to dull his sensitivity to pain.

As part of the pay, the soldiers received the garments of those who were killed. Up until this time, none of the criminals executed had ever needed the clothes. John tells us that there was a coat woven without seam that the four soldiers gambled for instead of tearing into four parts (John 19:24). This was a fulfillment of a prophecy in Psalm 22:18.

Jesus was crucified at 9:00 in the morning, which would correspond to the third hour of the day. There is an apparent contradiction between Mark 15:25 and John 19:14. Probably Jesus was in the judgment hall of Pilate at the sixth hour, Roman time, which would be 6:00 a.m. He was crucified at the third hour, Jewish time, which would be 9:00 a.m.

It was customary to put one's crime over the head in order that those passing by could see the reason he was being killed. The only crime Pilate could accuse Jesus of committing was that of being the king of the Jews. The other writers tell us that this was written in three languages.

One would think that the crowd would have been satisfied

after all they had done to Jesus, but they still passed by, wagged their heads at him, and challenged him to come down from the cross. This cry to come down from the cross might have been a desperate hope that possibly he would come down from the cross, really be their Messiah, and not die like the other "Messiahs" before him.

Even though nails held the other two on their crosses, did you ever wonder what held Jesus to his cross? Surely anyone who could raise the dead and calm the sea would not be held by spikes in his body. Besides just the pain, the ridicule would be a temptation for him to come down from the cross, yet Jesus stayed on that cross because he knew it was God's will for him to do it and because of his love for you and me. He knew that he had to do it so you and I could be saved.

There were seven sayings of Jesus on the cross. Probably the first was the prayer for his enemies, "Father, forgive them." The second showed his concern that his mother be cared for, and the third was a word of comfort to the thief dying beside him.

The fourth utterance of Jesus on the cross was a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This is an allusion to Psalm 22:1, even though it is not an exact quotation from the Hebrew. Some have thought that at this moment, Jesus became contaminated by all the sins of the world (2 Corinthians 5:21). Being so contaminated, God left him.

However that may be, this is certainly the greatest point of Jesus' suffering. It is bad enough to be betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and abandoned by all of the apostles, but the worst of all would be for the Father in heaven to turn his back and leave him there to die.

Since the Hebrew word for "My God" (*Eli*) sounds like Elijah, one of those standing by thought he was calling for Elijah when he cried, "My God."

The fifth saying of Jesus on the cross was, "I thirst." The last two sayings of Jesus on the cross were, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," and "It is finished." This is probably the loud cry Jesus uttered before he breathed his last (Mark 15:37).

### THE AFTERMATH (Mark 15:38-41)

There was a veil in the temple separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The Most Holy Place represented where God dwelt. The veil excluded entrance to the presence of God. When Jesus died, the veil was torn in two, symbolizing that it was possible for man to approach God.

Since this happened around 3:00 in the afternoon, it is highly likely that priests were in the Holy Place when the veil tore. To their surprise, they looked around and for the first time saw the Most Holy Place.

Probably the centurion did not acknowledge Jesus as *the* Son of God. The Greek says "*a* Son of God." The centurion recognized that Jesus was certainly more than a human.

The women who were looking on from afar were those who ministered unto Jesus during his earthly ministry. Mary Magdalene was the one out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils and the first one to see him after his resurrection. Mary, the mother of James the Less and James, was possibly the mother of James the apostle. Salome, more than likely, is the wife of Zebedee, possibly a sister to Jesus' mother, and of course, the mother of James and John.

### THE BURIAL (Mark 15:42-47)

Since Jesus was crucified during the week of the Passover, the Sabbath of that particular week was a high Sabbath. The preparation day was probably the Friday before that Sabbath. The Jews did not want any of the bodies hanging on the cross during the Passover Sabbath. Since the Sabbath began at sundown, it was necessary to get the bodies down before evening.

Joseph of Arimathea was assisted by Nicodemus in burying the body of Jesus (John 19:38-39). The traditional site of Jesus' burial is the garden tomb. It is a cave over the mouth of which a large stone was rolled. Our Lord was probably wrapped in burial cloths and laid in such a tomb as this. Because the Sabbath was approaching, there was no time to anoint his body properly for the burial. The women noted where Jesus lay and planned to come back after the Sabbath to complete

the burial preparations.

They were in for a surprise that Sunday morning!

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## THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS (THE ROCK THAT ROLLED)

(Mark 16:1-14)

ART MCNEESE

Allow me to ask a personal question. What is it that limits your life? What keeps you from living life to its fullest? What stands in the way of realizing your dreams?

Maybe it is a failure that has been repeated over and over, and you do not see any way of breaking the cycle. Maybe you feel as if you do not have the time, energy, or enthusiasm to do all that you want to do. Maybe you feel as if you do not have the inner resources to live life to its fullest. Or maybe it is the discouragement of other people that puts a lid on your life—the negativism or hostility, or just a generally bad attitude that poisons the atmosphere.

Let me ask another question: Do you think it will ever change? And if you were going to be able to change, what would it take? What would it take for you to live life without limits?

The women who came to the tomb almost two thousand years ago today thought that life was over. The only reason they came to the tomb was to anoint the body of Jesus. The living body had been anointed, but not the dead one. They were on their way to a rotting corpse. That is why they brought their spices. They came to say good-bye one last time. It is like that moment when you say good-bye to a mother, a father, or someone else you love. You go to the casket, which will be closed from now on. When you go to the cemetery and watch pallbearers put boutonnieres on the casket, there is a note of finality.

The women came to the tomb very early on Sunday morning, and suddenly thought, Who is going to move the stone? The stone had finally shut the door on all their hopes. Where there is life, there is hope, but now there is no life, and no hope.

Some of you know what it is to see the stone rolled up against the tomb of your hopes. You were looking for a better marriage, but there does not seem to be much chance. You were hoping for better health, but the door seems to be shut. You were looking for an end to your discouragement, but now you wonder if the stone can ever be rolled away. You are waiting for your day in court, but they seem to be stonewalling. You are wishing there might be forgiveness, but now you feel buried in the chamber of guilt. No matter how hard you try, there does not seem to be any way to budge the boulder that sets in the way. You keep shoving and pushing and hoping with all your might, but there does not seem to be any way out.

That is the way "the rock" must have felt. I am talking about Peter—that is what Jesus called him—"the rock" (John 1:42). Peter knew something about stones—he knew they did not move easily—and Peter knew this stone was like the Rock of Gibraltar. Jesus was shut up tight in the tomb, and there was no way out.

All of Peter's hopes were locked up in that grave. His hope was that the Romans would be ground in dust. His hope was that things would be different. Most of all, his hope was he would be forgiven. All those hopes were dashed on the rock that stood in front of the grave.

"The rock" had pledged that he would never forsake the Lord. In Mark 14:29 he declared, "Everybody else may fall away, but not me. Everybody else may splinter, but I'll be a Rock." (Paraphrase, A.M.)

But it was not long before "the rock" shattered. He denied he ever knew Jesus and cussed up a blue streak.

We have all been there, have we not? We say, "Lord, I promise to be faithful to you!" And we really mean it. We really intend to follow him, and we are sincere in wanting to do things his way. But we come face to face with temptation, and we crater. So we promise again—"I will not deny you! I will never do this again!" Before we know it, we have said something that hurts, lusted for someone, gloated over our own goodness. We feel as if we have lost forgiveness forever. How could God forgive me when I have prayed the same prayer over and over? There is no way that God and I will ever be

friends again. I may as well forget about it—I am walled away from God because of my sins.

Here is "the rock," sitting in Jerusalem and feeling as if he has lost his last friend. He has turned his back on Jesus, lost the respect of the other disciples, lost his self-respect, and now the one man who seemed to believe in him is dead, shut up in a tomb.

But the angel sends the word, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter, He will meet you in Galilee" (Mark 16:7). Can you imagine how Peter must have felt? Perhaps he thought, "Do you mean there is still a place for me? He still loves me after all?" It was no accident Peter was singled out.

Paul makes a point of saying in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus was seen by Peter. Luke gives us the report of the two men on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:34: "The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." "Be sure and tell Peter he has been resurrected too. You were dead in your sin, Peter, but now you're alive."

God has the same message for us! "Go, tell the disciples and Bill, Mary, Joe, . . ." It does not make any difference how far you have fallen. Ruth Harms Calkin prayed: "Dear God, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your child." And God answered: "Child, I know. . . I know. . . But My Son is worthy to be called your Savior."

What we celebrate is not just Jesus' resurrection, but our resurrection! We can fail him, deny him, crucify him, but he still loves us! And the power of the resurrection can live in us!

Paul tells us how in Romans 6:4-8:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with

Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

First, we have to die with Christ. We have to be crucified with Christ, so the controlling power of sin and death does not have a vice-grip on our lives. We have to enter into a union with Christ, so the old self is killed, put to death, done away with.

Second, we have to realize the power of the resurrection in our lives. The stone is blasted away from the hopelessness of your life! Sin and death cannot overcome you because Jesus has already sent them down to defeat! The Gaithers sing:

Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.  
Because he lives, all fear is gone.  
Because I know (I know) he holds the future,  
And life is worth the living, just because he lives!

I know what it is to have the power of Christ in my life . . . to be lifted out of discouragement . . . to experience the resurrection power of Christ . . . to know he is with me.

Philip was a little boy who was born with Down's syndrome. He went to a third grade Sunday School class where he was not really a part of the group. His teacher had a great idea for the Sunday after Easter. He collected ten of the containers that pantyhose come in—the ones that look like great big eggs. Each child was to go outside, find a symbol of new life, put it in the egg, and bring it back to the classroom. He opened one, and there was a flower, and everyone oohed and ahed. He opened another, and there was a little butterfly.

He opened another, and there was a rock. One of the kids said, "That's crazy! How's a rock supposed to be like new life?" A little boy responded, "That's mine. I knew all of you would get flowers and buds and leaves and butterflies and stuff like that. So I got a rock because I wanted to be different. And for me, that's new life."

He opened another one and nothing was there. "That's not fair! That's stupid. Somebody didn't do it right," said one of the kids. The teacher felt a tug on his shirt. It was Philip. "It's mine. It's mine," Philip said. They said, "You don't ever do anything right, Philip. There's nothing there!" "I did so do it. I did do it. It's empty. The tomb is empty," Philip rejoiced.

There was silence, a very full silence, as Philip became a part of that group of eight-year-olds.

Philip died soon after, as he did not have the strength to fight off infection. At the funeral, nine eight-year-old children marched up to the front, but not with flowers. They went right up to the front and placed on it an empty egg, an old discarded plastic egg.

The resurrection power of Jesus resides in one fact—the tomb is empty!

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## JESUS' PARTING CHARGE

(Mark 16:14-20)

C. PHILIP SLATE

Somehow we like to hang on to the last words of both the famous and the beloved. We treasure the last deliberately spoken words of a close friend. Even when loved ones die unexpectedly, and neither we nor they know they were saying their last words to us, we like to cling to those words as the last tangible contact with the person. People have made collections of the last words of those who are regarded as important because their statements are often revealing of what those people were at the core.

As far as I can determine, Luke gives the last recorded words of Jesus before his ascension: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus was then enveloped in a cloud and taken up (Acts 1:9-11).

During the forty days between his resurrection and ascension (Acts 1:3), he was often with his apostles. During that time he evidently spoke to them several times about the next phases of his proposed work—especially his work through them and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Along with Matthew 28:16-20 and Luke 24:44-49, Mark 16:14-20 falls in that time period.

### A DISPUTED TEXT

My topic falls within what many regard as a "disputed text" (Mark 16:9-20) because those verses do not appear in the two oldest major manuscripts of the New Testament. Since the nineteenth century numerous scholarly and popular books have outlined the evidences for including or excluding the passage in Mark.

Since I am to speak on the text, I must offer some defense for doing so. Many people are more certain than I that the text definitely belongs in Mark; many people are more certain than I that it does not belong in Mark. We do no service to God by adding to his word; we seriously err when we take away from his word (cf. Revelation 22:18). I wish the issue could be resolved. But of one thing I am confident: The content of Mark 16:9-20 is taught elsewhere in the New Testament, as the following comparison demonstrates; so I am in no danger of teaching error through this passage:

Mark 16	Item	Elsewhere
v. 9	First day resurrection	John 20:1
v. 9	Appeared to Mary Magdalene	John 20:11-18
v. 10	Mary Magdalene told others	John 20:2
v. 12	Appeared to two in countryside	Luke 24:13ff.(?)
v. 13	Went back to tell others	Luke 24:33-34
v. 14	Appeared to the eleven at table	Luke 24:36-43
v. 14	Upbraided them for unbelief	Luke 24:38(?)
v. 15	"Go preach to all"	Matthew 28:19-20
v. 16	Baptism connected	Matthew 28:20
v. 17	Cast out demons	Acts 16:18
v. 17	Speak in tongues	Acts 2, 8, 19
v. 18	Pick up serpents	Acts 28:3-6
v. 18	Drink deadly thing	???
v. 18	Lay hands on sick	Acts 5:12; cf. 3:7; 8:18
v. 19	Ascended to heaven	Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9
v. 19	Sat on right hand of God	Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:12; 1 Peter 3:22
v. 20	Went forth and preached	Acts 1:8; etc.
v. 20	Lord confirmed message	Acts 3:1-16, 4:29-31; Hebrews 2:1-4

Of these eighteen items, only one, drinking some "deadly thing" (v. 18), appears to be without parallel in the New Tes-

tament; and compared to the power over demons and serpents, there is nothing especially extraordinary about protection from poison. Consequently, one finds no odd twists in the passage; there is no Christian doctrine found only here in the New Testament. For practical purposes, one may simply consider the thrust of this passage at the end of Mark.

### THE MESSAGE

#### *The Resurrected Jesus (Mark 9:14)*

The resurrected Jesus repeatedly made himself known by appearing to Mary Magdalene, two disciples, and the eleven. Paul used the appearances of Jesus as evidence that he really was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-8); but in spite of the fact that Jesus had earlier told his followers that he would be killed and rise from the dead (Mark 8:31, 9:30-31), they did not understand (Mark 9:32). Jesus even rebuked the eleven because they had not believed the report of those who had seen him (Mark 16:14).

The belief that Jesus was raised from the dead is said by Paul to be a part of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3ff.), and it is fitting that Mark mentions it since he claimed to be reporting the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1). In early Christian preaching and teaching, the resurrection is related both to the credentials of Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 2:24-36, 10:40, 17:31; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; etc.) and to the Christian's hope of salvation (1 Corinthians 15:12-19; 1 Peter 1:3-4; etc.). His resurrection is bound up with the conquest of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Through it Jesus Christ showed his own superiority over Satan and death, and demonstrated that those who repose their hopes on him will be similarly victorious over death (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The hope created by the resurrection is a great consolation in a world about which we sing, "Change and decay in all around I see." According to the New Testament, people do not die and rise from the dead because they are natural parts of human experience (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23). God did not create people to die, so death is exceptional. God is associated with life, not death. Similarly, people have no hope

of resurrection merely because they are human, as though some resident power would make it possible apart from God. Certainly not! The guarantee of the resurrection is Jesus Christ himself. His resurrection is not an example of what we can do on our own. Rather, his resurrection heralds the message that God will raise people up so that death as an enemy of God's purpose will have been destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). People who have that hope in Christ should live victoriously!

#### *The Commissioning Christ (Mark 16:15-16)*

It should not be surprising that the Lord of life should make provisions for the message about himself to be broadcast throughout the world. As Mark pointed out, Jesus gave his life "a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). All who stand to gain from his death and resurrection deserve to hear about it. So Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (v. 15).

There is nothing about the passage of several centuries which changes the benefits of Christ's saving action, nor the need people have for him, nor the urgency to carry out Christ's directive. It is very likely the case that the seriousness with which we take Jesus as Lord may be measured partially by the efforts we put forth throughout the world to tell others about him.

"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved," Jesus said; "but he who does not believe will be condemned" (v. 16). It strikes me as a little strange that the apostles who so recently were rebuked for unbelief and hardness of heart (v. 14) should now be commissioned to preach the message they were only gradually coming to understand and digest. But Jesus had confidence in their ability to grow, so they were urged to do the work he had for them.

The connection between baptism and the appropriation of salvation is found elsewhere in the New Testament. As an act of trust in a crucified, buried, and resurrected Lord (Romans 6:3-5), it is said to be necessary for forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), washing away sins (Acts 22:16), getting into Christ (Romans 6:3-5), putting on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), and

salvation (1 Peter 3:21). It has no more merit than faith, repentance, and confession of Christ (Romans 10:10); but it is as necessary as they are as a response to the Savior, and one finds in Acts that they who turned to Christ from both Judaism and paganism were baptized as a part of that process (Acts 2:38-40; 8:12, 36-39; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 22:16). But it is always a baptism which embodies faith and repentance.

*The Confirming Christ (Mark 16:17-20)*

When Jesus promised that signs would accompany the efforts of those who believed (vv. 17-18) he was evidently referring to the confirmatory nature of those signs since he so identifies it in verses 19 and 20: "The Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it." The victorious Jesus ascended to a position of power (v. 19), but he had arranged for the message about himself to be confirmed.

The point of this section is not the duration of those signs about which one can read in Acts and occasionally the Epistles. How long they were to occur must be determined from other passages. Another writer also refers to the confirmatory nature of "signs and wonders and various miracles" (Hebrews 2:1-4), and that is the point to be observed here.

Being a Christian involves the entire person—thought, feelings (emotions), and actions. People are not called upon to commit intellectual suicide in the process of becoming a Christian. Rather, there are various types of evidences supplied to enable a fair-minded person to accept the bases of being a Christian. To confirm that Jesus was raised from the dead, Jesus appeared to and talked with a large number of people (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Similarly, the message spoken by those original heralds was confirmed by supernatural events, by God's intervention, to authenticate the message. Once Jesus established his resurrection, the cornerstone of Christian teaching, it was not necessary for him to make repeated appearances to prove it again. We may argue the same for the other elements of Christian teaching. Once confirmed, or authenticated, by God's action, one may accept the message as true.

Matthew records Jesus as saying he will always be with his messengers (Matthew 28:20), but he does not specify how that was to be done. It is a great encouragement to Christian teachers and preachers to know, however, that they proclaim an authenticated message, and that Christ will be with them in their righteous efforts (cf. 2 Timothy 4:16-17).

## CONCLUSION

As surely as the message of Mark is true, hurting and needy people may safely place their trust in a powerful but compassionate Christ. If he could heal and give order to chaotic lives when he was on earth, he can give forgiveness to the guilty and life to the spiritually dead today. What incredibly good news!

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## THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS IN MARK

EDWARD P. MYERS

Our discussion for this series centers around the authority of Jesus Christ. This subject presents a difficulty for each of us. The difficulty is not from understanding the word "authority" and how it is used, but rather from our inability to accept authority in our own lives. There is something about the word "authority" that has left an enigma in the minds of people in our Western civilization. There is something about authority that we do not like and want to rebel against. In light of that, perhaps we need to be discussing the subject of submission rather than authority.

The language of Matthew 28:18 is familiar: "And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, 'All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.'"<sup>1</sup> The authority of Jesus Christ is one accepted by any who would claim Jesus as Lord and live the Christlike life.

Four words are used in the Greek language translated "authority." The noun forms are: (1) *exousia*, (2) *epitage*, (3) *huperoche*, and (4) *dunastes*.<sup>2</sup> The word *epitage*, is usually translated "commandment" and is used as an injunction. It is rendered once in the KJV as "authority" (Titus 2:15). The word *huperoche* is found twice in the New Testament. Once it is translated "excellency" (1 Corinthians 2:1) and the other time "authority" (1 Timothy 2:2). This word primarily denotes eminence, as a mountain peak; hence, it is used metaphorically to represent excellency. The word *dunastes* is closely related to the word *dunamis* (power) and is used to designate a potentate or high-ranking officer. This word occurs three times in the New Testament and is translated "mighty," "of great authority," and "Potentate."<sup>3</sup> The word *exousia* is important for our study in the Gospel of Mark. It is, therefore, to that

word that we turn our attention.

The word *exousia* occurs 103 times in the New Testament and is translated in different ways: "power" (69 times), "authority" (29 times), "right" (2 times), "liberty" (1 time), "jurisdiction" (1 time), and "strength" (1 time). It is used in the Gospels (44 times), Acts (7 times), Paul's epistles (29 times),<sup>4</sup> the General Epistles (2 times), and the Revelation (21 times).

In the Gospels it is used by Matthew (10 times), Mark (10 times), Luke (16 times), and John (8 times). It is evident, therefore, that one cannot read the Gospel records without understanding that each writer revealed information about the authority of Jesus Christ.

### THE MEANING OF "AUTHORITY"

The questions for beginning our study are these: What is meant by the word "authority" (*exousia*)? How are we to understand this word? In the Gospels *exousia* is translated in three different ways: "power," "authority," and "jurisdiction."<sup>5</sup> How are we to understand it?

The word *exousia* is derived from *exestin* and has several meanings.<sup>6</sup> Our concern centers around the New Testament concept of *exousia* and its significance for understanding Jesus as one with authority.

Werner Foerster says the role played by *exousia* in the New Testament world of thought rests on three foundations. First, it denotes the power which decides, so that it is particularly well adapted to express the invisible power of God whose word is creative power. Second, this power of decision is active in a legally ordered whole, especially in the state and in all the authoritarian relationships supported by it. Third, it can denote the freedom which is given to the community.<sup>7</sup>

Foerster then explains *exousia* as it relates to the person and work of Christ. He writes,

It denotes his divinely given power and authority to act. If he is the Son, this authority is not a restricted commission. It is his own rule in free agreement with the Father. . . . Jesus speaks of the power with which he is invested in Matthew 28:18. . . . This means that Jesus is

exalted to be *Christos* and *Kurios* in the *basileia tou Theou* [Christ and Lord in the kingdom of God].<sup>8</sup>

### AUTHORITY IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mark opens his writing of the "beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1) with an account of Jesus' authority. What is the nature of *exousia* as used by Mark in his Gospel? What is the nature of the quality of the *exousia* which Jesus claimed and exercised? In order to answer these and other questions, we must examine the ten occurrences of this term found in six places in the Gospel of Mark.<sup>9</sup>

*Mark 1:22-27 (two times)*<sup>10</sup>

It is the Sabbath Day when Jesus enters Capernaum and visits the synagogue. Jesus finds a receptive audience and teaches. Their reaction to his teaching is the center of our discussion. Mark records, "And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority [*exousia*], and not as the scribes" (v. 22). As the story continues, Jesus performs a miracle by cleansing a man with an unclean spirit. The response is: "And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority [*exousia*] commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him'" (v. 27).

This entire story (vv. 21-28) indicates that the witnesses of Jesus' teaching and action considered the exorcism to be the result of his teaching. It is interesting that this statement regarding Jesus' teaching with authority is not followed by any teaching material. Mark simply asserts that Jesus' manner of teaching possessed authority, and then passes on to an account of the manifestation of that authority as seen in the miracle which Jesus performs.

Aloysius M. Ambrozic has written an essay on the use of authority in Mark 1:27. He writes that "in the New Testament the term *exousia* serves to describe primarily the means by which there manifests itself the invisible creativeness of God who alone possesses the absolute ability to act as he wishes and decides."<sup>11</sup> Mark's use of the term *exousia* is related to the

authority of Jesus, or he depicts it as a gift given by Jesus to his disciples.<sup>12</sup> This authority is not self-derived but is authority received from God.

But, what is significant about Jesus' teaching compared with the scribes', specifically in the negative, "not as the scribes"? Who were these scribes, and of what did their teaching consist?

With one exception,<sup>13</sup> the scribes are presented in Mark as deadly enemies of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark they accuse him of blasphemy (2:6), of working his miracles by the power of Beelzebub (3:22), of eating with sinners (2:16); they plot to destroy him (11:18, 14:1) and are among those who come to arrest him, take part in the verdict condemning him to death as well as in the decision to hand him over to Pilate (14:43, 53; 15:1); they mock him in his dying hour (15:31). Jesus accuses them of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (3:29-30), of making void the commandment of God (7:8-9, 13), he corrects (contradicts) their opinions (9:11-13, 12:35-37), he warns against their pride, vanity, greed, and hypocrisy (12:38), and he refuses to answer their hostile question about the sources of his authority (11:33).

When Mark tells us that Jesus taught as one having authority and not as the scribes, he is being specific about that claim. The scribes were responsible for teaching the Torah and depended not only on the written Law, but also on the oral tradition of the elders. Jesus' teaching, however, was not derived or borrowed; he taught with "personal authority." Barclay writes,

No Scribe ever gave a decision on his own. He would always begin, "There is a teaching that . . ." and would then quote all his authorities. If he made a statement he would buttress it with this, that and the next citation or quotation from the great legal masters of the past. The last thing he ever gave was an independent judgment. How different was Jesus! When Jesus spoke, He spoke as if He needed no authority beyond Himself. He spoke with utter independence. He cited no authorities and quoted no experts. He spoke with the finality of the voice of God.

To the people it was like a breeze from heaven to hear someone speak like that. The terrific, positive certainty of Jesus was the very antithesis of the careful quotations of the Scribes. The note of personal authority rang out—and that is a note which captures the ear of every man.<sup>14</sup>

*Mark 2:10*<sup>15</sup>

The context of this story is important. This discussion of healing and forgiveness (2:1-12) is the first of five stories of conflict in the opening sections of this Gospel (2:1—3:6). Jesus enters again into the city of Capernaum. His reputation evidently has preceded him, for when the word gets out that he is in a house, the people crowd him so much that friends of a crippled man are unable to reach Jesus and have to uncover the roof of the house and let him down through the top. Jesus, seeing their faith, heals the man. Some accuse him of blasphemy. Jesus' response is, "Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority [*exousia*] on earth to forgive sins" (vv. 9-10).

This story poses some interesting observations. From man's perspective, to say, "Your sins are forgiven" would be easier. After all, this is something that no one could really question. There would be no possibility of whether the words were effective or not. Any charlatan could make such a statement, and one could not prove it either true or false. But to say, "Get up, take your bed, and walk," was entirely different. To make such a claim meant proof was necessary.

However, for deity, the question is different. Which is easier for God to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or "Arise, take up your bed, and walk"? Both require an equal measure of omnipotent power. No sins are ever forgiven and no ailment ever healed except by the power of God. It is, therefore, not any easier for Jesus to say the one as opposed to the other. He is a man with *exousia* (authority). The expression of that authority is once again observed in the performing of a mighty miracle.

*Mark 3:15*<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter we have Mark's account of Jesus calling the twelve apostles (3:13-19). This is an important moment in the

ministry of Jesus. Jesus came preaching and healing, and at this time has made a considerable impact in the world. There were two problems faced by the Master. First, what would happen to his message in the event something happened to him? The fact that something would happen to him he knew well. Second, how could he get his message out for others to hear it? The way he chose to answer these two problems was by selecting twelve men whom he appointed for this special work. In appointing them to their work it is recorded that they would go preaching and have authority (*exousia*) to cast out demons (v. 15).

*Mark 6:7*<sup>17</sup>

This story (6:7-13) is similar to the preceding one. The Twelve had been appointed (3:13-19) to be with Jesus and also to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. They have spent time in preparation for their work by hearing Jesus (4:1-34) and witnessing for themselves his mighty works (4:35—6:6). The time has now come for them to take an active part in the ministry. Jesus sends out the Twelve, two by two, and gives them authority (*exousia*) over unclean spirits. Exactly what this authority involved we are not told at this point. But from a continuation of Mark's Gospel record, it is evident that it involves special powers from the Holy Spirit to accomplish their task.

*Mark 11:27-33 (four times)*<sup>18</sup>

This is perhaps one of the classic passages in a discussion on the authority of Jesus. Jesus is entering the temple in the city of Jerusalem. The chief priest, scribes, and the elders approach him with two questions: "By what authority do you do these things? and "Who gave you that authority?" The response of Jesus is that they must first answer a question from him, and he would give them their answer and tell by what authority he did the things which he did. When they were unable to properly answer Jesus' question about the baptism of John being from heaven or from men, the Lord feels no obligation to tell them the source of his authority.

The reference to the authority of Jesus may have been to the authority conferred on one as a rabbi or to the claim of Jesus as

a religious teacher to act independently of the supreme tribunal in such matters.<sup>19</sup> The response of Jesus to the questions asked indicates that his authority is one of religious significance and not of legal or political origin. It is interesting to note that their attack was double (two questions); Jesus, on the other hand, was concerned with their answering of only one question.

### Mark 13:34<sup>20</sup>

This is the final occurrence of the word *exousia* in Mark's Gospel (13:28-37). Jesus is teaching his disciples the importance of being prepared for a coming judgment. By means of an illustration, Jesus seeks to teach the importance of diligence. He says, "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." Then he states, "It is as when a man, sojourning in another country, having left his house, and given authority [*exousia*] to his servants, to each one his work, commanded also the porter to watch."

## CONCLUSION

The authority of Jesus Christ presupposes divine commission and authorization to accomplish the work he was sent to do. This authority is often expressed in the miracles which Jesus performed. However, the performing of the miracles, within and of themselves, are not a result of his authority but rather the result of exercising that authority given to him from his Father in heaven. Jesus recognized that he was doing the Father's will. He realized that his commission was from heaven and that what he did was given divine sanction.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>American Standard Version (1901).

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament Words* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1966 reprint), p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Information on occurrences of these words comes from J. B. Smith, *Greek-English Concordance* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1955). The one limitation of the English uses of the words is that Smith's work is based on the Authorized King James Version of the Bible. This means that if you look up the word in places cited, there may be a difference if you are using another translation.

<sup>4</sup>This is not the time or place to discuss the authorship of the book of Hebrews. I have included that book in the counting of these occurrences as a matter of convenience.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, *Greek-English Concordance*, p. 135. The entry number for this word is #1849.

<sup>6</sup>Werner Foerster, "Exousia," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964) 2:560-575.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 566.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 568.

<sup>9</sup>The listing of these ten occurrences is found in Smith's *Greek-English Concordance* and also in a short article of Joshua Starr, *Harvard Theological Review* 23 (1930):303.

<sup>10</sup>Parallels of this are \*Matthew 7:28-29; Luke 4:31-32; \*John 7:46. This is according to Kurt Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (English Edition), London, England: United Bible Societies, 1982, p. 64. Parallel citations also include important listings of Semantic parallels as given by Aland. These are all marked with an asterisk (\*). All future parallel references footnoted will come from this source.

<sup>11</sup>Aloysius M. Ambrozic, "New Teaching With Power (Mark 1:27)" in *Word and Spirit* (Joseph Plevnik, ed.), Essays in honor of David Michael Stanley on his 60th birthday. Ontario, Canada: Regis College Press, 1975, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup>"He refers to the power of Jesus six times: It is present in his teaching and his forgiving of sin, and is discussed in a controversy with the chief priests and scribes (Mark 1:22, 27; 2:10; 11:28, 29, 33); three times he speaks of it as Jesus' gift to the disciples (Mark 3:15; 6:7; 13:34)." Ambrozic, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup>Mark 12:27-34.

<sup>14</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*. The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Parallels listed are \*Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26; \*John 5:1-7, 8-9a.

<sup>16</sup>Parallels listed are \*Matthew 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16.

<sup>17</sup>Parallels listed are \*Matthew 9:35; 10:1, 7-11, 14; Luke 9:1-6.

<sup>18</sup>Parallels listed are Matthew 21:23-27; Luke 20:1-8; \*John 2:18-22.

<sup>19</sup>Several articles address the significance of Jesus being seen as one teaching with authority. For further study you might want to check the following: H. J. Flowers, *The Expository Times* 66(1954-55):254; E. M. Sidebottom, *The Expository Times* 66(1954-55):350; A. W. Argyle, "The Meaning of *Exousia* in Mark 1:22, 27" in *The Expository Times* 80(1960):343; Joshua Starr, "The Meaning of Authority in Mark 1:22" in *Harvard Theological Review* 23 (1930):303; David Daube, "Exousia in Mark 1:22 and 27," *Journal of Theological Studies* 39(1938):45-59.

<sup>20</sup>Parallels listed are \*Matthew 25:13-15; 24:42; \*Luke 21:36; 19:12-13; 12:40; 12:38.

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## JESUS AND THE TWELVE

(Mark 3:13-19)

EDWIN WHITE

Jesus' choice of men to be his disciples, on the surface, seems to be ridiculous. The Twelve were to be trained and commissioned to take the message of salvation to a lost world. Such a task as the disciples were called upon to perform would seem impossible enough of its own accord, and when you consider that the Twelve were simple, unlettered men, without wealth, influence, or financial backing, the job of spreading the kingdom over all the earth would seem even more absurd. Conventional wisdom would dictate that Jesus should choose disciples from the ruling aristocracy or from the religious establishment. Instead, Jesus chose men who seemed to be narrow in their views, who lacked spiritual understanding, and who, far from being cultured, were men who had known only the sweat of toil.

We are told, however, that Jesus "summoned those whom he himself wanted. . . ." The Twelve were "handpicked" by Jesus. The Lord knew the potential of the Twelve, and no one can deny that this small band of men, with the exception of Judas, has exercised a greater influence on the world than any other group, large or small. Jesus knew that he could take this group of unlikely people from divergent walks of life, and make of them a glorious band of apostles who would make the earth rumble with the sound of their message. Knowing the hearts of men, Jesus could see that these disciples would eventually burn with the desire to go out and change the world by preaching the gospel.

### JESUS NEEDED COMPANIONSHIP

Jesus chose the Twelve "that they might be with him. . . ." We

are touched by a Lord who is so human and warm that he hungers for companionship. Even God needs companionship and love, which explains why man was created. God knew we would break his heart when he made us, but he made us anyway, knowing that some few of us would choose to be his loving friends.

The desire for companionship explains why Jesus wanted Peter, James, and John with him when he faced the ordeal of Gethsemane. Jesus needed friendly hands and voices. Instead, he found three sleeping disciples. He asked, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Jesus' wistful question revealed a heart crying out for human companionship and sympathy.

Jesus chose the Twelve because he wanted the companionship of men who would be faithful friends, no matter what happened. The disciples often disappointed Jesus, but he knew that they would ultimately prove to be committed friends. With appreciation, Jesus, the night before he died, said to his disciples in the upper room, "And you are those who have stood by me in my trials" (Luke 22:28).

### JESUS NEEDED PREACHERS

Jesus also chose the Twelve that he might "send them out to preach. . . ." Jesus had, from the beginning of his public life, been preaching. Thirteen voices are better than one, however. And the time would come when Jesus' voice would be quiet. Jesus' voice was never to be heard outside of his homeland. It would remain for the disciples to preach the gospel outside of Palestine. During Christ's lifetime, Europe never heard the gospel. The disciples had to face a hostile world where sin and vice flourished like a tropical forest, where the marriage bond was set at naught, and where immorality was the accepted norm.

Jesus called the Twelve to be his "learners" in order that they might become apostles (men sent out). Without having been with Jesus, the Twelve would never have been ready for the commission to preach to all the world.

It is impossible to teach what one does not know. The disciples needed time to learn of Christ before they could teach

others about him. Like all new converts, the disciples were enthusiastic, but their zeal could never substitute for knowledge. Jesus wanted his men to be with him for a period of necessary schooling, without which they could never be successful apostles.

Around the turn of this century, Dr. J. D. Jones, a brilliant Welsh preacher, delivered a delightful sermon about the apostles in which he argued that all new converts must learn that discipleship always comes before apostleship. To understand the force of Jones' point, it is necessary to understand "apostle" in the literal sense of "one who is sent out." Although Jones took precautions not to dampen the enthusiasm of new converts, he warned that anyone who wants to go forth preaching had better undertake the work of a disciple first. Those, for example, who heard the apostles preach, took notice "that they had been with Jesus." Without a period of learning, how powerless the apostles would have been! Jones also brilliantly observes that the end of discipleship is always apostleship. Another way to put it is to say that Jesus always calls us so that in the end he may send us. If the modern church learns anything from Jesus and his disciples, it is the need to be about the business of evangelizing. Jesus called his men to be with him so that they might learn of him and then be sent to tell what they had learned to a lost world.

### A FELLOWSHIP OF KINDRED SPIRITS

Jesus "appointed the Twelve" to a common fellowship. It is remarkable how a group of such diverse men managed to come together in a common cause. For example, two men could not be more different than Peter and John. Peter was always bold and impulsive, while John was quiet, thoughtful, and loving. Most of the disciples were believing, but Thomas seemed to always play the role of skeptic. And the political differences between Matthew and Simon the Canaanite were so potentially explosive that it is curious how they could avoid being at each other's throat. Matthew was a tax collector and a servant of the Roman Governor, while Simon was a Zealot, a rebel against Rome, who hated Rome, taxes, and those who

gathered them.

One of the great lessons to be learned from Jesus and his disciples is that there is room for all and that there can be variety in unity if all have their attention focused on Jesus instead of prejudices which can cause division.

### CALLED TO SUFFER

The New Testament abounds with Scriptures which also make it clear that the disciples were called to suffer. Consider Paul, for example. Although Paul was not one of the original Twelve, he was, nevertheless, personally appointed by Christ himself. Paul prayed, "What wilt thou have me to do?" The answer was, "I will show him how great things he must suffer." Paul was not unique among the apostles in his suffering. Like the others, Paul lived life on the ragged edge. He often escaped destruction by the narrowest margin. At Malta he swam ashore on a piece of wreckage, barely escaping a death by drowning. At Damascus he was hunted down by persecutors who obliged him to run for his life. In humiliation, the apostle was lowered down the city wall like a basket of laundry, to ignominiously flee for his life. At Ephesus, Paul escaped the madness of a whole heathen city only because "certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends," persuaded him not to enter the city's theatre where a great mob demonstrated against him for two hours. At Lystra the apostle was stoned and left for dead. Even the other disciples were surprised when Paul suddenly stood in their midst and walked away. It seems that Paul's life was one long, hard fight with persecuting Jews, wild tempests, venomous vipers, and the powers of evil.

Paul was aware of his life's conflicts and narrow margins of escape. He once commented that he was "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; . . . perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest" in his body (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

Being "troubled on every side, yet not distressed" pictures

one who is pressed on every side by an ever tightening circle of enemies, and yet is able to escape because God makes an opening just wide enough to get through. In other words, Paul is crowded by the press of enemies but not crushed.

"Perplexed, but not in despair" is a phrase that portrays one whose road is dark and unknown; yet as he speeds on, just enough light is provided to see the next few feet.

"Persecuted, but not forsaken," depicts the desperation of one being hotly chased by a deadly enemy, but not quite overcome due to the fact that God always comes to his defense at the last possible moment.

"Cast down, but not destroyed" is the drama of one whose enemy has caught up to him and has struck a blow which has knocked him down, but has not knocked him out. It is the picture of one who has been knocked down but not run over.

"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest" in the body pictures the agony of one who sustains the death wounds of Jesus in his own body, but who never dies himself because "the life also of Jesus" comes to his aid. Paul's life is like Moses' burning bush. He is always burning, but never consumed.

If anything, the disciples of Jesus prove that the greatest of God's servants are often laced with scars. What a lesson the disciples teach us! The privilege of serving Jesus often comes to us at great cost. We are often called to suffer. When suffering comes, God always provides just enough grace to keep us from being overcome, and we may be assured that the struggle itself is our opportunity for growth and glory.

## CONCLUSION

It has been suggested that nothing is so powerful as enthusiasm, and that no movement, especially the church, is safe unless it is enthusiastic. If anything, the Twelve were enthusiastic servants. Unlike many of us today, Jesus' disciples did not possess only an excess of excitement while retaining a deficiency of genuine enthusiasm. What is often seen in modern-day disciples is not enthusiasm which is always inward, grave, and self-controlled, but mere excitement

which is outward, fantastic, and often hysterical.

Excitement, of course, is not evil. Excitement is a part of our nature, and like all other appetites, it is not sinful unless indulged unlawfully or excessively. We do need to be reminded, however, that excitement is always of impulse, while enthusiasm is of principle. Excitement is merely the glow; enthusiasm is the fire.

One cannot help but wonder if much of what is seen in churches today is nothing more than a violent excitement which succeeds only in exhausting the mind, leaving it withered and sterile. Instead of genuine enthusiasm, some seem to possess only a fanatical sensationalism. They have forgotten what their aim is while redoubling their efforts. And, as one poet put it:

Where life becomes a spasm,  
And history a whiz:  
If that's not sensationalism,  
I don't know what is.

The Greeks had a word for enthusiasm which affords the noblest definition of it—a word which signifies "God in us." "God in us" was the only foundation of enthusiasm the Twelve ever had. The men Jesus chose had little cause for excitement, but their enthusiasm flourished in adversity and kindled a fire in the hour of danger. The terrors of persecution only caused the apostles to become more steady in their resolve. Their enthusiasm swelled into proud integrity and into the great purity of their cause. Modern disciples need to discover that same brand of genuine enthusiasm.

## THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF THE DISCIPLES

EDWIN WHITE

In secular biographies, the best is usually magnified while delinquencies are either omitted or given only a passing mention. The tendency of secular biographers is to make bigger-than-life characters of their subjects by magnifying their virtues and giving little or no attention to their faults and imperfections.

The Bible is careful to give a factual account of the lives of the disciples of Jesus. Although they were men of extraordinary promise who would eventually achieve deserved recognition as being among the greatest men to ever live, their faults, weaknesses, and lack of spiritual understanding were not glossed over.

### THE MISUNDERSTOOD CHRIST

It is surprising that as late as the descent of the Spirit on that historic Day of Pentecost, the disciples were still deluded by the hope of a temporal kingdom (Acts 1:6). The Lord's chosen men had demonstrated an inability to grasp the significance of the Christ himself. There was little comprehension of Jesus' purpose or method, and when he tried to explain the fact of his suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection, the disciples could not conceive the reality of what he said. Peter, always the bold one, undoubtedly acted for all the disciples when he rebuked the Lord for speaking of his suffering (Mark 8:32).

Peter's action caused Jesus to offer one of his strongest rebukes: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Mark 8:33). Jesus was severe with Peter and the rest of the disciples because they still, as incredible as it may seem, were far from understanding his mission on earth.

They had ideas of political rule and military conquest. When Jesus spoke of his suffering and death, the disciples were shocked. Peter, as usual, voiced the disciples' response: "Don't speak like that; this must never happen."

In order to appreciate Jesus' rebuke of Peter, it is necessary to understand that "Satan" is not primarily a proper name, but a Hebrew common noun meaning "the adversary." The Greek word for Satan is *diabolos* (accuser) and is the word from which we derive "devil." When the tempter confronted Jesus in the wilderness soon after his baptism, he tried, in effect, to dissuade Jesus from obeying his Father's will. Jesus rejected the tempter's appeals by saying, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 4:10). When Jesus heard the words of Peter's rebuke, he recognized that they constituted the same temptation to disobey the Father's will. Peter was playing the part of an adversary, and Jesus had to tell him that he was not on the side of God.

In all probability, Peter had no evil intentions when he rebuked the Lord. It is likely that Peter inadvertently played the role of critic and adversary of the Lord's stated mission. The fact that Peter was an honest adversary, however, only serves to more clearly demonstrate the magnitude of the disciples' misunderstanding of Jesus' earthly mission. The disciples made the common mistake of thinking that the will of God corresponded with their own prejudices and expectations concerning an earthly kingdom.

### MISUNDERSTOOD POWER

Perhaps the most surprising failure of the disciples was their inability to grasp the significance of Jesus' power. One would think, for example, that the experience of seeing Jesus feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:32-44) would have convinced the disciples that nothing was impossible for the Lord. Immediately after the miraculous feeding, however, Jesus sent his disciples by ship to Bethsaida while he remained behind to disperse the crowd. Jesus then joined the ship by walking on the water. Thinking they had seen a ghost, the disciples cried out in terror. The Lord com-

forted his men by telling them who he was, and upon entering the ship, the Twelve were amazed "beyond measure" (Mark 6:51). We are told that "they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened" (Mark 6:52).

The unbelief of the disciples is astonishing. Mark records a second miraculous feeding of four thousand in chapter 8. When Jesus announced his intention to feed the multitude, the disciples responded by saying there was no place there in the wilderness to buy enough food for so many (Mark 8:4). However, the disciples knew that they had seven loaves (Mark 8:5) and one has to wonder, in light of the former miraculous feeding of five thousand, why they thought it not possible for Jesus to duplicate his former miracle. In fact, Jesus did feed the four thousand with seven loaves and a few fish and took up seven baskets of fragments. A few days later, Jesus warned his disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15). The Twelve thought Jesus made his comment concerning leaven because they had brought no food with them (Mark 8:16). Jesus then asked the disciples, "When I broke the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They replied, "Twelve." Jesus inquired, "And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They replied, "Seven." The Lord said to them, "Why is it that you do not understand?" Indeed, having seen Jesus miraculously feed so many on two different occasions, the disciples should never have understood Jesus' warning about the leaven of Herod and the Pharisees to be a reprimand for having not brought food with them.

"O thou of little faith," Jesus said to the apostles (Matthew 14:31).

Because of weak faith, all the disciples deserted Jesus in his moment of greatest need—the very men who in the beginning "forsook all and followed him" (Luke 5:11) are the very ones who "forsook him and fled" when Jesus emerged from Gethsemane and was arrested (Mark 14:50). Weak faith always withdraws when it hears the rattle of swords and staves.

## MISUNDERSTOOD HUMILITY

If lack of faith was the most surprising fault of the disciples, pride and jealousy were the ugliest. Jesus words, "I came, not to be served, but to serve" had scarcely been spoken when his disciples began their sectarian fight for position. The disciples actually engaged in a childish dispute over which of them would be greatest (Mark 9:34). James and John were bold enough to request of the Lord that they be allowed to sit, one on his right hand, and the other on his left hand when he was glorified (Mark 9:37).

The Twelve evidently failed to grasp Jesus' meaning when he said, "I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15). The disciples did not understand that the way to greatness was by being a minister to others, and that one becomes chief of all by being servant of all.

## A HELPER IS SENT

Although the disciples lacked spiritual understanding, they were honest, seeking individuals, and one of God's provisions for the seeking heart is that it always finds its way. If the disciples were lacking in understanding, they were also numbed by a sense of tragedy. When Jesus was finally taken from them they felt that their world had crumbled in chaos about them. But Jesus had made a provision which would both comfort the disciples and provide them with the understanding they had always lacked. Jesus kept his promise: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever. . . ." (John 14:15).

The Greek word for "Comforter" is *parakletos*. *Parakletos* is an untranslatable word. The difficulty lies in the fact that there is no single English word by which *parakletos* can be translated. In Greek law, *parakletos* is used of a prisoner's friend who served as advocate and counsel for the defense and bore witness to his friend's character when others wished to condemn him.

*Parakletos* literally means "one who is called in." The implication is that the Comforter is called in to render some service.

The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the helper of men. *Parakletos* is a word that is often used to speak of that kind of comfort and consolation in distress which keeps men on their feet, when, left to themselves, they would collapse.

Jesus' promise to send another *parakletos* (Helper, Comforter, Advocate) meant that in his absence, the disciples would not be diminished, but increased, for now they would have two Helpers instead of one. The first Helper (Jesus) would be a Helper in heaven where he would plead the disciples' case before God. The new Helper (Holy Spirit) would make God's cause clear to the disciples on earth. Furthermore, having once arrived, the new Helper would never depart from them in any sense. He would abide with them "forever."

Having the Holy Spirit as a Helper meant that the disciples could go past the breaking-point without breaking. Not only would the disciples be able to cope with things, but the new Helper would also bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said, providing them with understanding to properly interpret both Jesus and his message.

### CONCLUSION

While it is true that in the beginning the disciples lacked spiritual understanding and often disappointed the Lord by failing to grasp the meaning of his parables and precepts, it must also be noted that they became men of great spiritual strength whose message changed the world. No group of men has ever so profoundly influenced the world as the small circle of men Jesus called and trained to finish his mission.

In the disciples we learn that God can take ordinary people and make of them extraordinary servants who are able to change the events of history.

## JESUS' RELATION TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

CALVIN WARPULA

Jesus Christ was not born into a religious vacuum. He lived amidst the Judaism of his time which was largely controlled by the Pharisees among the common people and the Sadducees among the rich and priestly aristocracy. Both groups apparently had their own scribes, or professional theologians, to study the Law and their traditions. Jesus interacted frequently with the Pharisees since they were the dominant minority in Israel. These interactions were largely negative, although Jesus did not condemn wholesale either the Jewish system in which he lived or all the Pharisees. Jesus warned of the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" which meant that "the teaching of each group . . . is in its own peculiar way corrupt and contrary to the message of Jesus" (Matthew 16:16).<sup>1</sup> This study examines some of the differences in the teaching and practices of Jesus and the Pharisees, the scribes, and the Sadducees.

### JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

The Pharisees, the most influential party among the Jews during intertestamental and New Testament times, are frequently referred to in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> There were about 6,000 of them in the time of Herod the Great.<sup>3</sup> This probably refers to those who claimed full membership. When the adherents are added, the number may have reached 25,000, with 20,000 of these in Jerusalem. The total Jewish population in the Judean countryside and the territory of Herod Antipas is estimated at 500,000. The Pharisees then made up about 5 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup>

The Pharisees were noted for their strict accuracy in their

interpretation of the Law.<sup>5</sup> In attempts to make the Law continually relevant to changing times, the Pharisees developed a constantly expanding oral tradition of laws and ordinances that were adjustable to new situations. By trying to make the Law fit every circumstance, they were actually writing new laws.<sup>6</sup> A body of legal decisions, named the halachah, developed which interpreted the Law and were reckoned to be as binding as the biblical tradition. About A.D. 200, these oral traditions were codified into writings called the Mishnah, a "virtual encyclopedia of Pharisaic legalism that instructs the reader with almost incredible detail concerning every conceivable area of conduct."<sup>7</sup> The Mishnah says, "Greater stringency applies to the observance of the words of the scribes than to the observance of the words of the written Law."<sup>8</sup> No wonder, then, Matthew Black could charge the Pharisees with being "a sterile religion of codified tradition, regulating every part of life by a halachah, observing strict separation, and already as entrenched in its own conservatism as that of the Sadducees."<sup>9</sup>

Jesus denounced the Pharisees more than any other class of people. He is constantly in a running battle with them throughout the Gospels. Jesus differed with the Pharisees over the authority of oral tradition. He rejected the authority of their oral law and called it nothing but "vain worship," "rules taught by men" and "the traditions of men" (Mark 7:7-8). He called these teachers "blind guides" who lead others to "fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14). He explained, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (Matthew 15:13). Because the Pharisees emphasized their human rules to the neglect of obedience to the word of God itself, Jesus said to them, "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition" (Matthew 15:6).

Jesus differed with the Pharisees over the roles of external ceremony and internal purity (Matthew 15:17-20). The Pharisees emphasized such things as ceremonial cleanness and ritualistic handwashing. Jesus contended that not all religion pleases God. God looks at not only what man does, but why he does it. All religious acts are to be judged by motive, not mere performance (Matthew 6:2, 15-16). Some who prophesy, exor-

cize demons, and work miracles are wicked characters who will be cast away from God (Matthew 7:20-23). The legalistic approach of the Pharisees said, "Good conduct produces good character." Jesus said, "Good character produces good conduct." "For Jesus good living is the spontaneous activity of a transformed character; for the scribes and Pharisees it is obedience to a discipline imposed from without."<sup>10</sup> A righteousness that does not go deeper than the Pharisee's eternal religion and outward ceremony will never enter God's kingdom (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus does not give a new law with a code of rules to replace Moses. Rules can only treat symptoms. Jesus treats the cause by emphasizing the heart, sin, repentance, and forgiveness. For Jesus, God's grace, and mercy is the source of life (Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 15:11-32). For the Pharisees, it was a continually expanding body of rules that grew more elaborate and complicated. For Jesus, the two supreme commandments with absolute priority are "Love God totally" and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:28-34). Jesus explains the meaning of love by describing the ideal character the disciple is to imitate (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus differed with the Pharisees on priorities. The Pharisees emphasized ritual, ceremony, and tradition. Jesus emphasized human need and compassionate care for people. A prime example is the opposition Jesus encountered to healing sick people on the Sabbath Day (Matthew 12:9-14). The Law said, "You shall do no work on the sabbath" (Exodus 20:9) but did not define "work." The Pharisees enumerated thirty-nine types of work with hundreds of rules that opposed or excused various activities. The Pharisees accused Jesus of practicing medicine on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out their inconsistency in assisting animals on the Sabbath but forbidding help to people. Is a sheep worth more than a man? Is keeping tradition more important than showing mercy? Jesus asked about the intentionality of God, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). It is a strange religion that condemns Jesus for healing the sick on the Sabbath but permits plotting his murder on the same day (Mark 3:6).

The Pharisees castigated the disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath, something the Law did not condemn (Matthew 12:1-8). By picking the grain, rubbing it in their hands, and eating it, the disciples were accused of reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing a meal on the Sabbath. In response, first Jesus mentioned David's hunger emergency which allowed human need to take precedent over ceremony and the priests' work on the Sabbath by sacrificing animals in the temple. Second, he quoted God's words to Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Human values take precedence over ritual requirements. Third, he affirmed Messianic authority determines the meaning of the Sabbath: "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus differed with the Pharisees on separation from the world. They believed the righteous must have no table fellowship with sinners, especially with the ceremonially unclean who neglect the Law and do not tithe. Jesus created a scandal because he "ate and drank with sinners" (Matthew 9:9-13). He believed saving the world required contact with it. The sick need the Great Physician. Table fellowship did not demonstrate an endorsement of sin but a love for sinners.

Jesus differed with the Pharisees on how to interpret the Law. In the six antitheses of Matthew 5, Jesus contrasted the original intention of God in the Law with the commonly accepted views of his day. He did not change the Law, but challenged their casuistry by clarifying what God had intended all along. Jesus loved and obeyed God's Law. He never spoke against the Law of God, but he did oppose the traditions and interpretations of men. In the marriage-divorce discussion, Jesus interpreted the Law in terms of fundamental divine principles present in God's original creation model (Matthew 19:1-9). The teaching of Jesus was corrective both to the rival Sadducees and Pharisees.

According to him the Sadducees were right in exegesis—the Scriptures did not mean what the Pharisees made them mean—but they were wrong in relegating Scripture to the place of an archaic relic with less and less relevance to the present. The Pharisees were right in

trying to keep Scripture applicable, but were wrong in their method by making tradition superior or equal to the written word. . . . The written word is authoritative, but the great fundamental principles therein take precedence and provide the standard by which it is to be interpreted and applied.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus opposed the Pharisees' self-righteousness and self-satisfaction produced by their passion for legalism. Nothing made Jesus angrier than self-righteousness. In the story Jesus told, the Pharisee bragged on himself by telling God how good he was and how bad other people were (Luke 18:9-14). He glanced toward heaven but focused on himself. He confessed no sin, admitted no need, and made no requests. He boasted of fasting twice weekly, which was one hundred times more than the once annually the Law required (Leviticus 23:26-32). He spoke disparagingly of the tax collector. However, the tax collector, a self-admitted sinner who begged God's mercy, was justified because of his penitence and humility.

The greatest anathemas of Jesus are against the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. Jesus repeatedly called them hypocrites because they did not practice what they preached (v. 2). They had no compassion and bound heavy rules (v. 4). They served God for publicity (v. 5). They kept people out of the kingdom (v. 13). They made their converts more fanatical and rabid than they were (v. 15). They consistently wrangled over oaths (v. 16) and allowed trivial details to replace significant matters like faith, mercy, and justice (v. 23). They practiced ritual cleanness, but their hearts were full of greed, arrogance, hypocrisy, and wickedness (vv. 25-28). They claimed to honor the prophets but represented the very type of religion the prophets condemned (v. 3). They violently opposed the truth and the messengers of it (v. 34).

It would be a mistake to assume that Jesus condemned all Pharisees and opposed all their practices. While he condemned them for not practicing what they preached, he did tell his disciples, "You must obey them and do everything they tell you" (Matthew 23:2). Several similarities exist between Jesus and the Pharisees: (1) Jesus' teaching was more in the

line of the Pharisees than the Sadducees. (2) Jesus stood nearer the synagogue which the Pharisees controlled than the temple which the Sadducees controlled. (3) Many of the things the Pharisees did were also a part of Jesus' teaching or the practice of his disciples. These include fasting, alms giving, praying, baptizing, eating together, making converts, looking to a future world for grace and glory, seeking first heaven and its righteousness, and honoring the Scriptures.<sup>12</sup>

Some Pharisees were interested in Jesus and became believers. Matthew and Mark report nothing good about the Pharisees, but Luke and John sometimes speak well of them. The faith of Nicodemus progressively developed throughout the ministry of Jesus (John 3:1, 7:50, 19:39). Joseph of Arimathea assumed responsibility for the burial of Jesus (Luke 23:51). Later, Gamaliel argued for tolerance toward the disciples (Acts 5:34). The Pharisees warned Jesus of Herod's threat to his life (Luke 13:31). On three occasions some Pharisees invited Jesus to share a meal with them (Luke 7:36, 11:37, 14:1). At the table, Jesus may not have been given the kiss, anointing, and feet washing (Luke 7:44) because the Pharisees would not extend "the formal rites of fellowship and acceptance to one who stood outside their number and was so critical of their understanding of righteousness."<sup>13</sup>

### JESUS AND THE SCRIBES

The scribes (*grammateus*) were the professional theologians who spent all their time in the study of the Law and the traditions. They are also called "lawyers" (*nomikos*, Matthew 22:35) and "teachers of the law" (*nomodidaskalos*, Luke 5:17). Most of the scribes were Pharisees (Mark 2:16), but the Sadducees probably had their scribes too (Matthew 2:4). They are sometimes grouped with the "chief priests" (11 times), "the elders" (1 time), and "chief priests and elders" (10 times) in sixty-five New Testament references.<sup>14</sup>

When the scribes gave their interpretation of the Law, and it was ratified by the Sanhedrin, it became law itself. As "the true teachers," they "held undisputed sway over the thought of the people."<sup>15</sup> They loved the honor of men (Luke 20:46) and

were known as "rabbi," "father," and "teacher" (Matthew 23:7-9). As the learned men of religion, the scribes "devoted themselves to a close and careful study of the Law, to the accumulation of precedents, to the working out of inferences and deductions, and to a general development of legal regulations so as to meet every possible circumstance which might occur in human life."<sup>16</sup>

The teaching of Jesus was significantly different from that of the scribes (Matthew 7:29). While they quoted older authorities to support their views, Jesus taught in his own name with freshness and directness. Scribal religion practiced law with finical literalism. All acts were on a par with each other, and motive was not important. The multitudinous precepts and duties afforded opportunities for casuistry.

### JESUS AND THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees, consisting mostly of priests and the wealthy, ruling class, were a small minority party.<sup>17</sup> Jesus never denounced the Sadducees without the Pharisees, though he did denounce the Pharisees alone. This appears to be true for three reasons. First, Jesus was much nearer the Pharisees in doctrine and practice, and he had to distinguish himself clearly from them, but there was no danger of his position being confused with that of the Sadducees. Second, Jesus ministered more to the common people, while the Sadducees influenced the rich. Third, Jesus spent most of his ministry in Galilee, but the Sadducees were located mostly in Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

The Sadducees were theologically conservative. They apparently gave more credence to the books of Moses than they did to the later writings of the Old Testament. They denied God's work in human history and limited man's existence and blessing to this life. They denied the resurrection of the body (Mark 12:18) and the elaborate hierarchy of angels developed by the Pharisees (Acts 23:8). The Sadducees believed the soul perished with the body,<sup>19</sup> and therefore, we can receive neither penalties nor rewards in an afterlife.<sup>20</sup> With no belief in a future life of any kind, either bliss or sorrow, the Sadducees had "religion within the limits of mere sensation."<sup>21</sup> As the

irreligious officials of religion, their main problem was a "temporal concern that gave inadequate (if any) attention to the spiritual side of human existence."<sup>22</sup> They had no Messianic hope.

The most significant interview of Jesus with the Sadducees is the discussion of marriage at the resurrection (Matthew 23:23-32). Jesus opposed their rationalism and agnosticism by declaring, "You do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." He quoted Exodus 3:6 from the books of Moses to demonstrate God's affirmation of life after death.

As the aristocratic oligarchy in the temple, the Sadducees had little to do with Jesus until it was clear that his Messianic claims and power with the people were a threat to their position. They went to great extremes to protect their power, position, and prestige. When it appeared that Jesus would give them practical political problems, they began to openly oppose him. Jesus' cleansing of the temple was a direct attack on their exploitive, abusive religion (Mark 11:18). "If a man must be content with the present life alone, he is bound to capitalize on any present advantages he may enjoy."<sup>23</sup> Because it was politically expedient to get rid of Jesus (John 11:47), they united with their rivals, the Pharisees, against Jesus (Mark 14:53-54, 15:1-2).

The death of Jesus was plotted by the most religious people on earth (Matthew 16:21, 20:18, 21:33-46). After his death, they wanted to be sure his tomb was secure (Matthew 27:62-64). When news of the resurrection circulated, they bribed the soldiers to report that the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept (Matthew 28:12).

Naturally, the Sadducees were greatly agitated by the apostles' preaching of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4:1-2). They were jealous of the popularity the apostles enjoyed (Acts 5:17). Apparently, they were involved in the death of James, the brother of Jesus, who died in A.D. 62 as a result of being thrown from the temple and clubbed.<sup>24</sup> There is no record of any Sadducee ever being converted to faith in Jesus Christ. After the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Sadducees disappeared from power.

Jesus' relationship with the religious leaders is a side issue

in his ministry. He focused his life on saving and serving the people, the 93 per cent of Israel that were not adherents of any religious or political party. Jesus' arguments with the religious leaders developed out of his call for repentance on the basis of the kingdom of God in his authority and his nature (i.e., who he is, what he is doing, and why he is doing it). For them, it was easier to kill Jesus than repent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>D. A. Hagner, "Sadducees," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975), 5:215.

<sup>2</sup>The Pharisees are named 27 times in Matthew, 12 times in Mark, 27 times in Luke, 19 times in John, 9 times in Acts, and 1 time by Paul (Philippians 3:5).

<sup>3</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 17. 2. 4.

<sup>4</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Servant Messiah* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1961), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 17. 2. 4; *Wars* 1. 5. 2; 2. 8. 14; *Life* 38.

<sup>6</sup>Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings: Parts I and II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1938), pp. 115-16.

<sup>7</sup>D. A. Hagner, "Pharisees," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, 4:748.

<sup>8</sup>Sanhedrin 11. 3. A modern publication of the Mishnah is Herbert Danby's, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, England: University Press, 1938).

<sup>9</sup>Matthew Black, "Pharisees," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1962), 3:781. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Pharisees dominated Judaism. George Foote Moore says that modern Judaism is the monument to the Pharisees in *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 2:193.

<sup>10</sup>T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of Its Form and Content* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1943), p. 300.

<sup>11</sup>Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), p. 410.

<sup>12</sup>Hugh M. Scott, "Pharisees," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1933), 2:352.

<sup>13</sup>D. Muller, "Pharisee," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 2:812.

<sup>14</sup>Scribes are mentioned 60 times in the Synoptics, 4 times in Acts, 1 time by Paul, and not at all in John except 8:3 which may not be a Johannine passage.

<sup>15</sup>Frank E. Hirsch, "Scribes," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 4:2704.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Mitchell, "Scribes," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1933), 2:583.

<sup>17</sup>T. W. Manson estimates that the Sadducees and the Essenes together made up only about 2 per cent of the population (*The Servant Messiah*, p. 11).

<sup>18</sup>For discussion of these points, see D. A. Hagner, "Sadducees," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, 5:215, and J. E. H. Thomson, "Sadducees," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 4:2661.

<sup>19</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 18. 1. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Josephus, *Wars* 2. 8. 14.

<sup>21</sup>J. E. H. Thomson, "Sadducees," in *International Standard Bible Encyc-*

lopedia, 4:2660.

<sup>22</sup>Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, p. 411.

<sup>23</sup>D. A. Hagner, "Sadducees," in *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*, 4:215.

<sup>24</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 20. 9. 1.

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## JESUS, THE MASTER TEACHER

ROBERT OGLESBY

They called Jesus many things. He was the Messiah, the Word, and the Son of Man. His disciples, however, most often called him the Master, meaning "teacher."

In retrospect of history, one might wonder, Master of what? The answer is clear. He was the Master of everything.

But even men who do not accept his mastery in all areas still accept his mastery as a teacher. It is not uncommon for secular university professors to have their students study Jesus as the prime example of a master teacher.

No doubt they are impressed for the same reason that men of Christ's day were impressed. Nicodemus, for instance, said, "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). The temple police returned from listening to the Lord and said, "No man ever spoke like this" (John 7:46). The people were astonished at his teaching, "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

What was it that made men feel Jesus was the Master Teacher? Why are even unbelievers still impressed today? Perhaps we can capture some of the reasons when we examine Christ as the Master Teacher.

### HIS MANNER AS A TEACHER

We are immediately struck by the poise the Lord had as a teacher during his ministry. There is that undefined something which marks him for all time as a really great teacher.

One of the first things we notice is the artful way he taught. Yet we are sure he did not seem at first to be so competent. If Jesus had blustered and impressed his enemies with his ability, no doubt they would have quickly ceased to believe they

could defeat him in verbal encounters. The record suggests that until he had taken on all comers, they did not pull back in fear of his teaching power. It was not enough for Jesus to defeat the Pharisees. The Sadducees thought they could succeed where others failed. Finally, the truth dawned that none of them could defeat him in open verbal combat, so they withdrew to plot against him behind the scenes.

Christ must have looked very artless at first; that is, his technique must not have showed. Perhaps this was because he took the most complicated of subjects and made them sound really quite simple. Where scribes had floundered for centuries, he cut through the confusion by simply saying, "But I say unto you" (Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). Yet his simple words were weighty because the crowd noticed that he did not teach as the scribes did. Instead, without quoting other authorities or citing legal precedents, he still sounded as though he were speaking the "last word" on subjects that had baffled Israel for centuries.

### HIS STYLE OF TEACHING

All of us have characteristic ways of saying and doing things. It is almost as if we have a trademark way of teaching.

So did Christ!

We have grown so familiar with his teaching that we have lost our sense of awe for its symmetrical beauty. Since we only look at his teaching a little at a time, we have adjusted to looking at its brilliance in small doses. However, when we concentrate on his total style, the result is overwhelming!

We come away from such an investigation dazzled by his ability as a communicator. Professional educators realize Jesus did all the right things.

His language, for instance, is always simple. He uses no big words which slow the comprehension. His words are small and simple enough for any audience to understand. Many believe that President Abraham Lincoln drew much of his power as a communicator from his conscious imitation of the biblical style rooted in Jesus.

Jesus' words were not only simple, but concrete as well.

Listen to everything Jesus ever said, and you are immediately struck by the fact that his words are all pictures of ordinary life. He used words like "door, salt, light, bread, vine, branches, dogs under the table, an ox in the ditch, the eye of the needle, a lost coin, a lost lamb, a lost boy, fields white unto harvest, a splinter [mote] in the eye, a house built on a rock," and many, many others. Can you see the pictures? Perhaps the better question is this: Can you fail to see the pictures?

Added to this, the Lord reminded his hearers that the intangible, spiritual kingdom was "like" many things. It was like a king giving a banquet, a fisherman gathering his nets, a farmer sowing seed, and weeds growing among the wheat.

With the verbal skills of a teacher, Christ loved to make a "play on words." He chose rock-bound Caesarea Philippi as the setting for his lesson to Peter (*petros*) about the kingdom which was built on rock (*petra*) (Matthew 16).

Jesus loved to use hyperbole to make his point. To exaggerate the obvious served to deepen the impression of the lesson. Scribes and Pharisees became blind guides who would "strain out a gnat and then swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24). A critical person became someone who would stumble around with a "beam" in his own eye and offer to help someone who merely had a "mote" in his (Matthew 7:3).

The use of paradox served a similar purpose in the Lord's style of teaching. He liked to stand the truth on its head in order to get attention. He used seeming contradictions to baffle and yet arouse the curiosity of his hearers. He left them scratching their heads when he said, "The first will be last and the last first. . . the humble shall be exalted, and the exalted shall be humbled. . . and those who save their lives will lose it, while those who lose it for my sake will save it." Nobody left his classroom completely satisfied that they had caught his meaning. Life's contradictions worked for his teaching, not against it.

We sometimes say, "You needed to be there to understand this." In no area is that more true than Christ's use of devices such as irony. Was it the glimmer in his eye which carried his meaning when he said things? Did they understand that his ironic statements meant exactly the opposite of what he said?

The scribes and Pharisees murmured against Jesus for eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. The Lord's answer was perfectly reasonable when he said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). Are we to suppose that Jesus accepted the scribes as righteous? No, they were just as sick and as unrighteous as the publicans, but they did not know it. No matter how they understood the Lord, his logic was unassailable. They could not complain because he went to sick sinners which even they had to admit needed help. If they denied that truth and insisted he associate only with them, they indicated themselves as sinners.

They avoided that trap, but probably caught the reverse cut of his words just the same.

### HIS USE OF TEACHING METHODS

The Master Teacher shows his skill best in his use of teaching methods. Some sermon listeners believe that strong preaching demands steel trap logic and strong statements of abstract facts. They believe that stories are for well-meaning, but weak preachers. Fortunately, Christ did not know this so-called truth about preaching. He used stories constantly. His sermons bristled with stories. They were always brief, pointed, and carried a "bite" of life application. When the Pharisees and scribes pressed him about receiving sinners, he told three stories about "lost" things. A lost coin, a lost lamb, and a lost boy provide the substance for three stories in Luke 15. In each case, his hearers would have accepted the value of each lost thing. Only when talking about lost sinners did they deny the value. No doubt they did not miss the "bite" of the story which featured the older brother in the villain's role. Although the Lord did not tell them that was where they fit into the story, they obviously knew. When a lawyer tried to escape the force of needing to love his neighbor, Jesus again told a story. In a cleverly crafted story, the Lord forced the lawyer to choose a despised Samaritan as the neighbor and the hero of the story. Having done that, he told the lawyer to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). No doubt, the lawyer was left

stunned and defeated by a simple story in the hands of the Master Teacher.

Jesus was also the absolute master of catching people in a compromising situation and then giving them a life application lesson that they could not escape. He continually worked on the "cutting edge" or at the point of their "learning readiness." Just a few examples establish this. To the man who came asking the Master to bid his brother divide the inheritance with him, he gave the story of the rich farmer (Luke 12). To Simon the Pharisee who was guilty of not treating Jesus with hospitality, the example of a woman from the street who washed his feet with her tears was called to his attention. When men at a banquet fought for the higher seats, he reminded his disciples of the wisdom of taking a lower seat and then being honored by being asked to come higher. And the list goes on and on. Jesus taught in the "now" situation. He knew how to go for the heart of the matter.

Christ knew how to teach with questions. Socrates had taught with questions, but no one sharpened the question-asking tool to a finer edge than did the Lord. For the record, it all started in Jerusalem when he was only twelve years old, and his mother came looking for him with reproach in her voice. His response was a question, "Did you not want me to be in my Father's house?"

This question of Luke 2:49 must have stunned his mother, but she was not the last one to be baffled by his question-asking ability. When they accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, he cleverly asked if that was the only possibility for how to do it, and then asked, "How do your sons cast them out?" (Matthew 12:27). There is an incredible number of questions recorded during his three-year ministry on earth: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"; "Whose son is Christ?"; "Which son did the father's will?" Christ used this technique so well that eventually "no man was able to answer him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask him any more questions" (Matthew 22:46).

His dramatizations carried teaching power. Can anyone match the driving force of Jesus washing the feet of twelve disciples on the night of his betrayal? Do you suppose they

remembered the lesson of John 13? Study carefully the dramatic writing on the ground while he waited for someone to "cast the first stone" (John 8:7) at the woman taken in adultery.

And who can even come close to Christ's ability to interact with his students in discussion? Jesus could tell, ask, listen, tell a story, and then ask a question again. He was completely at home allowing the student to ask questions. No matter where the conversation went, Jesus still got his lesson taught. Study carefully the conversation of the Savior with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4). Look searchingly at the conversation recorded in Matthew 19 with the rich young ruler. Dig into the exchange between Jesus and the Herodians about paying tribute to Caesar (Matthew 22). Watch him disarm the Sadducees completely in the test case of the woman who had had seven husbands (Matthew 22). Our Lord could really "mix it up" with the best of them and always come out a winner.

There is much, much more to say about Christ as the Master Teacher, but as we draw this to a close, we must note one problem we might have with the Lord's teaching technique. He did not always answer every question he was asked. Some he ignored, and some he only hinted at the answer. He also seemed comfortable in suggesting some answers, but not necessarily systematizing them into a coherent picture of the entire truth on that subject. In our Western society, we feel a little uncomfortable with that approach. We feel honor bound to not only answer every question put to us, but in some cases, to even answer questions they should have asked, but did not! Have we yet something to learn from the Master Teacher? Are a few things we might have missed?

We close with a sense of inadequacy and incompleteness. We keep coming back to the life of one teacher to capture the essence of his teaching technique. Each time we find things we missed before. Ultimately, we must admit that the well is deep, our rope is short, and our bucket is too small. Truly we stand awed in the presence of *Christ, the Master Teacher!*

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## THE LIFESTYLE OF JESUS IN MARK

J. J. TURNER

One day while switching channels on TV, I came to a program called, "The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." I watched for a few minutes with great amazement. I was shocked at the blatant presentation of how certain rich and famous people reveled in the shameless and arrogant usage of their wealth. I have no doubt that a continual watching of the program would create a covetous spirit within the human heart. The media does all that it can to create unhappiness within the heart of man!

As I watched the program, I could not help but think how drastically different was "The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" to that of the "Poor and Unknown." I especially noted how different it was from the lifestyle of the lowly carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth.

Is it possible to become famous without being rich and arrogant? Yes. Jesus had no place to lay his head and had very little of this world's goods. But his fame has outlived his enemies and the so-called rich and famous who are in their tombs. His memory and work lives on because of *who* he was, not because of *what* he had.

The Gospels give us different views of Jesus. Each document is designed to present a special facet of the Master and his ministry:

- Matthew presents Jesus in a way that would appeal to the mind of a Jew. He traces Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-2).
- Mark writes for minds that are impressed with authority and power; this has special appeal for the Romans as he presents Jesus as a man of power.

- Luke writes for the Gentile mind (Luke 1:1-4).
- John presents seven miracles (i.e., signs) from the ministry of Christ to prove that he is God (John 1:1-14, 20:30-31).

In this study we will direct our attention to the Gospel of Mark. From this grand Gospel we will glean some dynamic principles for daily living from the lifestyle of Jesus. Someone wisely wrote: "If you want to be successful, just pick out someone who is a success and copy his lifestyle." Jesus was a perfect success. Therefore, we cannot have a better role model to follow.

A quick overview of Mark will help us get a feel for the book. Mark presents Jesus as a man of authority and power. It is in the midst of his authority and power that we find a simple lifestyle worthy of imitation.

Mark is the Gospel of the Almighty wonder worker who conquers all.

- I. The Almighty King is presented as the Son of God (1:1-13).
- II. The Almighty King works in Galilee (1:14—9:50).
- III. The Almighty King prepares for his death (10:1—14:21).
- IV. The Almighty King suffers at the hand of his enemies (14:22—15:47).
- V. The Almighty King wins over his enemies (16).

### THE LIFESTYLE OF JESUS IS IMPORTANT

Every person's lifestyle is important. The word *lifestyle* refers to the way a person lives and how he conducts his life as a matter of daily habit.

The lifestyle of Jesus is eternally important for a number of major reasons:

First, Jesus asked people to follow him: "And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). When you ask people to follow you, you should be worthy of following and should have a good reason for being followed. Jesus met both qualifications. We may safely follow every lifestyle example of our great leader. When

we do, we are truly being Christians.

Second, the apostle Peter taught that we should follow the lifestyle of Jesus: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). You are on safe ground when you walk in the steps of the Master. He will never lead you astray.

Third, Paul commanded us to have the mind of Christ: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

We must have the attitude of Christ before we can copy his lifestyle. Mark will help us learn about his lifestyle.

Fourth, we must grow up in Christ: "... [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). Christianity is an expression of Christ through our lifestyles to the world. This is why we must learn *how* to live as Jesus lived.

The name Christian says it all. As we follow the example of Jesus, people will take notice of us (Acts 4:12-14). He is the only man—God's man—who has ever set foot on planet Earth that can get us to heaven: "... thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

### QUALITIES OF THE LIFESTYLE OF JESUS

The lifestyle of Jesus was a natural way of life. The Master did not attend a charm school or read special books on how to act during life's challenges. He was *real* all of the time.

The lifestyle of Jesus occurred as he was going about the business of his Father. His lifestyle was one of service. That was his priority. The Lord was always aware of who he was and why he was sent to the lost world.

The lifestyle of Jesus was casual. He did not need a special context before he could approach people. The Lord was a people person every moment of his life. Mark will make this clear as we read through his Gospel.

The lifestyle of Jesus was confident. He knew that his work was eternal and backed by his heavenly Father.

Caring is another quality of the lifestyle of Jesus. He was

never too busy to help people in need. He taught about caring, and he backed it with a demonstration of caring.

Jesus was always consistent in his lifestyle. He did not teach one thing in one place, and then say something else in another situation. He never contradicted himself.

The lifestyle of Jesus was courageous. He never flinched in the face of his enemies. He rebuked the Pharisees, and laid bare the scribes. Finally, he courageously went to the cross.

The lifestyle of Jesus demonstrated convictions. He plainly stated that there was only *one* way to the Father (i.e., heaven) (John 14:6, 8:24-28). He is that way.

Jesus was confronting men as he lived among them. He always had the right words for every situation; he did not compromise the truth.

These have been some overview observations about the lifestyle of Jesus. It will help prepare our minds for a more specific view of the Master's lifestyle.

As we study specific examples of his lifestyle in Mark, note how these general qualities abound: naturalness, casualness, confidence, caring, consistency, courageousness, convictions, and confronting.

### THE LIFESTYLE OF JESUS IN MARK

Mark gives us one of the best comments on the work and life of Christ that we could possibly find: "... He hath done all things well: ..." (Mark 7:37). Most of us can do a few things well, but Jesus did *everything* well. He never blundered, failed, neglected, or gave up on his mission.

The Hebrews writer put this capstone on the lifestyle of Jesus: "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus never failed one time!

Every verse in Mark relates to the lifestyle of Jesus. Because of the time limits in our study we will not be able to do a verse-by-verse study of our Master's life. Therefore, I have selected some special qualities for our study. I encourage you to read the book of Mark along with our study.

Please keep in mind that our goal is twofold: (1) to learn about the lifestyle of Jesus and (2) to apply his lifestyle principles to our lives. We are extensions of Christ in this world (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:15). We must know *how* he lived before we can live in the same manner.

### *Balanced*

Jesus was a man of perfect balance. He was a perfect manager of his time and opportunities. Sometimes we think that following Jesus means rigorous activities, never resting. Jesus was balanced. He took time to rest and relax.

And he goeth up into a mountain and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him (Mark 3:13).

And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him . . . (Mark 4:38).

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: . . . (Mark 6:31).

The Christian life cannot properly function without balance. There is a time to go forth among men for God, and there is a time to get away from men and be with God. To know how to do this requires wisdom (James 1:5).

Jesus was not too involved or too withdrawn; he was balanced. What a lesson for us in our busy world. How balanced is your life? Do you feel guilty when you relax? Do not!

### *Prayer*

A small boy when asked if he said his prayers every night, replied, "Yes, sir." When asked if he said them in the morning, he said, "No, sir." When asked why, he replied, "'Cause I ain't scared in the morning."

There are all kind of attitudes toward prayer. Some try to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and others use it only in an emergency.

The lifestyle of Jesus demonstrated belief in the power of prayer.

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there

prayed (Mark 1:35).

And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray (Mark 6:46).

And when they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray (Mark 14:32; cf. vv. 35-36).

Jesus knew that he needed contact with his Father in heaven. He knew that in order to live a victorious life, he had to have power and help from above. He could not and would not live without daily prayer.

We, too, must make prayer a natural part of our lifestyles. Through prayer we give God an opportunity to act on our behalf.

### *Looking for Helpers*

Jesus was not a loner or a person who ran a one-man show. He knew that he needed people to help him carry the Good News to the whole world (Mark 16:15-16). As he moved among men, he was always looking—looking for men who could be molded into greatness for the kingdom of God. He found these men in some unusual places.

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me and I will make you to become fishers of men (Mark 1:16-17).

And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him (Mark 2:14).

From fishermen to a hated tax collector, Jesus recognized potential in people for kingdom service. These men lost their jobs, but they gained a far more important job: winning men. They became ambassadors for Christ.

As we are going about in our daily world, we need to be looking for people—people whom we can disciple in the ways of the Lord. Evangelism is not something you *go* and do; it is

what you are. Evangelism is a lifestyle.

### *Patience*

Some people wonder why Jesus did not do all he had to do in one day—after all he was God; or why did he not straighten out his disciples in one session. This was not the Master's way. He was on a time scale; he was working his Father's plan. He was a patient man; he had many things to tell them, but they were not ready for them. His daily life was constantly being challenged by things that tested his patience:

1. Jesus was patient when people laughed at him: "And they laughed him to scorn. . . ." (5:40).
2. Jesus was patient when they made fun of his background: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, . . . And they were offended at him" (6:3).
3. It required patience to deal with people who had hardness of heart (3:1-7).

Jesus developed patience through testings that came upon him daily. According to James, we, too, develop patience through daily testings (James 1:2-7). Our quest is to make every test a positive growth experience which helps us live more like Jesus.

### *Social*

Jesus was never too busy to be social. In John's Gospel we have the account of the Lord attending a wedding feast (John 2:1-11). Mark also presents the social side of Jesus' lifestyle.

And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, . . . (Mark 14:3).

And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with the publicans and sinners, . . . (Mark 2:16).

And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, . . . (Mark 14:18).

Have you ever noticed how often in the Gospels Jesus is seen eating and sharing with people in a social setting? Maybe this is why we are justified in spending so much of our time at church potlucks!

A Christian's life must include other people. Social occasions are great times for sharing and letting our lights shine.

### *Alert and Watchful*

Some people as they are going about their daily activities seem to be oblivious to things around them. When there is an accident, they do not see a thing. One characteristic of the Master's lifestyle was the power of observation. He was a people-watcher. Here is how Mark described one of the Lord's people-watching occasions: "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how they cast money into the treasury: . . ." (Mark 12:41). In this context we have the inspiring account of a poor widow and a lesson on what real sacrifice is all about. Jesus never missed a thing; he was a trained observer.

How can we apply this lifestyle quality to our lives?

## THE PREACHING LIFESTYLE OF JESUS IN MARK

To my knowledge, Jesus was never called a preacher in the Gospels. That does not mean, however, that he did not preach. On one occasion he said: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues. . . ." (Mark 1:38-39).

Jesus did not need a robe or a pulpit before he could preach. His pulpit was need, and his robe was love. Whether in a boat, in the synagogue, in a house, walking, on a mountain, or before a crowd, Jesus always preached the Good News of the kingdom of God. Preaching was not an extra effort or a tack on; it was a natural part of his lifestyle. Preaching was as natural to Jesus as breathing. Of some preachers it is said, "What you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you are saying." That could never be said of Jesus.

### *Dependency on God*

Some people try to live their lives with an attitude that says that they do not need anyone. Life cannot be lived without dependency. Even the most affluent and self-sufficient people must depend on others.

Even though Jesus was the Son of God, he always demon-

strated his dependency upon the Father: "And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

Someone rightly said that a person who trusts only in himself is trusting a fool. A person who is trusting in God is depending on the one who has all power (Ephesians 3:20). Men cannot save themselves: it is *impossible*, but with God it is *himpossible*!

We must develop a lifestyle that depicts a dependency on God. Through him we can do all things.

### *Compassionate*

How do you feel when you see a person who is sick, hurting, in pain, and without resources? No word better describes how Jesus felt about such persons than the word *compassion*.

Jesus felt the hurt and misfortune of people. Mark captured one of these moments with these words: "And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him. . . ." (Mark 1:41).

The Greek verb Mark uses for "moved" means to have the viscera moved: liver, lungs, heart, which are believed to be the seat of such feelings as love, pity, etc. Not only does the word describe pain at seeing the suffering of another, it also includes a strong desire to relieve or remove the suffering.

The lifestyle of Jesus involved a natural desire to help people who were hurting and in trouble. His desire to help was always translated into actions:

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34).

People do not care how much we know until they know how much we care. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

### *Authoritative*

When Jesus paused to teach, regardless of where it was, people were awed by his style. Mark tells us that Jesus caused people to be dumbfounded at his teachings: "And they were

astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22).

The scribes were stale, rote, and dogmatic in their teachings. They never departed from their carefully memorized speeches. They were concerned only with orthodoxy and pettiness. They left the souls of their hearers empty and hungry.

Jesus was drastically different. He fed them meat; his teaching was always full of power and authority:

And they were amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him (Mark 1:27).

Our lifestyles must be backed by God's authority. This authority is his word. Paul wrote: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Mark 3:17).

### *Emotional*

Jesus was not dispassionate! In fact, he was the opposite. Mark presents Jesus as an emotional King among his people. No other writer gives us the graphic insights into the daily emotional displays of Jesus that Mark gives.

1. The Lord sighed deeply (7:34, 8:12).
2. He was moved with compassion (6:34).
3. He marvelled at unbelief (6:6).
4. He was moved with righteous anger (3:5, 8:33, 10:14).
5. He looked at the rich young ruler and loved him (10:21).
6. He felt the pangs of hunger (11:12).
7. He became tired and needed rest (6:31).
8. He felt pain (15:33-38).
9. He expressed thanksgiving (14:22-25).
10. He experienced sorrow (14:32-34).

As the song verse goes, "Jesus knows all about my struggles." His lifestyle was lived in a real world that brought him hurt and frustration, but he never quit. He was always about his Father's business. What an example for us.

Contrary to the thinking of some people, it is okay to be

emotional in your daily Christian lifestyle.

### *Faithful Unto Death*

It is not so much how men live that marks their greatness, but it is how they die. Jesus lived and died faithfully. Because of that he has the right to command us to be faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).

A reading of Mark 14:32—15:38 reveals how Jesus faced death. These key words describe how the Master lived in those last hours:

1. He faced death in sorrow (14:32-34).
2. He faced death in prayer (14:35-42).
3. Jesus faced death alone (14:46-50).
4. The Master faced death bravely (14:53-65).
5. He faced death being mocked (15:15-20).
6. Jesus faced death in pain (15:33-38).

It is easy to live a faithful lifestyle when the conditions are just right, but the acid test is: How do you live when the pressure is on? Jesus did not alter or change his lifestyle. Faithfulness was a natural response to the conditions of the cross. Jesus was faithful unto death!

## CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Mark presents the humanity of Jesus in a vivid way. He shows us how Jesus lived and what he did. His attitudes and actions constituted a lifestyle never seen in a human being. Jesus was a man of action. More than thirty times Mark uses the word "straightway" (i.e., immediately) to describe the sense of urgency in Jesus' mission. He was a powerful man of action. Jesus never hid from problems or opposition. Mark reminds us that Jesus was constantly being challenged by the forces of evil. The Master was always in control. When people saw his exercise of authority they were filled with amazement.

Jesus was a balanced man. He never kept office hours or ran his life by the clock; he never had to switch mental gears to be involved in service to others. His lifestyle was service, caring, loving, helping, teaching, praying, etc. If you saw him, you saw the Father.

What difference does the lifestyle of Jesus make in our lives? None if it is not incorporated into our thinking and translated into our lifestyles.

Gandhi is reported to have said after he made a detailed study of Christianity, "If Christianity ever hopes to take the world, those who profess it must start acting like the Christ they profess." You can argue positions and be as unspiritual as a rock, but when you speak a word for the master that is backed by a lifestyle like Jesus, you cannot lose.

"Sir, we would see Jesus," a question asked originally by Philip (John 12:21), is still being asked today. We have seen some exciting and demanding qualities from the lifestyle of Jesus as presented by Mark. Our task is only half-finished; the remaining challenge is to demonstrate those qualities in our daily lives.

Sir, we would see Jesus!

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## JESUS AS THE SON OF GOD

ART MCNEESE

Is Jesus a myth, a man, or the Messiah? Could it be that he was a myth, like some kind of cosmic Santa Claus—just a figment of somebody's imagination? Not even the most hardened atheist takes that position seriously.

Could it be that he was just a man, perhaps a good man, but nothing more? Could it be that he takes his place alongside Buddha, Gandhi, Socrates, and Plato? Or could it be that he was the Messiah, the Son of God? If he was, that of course, has some significant implications.

When you look at the Gospel of Mark, a number of people seem to believe he was the Son of God. Mark opens his Gospel with these words: "The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). It may be that Mark is echoing the words of Genesis 1:1, that he sees Jesus as the beginning of a whole new world!

Peter seems to believe the same thing about Jesus. Though he is known as the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth, here he seems to get it right. In Mark 8:29 he declares: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

Then one of the most unlikely believers comes at the end of Mark's Gospel. He is a Roman soldier who has watched a lot of men die, but he has never seen anyone die with this kind of courage. He announces: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). But what did Jesus do to prove he was the Son of God? Mark gives us several answers.

First, he called men to follow him, and they did. In Mark 1:16-18, he calls Peter and Andrew to follow, and they leave boats full of fish immediately. The same happens with James and John in Mark 1:19-20.

In chapter 2 it is Matthew who leaves a lucrative position to

follow, and in chapter 3 Jesus summons the Twelve to preach and to drive out demons. Some might think that Jesus was just another rabbi—but he was much more than that. A rabbi never called his own disciples; he was sought out by his students. It was unthinkable that a man would call his own disciples. A rabbi's students dreamed of the possibility of becoming greater than their master, but the Twelve would never have thought of themselves as being equal with Christ.

This was more than charisma. They had seen stars like John Kennedy and Jimmy Carter come and go. This was a man with absolute authority over their lives. Everything about him was extraordinary—from the strength in his voice to the softness in his eyes.

Second, Jesus claimed to have supernatural knowledge, and he did. In Mark 2:8 he knows what the scribes are thinking as he forgives the paralytic. He is aware that the daughter of Jairus is not dead but asleep (Mark 5:39). In Mark 8:17 and 9:33, he is cognizant of what they have discussed though he has not been within earshot. As he prepares for the entry into Jerusalem, he knows the exact location of the colt he will ride. When he shares the parable of the tenants in chapter 12, he envisions his own death. In chapter 13 he predicts what will happen in the last days. Not long ago I saw Jeanne Dixon, the self-proclaimed prophetess, on "The David Letterman Show." With all due respect, this is a woman whose crystal ball is about as reliable as a Ouija board. She is fun to listen to, but her predictions mean nothing.

In Jesus, something was different! Here was a man who did know the future! He knew what others were thinking, what was going to happen in their lives, in his own life, and in the future of the world. The amazing thing is that he did not try to hang out a shingle and make a profit!

Finally, Jesus told diseases and demons to go away, and they did. Mark writes to a Roman audience interested in power, action, and authority. There are twenty miracles in his Gospel, but only four parables. He heals Peter's mother-in-law (1:31), the leper (1:45), the paralytic (2:1-12), the man with the withered hand (3:1-6), the woman with the hemorrhage (7:31-37), the man who was deaf and dumb (7:31-37), and the blind man

at Bethsaida (8:22-26). Even the demons recognize Jesus as the Son of God when he drives them out (Mark 3:11, 5:7).

The people in Jesus' day had seen the faith-healers, the charlatans who came through and put up a tent and healed a few bogus cases of arthritis and then ran for the next town. They had seen Brother Love's Travelin' Salvation Show, and they knew a fake when they saw one. But in Jesus, they found someone who was real—one who could speak, and the lame walked, the blind could see, and the deaf could hear. Mark tells us about a Jesus who is not a myth or a man, but the Messiah—the all-knowing and all-powerful Son of God!

Your reaction to Jesus is all-important. He does today what he did then. He calls you to follow him, and it is not a call that can be taken lightly. If Christ is only a man, the call to follow him is an insult. But if he is the Son of God, your response means life or death. If he is the One who died in your place, to reject him is to reject your only hope. He is still calling, and he expects you to follow him!

Jesus still knows everything, including all about your life. He knows your past, and he is willing to forgive it. He knows your present and is willing to help you live it. He knows your future and wants to be a part of it.

If Jesus was a myth, the historians have been hoodwinked for a long time. If he was only a man, we might as well close up shop because we do not have any salvation or any hope. But if Jesus is the Messiah, he holds our lives in his hands. Mark's consuming conviction is that Jesus is the Son of God. We can follow him, knowing that nothing can defeat us, because we are walking with the Messiah!

## JESUS AS THE SON OF MAN

ART MCNEESE

The Negro spiritual says: "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen." Sometimes we believe that no one else has ever experienced what we have or that no one else has known the kind of pain we feel. We believe that no one else can really identify with the hurt that we have, or if they can identify with it, they cannot really do anything about it. And it *may be* that there is no one else who is suffering in precisely the way you are right now.

But what if there were someone who has known all the pain there is to know in the world and could honestly say, "I know how you feel" or "I know your pain"?

When Mark writes his Gospel, he tells of a man who seems to have that ability. This man chooses an unusual name for himself—he calls himself the Son of Man. This name is used eighty-two times in the New Testament and is found often in Mark.

This man, the Son of Man, is someone who has known *all power*. As Mark opens his Gospel, he seems to be deliberately arranging his story to show us this man's power. He is writing like Hemingway or another great novelist who gives us foreshadowing. He refers to Jesus as the Son of Man, a term used in Daniel 7:14 to describe a person of glory and power. We see that power as Jesus drives out an evil spirit in Mark 1:26: "The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek." We see it again when he heals a man with leprosy in Mark 1:42: "Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured."

In fact, Jesus uses the phrase "Son of Man" to indicate his own authority. In Mark 2:10, we see that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins: "But that you may know

that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." And in Mark 2:27, we see that the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath: "Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.' "

Jesus continues to show his power in Mark's Gospel. He makes Rambo look like Pee Wee Herman. In chapter 3 he heals the man with the withered hand, in chapter 4 he calms the storm, and in chapter 5 he rids a possessed man of a demon, raises a little girl from the dead, and heals a woman with a hemorrhage. In chapter 6 he feeds five thousand and walks on water. In chapter 7 he heals a man who has been deaf and dumb, and in chapter 8 he heals a blind man at Bethsaida. Here is a man who can do anything. He fits the Jewish image of a Son of Man as one with *power*.

But this same man, this Son of Man, is also One who has known *all pain*. Mark's Gospel takes a decided turn in chapter 8 as Mark prepares his readers for the terrible events about to take place. He begins a series of sayings that not only identify Jesus as the Son of Man of Daniel 7, but also the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. The series begins in Mark 8:31: "He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." It continues in Mark 9:31: "He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days, he will rise.' " It is found again in Mark 10:33: "'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles.' "

Mark deliberately places these things in his story to help us see where Jesus is going. It is fascinating to see the reaction of the disciples, especially Peter. Notice the words of Mark 8:32: "He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him." That is one of the reasons why Jesus discouraged the disciples from going out and creating a campaign, one of the reasons for the secrecy motif in the Gospel of Mark. Ian Thomas says the disciples would have stirred up people all over Israel so there would have been donkeys with

little stickers on their tails which read, "Snort if you love Christ."

Imagine a popular young President of the United States who has just been elected. In his inauguration speech, he outlines all of his goals and injects hope into the people, but closes by announcing he is suffering from a terminal disease and will be dead within a week. Can you imagine the people's reaction? That is the reaction of the disciples!

But the most striking thing is that this Son of Man, who has all power, *chooses* to go through pain. It is not as if he loses control of the wheel of history. It is not as if he is a helpless victim of circumstances beyond his control. He makes the *deliberate* choice to go through *pain, suffering, and even death*. His suffering is completely voluntary. It is all summed up in Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Jesus' death was not thrust on him like some kind of cruel fate. He chose his destiny: "Returning the third time, he said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!' " (Mark 14:41).

As the Son of Man with *all power*, he could have ended the suffering anytime he wanted. He could have walked out of Pilate's courtroom just as he had walked through the murderous mob in John 8:59: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds." He could have asked the Father to send twelve legions of angels. He could have done as his enemies taunted him to do and come down from the cross.

Jesus did not *have to* suffer anything that he did. He suffered the pain of physical torture beyond description. He suffered the humiliation of hanging on a cross. He suffered the rejection of his so-called friends. He suffered the horror of being betrayed by one of his own.

But he deliberately *chose* to go through all of this because of his *love*. And because of that, Jesus knows everything we have been through.

He not only knows what we have been through, he also has

the strength to help us through it. He has not only been through *all pain*, he also has *all power*. Jesus is not just a martyr, he is the Messiah. He is not just the Son of Man, he is also the Son of God. He is not a helpless victim, he is a heavenly victor. His pain has meaning because he broke through pain to victory. His death has meaning because he conquered sin and death once and for all. His suffering is not the end of the story. He became a *ransom* for us. We were in the slavery of sin, but he bought us back with the price of his *blood*.

Do not ever forget that the Son of Man knows what it is to be human. He knows the hurt of rejection and loss. He knows about depression, despondency, and despair. He has known the bitter heartache of seeing dreams and hopes dashed against the *rocks*. There is *nothing* we can ever go through that he does not understand.

Do not ever forget that the Son of Man is also the Savior. He will be with you in every trial, and he will wipe every tear away from your eyes. That promise may not do a lot to ease the pain of the moment, but there will be a time when that promise will mean something to you. There is one who can help you deal with any burden—he is the Son of Man.

## JESUS AS THE SERVANT OF GOD

ART MCNEESE

Colonel James B. Irwin is a former astronaut who was a part of the crew that made the successful moon walk. He recently talked about the adventure of traveling to the moon. He mentioned the thrill of leaving planet Earth and watching it shrink in size. He began to realize that when he returned, many would consider him a superstar, a celebrity. But soon he was humbled in the realization of God's goodness in his life. He described his feelings in these words: "As I was returning to earth, I realized that I was a servant, not a celebrity. So I am here as God's servant on planet Earth to share what I have experienced that others might know the glory of God." Irwin realized that the only real greatness is found in service. For most of us, that is a difficult lesson to learn because the prevailing attitude in our society is that we get to the top by serving ourselves. The motto of our time is this: Leaders are those who get others to serve them.

But Jesus reverses every notion of human greatness. He calls us to be servant leaders. He says the only real leaders are those who serve others. Every Christian is called to be a servant, not a celebrity.

### THE CALL TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The call to servant leadership is found in Mark 10:35-45. Christ says to James and John: "Ask not what the kingdom can do for you. Ask what you can do for the kingdom."

The encounter of Jesus with the Sons of Thunder is charged with emotion. Christ has just announced to the Twelve that he is on his way to Jerusalem to die (Mark 10:34). He describes his execution in vivid detail. But in the wake of that announce-

ment, the only concerns of James and John are the place cards at the Messianic banquet. They want to be sure they are given the places of pre-eminence. They probably thought Jesus was going to Jerusalem to restore the glory of the fallen throne of David. So they say, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask" (v. 35). They wanted a *carte blanche*, unlimited agreement from Jesus to do whatever they wished.

In verses 36 through 40, Jesus answers the two, James and John: "What do you want me to do for you?" They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory" (vv. 36-37). "We want the inside track. We want positions in the oval office." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (v. 38). James and John were so obtuse. They wanted to be a part of his glory, but did not realize that pain was the prerequisite. Jesus uses the images of the cup and baptism to refer to his sufferings and death. Sharing someone's cup was a recognized expression for sharing his fate. In the Old Testament, the cup of wine is often used to refer to the wrath of God's judgment upon human sin.

Jesus will drink the cup of death and suffer the baptism of death, and if they are serious about following him, they must do the same.

"We can," they answered (v. 39a). James and John are so naive. Jesus said, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (v. 39b). Jesus knows that James and John will die for the sake of the kingdom. James will be killed by the sword at the hand of Herod. John will die in exile on Patmos. But that is not, of course, what they had in mind. In verse 40, Jesus reminds them that the places of honor are the prerogative of the Father.

### JESUS ANSWERS THE TWELVE

Jesus' answer to the Twelve is found in verses 41 through 45. Mark says that the ten had been eavesdropping and became indignant. We normally castigate James and John, but the other ten were no less selfish and ambitious. "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over

them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (vv. 42-44). Jesus' reference to the rulers is ironic: Those who are supposed to rule and lead are the ones who exploit the people. The rulers of the Roman empire were tyrants. Jesus says your leadership style must not be the style of the despots.

Those who aspire to greatness must be servants (*diakonoi*) and slaves (*doulos*). A servant (*diakonoi*) was one whose service was often menial and undesirable. He frequently served meals and ministered to physical needs. Greatness is derived from serving the most basic needs of others.

The servant leader is also to be a slave (*doulos*). He is one who has lost his own will to become the slave of all—the slave of God, the slave of the Lord Christ, a slave in the Spirit, and a slave to his brother. He is both *diakonoi* and *doulos*, servant and slave.

The model for his service is Christ, who "did not come to be served, but to serve" (v. 45). He is the ultimate servant leader.

### IS THE CALL HEARD TODAY?

All too often, the call to service is not heard today. The call often falls on deaf ears, even for those in the church. Rather than serving others, we are prone to be self-serving.

The major preoccupation of man in the eighties is the search for self-fulfillment. Daniel Yankelovich has documented this search in his important work, *New Rules in American Life: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*. Yankelovich argues that Americans have not returned to discipline and self-sacrifice, in spite of other signs of conservatism in our society. Instead, they are engrossed in the desire to fulfill themselves. He says, "In place of the traditional ethics of self-denial and sacrifice, we now find an ethic that denies people nothing." The paradox is that because of the strategies people employ, they do not find themselves. Because they focus on their own needs, they find that the inner journey leads to loneliness and depression.

Yankelovich says there are two forms of the search for self-fulfillment: 17 per cent of the population is involved in the strong form of the search—they are extremely intense in their pursuit; 63 per cent participate in the weak form—they pursue new meanings, but with less intensity.

Mark and Abby Williams are examples of the strong form of the search. They are both in their thirties. He works for a public interest law firm. She is the assistant editor of a magazine published for a large chemical company. They delayed having children for five years so that they could establish themselves. They are still delaying. They are torn between a multiplicity of wants.

Abby describes her feelings in these words: "Sometimes I feel I really am part of the 'Me Generation,' too preoccupied with my own needs and wishes. I know you can't have everything. But I'm not sure what to give up and what to hang on to."

Mark and Abby find themselves presented with an abundance of choices about what to do with their lives, without knowing how to make the right choices. Their financial ability and value system give them the opportunity to have almost anything. But every new choice becomes a threat to their freedom. The question of what to be committed to and what to sacrifice for remains forever open, leaving their lives unsettled.

They think of themselves as people who must have all of their cravings fulfilled. Their lives are like an ice cube tray, and every section has to be filled to the brim. One of the problems is that many of their needs are contradictory. For Mark and Abby, self-fulfillment means having a career, marriage, children, sexual freedom, sexual fidelity, having money, insisting on social justice, enjoying city life and country living, and the list goes on and on.

They assume that the self is the sum of all of one's needs and desires. But as Yankelovich points out.

Suppression of desires is not always bad; in fact, some suppression is required if one is to avoid becoming a blob of contradictions. The injunction that to find one's self one must lose one's self contains a truth any seeker of self-fulfillment needs to grasp.

## THE ANSWER OF CHRIST TO THE SEARCH FOR SELF

What is the response of Christ to this quest? First, Jesus says we are called to a life of service, not a life of being served. Mark and Abby assume they will make it to the top when all their wants are met. They believe they will have "arrived" when the tray is full. But Jesus says that greatness is defined by service. Could it be that we, like Mark and Abby, have been influenced by the self-seeking ethic of our society? Could it be that we will miss the mark of greatness because we see ourselves as a collection of needs, rather than servants? The words of Christ need to be etched into our hearts: "Not so with you."

Second, Christ says life demands that we make certain choices. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Though he is speaking in the context of riches, the principle has a much broader application. We cannot serve the masters of sexual fidelity and sexual license. We cannot serve the masters of discipline and self-indulgence. Nor can we serve the master of friendship and seclusion. Some things in life are mutually exclusive, and the person who tries to choose everything winds up with nothing.

Maybe we want to have it both ways. We want the good warm feeling that comes from giving of ourselves, but we also want the security of lots of money and things. We want the kind of teaching that will keep our kids on the straight and narrow but also the license to do whatever we want in our personal lives. We want other people to dispel our loneliness but also the right to retreat into our private cocoons. We want the esteem and belonging that come from marriage but also the right to look around. We want the joy of rearing children but freedom from the responsibilities that parenthood implies.

Third, Jesus reminds us that if we want to find ourselves, we must lose ourselves: "He who would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mark 8:35). The leader is one who finds his life by losing it. He discovers life by giving it away. The irony is that we must die in order to live and serve in order to be great. We never find life by hoarding it, but only by giving it away. "Unless a grain of wheat falls

## DEMONS IN MARK: WHO ARE THE DEMONS?

BILL SWETMON

As one begins to read the New Testament, there is an immediate encounter with the existence of demons. Their origin is not explained; their existence is virtually taken for granted. There is also little information on their nature and characteristics. No theoretical discussion of demons occurs anywhere in Scripture.

In contrast, extra-canonical Jewish sources attribute all kinds of ills of mind and body to innumerable swarming hosts of demons lying in wait for men and besieging them with attacks and illnesses of all descriptions. In the New Testament there are only about eighty references to demons. In almost every case the center of attention was the life or ministry of Jesus. It seems that his appearance on earth precipitated a violent outburst of Satan's influence and power. Perhaps one reason God allowed so much demon activity during Jesus' ministry was to give undeniable proof of his power and divinity.

This idea is supported by the fact that in the Gospel of Mark Jesus gave his disciples authority to expel demons (Mark 6:7, 9:38, 16:17) and expelled them himself (Mark 3:22). However, there were some demons that even the disciples could not expel; only the Lord himself had the power to cast them out (Mark 9:18, 28-29). So the conclusion seems to be that the presence of God incarnated on earth brought to the forefront all the power and wrath of Satan's forces.

### WHAT ARE THE THEORIES?

Since the Scripture is almost silent concerning the identity of demons, numerous theories have developed over the years

relative to their origin.

#### *Superstition*

Some have rationalized that demon possession in the first century was simply the effects of certain diseases upon ignorant people who superstitiously regarded all evil as Satan's activity in the affairs of men. However, in at least eleven instances, Scripture distinguishes between demon possession and diseases (Matthew 4:24, 8:16, 10:8; Mark 1:32, 34, 6:13, 16:17-18; Luke 4:40-41, 9:1, 13:32; Acts 19:12). There is a distinction made between a demonized person and an epileptic (Matthew 4:24); also, distinction is made between diseases caused by demons and the same diseases not so caused (Matthew 12:22, 15:30).

#### *Spirits of Deceased Men*

Josephus apparently accepted the idea that demons were actually the spirits of wicked people that entered into men who were alive.<sup>1</sup> The origin of this idea can be traced to Greek mythology; however, it has absolutely no support from biblical revelation.

#### *A Pre-Adamic Race*

Some have developed the idea that a pre-Adamic race of men existed before the creation of man or angels. To support this theory, a distinction is made in scriptural interpretation between "angel" and "spirit." It is believed that the term "spirit" refers to the spirit of a person who lived before Adam. However, Scripture refers to angels as spirits (Psalm 104:4; Hebrews 1:14). This theory has no biblical or extra-biblical support.

#### *Offspring of Angels and Ante-Diluvian Women*

In Genesis 6:2, the Scripture declares that "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose." The term "sons of God" is believed to refer to fallen angels who had intercourse with mortal women, producing a race of partly human, partly angelic beings. This race was destroyed by the flood, but the disembodied evil spirits still seek bodies to inhabit.

It is questionable whether or not the term "sons of God"

actually refers to fallen angels since Jesus declared that angels cannot marry (Matthew 22:30). We would conclude that there is no male/female distinction among the angels. Also, the Bible tells us that fallen angels are confined to Tartarus to await the Judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

### WHAT SHOULD WE CONCLUDE?

Some have concluded that demons are unconfined fallen angels. They believe that when Satan rebelled and introduced sin into the universe (Isaiah 14:12-14), he drew with him a large number of angels. (See Matthew 25:41.) However, we must realize that much of this is simply conjecture, since Scripture is not totally clear on the origin of the devil and his demons (cf. Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:8-9). If this were true, we wonder why some angels are confined to pits of darkness (2 Peter 2:4) and others are allowed to possess human beings.

Basically, two texts may give some insight to the origin of Satan: Isaiah 14:12-20 and Ezekiel 28:12-19. The text in Isaiah is apparently directed to "the king of Babylon" and Ezekiel's text refers to "the prince of Tyre." In each case, however, Bible scholars have pointed out that the prophet used language which could not refer literally to any mere man. So these texts have been viewed with a twofold application—literally to human kings and figuratively to Satan's fall.

Since the Bible does not fully reveal the origin of demons, we would encourage a neutral position on this issue. On the other hand, a great deal of evidence can be gathered concerning the activities of demons from the Gospel of Mark. Mark 1:23-26 records the first encounter which Jesus had with a demon.

And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him.

A few years ago an evil and frightening film, *The Exorcist*,

depicted a demon taking over the body of a young girl. Various scenes in the film characterized the demon as all powerful. It could not be expelled until two men finally freed its hold on the young girl, but only at the expense of their own lives. The film taught millions of people that evil triumphs over good—an opposite message from the one found in Scripture.

One wonders how long the demon-possessed man attended the synagogue services without being revealed as demonized. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ arrived on the scene, the demon was immediately exposed.

Apparently, demons were able to possess the bodies and personalities of people in Jesus' day. We are left to wonder how much willingness on the part of the individual contributed to the possession. Or was it done totally against the person's will? Perhaps Satan himself was involved in leading people into a state of possession, since demons are presented in Scripture as his angels (Matthew 12:24, 25:41; Revelation 12:7). Since heavenly angels do not appear to have possessive power over human beings, it is difficult to believe that Satan's demons (angels) would be able to take over a person's body on the demon's own prerogative and strength. No doubt Satan's deception and limited scope of power were involved in leading individuals into a demon-possessive state.

Our text (Mark 1:23-26) reveals three interesting facts about demons and the power of Jesus over them.

The first concerns *the demon's confession*. The first confession of Jesus Christ as God's Holy One came from a demon. There are two important aspects of the demon's confession in verse 24. He referred to Jesus as "Jesus of Nazareth," which refers to his humanity, and then "the Holy One of God," which refers to his deity. So this demon knew Jesus as the Messiah, God's only begotten Son. It is interesting to note that demons recognized Jesus immediately and were instantly afraid of him.

Second, notice *the Lord's command*. The Lord gave the demon two commands, both of which he had to obey. First, Jesus said, "Be quiet. . . ." (v. 25). The Greek word is *phimotheti*, literally, "Be muzzled!" This is the same word Jesus used to still the storm (Mark 4:39). This was an almost instant

response. No doubt Jesus did not want the testimony concerning his deity to come from a demon, since they were lying spirits. Perhaps their testimony would be construed by many as proof that he was not the Son of God!

Mark Twain wrote an interesting book about his travels in the West and in Hawaii called *Roughing It*. In the book Twain gave an account of a man who was a notorious liar and was known throughout his community as a spinner of tall tales. So no one ever believed anything he said. One day they found him dead, hanging from a tree with a suicide note pinned to his shirt which said that he had taken his own life. A coroner's jury ruled it murder. Their reasoning was that if the man claimed he had taken his own life, it was proof that he had not!

Certainly, Satan and his demons did not intend to advance the cause of Christ by identifying him as the Holy One of God. Jesus knew this. That is why he rebuked the demon for acknowledging his deity. The last thing Jesus needed was word spreading about his deity from demons who could not be trusted with any truth and would actually convince people of the very opposite by their testimony. (See Acts 16:16-24.)

Jesus gave a second command: "Come out of him" (v. 25). As one last cruel act, the demon threw the poor man into convulsions, probably causing him to fall down on the ground, foaming at the mouth and crying in great agony. This was an act of anger and frustration on the part of the demon.

But in response to the divine command, the demon had to obey (v. 26). Here the power of God is demonstrated over evil forces. The demon recognized the fact that he and Jesus had nothing in common, and that Jesus had power over him. When he saw the Lord, he said, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us?" (v. 24). The use of plural pronouns would indicate that the demon closely identified with the person he possessed. However, he knew that Jesus could exercise total control over him and could even destroy him.

This gives great comfort to God's people, for there is no evil force or power that can take hold of our lives that God cannot destroy!

The third fact about demons and Jesus' power over them is

shown in *the response of the crowd*. The amazed onlookers debated, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him" (v. 27). It is amazing that this miracle led men to wonder, but did not lead them to believe in Jesus. This may be the reason Jesus did not want word about his miracles to be spread abroad. Miracles by themselves do not tend to produce genuine faith. The greatest problem with faith produced by miracles is that it must also be sustained by miracles. When the miracles cease, so does the faith.

In addition, such public excitement over his miracles would only create curiosity seekers among the Jews and perhaps create concern among government leaders in Rome, who might think he was an insurrectionist. So we find that Mark often recorded Jesus' request for people to keep quiet (Mark 1:44, 3:12, 5:43, 7:36-37, 8:26, 30, 9:9). Each time they failed to obey his request, problems were created for him.

## CONCLUSION

It is significant to note that this demon-possessed man was attending a religious meeting, and the demon recognized that Jesus was God's Messiah and even feared that Jesus would judge him and send him to the pit. One is made to wonder how many "religious" people who faithfully attend Sunday morning assemblies *really* believe these facts.

Great comfort can be gained by Mark's revelation of Jesus' power over this evil spirit. Jesus' compassion for those in need is clearly seen here. The following verses tell us that after the Sabbath, he continued to minister to those who were suffering and in need. He was always at the beck and call of all kinds of people (demoniacs, lepers, etc.) because he loved his creation so much.

His greatest act of compassion was his death on the cross to redeem lost mankind from Satan's grip. That even brought Satan and his demons under greater control and judgment.

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, hav-

ing cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him (Colossians 2:13-15).

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *Wars* 7. 6. 3.

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## DEMONS IN MARK: WHAT ARE THE DEMONS LIKE?

BILL SWETMON

The biblical teaching on demonology is strikingly different from the superstitions of pagan cultures and rabbinic Judaism of the first century. Scripture does not cater to human curiosity. It does not explain the origin of demons nor does it tell who they are. It simply states their existence as factual and that the human race is their prime target.

As we read the various accounts of demon possession in Scripture, some interesting facts begin to emerge concerning what demons are like. One example is the account given by Mark in 5:2-20.

### DEMONS ARE PERSONALITIES

Even though demons are spirit beings (Matthew 8:16; Mark 5:2; Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 16:14), they still possess personalities which are capable of thinking, acting, and speaking. (See Acts 19:15-16.)

When they would take over physical bodies, the demonic personality expressed itself through the individual's speech. Such was the case with the Gerasene demoniac. (Matthew reports there were two men while Mark evidently centered on the one most vocal.)

This particular demon possession demonstrated several signs of personality: anger (v. 5), worship (v. 6), faith (v. 7), fear (v. 7), self-identity (v. 9), and choice (v. 12).

### DEMONS ARE INTELLIGENT

The original meaning of the Greek word *daimon* (translated "demon") refers to knowledge or intelligence. Certainly if demons are fallen angels as some theorize, we would expect

them to be highly intelligent beings.

The legion of demons that Mark described knew about Jesus and his power to destroy them (v. 7). James tells us that demons believe and tremble (James 2:19). Demons seek to distort Jesus' divinity (1 John 4:1-6). They also corrupt sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-3). They also know what their destiny will be (Matthew 8:29).

So we would conclude that demons are highly intelligent, spirit personalities.

### DEMONS ARE STRONG

Mark records that these demons could not be bound with chains; they simply tore them apart, and the shackles were broken in pieces (v. 4). Their power is broad enough to produce unnatural actions in the people they possess. This poor man in Mark 5 lived among the tombs and cried out, cutting himself with stones (v. 5).

In Mark 9:22 there is an account of a boy possessed by a demon who threw the lad into fire and water, trying to destroy him. So demons were able to produce suicidal tendencies. Their main purpose was to drive people to self-destruction.

### DEMONS ARE DEPRAVED

When Jesus cast the demons out of this man, he clothed himself. Prior to that, he had lived among the tombs without any clothing. Luke tells us he had not worn clothing for a long time (Luke 8:27). Mark refers to the demons as an "unclean spirit."

Apparently, demons possessed physical bodies in order to continue their sinful, licentious disobedience of God's laws. Their lifestyle was one of total depravity. They are not only referred to as evil, but they also produce evil effects on those they possess (Matthew 8:28, 10:1; Mark 1:23, 5:3-5, 9:17-26; Luke 6:18, 9:39-42).

Mark describes the Gerasene demoniac as one who lived among the tombs (a place of death where dead bodies were buried in limestone caves in the cliffs), nude and self-destructive. It is obvious from this account that demons are

diametrically opposed to all that is pure and clean. The fact that they lived in the midst of dead bodies, filth, and rubbish evidenced their moral pollution.

### DEMONS ARE RELIGIOUS

As previously noted, this man ran and bowed down before Jesus in an act of worship (v. 6). The demons acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God (v. 7), and they prayed to Jesus not to torment them (v. 7). They also know that there is a Judgment (Matthew 8:29), something that many human beings do not acknowledge.

It is also important to note that demons do not know the future. They did not know what Jesus would do to them (v. 7). Satan cannot know God's plans. He cannot read the mind of man, let alone the mind of God. There is great comfort here because man has been inclined to attribute to Satan and his angels power that they do not possess.

One wonders why demons do not repent with such knowledge as they possess about Christ. Perhaps we will never know the answer to that question. It may be impossible for them to repent, or maybe repentance is useless, since there is no atoning sacrifice offered on their behalf. There is no indication in Scripture that Christ's death on the cross redeemed any beings outside the human race. We conclude, therefore, that no matter how religious demons may be, there is no hope for their eternal redemption.

An interesting sidenote here is that the term "Most High God" is the one used through the Old Testament by members of Gentile nations. Israel referred to him as "Jehovah"—"Lord"; Gentiles knew him as "*El Elyon*"—"God Most High." It is the highest name by which a nonbeliever can know God.

### DEMONS ARE IDENTIFIABLE

When Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, they encountered this man, who actually ran and bowed down before Jesus. We can imagine how frightened the disciples must have been. No doubt they were ready to get back into the boat and launch out into the sea, away from such

a pitiful sight. But they saw Jesus standing firm and ready to face this incredible display of evil and satanic power.

Jesus then asked, "What is your name?" (v. 9). The answer was, "My name is Legion; for we are many." This answer expressed the might and destructive force of demonic powers. A Roman legion could consist of as many as six thousand men. (Legion means "thousands.")

The fact that Jesus would ask their name suggests that demons have a form of identity. Apparently, demons are classified in various groups. In Mark we read of one demon (1:23), a legion of demons (5:9), and seven demons (16:9). Here is another mystery concerning demoniac activity. There apparently were various degrees of demoniac possession determined by the number or grouping of demons in each person. Those various groups apparently had some form of identity.

### DEMONS ARE HOMELESS

In Matthew 12:43, Jesus said, "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it." This suggests that as long as demons were outside physical abodes, they were restless and miserable. They needed a "home" of some kind. So Legion requested (prayed) that Jesus would send them into the swine (Mark 5:12). Jesus had two choices: He could send them out of the country (v. 10), or he could send them into the swine (v. 12). He answered their request and sent them into the swine.

Some have criticized Jesus for destroying two thousand head of swine by sending the demons into them, causing the swine to run down a steep bank into the sea (v. 13). Several explanations have been given for Jesus' actions here. One is that by sending the demons into the swine, Jesus demonstrated to this man that he was totally free from the demons that inhabited him. Another explanation is that this action caused the demons to leave the man peacefully, averting any further torment such as we read about in Mark 1:26. If one demon can throw a man into convulsions, only God knows what six thousand could do! A third explanation is that the swine were owned by Jews who engaged in selling ceremonially

unclean pork to the indiscriminating Gentiles in that area. Whatever the explanation, we can be assured that Jesus did what was right for the poor demonized man as well as for the owners of the swine.

### CONCLUSION

This account ends with two interesting responses to Jesus. The swine owners came to him, fearful, and "began to entreat him to depart from their region" (v. 17). Jesus responded by leaving, never once imposing himself on those who rejected him. Instead of requesting that Jesus stay and help others, the swine owners had only one concern—finances! They could not afford the loss of more pigs. Jesus could have destroyed the local economy by remaining in that area! What a blessing these people missed! Jesus left their region, never to return again during his personal ministry.

John Oxenham stated it well:

Rabbi, be gone!  
And take this fool of thine!  
You love his soul:  
we prefer swine.

The second response to Jesus is seen in the man who is now "clothed and in his right mind" (v. 15). He requested that "he might accompany him" (v. 18). Jesus refused. Four requests were made of Jesus in this text. The demons made two: to not be sent out of the country and to be sent into the swine. Jesus answered both. The swine owners asked him to leave their region, and he did. Now the demon-free man requests to go with him, and he refuses.

Instead, he makes a request of him: "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you" (v. 19). Evangelism begins at home!

The next verse declares, "And he went off and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled" (v. 20). The Decapolis was made up of ten Greek cities on the eastern side of Galilee including

Damascus. These were Gentile cities, so this man became one of the first missionaries to the Gentiles. His motivation to evangelize was based on the "great things Jesus had done for him." What a marvelous motivation for us today as we endeavor to reach out to those around us!

Our text reveals three major forces at work in our world today: Satan, society, and the Savior. Satan's purpose is to destroy (John 10:10); society tries to deal with man's sin problems, but about the best that can be expected is isolation, binding, and restraint. The only hope for our world is the third force—the Savior! He graciously and lovingly confronted the demonized man, freed him from his bondage, and set him on a new course with purpose and direction. Without this third force, our world would be hopelessly doomed! Thank God for the power of his deliverance!

## DEMONS IN MARK: WHAT CAN DEMONS DO TO PEOPLE?

BILL SWETMON

Several years ago, one of the popular opinion polls reported that Americans' belief in the devil has gone up from 37 per cent to 48 per cent, and another 20 per cent are half persuaded that he exists. No doubt the most clever trick Satan has is to convince people that he does not exist. One way he has found to make people wonder about his existence is to present himself as a fictional character that provokes ridicule and disdain.

He has even used the Scriptures to carry out this diabolical scheme. For example, Isaiah, in a prophecy against Babylon, mentioned a creature that would one day roam about over the fallen and deserted city (Isaiah 13:21-22). The Hebrew word for this creature is *sair*, meaning wild goat. Some early translations of the Bible called it *satyre*, which was one of the half-human, half-bestial figures of mythology, having a man's body but the horns and legs of a goat. During the Middle Ages, when church plays were used to teach illiterate people basic Bible stories, the devil was portrayed as a monster with horns and a head somewhat like a goat. Someone would dress in a red outfit with a goat head-type mask and a pitchfork to portray the devil.

Today, that portrait of Satan is still prevalent, and most educated, intelligent people find it hard to believe in a mythological creature with horns, a long tail, red suit, and a pitchfork in hand. Few people realize that this portrayal of Satan comes from medieval times and a poor biblical translation of Isaiah 13:21-22. So his plan to convince people that he does not exist seems to have worked well.

However, the age in which we live seems to have caused some to stop and reconsider their attitudes toward evil. With so much sin and suffering in our world, many are wondering if

there is not, in fact, an evil force at work in our world beyond just circumstantial happenings and events. Such knowledge was never doubted in the first century. It seems, from reading the Gospels, that the existence of Satan was common knowledge among both Jews and Gentiles. As a matter of fact, the people seemed to be able to distinguish between common illness and demoniac possession.

A good example of this is found in Mark 9:17-27. This text illustrates the fact that demon possession could be distinguished from ordinary illnesses of that time. Perhaps one way they could distinguish the difference was by the effects which the demon brought upon the individual. The Scriptures are clear about what demons could do to people.

### DEMONS CAUSED PEOPLE TO OPPOSE GOD

The very meaning of the term "Satan" is "opposer." It appears that Christ's ministry on earth apparently provoked an outburst of demonic activity.

From the examples we have studied thus far in Mark, it is evident that demons desired to destroy God's creation by taking over the bodies of human beings and provoking them to violent destruction. In verse 20, the demon threw the boy into convulsion, causing him to fall to the ground, rolling about and foaming at the mouth.

So demons represent everything that is evil, destructive, and hurtful to the human race. They are opposed to all that is good and right. Judas betrayed Christ because he was possessed by Satan (Luke 22:3). Jesus' earthly ministry began with Satan tempting him with the world's pleasures to reject all that was good and right (Matthew 4:1-11). Satan knew that the completion of Jesus' ministry would seal his own doom. In every activity of Satan and his demons, there is opposition to God's plan and purpose on earth.

#### *Demons Could Affect People Physically*

As noted above, this poor boy was afflicted physically by the evil spirit. So far we have seen that demons could cause convulsions, foaming at the mouth, screaming, and could display tremendous physical strength.

Mark records that this demon threw the boy to the ground, causing him to foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and stiffen his body. The father told Jesus that the boy had been possessed since childhood. There is no way for us to begin to comprehend the tremendous physical suffering this young man must have experienced during those years.

#### *Demons Isolated People From Their Friends and Family*

Verse 17 says that the spirit had made the boy mute. Jesus referred to the demon as a "deaf and dumb spirit." In Mark 5:2-20 the legion of demons had caused the two men to live by themselves in the tombs, away from humanity, cut off from the rest of the world. In every case of demoniac possession, there was some alienation and separation either physically or emotionally.

#### *Demons Robbed People*

The boy in our text had lost all self-control. He was unable to control his body. The demon apparently could throw the boy into convulsions at any moment. The two demoniacs that lived among the tombs were robbed of all self-respect. They lived like wild animals, cutting themselves, screaming, and frightening the local people.

In every case of demon possession, there was a loss of self-respect, peace, and purpose for living. Satan is a thief! He takes away everything that is good and meaningful in life. Demoniac possession was an extreme form of this thievery.

#### *Demons Produced Suicidal Tendencies*

In every case of demonic possession there was a tendency toward self-destruction. This boy was mute, no doubt creating a more dangerous situation because once the demon would throw him into convulsions, he would be unable to cry for help. In verse 22, the father told Jesus that the demon has "often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him."

In chapter 5, the legion of demons that entered the swine caused them to rush down the mountain in a suicidal plunge into the sea. Perhaps the only way this boy had remained alive is that in some way his will fought against the destructive

power of the demon, and the boy persevered.

The combination of the above effects distinguished demon possession from normal illnesses.

### WHAT ABOUT DEMON POSSESSION TODAY?

No doubt many wonder about the possibility of demonic possession in the twentieth century. Some religious people claim to have encountered demon possession in extreme paganistic cultures such as China, India, Japan, South America, Africa, and various islands of the sea.

The methods of exorcism vary from culture to culture. Usually, there is some kind of pain inflicted on the one possessed, such as beating, pricking with needles, pinching, and burning. It is believed that discomfort will drive the demon from his abode. In other cases, there are magic rites performed to expel the demon.

These methods vary little from first-century Jewish non-canonical writings which contain numerous forms of words and ceremonies for the expulsion of demons. Josephus (A.D. 37-95), the popular Jewish historian, describes a cure in which a demon was drawn through the nostrils of a demoniac by using a magic root, supposedly prescribed by Solomon. As the demon left his victim, he turned over a vessel of water.<sup>1</sup>

The interesting aspect of demonic possession in the New Testament is that there were no rituals performed to deliver the afflicted. The New Testament is free from all paganistic magic; it deals directly with the reality of Satan and his demons. Only God's power could expel demons, and the deliverance was instantaneous and complete. The conclusion is that what many mistakenly call demon possession today is probably mental or psychological phenomena rather than actual demonic activity. The reasons for this conclusion are based on strong biblical evidences.

For one thing, demonic activity such as that described in Mark seems to be peculiar to the time Jesus lived. The Old Testament has precious little reference to demonic activity. (See Leviticus 17:7; Isaiah 13:21, 34:13; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Chronicles 11:15; Psalm 106:37.) However, when we enter the

pages of the New Testament, demonic activity is prevalent wherever Jesus goes. After his death and resurrection, the book of Acts records little demonic activity. The conclusion from this is that there was an unleashing of satanic activity during Jesus' ministry that the world had not seen before nor has it seen since.

A second observation concerning demonic possession today has to do with spiritual gifts. It only stands to reason that if demons could possess people today the way they did during Jesus' ministry, God would also provide the power through human agency to cast them out today. Since neither the type of possession described in this study nor the ability to cast out demons are evidenced today, the conclusion must be that such activities were limited to the ministry of Jesus. The temporary nature of supernatural gifts, described in 1 Corinthians 12—13, lends credence to this conclusion. From all evidence I can gather, it seems that in the days of Christ there was a great outburst of satanic activity, just as there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit's power, manifested in miracles of healing.

Nevertheless, we must not underestimate the destructive power of Satan. He is the enemy of God who desires to destroy God's children. He goes about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8-9). He works in the lives of unbelievers, making them "children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1-3). However, our study of demons in Mark has shown us that Jesus is Lord. Because of his atoning death and resurrection, Satan has been defeated! Even though today we may not be possessed by demonic spirits, there are demonic attitudes that capture and hold us—hostility, lust, resentment, selfishness, materialism, and the like. These things rip and tear us apart, making us restless, guilt-ridden, and discontented. Whatever it is, Jesus is Lord! Through the power of his grace, we can overcome, and these negative attitudes can be cast out. Within and without, he reigns as Lord of our lives.

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 8. 2. 5.

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## THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES

(Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-17; 3:13-19)

STEVE TRIPLET

In these verses Jesus calls for several men to leave their present situations and circumstances in life and follow him. They were to be with him, learn of him, become like him, and, in so doing, become fishers of men. That which they are called upon to do—to leave all and follow him—is the basic call of all who would be Jesus' disciple. Just what was entailed in their "leaving all and following Jesus" would only be understood after being with him during his earthly ministry and receiving the promised Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would complete that which Jesus wanted to impart to them (John 14:25-26, 16:12-13). We have the benefit of being able to look back upon the "making them become fishers of men" as a whole through the pages of Scripture.

No one verse, though, seems to summarize and capture the essence of Jesus' call, both then and now, better than Mark 8:34 and its parallels: "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'" This verse, when looked at in its parts with the light of the rest of Scripture illuminating what they mean, challenges each of us who would "come after Jesus."

## DENYING SELF

First, if a person is to answer the disciple's call and "come after Jesus," he must "deny himself." Denying self is not a self-abusive type of action. It is not deliberately doing harm to self in the name of Jesus as some Latin American groups do during some of their religious festivals. Certainly, a disciple of Jesus would find it necessary to deny himself any practice that

would put him in conflict with the will of his Master (e.g., the practice of sexual immorality). Perhaps the disciple of Jesus may even find it necessary to deny himself something that, in and of itself, is acceptable to God in order to maintain and exert a proper Christian influence, just as Paul did. He stated, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Corinthians 8:13). But, the concept of denying self here goes much further. Notice it is not "deny yourself such and such" as one would deny himself chocolate cake in order to lose weight. It is "deny self." "Self" is the object of the denial. The word translated "deny" also carries the meaning of "disown."<sup>1</sup> This particular word also contains a prefix that adds the intensity of "utterly."<sup>2</sup> Jesus says that in order to come after him you must first utterly deny or disown self. To utterly deny or disown self means that you renounce self as the goal of life. William Barclay expresses what denying self means:

To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self and yes to God. To deny oneself means once, finally, and for all to dethrone self and to enthrone God. To deny oneself means to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life, and to make God the ruling principle, more, the ruling passion of life. The life of constant self-denial is the life of constant assent to God.<sup>3</sup>

Denying self means you take self out of the number one spot and permanently place God there. We have an example of one unable to deny self in the rich young ruler as recorded in Mark 10:17-22. He was unable to dethrone self and the pleasing of self with his worldly possessions, and therefore, he could not follow Jesus.

### TAKING UP THE CROSS

Second, in answering the disciple's call, one must "take up his cross." I have heard and read various explanations about what this means. Some see our cross as the trials and burdens of life. But everyone has those. They are not peculiar to one who follows Jesus. Someone might say that it is those persecu-

tions, trials, and burdens that come upon one because he is Jesus' disciple. Certainly, part of answering the disciple's call is the willingness to endure hardship and persecution if necessary to be true to Jesus. But is that all that is meant by "take up your cross"? What was the cross to Jesus? It was an instrument of death! The "cross" that we are called to take up is nothing less than the instrument of death. Jesus is taking the first concept of utterly denying self (disowning self) and going even further. Jesus calls for us to not only deny ourselves (disown ourselves) but die to ourselves as well. We must do what Paul said he did: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). This being "crucified with Christ" begins when we are baptized into Jesus Christ, baptized into his death, crucifying the old man, according to Romans 6:3-6. There we die to ourselves and to the sin that has controlled us, being forgiven of those sins, rising to walk a new life—a Christ-controlled, Christ-living-in-me life. But baptism into Jesus is just the beginning of the crucified life. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "... I die daily." In Luke 9:23 we have recorded from the lips of Jesus, "... if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow me." (Emphasis mine.) Each day the disciple of Jesus must die to self, letting Jesus live in him. Jesus' will must become our will, his desires our desires, his motives our motives. Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross for us and calls for those who would come after him to offer themselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

### FOLLOWING JESUS

Then, to answer the disciple's call, we must follow Jesus. Do you remember as a child playing the game "Follow the Leader"? One person would be designated as "leader," and whatever that person did, no matter how difficult (or in the case of the game, how ridiculous), everyone else had to do it. As disciples of Jesus, we must follow his example—no matter how difficult (or in the eyes of the world, how ridiculous). But Jesus

does not ask us to do anything he has not done. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus has the right to call upon us to deny ourselves and take up our cross, for he himself denied self and took up a cross. Part of what it means to follow Jesus is that we become servants. Jesus said that he "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus also said, "... I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). Too many who claim to be disciples of Jesus are waiting for someone to minister to and serve them instead of ministering to and serving others. Following Jesus also involves the willingness to suffer persecution: "Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). In 2 Timothy 3:12 we read, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Following Jesus also means being concerned with the lost. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to call sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17). Recall that Jesus promised to make those first disciples he called "fishers of men." If we are going to follow Jesus, we must share his concern for the lost. Wherever and through whatever following our leader takes us, we must be willing to go.

Denying self, taking up one's cross, and following Jesus is a supreme challenge. It is not to be taken lightly. Yet, the "coming after Jesus"—going to be with him where he is—makes it all worthwhile. For one who answers the disciple's call successfully will receive a crown of life. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). We will also receive a mansion in the Father's house. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3). Jesus' disciples will enjoy

the salvation of their souls in the very presence of God. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). We must meet the challenge of the disciple's call with courage, commitment, and conviction so that we may know the joys of "coming after Jesus."

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James Strong, "Dictionary of Greek Words," in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1977), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Greek Words* (McLean, Va.: Macdonald Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 294.

<sup>3</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2. The Daily Bible Study Series* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 151.

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## THE CONDITIONS LAID DOWN (Mark 8:34)

"The Jesus Lifestyle" can be described in many ways. It is beautiful, spiritual, powerful, exciting, and majestic. Our Lord says it is also costly. There are battles to be fought, enemies to be overcome, sacrifices to be made, victories to be won. There is service to be rendered and work to be done. There is an Egypt to forsake, a wilderness to pass through, a cross to be borne, a race to be run.<sup>2</sup> Discipleship will cost a man his own self-righteousness, his sinful living, his love of ease, and the favor of the world. A price has to be paid and a commitment made. Not everyone is ready and willing, except perhaps in a superficial way. Large crowds have been following Jesus. Sifting time has come. Notice that he summoned both the multitude and his disciples.

As Jesus outlines the conditions or terms of discipleship, he begins with self-denial. The Christian life is full of paradoxes. Giving away, you have. Keeping, you have not. Dying, you live. Losing life, you find it. Denying self, you have self-fulfillment. The idea of self-denial is a strong concept. To the Greeks it meant "to disregard one's own interests."<sup>3</sup> It is to disown one's selfish desires and foolish pride. We repudiate our right to ourselves, our right to run our own lives. Self-denial is not just giving up this or that, but rather giving up ourselves. It strikes at the heart of our very existence and the right to rule for ourselves.<sup>4</sup> Jesus is now to have the Lordship of our lives. Paul would write later, "Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The second condition mentioned by Jesus has to do with cross-bearing. Here we must remove some misunderstanding. There was nothing beautiful about the cross. Taking up one's cross is far more than wearing a gold diamond-studded cross necklace. The cross was ugly—as ugly as pain and death can be. People did not sing pretty songs about it or write nice poetry about it. They feared it, and some cursed it. The cross was crude—not glamorous. It meant hammers, nails, and broken flesh. It meant cracking bones, gushing blood, and excruciating pain. It involved the crying out for a death that was slow in coming. It was indeed a crude and ugly sight. Nor

## THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, 1

(Mark 8:34—9:1)

BILL BURCHETT

The Gospel According to Mark is the Gospel of activity and energy. Key words are "straightway," "immediately," and the little word "and." This account of our Lord's earthly mission moves quickly from one scene to another. It emphasizes the superhuman power and might of Jesus—the things he *did* contrasted with the things he said. Some nineteen miracles as opposed to only five parables stress works rather than words. Obviously, Mark appeals primarily to the Romans who were men of power and might.

Frequently, the response to Jesus in the book of Mark is one of awe, astonishment, fear, or amazement. Mark's pictorial Gospel vividly presents things with acute detail. It is not only action-packed, but clearly a call to action. One cannot substitute preaching for practice or lectures for living. Nowhere is this made more evident than in our text.

It has been said that a text without a context can easily become a pretext. The larger context of Mark 8:34—9:1 is 8:27—10:52. Jesus is in Caesarea Philippi and on his way to Jerusalem. This section, however, is not a travelogue. Jesus is approaching the shadow of the impending cross. Golgotha is on the horizon. The context deals with his approaching death and its meaning for the disciples.<sup>1</sup> To understand Christianity, one must comprehend the cross. With Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, his misunderstanding and rebuke of Jesus (Mark 8:29-32), one might expect a lengthy treatment of Messiahship to follow. Instead, it is an explanation of discipleship which relates the disciple to the suffering Savior. The disciple must be made into the image of his Lord. Only in following Jesus does one truly know him.

was the smell any better—the smell of death, the stink of sweat, and the stench from uncontrollable biological functions.<sup>5</sup> Crude, contemptible, painful, deadly, shameful—this was the cross. William Barclay reminds us that for the disciple the cross means “to be ready to endure the worst that man can do to us for the sake of being true to God.”<sup>6</sup>

The cross then is a synonym of suffering, shame, and death. When a person took up his cross in the ancient Roman world, he was going to his death. When we bear our cross for Christ, it signifies our death for him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was on target here. When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die. One does not die by proxy. He dies by participation.<sup>7</sup> He also dies willingly. Jesus said, “If anyone wishes . . . , let him. . . .”

Crosses get heavy and burdensome. We must remember, though, that because Jesus bore the cross of Calvary, our crosses are lighter. Let us keep before us, too, the words of Thomas ‘a Kempis in *Of the Imitation of Christ*: “Carry the cross patiently, and with perfect submission; and in the end it shall carry you.”<sup>8</sup> Death to self is the door to life.

Jesus states the third condition for discipleship with the simple words, “Follow me.” Nothing can be more basic to the Master/disciple relationship than submission and obedience. It is this which separates the mere learner from the true disciple. The disciple does more than receive instruction. He embraces the teaching of his teacher. There is more to this matter of discipleship than intellectual comprehension. There is also practical application. “Follow me.” There is unconditional surrender. “Follow me.” There is ownership. “Follow me.” Where? Everywhere! When? All the time! Why? We cannot be his disciples otherwise! We simply cannot have a “Burger King” discipleship. There is no “Have it your way.”<sup>9</sup> There is only the caring and compassionate voice of Jesus saying, “Follow me.”

#### A CLARIFICATION OFFERED (Mark 8:35-37)

“The Jesus Lifestyle” would require of us certain conditions. These have now been laid down—one, two, three. Discipleship

will cost. The terms are demanding. Jesus, knowing that, will not leave it with a mere statement of the conditions. He will elaborate, explain, and clarify. He wants no misconception about following him. And, while the words in these verses are motivational, they are also here for clarification. Notice the clarifying conjunction “for” used to introduce each of these verses.

Jesus clarifies with words about life, or rather about soul-life. “The Greek word *psuche* means both ‘life’ in the sense of human life and ‘soul’ in the sense of man’s ultimate life.”<sup>10</sup> Both meanings are clearly present in these three verses. How much will discipleship cost? Just as Jesus was to lose his life for man, so man must be willing to lose his life for Christ. Death for Christ and the gospel will not be loss, but gain. Jesus also speaks here of the intensity of Christian loyalty, even to the losing (giving up) of oneself that the service of God might be carried out. To save one’s life means to deny Jesus in order to enjoy present ease. To suffer the loss of all earthly things, including life, for Christ and the gospel, is to save the soul.<sup>11</sup> This is self-denial, cross-bearing, and following Jesus. This is discipleship.

Our Lord then asks two profound questions about the value of the soul. The first asks us to compare the worth of the soul with the value of the whole world. The implication is that there is no comparison. The soul is too important. Another implication is that those who reject discipleship while striving to gain the world will lose their souls. In the second question Jesus asks for an equivalent, an exchange, or a compensation for the soul that is ultimately lost by rejecting discipleship. In essence, he would have us fully understand that there is no redemption in hell.<sup>12</sup> In his efforts to clarify the cost of discipleship, he graciously reminds us of the alternative.

#### A CAUTION ISSUED (Mark 8:38)

The discipleship motivation which Jesus has offered in his clarification now gives way to the most serious caution man could ever heed. One must never be ashamed of Jesus and his words! He did not deny us and our need. We must not deny

him. He bore the suffering and the shame of the cross for us. We must bear our cross for him and his cause—without shame. He followed the will of his Father. We must follow him—without shame. To deny, denounce, or disown Jesus in the presence of a lost and sinful generation which needs salvation is to be denied, denounced, and disowned by him when he comes in judgment and glory. This is his caution.

Shame has continued to make the cross of Christ a stumbling block for some and for others foolishness. Shame coupled with love of the world is an ever-present threat to discipleship. This "adulterous and sinful" age competes with the longing of God for human devotion. The distant goal and the ultimate outcome must govern the outlook and the actions of disciples. Impending judgment will reveal the wisdom of devotion to the Christ.<sup>13</sup>

#### A COMING KINGDOM (Mark 9:1)

Mark 8 closes with a strong caution which is tied to the coming of our Lord in judgment. Mark 9 opens with a powerful promise which is connected with the coming of God's kingdom. The kingdom would come while that current generation was still living, and it would come with power. This promise when studied in connection with Luke 24:44-49, Matthew 16:18-19, and Acts 1:1-8 is clearly a reference to the birthday of the church-kingdom as recorded in Acts 2.

Is there any relation between the church and the subject of discipleship? Indeed there is! There is the need for and the beauty of fellowship in the one body. Here there is a oneness of commitment and a oneness of purpose. The cost of discipleship and "The Jesus Lifestyle" involves our joining ranks with others who are following him. Following Jesus builds relationships—with him and with his. Here there is joint participation, mutual sharing, togetherness. These folks called disciples do not always love as they should, are not as quick to forgive as they should, are sometimes selfish and greedy. Before we become too self-righteous, however, let us remember that they are us.<sup>14</sup> Let us remember, too, that discipleship has already cost us our self-righteousness. Self-denial no longer

permits us that sinful luxury. Imperfect in love, short on forgiveness, tempted by selfishness, disciples are *co-followers* of the Christ. What an honor that he acknowledges us as *his* disciples! What a blessing that he encourages us: "Keep on denying yourself, keep on taking up your cross, keep on following me." This is a daily (or day after day) matter (Luke 9:23). God be thanked for the encouragement of brothers and sisters in the kingdom.

#### CONCLUSION

Discipleship is a costly venture. We can be thankful, however, that our Lord never invited anyone to follow him without pointing out the cost. He wants nobody to sign on with him under a false notion. Thomas Olbricht sums this all up for us distinctly in his book *The Power To Be*.

The lifestyle of Jesus was the way of the cross. He commended the same path to all who seek the way of God in this world. With Jesus as our model, we have a concrete, day-by-day, hour-by-hour, lifestyle. The life of the cross is not possible as a self-determined course. It is possible only because Jesus went that way first, then turned around and lifted us up. He likewise helps us to turn and lift up others.<sup>15</sup>

Becoming a disciple is a radical step. It is not easy. It is the way of the cross. It is also the way of life.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Wendell Willis, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1972), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (London, England: James Clark & Co., 1956), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup>Glen McCoy, "Becoming Jesus' Disciples," in *Proclaim*, July-September 1985, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup>Joe D. Schubert, *Mark, Introduce Us to the Master* (Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 1987), p. 147.

<sup>5</sup>McCoy, "Becoming Jesus' Disciples," p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 122.

<sup>7</sup>McCoy, "Becoming," p. 14.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (New York: New American Library, 1957), p. 69.

<sup>9</sup>J. Wayne Kilpatrick, "The Cost of Discipleship," in *The Preacher's Periodical*, June 1984, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Willis, p. 51.<sup>11</sup>C. E. W. Dorris, *The Gospel of Mark* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1959), p. 200.<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 200-201.<sup>13</sup>Albert E. Barnett, *Disciples to Such a Lord* (New York: Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1957), p. 86.<sup>14</sup>McCoy, "Becoming," p. 16.<sup>15</sup>Thomas H. Olbricht, *The Power To Be* (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), p. 29-30.

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## THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP, 2

(Mark 8:34—9:1)

JERRY CULBERTSON

In order to receive the full thrust of Jesus' teaching found in Mark 8:34—9:1, one must read and study the entire letter. Mark wrote his Gospel with a purpose in mind. He, by design, intended to show the church of the first century, as well as the church of the 1980s, what being a disciple of Jesus was really all about.

In a recent television broadcast on one of the local Alabama stations, Tony Campolo, a popular religious speaker, made this statement: "There is a difference between a believer and a disciple." Although one might not agree with all that Mr. Campolo had to say during the broadcast, this statement is worthy of a closer look.

### BELIEVERS AND DISCIPLES

Mr. Campolo is on target. It hurts to say it, but church pews are filled with good, honest, God-fearing, Jesus-believing people who have never really gotten into discipleship (following Jesus). Discipleship, following Jesus, is still being misunderstood today in much the same way it was in the days of the disciples in Mark's Gospel. One can believe in Jesus without ever doing his will. A disciple of Jesus puts his belief into action.

Jesus called four men to come and follow him. He did not ask them to do anything but simply follow and watch. These four men, pre-Christian Jews, would be joined later by eight more men; the Twelve were thus in training. Again the only request Jesus made of them was to follow, listen, and watch.

In Mark 6:7ff., after the rejection of Jesus in his home town synagogue, he sent the Twelve out in pairs to flex their spiri-

tual muscles. They had been watching and listening, and now Jesus was pushing them out into the world to minister to his name. Armed only with the authoritative name of Jesus and the hospitality of the villages they would visit, they went forth at his command.

### THE TWELVE MISUNDERSTOOD DISCIPLESHIP

In Mark 6:30ff., the Twelve return to report all the mighty works they were able to accomplish in Jesus' name. Jesus takes them to a retreat site where they can be alone, only to find a crowd of thousands already gathering. These pre-Christian Jews, the Twelve, had once again misunderstood the nature of the kingdom of God.

Sending the disciples across the Sea of Galilee, Jesus then dismisses the crowd, goes to the hills to commune with the Father, and later returns to the seashore very early in the morning (the fourth watch, 3:00 a.m.-6:00 a.m.). Walking on the water out to his struggling men (Mark 6:45-52), once again they misunderstand and think that they are seeing a ghost. They do not know why he sent the army away, which they had likely gathered to that remote site; they do not understand the miracles of the feeding of the five thousand and later, the four thousand (Mark 8:14-21). They only know that he must be the Messiah. They have seen his power, and they have been given authority based on his name. He does not fit the pattern of what the Messiah is supposed to be doing, but he has the power.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

These twelve, pre-Christian Jews, are judging Jesus by the only standard they know: the Law and the traditions of hundreds of years of Judaism. They are looking forward to the coming Messianic King who would come from God to restore Israel to her proper glory on the earth and eliminate the bondage of Rome.

It seems puzzling, to say the least, that these twelve men would give up jobs, leave family and friends to follow this itinerant preacher from Nazareth. The only logical conclu-

sion, unless one prefers to take the position that Jesus' divinity forced them to follow, is that the disciples thought they were enlisting in the Messiah's army and heading for war. Just as thousands of men and women left homes and family for the World Wars of this century, these twelve men shared a military mindset. This military mindset, particularly of the first four disciples, is clearly set forth in the feeding of the five thousand episode mentioned above (Mark 6:30ff.).

Jesus taught them to follow, listen, and watch as he instructed them concerning the ways of the kingdom of God. His way would not be by swords or spears; it would not be a way of military supremacy or strategy; his way would be the ultimate challenge entailed in the command to follow: the challenge to deny self.

When one follows, listens, and watches Jesus, there is no more room for self to set the standard for living. Even hundreds of years of tradition and the Old Covenant would yield to following this man Jesus. They had not yet come to grips with Jesus' living definition of Messiah, and thus they were confused.

The conflict between Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom of God he had come to establish and the Twelve's view of the Messiah was inevitable. Patiently and lovingly, Jesus continued to teach these twelve (particularly) and the crowds also about the nature of the coming kingdom of God. He does so through parables, plain teaching, and demonstrations of God's power (miracles).

It is from this background that one should attempt to read and interpret the message of Mark found in Mark 8:34-9:1. It is within this pivotal section of Mark that Jesus sets forth the dimensions of discipleship.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MESSIAH?

Jesus spoke "plainly" about his coming suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. The Twelve only heard defeat in his words, and the resurrection message never quite penetrated their minds. God's Messiah was not supposed to die. How could a man with this much power from God be killed? Peter called

Jesus aside and sought to straighten out this mistake. Peter rebuked Jesus for even mentioning that the Messiah of God would be killed.

It is after Peter's rebuke of Jesus and Jesus' stinging counter-rebuke of Peter that Jesus calls the crowd and the Twelve together to instruct them concerning the way of the cross.

The first instructions concerning discipleship would make sense later, but at this juncture they only served to confuse them even more. What does it mean to deny self and take up one's cross? God's Messiah sure had a strange way of pumping up the morale of his army.

### "DENY SELF, AND TAKE UP YOUR CROSS"

To deny self and take up a personal cross were both prerequisites for the third basic principle of discipleship instruction—"Follow me." One could not then, nor can one today, follow Jesus until the first two are understood and put into everyday life to some degree.

Many in the religious world have understood Jesus to be teaching a way of asceticism (punishing one's self). However, nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus does not want people to hate themselves or to do without certain things in life to prove loyalty as disciples. Asceticism can be credited to self, and thus self wins the victory. No, the call to self-denial runs much deeper. It penetrates to the very inner nature of man's spirit. It is a denial of the grasping, clinging nature of self so as to liberate the greater potential.

To deny self is to lead a coup against the throne room of one's very existence. It is almost a betrayal of self; at least Satan attempts to convince one that this is what is going on. One must allow Jesus to sit on the inner throne of self. Jesus takes over one's thoughts and daily living. The adversary, the devil, will continue to do battle against the inner man and challenge the right of Jesus to sit on the throne. Many people have listened to the devil, dethroned Jesus, and resumed control of their lives. When this occurs, the potential to be Christlike is destroyed.

Some people try to maintain a certain appearance of being

religious. They may even continue to do all the right-looking religious things: regular church attendance, giving, waiting on the Lord's table, praying, visiting the sick, and numerous other activities associated with faithful church membership. However, the inner man is still controlled by self, not by Jesus. Self has established some acceptable standards that must be met in order to be religious (actually a return to a law system), while avoiding those biblical teachings which might require self to descend and allow Jesus to ascend to the throne of one's inner self.

In self-denial one comes face to face with the way of the cross. There are no specific burdens which can be identified as special ones brought about by self-denial. It does not work that way. Rather, self-denial is a mindset of the disciple that propels one into a way of living. This is taking up the personal cross. It is a way of living that is sometimes painful because we are imitating the Master.

Cross-bearing means one does not have to always win the arguments. One must learn to leave people some room to think and perhaps see the error of their way. It also means that one should accept the fact that his position may also be wrong.

Cross-bearing is best described by the word "servant." Jesus left us the greatest example of what it means to be a servant. When we help others, even though we are tired and weary, we are understanding servanthood. We begin to see the ultimate serving heart that sent Jesus to the cross of Calvary. If we are to deny self, we, too, must go to our cross.

When one voluntarily gets involved in the redemptive action of telling men about Jesus, certain consequences may follow. No one can force another person to be a disciple. It is a decision that one must make alone. No one can do discipleship work for another. It is a personal work motivated by love and the serving spirit of having Jesus on the throne of one's life.

### "FOLLOW ME"

Denying self and taking up one's cross is a daily event. The language literally says, "Keep on denying self, keep on taking up your cross, and keep on following me." It is written in the

present continuous tense of the original language. Thus discipleship, being a Christian, must be a present continuous action. Every day one must decide to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus by repudiating any right to self. Major issues of life are no longer under one's control, but rather the decisions are made through living for Jesus (Galatians 2:20).

Many people try to justify certain actions by saying, "I just could not control myself." This is not a valid excuse to sin. Jesus says you must control yourself and obey his will. If you have been crucified with Christ, symbolically through being baptized into Christ, your life is no longer your own to do with as you please.

When a man took up his cross in the first century world, he knew only one thing: He was going to his death. The cross was only good for execution. Today, we see much more clearly than the disciples did when Jesus first mentioned going to his cross. They could only see a cruel death reserved for thieves and robbers. We can see the supreme sacrifice of God who loved us so much he was willing to ask his Son to die in our place. The disciples could not see the great servant spirit of Jesus when he spoke of the coming cross.

After hundreds of years and the benefit of God's Scriptures, men and women today are still blind to the greatness of the cross. The thought of death and dying to one's self is still as repulsive to most today as it was to those pre-Christian guerrilla fighters in the first century.

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS SPIRITUAL

Jesus elaborated on these principles of discipleship in Mark 8:35-38. He used a paradoxical statement, simple logic, and a warning/promise to teach the lesson. The section closed with a call for urgency. The kingdom of God was coming soon. People are warned not to miss it because of earthly thinking. The battle was so much larger than Judaism against Rome. It was to be a battle of good against evil. A cosmic battle in which the Prince of Glory would give his life to save mankind.

If one tries to save his life, showing concern for the world and the things of this earthly existence, he will lose his spiri-

tual life. The promise is for those who die to self (even physically if necessary, i.e., Revelation 2:10) and go the serving way of the cross. These faithful ones will receive the crown of life and live eternally with the resurrected Lord (1 Corinthians 15). All the riches of this world cannot pay the price of a man's soul. The only security for a man's life is found in being a disciple of Jesus.

### CONCLUSION

Are you a disciple of Jesus or just a believer? Have you spent the better part of your religious life just sitting on a pew, taking up space without following the way of the cross? Are you ashamed of Jesus and his church? Are you tired of singing "Trust and Obey," only to leave "Doubting and Proud"? The kingdom of God is here today on earth in Christ's body, his church. Your discipleship manual is complete and plain-spoken. You must decide if you will pay the high price of being his disciple or simply remain an uninvolved believer.

C. S. Lewis summed up the radical nature of following Jesus in a section of his book *Mere Christianity*:

God is going to invade this earth [in force], all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream? . . . For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.<sup>1</sup>

Becoming a Christian is not easy. It is a challenging life of service and at times even persecution. It is a daily surrendering of self and daily following of the way of the cross. The way

of the cross still leads home.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), p. 66.

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## THE HUMILITY OF DISCIPLESHIP

(Mark 9:33-50)

MARK HOWELL

How many of us like to be questioned? It could be an okay experience, and at times even welcomed. But it can also be intimidating. Much depends upon who is doing the questioning and what the circumstances are.

How would you like to be questioned by Jesus himself about how much you understand him and what your behavior has been like lately? That prospect could keep you up at night. Even though there would be no doubt as to his love and concern for your well-being, the whole encounter could prove to be disquieting. That is probably a mild interpretation of what the disciples felt in Mark 8:14-21 when Jesus heaped up a wall of questions that can be roughly interpreted as, "Hey! Where have you been the last two years?" They were surely yanking at their collars before it was all over.

Our text begins with another question of Jesus to his disciples, "What were you discussing on the way?" With that question, he begins to expose a hard practical side of discipleship. This exposure constitutes an encounter between him and the disciples that is only another in a list of encounters that sets the tone for this second half of the book:

**The Barrage Encounter (8:14-21)**—The disciples face questions that spotlight their shallow faith and understanding.

**The Turning Point Encounter (8:27-30)**—The disciples begin to see that the upcoming kingdom and its leader may not meet their expectations.

**The Traumatic Encounter (8:31-38)**—The leader begins to sound defeated.

The Triumphant Encounter (9:1-8)—The transfiguration stirs the hearts of the inner circle.

The Test Encounter (9:9-29)—The disciples are unable to perform because their trust has momentarily shifted from God to themselves.

The Traumatic Encounter, 2 (9:30-32)—Again Jesus predicts his passion.

The Humbling Encounter (9:33-50)—Jesus shares some insights into the nature of the kingdom that implies the mandate, "Humble yourselves!"

As the whole of this last encounter is read, it appears at first wash to be disjointed and confusing, as if nothing really ties together. But close examination reveals that it is all tied together by catchword associations. Ideas are connected through related expressions. The whole of the section is bound together by a Semitic device known as *inclusio*, wherein a return to the beginning of the section is found at the conclusion.<sup>1</sup> The disciples were bickering<sup>2</sup> on the way to Capernaum (v. 33), and Jesus concludes with the admonition, "Be at peace with one another."<sup>3</sup> The result is a unit of teaching that hammers home one supreme lesson: Discipleship is for the humbled. Without humility there is no following.

The pericope can be broken down into three main notions. First, discipleship means living by a humility that reverses the world's rules of success (vv. 33-37). Second, discipleship means having a humility that casts down sectarian pride (vv. 38-42). Third, discipleship means displaying a humanity that exemplifies itself in self-renunciation. A summary statement would be that humble disciples do not live like anyone else, have no cause other than Christ, and will give up anything and everything for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus the Lord.

### IT MEANS REVERSING ALL THE RULES

Jesus wants his disciples to know that true greatness is not what it always appears to be. To the world, success is measured in dollars, cars, houses, and how many people work for

you. Disciples occasionally measure it the same way as the Twelve were doing when they took each other's greatness to litigation. They were ashamed when Jesus asked them what they were talking about; they would not tell him. "There is something heartbreaking in the thought of Jesus going towards a cross and his disciples arguing about who would be the greatest."<sup>4</sup> Unabashed by their silence, Jesus proceeds to tell them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all."

They must have wondered what that was supposed to mean. Jesus is telling us all that great people are found at the bottom of the heap. They are the ones who have humbled themselves into lowly service. While simply said, it is not easily learned. There are at least three occasions in Scripture when the disciples argued about greatness. The first is in Matthew 20. Though the text does not say they were arguing about greatness, the circumstances of the text indicate this. Jesus offers the same essential teaching as in our text and adds to that teaching the example of his own mission as "a ransom for many." The second is in Mark 9 (duplicated in Luke 9), and the third is in Luke 22. The occasion there is the Last Supper. John 13 records most poignantly the Master's response: He washed feet! He rose to stoop, all the while thinking about his hour that had come, about where he had come from and where he was going, and about the fact that all things had been given into his hands.<sup>5</sup> The message in all of this is that the kingdom operates under a different set of rules. Kingdom greatness is achieved from the knees!

Greatness is found in giving attention to the lowly person and the lowly task. "Take this child for instance," Jesus says (v. 37). "Whoever ministers to him ministers to Me and the Father." Little children offer no reward or valuable recognition of your service. Meeting their needs requires humility. There are probably several points to be made out of verses 36 and 37, but in the last, Jesus is talking about the very heart of discipleship. Real discipleship is not hitting the grand-slam homer, and that is good news! Real discipleship is found in the day-in, day-out decisions to be lowly in service. What could be more ordinary than to hold a child in the crook of your arm?

What a vivid visual Jesus used to drive home his point.

Too often we suffer from the activist delusion that nothing significant happens unless it is accompanied by a loud noise. . . . According to human standards, anything which begins with significance must be accompanied with neon lights, fireworks, and spotlights. How different is the wisdom of God! . . . When a father and mother pray nightly with their children, it may seem like the tiniest of events. Or when a family gathers on family night and studies the Bible, prays, and talks about God, it may seem a small affair. But this is God's way. . . . Again, God calls upon his people to render acts of service, however small and insignificant they may seem. . . . Even "a cup of cold water in his name" brings glory. So for the people of God, success must be measured by different standards than those used in the world around us.<sup>6</sup>

To put it simply, greatness is in servanthood. Looking at what has just transpired in these verses, the realization begins to dawn that Jesus has turned their question of greatness into an issue of service. He has thus established a new pattern for human relationships by removing the catalyst for fussing and competitiveness among brethren.<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:1-2 portrays the ideal between brethren. Words like "encouragement," "consolation," "fellowship," "affection," and "compassion"—these are the words of a happy family. This ideal becomes real when followers practice Mark 9:34. Give yourself away! Break the white-knuckled grip that you may have upon your rights; become a servant who does nothing from selfishness, who regards others as more important than self, who regards the interests of others as well as personal ones, and who is lowly-minded even as he who emptied himself, taking the form of a bondservant (Philippians 2:3-8). No, these are not the rules that the world lives by, but what does the world know?

### IT MEANS DESTROYING THE SECTARIAN SPIRIT

There is one word that adequately describes the sectarian spirit: "ugly"! It is a spirit that can be found in a person who

has lost sight of his Lord. He or she, like Peter in Mark 8:27-30, may be saying the right words but have the wrong meaning. He may have a clearer view of congregational tradition and issues affecting those traditions than he has of a relationship with the Lord. Always in an effort to cover all the bases, he reduces his relationship with God to the observance of rules and regulations. Being defined by rigid party lines, he is often divisive in attitude and action, and has little toleration for growth and the process of change in other people, and sometimes within himself.

In our text (vv. 38-42), the apostle John speaks up for the group and demonstrates sectarian pride. He has lost sight of the good that was being done in the name of Jesus. What was the offender's sin? He was not in the apostles' camp. Because of this, an attempt was made to hinder his work. The followers did not see that someone who successfully called upon the authority of the Lord for a good work was not the enemy, but rather was one who bore the mark of a believer.

Jesus was pointblank: "Do not hinder him." His explanation seems to indicate that in time this distant disciple will come to a fuller knowledge of truth. So toleration is the ticket, not hindrance. Why had it not occurred to the band that only a short time earlier they had been unable to do what this person was doing because of their unbelief? (Mark 9:9-29). This person could only do what was being done because of his belief, but a sectarian pride blinded them to the awareness. Lucky for them that Jesus was tolerant, allowing for growth. In fact, Jesus had seemed so tolerant on this point that some have questioned the genuineness of these verses.<sup>8</sup>

The words of Jesus let us know that to hinder someone from doing good in his name is destructive for at least two reasons. First, the hindrance may cause the one who does good to stumble. Hindrances can come in all kinds of packages such as ignoring, criticizing, withdrawing and isolating, or some other such way. If that person is not hindered, he is more freely permitted to come to a greater maturity, at least there will be no action from believers that would push him further from the truth. "For he who is not against us is for us."

Second, the hinderer could himself be lost. Just as a reward

is assured to one who gives a cup of water because of the name, so it is certain that there is a reward to lose if a hinderer "causes one of these little ones who believes to stumble." Jesus does not elaborate on what is in store for such a person, but with a shudder we read the words, "It would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea."

Can any applications be made to the current religious scene? Of course, but not easily. Making application is tough for us. Remember that Jesus is not encouraging disciples to embrace false teaching for the sake of unity. Be tolerant of differences, but exercise care in aligning your belief and practice with New Testament doctrine. Let us draw no lines where the Bible does not. In his *Declaration and Address on Christianity Unity*, Thomas Campbell asserted that the only rule for faith and practice for Christians was the Bible. While inferences and deductions can be valuable, they cannot be bound upon the consciences of believers, and certainly must not be made tests of fellowship. "... No man has the right to judge, exclude, or reject his professing Christian brother; except in so far as he stands condemned, or rejected, by the express letter of the law."<sup>9</sup> Speaking of the differences that sectarianism can produce, Alexander Campbell said (in his debate with N. L. Rice), "It is not the object of our efforts to make men alike on a thousand themes. Let them think as they please on any matters of human opinion, and upon 'doctrines of religion,' provided only they hold the head Christ, and keep his commandments. . . ." <sup>10</sup>

As disciples, let us walk in the humility called for by the Master. Let us in humble discipleship destroy sectarian pride.

### IT MEANS SELF-RENUNCIATION

What is heaven worth to you? As verses 43 through 50 are read, that question keeps surfacing. Answers are sometimes glibly voiced, "Of course, heaven is worth everything." Those answers are given from polished pulpits and from padded pews. They are discussed from stuffed couches and air-conditioned cars. Those answers are often given by folks who

have renounced nothing. Renouncement is a matter of submission. We struggle with submission, not because we can be so arrogant, but because we are so afraid. We are afraid to give up the things in which we already trust. That is why Jesus said, "How hard it is to enter the kingdom of heaven!" (Mark 10:23-25).

Every believer in Christ is called upon to potentially renounce everything. Some are called upon to do so literally, but we must all be ready. In these verses, Jesus speaks of hacking off hands and feet, and gouging out eyes. It was Jewish custom to not refer to activities abstractly, but to the specific members of the body which are responsible for those activities. Hence Jesus speaks as he does.<sup>11</sup> In other passages of Mark, Jesus calls for the renunciation of possessions, of family, and of life itself (Mark 10:21, 28f., 8:34f.). This passage demands the complete sacrifice of sinful activity. The Lord is not calling for Christians everywhere to get their knives sharpened, but in the strongest manner possible, he is speaking of sacrifice. "Do not place members at the disposal of sinful desires. Renounce the member and save the body!" This is an unqualified renunciation.

Christ says, "Give me All. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work; I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself; my own will shall become yours."<sup>12</sup>

Humble discipleship is not as glorious as some writers paint it. There is a gritty side; it is hard-hitting and not in the least winsome. This world is one giant trap, and humble discipleship is a matter of beating the entrapments—even if you must lose something precious to do it.

Do you have the control to do it? That is really the subject of

the ending verses of Mark 9: self-control. How do you exercise self-control? How do you cut off the hand that does the sin? And what if we speak of a real weakness, something that keeps cropping up. What advice is there—"Try harder"? Is that it?

Maybe you are trying hard enough, and maybe you want to be set free so badly that you can taste it. Your frustration may come from focusing upon the wrong kind of self-control. There are at least two kinds. One emphasizes my ability and depends on my strength. A synonym for it is self-discipline. The other kind of self-control comes as fruit of the Spirit. I obtain it by God's power, not by striving against weakness, but by striving toward freedom. Self-discipline is not bad; it is simply a beginning point. It is inadequate over the long haul. Self-control, that precious fruit, is the mature approach to winning.

Self-control is doing what you want to do when you understand clearly what life is. Self-discipline is the exercise of the will on top of an urge. The self-discipliner is motivated by a sense of guilt and justice, and is, therefore, under constant pressure to perform. In the long haul, he may suffer from severe repression and volatile swings in behavior. The self-controller is the one who understands that real life is only in Christ, and he honors who he is in Christ by refraining from sin. He is exercising his freedom to reach his potential in Jesus.<sup>13</sup> By the blood of Christ, he has been set free from the futile way of life inherited from his forefathers (1 Peter 1:18ff.).

The self-discipliner moves out of a sense of duty rather than a passionate desire to move in a good direction. He thus becomes less in touch with the awareness of freely choosing what is wanted—and may burn out, as he is constantly under pressure to try harder and harder. But it is never hard enough. The self-controller, on the other hand, does not win by "trying harder," but by courageously facing the reality that life is dismally empty without Jesus and that nothing is going to get in the way of fellowship with the Master. The Lord's will for you is to humbly bring yourself under control by moving in the direction of life.

## CONCLUSION

Did the disciples in Capernaum that evening understand all that is involved in the call of discipleship? No. Therefore, the Lord allowed them to grow, day by day. The value of humility is not at once apparent. It might appear as grinding failure to the world around. But that apparent failure is real success momentarily concealed.

By God's help and through his grace, his people are winners. May these winners always joyfully live by a different set of rules—kingdom rules. May they in a spirit of selflessness bow the knee to King Jesus and none other, making the sectarian attitude a castaway. And may they victoriously move in the direction of life through Christ-demanded renunciation. May their story be your story.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 338-39.

<sup>2</sup>Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 150.

<sup>3</sup>All biblical quotations are from the NASV.

<sup>4</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, The Daily Study Bible Series, 2nd ed., (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press; reprint ed., Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 228.

<sup>5</sup>Jim McGuiggan, *The God of the Towel*, (Lubbock, Tex.: Montex Publishing, 1984), p. 71.

<sup>6</sup>Prentice A. Meador, *Who Rules Your Life?* (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 62, 64.

<sup>7</sup>Lane, *Mark*, p. 349.

<sup>8</sup>D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, The Pelican New Testament Commentaries (Middlesex, England: 1963; reprint ed., Middlesex, England: 1977), p. 253.

<sup>9</sup>Calvin Warpula, "Defining the Extremes of Liberalism and Conservatism Part 1, *Image* 4 (April 1988):14-15.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Lane, *Mark*, pp. 347-48.

<sup>12</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), p. 167.

<sup>13</sup>Traci Mullins, "The Sin in Self-Discipline: An Interview With Dr. Larry Crabb," *Discipleship Journal* 8 (March 1988): 18-21.

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## SERVANT DISCIPLESHIP

(Mark 10:35-45)

CLAY HUMPHREYS

A couple of prowlers broke into a department store in a large city. They successfully entered the store, stayed long enough to do what they came to do, and escaped unnoticed. What is unusual about the story is what these fellows did. They took nothing, absolutely nothing. No merchandise was stolen. No items were removed. But what they did do was ridiculous.

Instead of stealing anything, they changed the cost of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged. These clever pranksters took the tag off a \$395.00 camera and stuck it on a \$5.00 box of stationery. The \$5.95 sticker on a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor. They repriced everything in the store!

Crazy? You bet. But the craziest part of this story took place the next morning. (You are not going to believe this.) The store opened as usual. Employees went to work. Customers began to shop. The place functioned as normal for four hours before anyone noticed what had happened.

Four hours! Some people got some great bargains. Others got fleeced. For four solid hours no one noticed that all the values had been swapped.<sup>1</sup>

This story is hard to believe, but it should not be. We say this could never happen, but it has. Satan has changed the price tag of things in our world. Items that were valuable and essential to God are passed off as unimportant and trivial. We spend thousands of dollars and much of our time, effort, and energy on the worthless and ignore the important. Our values have been changed, and Satan is the reason. But more impor-

tantly, we have allowed this to happen. Look at our world today. What is important? What is essential? Value and importance are controlled by two things: appearance and performance.

### APPEARANCE

If you are a "beautiful person" who looks nice and dresses well, you are loved and accepted. Several years ago, I joined a health club. One Saturday, while working out, a lady came in who was not one of the "beautiful people." She was overweight and was not very attractive. No one helped her. She struggled with using the equipment, yet none of the attendants came to her assistance. Later a beautiful young lady in her short outfit came in to work out, and every attendant came to help this "beautiful person." It happens every day in every location in our country. Appearance controls our level of acceptance.

### PERFORMANCE

If I am good at work, fantastic at sports, if I exceed at school, or I am successful at dealing with the opposite sex, then I am accepted and fellowshiped. If I have power, position, prestige and the plaudits that are important in life, then people accept me—I am valuable to them.

This emphasis on appearance and performance excludes the vast majority of people. Very few are "beautiful people" in the eyes of our world. And if they are, it is not long before someone else pushes them out, and they are replaced. America has become a society of users. We use people. As long as they benefit us, and as long as they do the things that will help us to achieve our goals, they are a part of our lives. But as soon as they are no longer useful to us, we throw them out on the "trash heap" of life. It is like the "No Deposit-No Return" bottles that we are accustomed to using. As long as there is something in the bottle, we keep it. But as soon as the bottle is empty, we throw it away. Why? Because we place too much value on how they look and how well they perform to *our* standards. The church is also struggling with this emphasis on appearance and performance. We claim that "we don't do this," but we do.

It is not a struggle found only in twentieth century America, but one that Jesus faced during his ministry.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:35-45; NIV).

This passage addresses the values struggle between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God.

### THE WORLD'S VALUES

The world places value on self and what "I" can receive. This is the foundation of James and John's request. They are looking out for number one by asking for the chief seats in heaven, and this had to be an agonizing request for Jesus because he had just explained to the Twelve that he was going to Jerusalem to die. Yet James and John did not seem to care. They were thinking only of themselves and made their request before anyone else could. After all, if people do not look out for them-

selves, who will?

There are *three danger signs of the world's value system*. First, it is totally selfish. Their request is self-centered. Notice the pronouns in their request—"we" and "us." It is like two little children asking Daddy for a favor—"Daddy, will you. . . ." Self becomes the center of attention, and I wonder sometimes if we adult Christians are any different. How many times has a congregation planned something only to have some members say, "I don't want to do that," or "We've tried that before," or "We've never done it that way before." We selfishly want things done our way, and if it is not, we throw a temper tantrum. Someone suggests that we do something good for the kingdom of God, and we ball up our fists, jump up and down, and scream, "No. No. No. No." We must learn to set aside "self" and its selfish desires and look at what is best for the kingdom the church, God, and others. Jesus did not want to go to the cross, but he did because it was best for you and me.

Second, selfishness destroys people. Rarely will selfishness seek out what is best for a person. We see this in James and John's request. They asked for the chief seats, and Jesus asked if they understood the totality of their request (Mark 10:38). Their reply was, "Sure, we can take it." But did they really understand? No. Rarely does selfishness understand or bring out what is best for us. Why? Because it pushes God out of our lives, and we become our own god. Everything surrounds me and my desires. We try to satisfy ourselves until it destroys us and our effectiveness for the Lord.

Third, selfishness sparks division and disunity. Nothing promotes division more than selfishness. We see this in the church, at work, and in our social lives. Selfishness destroys unity. It happened here with the Twelve because when the other ten heard about James and John's request, they became indignant. They became angry. Why? Not because they were super-spiritual people. They became angry because James and John beat them to the punch and made the request first. Disunity set in—bickering, arguing, and anger between brothers. Jesus dealt with the situation immediately because he knew that disunity would destroy the effectiveness of his message. So often division starts very small—a misunder-

standing—a petty jealousy, selfishness, but it quickly grows out of hand. Disunity in the church destroys the plea and effectiveness of God's message. Jesus knew this and dealt with it quickly, and we must deal with our disagreements quickly and in a biblical way (Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15-17).

## GOD'S VALUES

Jesus points out that God's people are different and live by a different value system. He realized that the Twelve had lived in the world and had been exposed to the Gentile system of leadership—lording it over others and exercising authority. He recognized the influence that the world had over his people. Yet his reply to this form of leadership was simple—"not so with you." "The world may live this way, but my people do not." Greatness in the kingdom of God is being a servant—a simple statement but with profound consequences. It goes against our nature and desires to be a servant. We do not talk much about being a servant, and we do not look for many opportunities to serve.

God's value system places great value on people—all people. Everyone is important to God, regardless of their position, performance, or appearance. The kingdom of God is for servants, and heaven is full of servants—Abraham, Lazarus, Isaiah, Amos, the sycamore picker, Rahab, the prostitute, Mary, the mother of Jesus, Peter, and Andrew, the bringer of people, just to name a few. Servants—they are people who have served God and others.

We love to serve God. Doing so is noble and honorable. Besides, there is a reward for serving God. But we are not too sure about serving people. Serving others is humiliating and degrading. There may not be a lot of glory in it for us, and also, we might be used if we serve others. But if we serve others and are taken advantage of, we ought to praise God because we are in great company. People took advantage of Jesus, but he continued to serve others even to the very end.

Serving was the lifestyle of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He said that he came not to be served, but to serve. The ultimate example of his servant heart was that he came to this

world to be the ransom for all. If there was anyone who could have demanded to be served by others—it was Jesus. While he could have demanded that everyone serve him, he came to serve others, and he did. He touched a leper and made him whole again. He drove two thousand demons from a man and put him in his right mind. He put self-esteem back into the life of a woman who had been married five times and was living in adultery. He brought sight and joy to a man who had been blind from birth. Hanging on a cross between two thieves, he told one of them, “I love you,” and took the man home with him. He served and served and served. He is calling his people to do the same.

### CONCLUSION

Little Chad was a shy, quiet young fella. One day he came home and told his mother, he'd like to make a valentine for everyone in his class. Her heart sank. She thought, “I wish he wouldn't do that!” because she had watched the children when they walked home from school. Her Chad was always behind them. They laughed and hung on to each other and talked to each other. But Chad was never included. Nevertheless, she decided she would go along with her son. So she purchased the paper and glue and crayons. For three whole weeks, night after night, Chad painstakingly made thirty-five valentines.

Valentine's Day dawned, and Chad was beside himself with excitement! He carefully stacked them up, put them in a bag, and bolted out the door. His mom decided to bake him his favorite cookies and serve them up warm and nice with a cool glass of milk when he came home from school. She just knew he would be disappointed . . . maybe that would ease the pain a little. It hurt her to think that he would not get many valentines—maybe none at all.

That afternoon she had the cookies and milk on the table. When she heard the children outside she looked out the window. Sure enough here they came, laughing and having the best time. And, as always, there was Chad in

the rear. He walked a little faster than usual. She fully expected him to burst into tears as soon as he got inside. His arms were empty, she noticed, and when the door opened she choked back the tears. “Mommy has some warm cookies and milk for you.” But he hardly heard her words. He just marched right on by, his face aglow, and all he could say was: “Not a one . . . not a one.” Her heart sank. And then he added, “I didn't forget a one, not a single one!”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus did not forget one, not one. He came into this world to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. He is asking us, his children, to give our lives to him and to others. The mark of a child of God is a servant's heart, a servant's hands, and a servant's life.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lucado, Max, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1986), pp. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Dale E. Galloway, *Dream a New Dream* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1975), pp. 77-78.

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discipleship, it is important that we have a proper perspective of our calling, our life, and our reward.

## THE REWARDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

(Mark 10:23-31)

STAN LITTLE

Mark (the John Mark of the book of Acts) has recorded for us in a beautiful way the ministry of Jesus. Mark, the shortest of the Gospels, shows us Jesus the minister. Mark seems to place more emphasis on what Jesus did rather than what he said. The Gospel of Mark has been called the Gospel of deeds. It has also been called the Gospel of passion because it repeatedly calls to our minds what Jesus did for us on the cross. Perhaps Mark was one who held the philosophy that actions speak louder than words. Truly this is a book that shows us not only what Jesus said but also "The Jesus Lifestyle."

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was continually calling people to become his disciples (to live "The Jesus Lifestyle"). Twelve of these disciples we know especially well because they were made apostles (special messengers) (Mark 3:16-19). Jesus challenged many to take up their crosses, deny themselves and follow him (Mark 8:34).

In Mark 10:21 Jesus called a man to discipleship. The parallels to this passage are found in Matthew 19 and Luke 18. This man happened to be rich (Mark 10:22), a ruler (Luke 18:18), and he probably was a young man. The rich young ruler had one seemingly slight character flaw: He loved his money. The problem in this man's life was not his money, but his love of his money. It is the *love* of money that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). This young man's problem was not slight at all. His life may have been in his religion, but his heart was in his bank account. The thing that kept him from living "The Jesus Lifestyle" is the same thing that keeps many of us from discipleship today. He preferred the riches of the world to the far greater riches of being a true disciple of Christ.

In thinking of and studying the subject of the rewards of

## THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

In Mark 10:22-27, Jesus said that it is impossible for a person who trusts in riches to enter the kingdom of God. To try to make it possible, by any argument, for a camel to go through the eye of a needle weakens what Jesus was saying here.

Many people, like the rich young ruler, dream of a divided life. But like the double-minded man of James 1:8, the rich young ruler was unstable in all his ways. In Matthew 7 Jesus told a story of a wise man who built his house on a solid foundation and a foolish man who built his house on the sand. I am sure that Jesus would have said, "It is equally foolish to build your house on a spot where half of the house would be on rock and half on sand." The house would still be destroyed. It is an impossible dream to have a divided allegiance between two masters, for "we will either hate one and love the other or we will be devoted to one and despise the other" (Matthew 6:24). This young man thought he loved God, but in loving his money more, he had reduced the value of God Almighty to less than a metal coin or a bag of grain.

What is number one in our lives? Whom do we love? Whom do we serve? How do you spell m-a-s-t-e-r? Jesus did not say that it is impossible for rich people to enter the kingdom of God—just those who trust in riches.

Tim Walker in his book *Christian Living Is for Real* said,

This does not mean that a person must take a vow of poverty and literally sell everything he owns before he can follow Christ. It means that a person must decide that nothing in the world is more valuable to him than following Christ; that no one in the world is more important to him than Christ. We must realize that Jesus has always indicated that first is the only place he will stand in a disciple's life.<sup>1</sup>

There will be rich people in heaven. They will be people who loved God and just happened to be rich, not people who were

rich and just happened to love God. Abraham was not considered righteous because he was rich or poor (he happened to be rich). He was considered righteous because of his devotion to God and his faith in him above all else.

Most of us probably would not consider wealth a burden, but I believe this is how God looks at it. With wealth comes a very heavy burden of responsibility. When you add to that the weight of bearing our cross daily, it is "hard" indeed. Sooner or later, most believe that they must lose some weight somewhere, and the loss of weight usually comes through less cross-bearing than through giving from our pockets.

This is not really a matter of money, but a matter of the heart. C. E. W. Dorris said, "A man may have great wealth and love God more than the wealth, and be a Christian; just as a poor man may have little and love the little more than God, and never be a Christian."<sup>2</sup> It might not be dollars that keep us from the kingdom of God. We may love sports, recreation, or jobs more. Remember, it is an impossible dream to think that we can divide our loyalty between God and anything.

### REWARDS ARE THE FRUIT OF THE SEED OF SACRIFICE

Do you get the impression that the rich young ruler felt incomplete and unfulfilled? Why? He had kept the Law and was a religious man, and yet he still knew the kingdom was out of his reach. He was unwilling to make a sacrifice. His wealth stood as a wall between his heart and his Lord. He wanted to follow Jesus, but he would not remove this barrier to his complete devotion.

If we want to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves. In other words, we must recognize that we are slaves (*doulos*) to Christ (Ephesians 6:6) and righteousness (Romans 6:18). Christianity is not a democracy; it is a monarchy with Christ as king. "We don't invite Christ in to sit for a spell, but to move in. Christ will not come into our lives as some temporary guest to be invited only when we desire His company. No! He comes in as the new owner to convert what was our house into His abode."<sup>3</sup>

When we decide to follow Jesus, first we give our hearts to

him, then we give our sins to him, and then we give our lives to him. If Jesus owns us, heart and soul, what is our wealth except a blessing from him, to be used for him?

I was reared on a small farm in Northeast Arkansas. We planted three to four bushels of rice per acre. If all went well, we might harvest 100 to 150 bushels per acre. Even though it was a small farm operation, my father still had to invest \$80,000-100,000 each year. After all of that, the profit was dependent upon plants left naked to a myriad of pests and natural disasters. A farmer's life is a life of sacrifice and faith. I have seen farmers forced into bankruptcy because they received little for their products, but few go out of business because nature's law of sacrifice and return (sowing and reaping) did not work.

Jesus tells us in Mark 10:29-31 that the Christian can expect a hundred fold return on his investment, but it takes sacrifice (and investing). None of us expect to go to the bank and see how much interest we have earned if we have no money in savings. A devoted weight-watcher does not step upon the scales, having lost twenty-five pounds in six months without having given up a few things. If you would have asked any athlete in the Olympics, "Did you have to make sacrifices to be here?" he would tell you what a silly question that was.

Any gift we give for Christ or the gospel does not go unnoticed or unrewarded, not even a cup of water (Matthew 10:42).

Rewards are the fruit of the seed of sacrifice. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

Ruth Harms Calkin writes poetry in which the Lord gives answers to her statements. The following fits in well with the thought of reward being the fruit of sacrifice: "My life seems nothing more than an endless series of Good Fridays. Please let me know at least one resurrection morning. . . ." "First, dear child, you must die to yourself, and then you shall know the unimaginable joy of walking out of the tomb."<sup>4</sup>

## ALL THIS AND HEAVEN TOO

In Mark 10:28 Peter reminds Jesus, "We have left all to follow you!" And indeed he had (Mark 1:18). But, Jesus in turn reminds Peter that the disciple is rewarded *in kind* many times over. Peter may have left his brothers and sisters, but how many did he have after the Day of Pentecost? He may have had to be away from the loving care of his own father and mother, but how many men and women during his ministry took him in and cared for him as they would have their own sons? Peter may have had to leave land or worldly possessions behind, but how many benevolent brethren provided for Peter and gave him of the fruit of their land? He had more of the same things *in this life and heaven too!* "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

As a matter of fact, God will bless us so richly in this life that he must give us some persecutions to keep us humble, alert, and sensitive to others. In Philippians 3:7 Paul said, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Paul was so richly blessed that he needed a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble (2 Corinthians 12:7).

The Christian life is the greatest life on earth. God intended for us to lead happy, fulfilled lives. I recently went to a gospel meeting conducted by a non-cooperation congregation. For 1½ hours I listened as the church that Jesus died for was reduced to a loveless and workless bureaucracy. I got the impression that the only thing there was to enjoy in my Christian life was death. That is not what this passage in Mark teaches. My greatest joy will be when I receive my crown, but because of my life's direction in the Christian race, I get to enjoy the run.

## CONCLUSION

Success is the American cry! It seems that everyone is looking for a way to get ahead in life from a materialistic point of view. For some reason we believe that if we are not at the front of the pack, the head of the class, we are not successful. To get ahead as we climb "the ladder," there may be a few obstacles we have to step on, step over, or push aside. The real tragedy is

that too many times people become the casualties of the climb. It is an *impossible dream* to think that we can live this way and be rewarded eternally.

We must constantly remind ourselves that we will reap what we have sown and that *God's rewards are the fruit of sacrifice*. I love to run the "Christian race"! It is the only race where being last makes you the winner. It is not because we are apathetic or we drag our feet, but because we are helping others to be with us and ahead of us. We are running with them, not against them. Our only opponent in the race to God is Satan. The Christian race is the only race where bringing up the rear gives you the greatest blessings of life. We have *all this and heaven too*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Tim Walker, *Christian Living Is for Real* (Nashville, Tenn.: 20th Century Christian, n.d.), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>C. E. W. Dorris, *Commentary on Mark* (Nashville, Tenn.: Gospel Advocate Co., 1938), p. 239.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Reed, *What Controls Your Life?* (University, Ala.: Youth in Action Inc., 1972), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>Ruth Harms Calkin, *Lord I Keep Running Back to You* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1979), p. 111.

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## THE MISSION OF THE DISCIPLES

(Mark 6:7-13; 16:15-16)

STAN WEBB

"Our greatest American cities are, for the most part, teeming pools of human misery where people live out their days in a kind of ritual dance toward death without hope or illusion."<sup>1</sup>

The truth of this statement we know all too well, not only as it applies to the greatest American cities, but to every city, every village, and every town which make up today's world. The only message of hope is Christ. The only messenger of hope is the disciple of Christ. Our problem today is not that we do not know what to do. Our problem is that we do not want to do it.

To accomplish our role in taking the saving message of Christ into all the world, we must be changed—transformed as were the Twelve into fishers of men. It is not who we are now that matters most. It is our willingness to become. "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17).

"The Jesus Lifestyle" training of the Twelve for their mission is recorded for our learning. They did not become great fishers of men overnight. In fact, the night of Christ's betrayal, it did not appear that they would even make the first attempt (Mark 14:50). Only following the resurrection appearances such as we have summarized in Mark 16 and the empowering of the Holy Spirit which took place on Pentecost (Acts 2), did they launch fully into their mission.

I am optimistic concerning what can be done today toward the continuance in the mission of the disciples. Our present situation is surely no less desirable than that of the Twelve in Mark 15. Yet, we must be as willing as they to become! We must, through the training of "The Jesus Lifestyle," become willing fishers of men. Our texts provide for us opportunity to better understand the challenges that face us. Three chal-

lenges are most apparent and thus, provide the structure for this study.

### INTO THE FIELDS

This is the challenge of the early mission of the Twelve (Mark 6:7-13). Matthew's parallel (Matthew 10:1-15) follows Christ's statement, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). Matthew's account is more detailed than Mark's, but the intent of the mission is clearly conveyed in Mark's abbreviated rendering. The disciples of Christ belong in the field—out among the people.

It was not harvest time in Matthew 10 or Mark 6. It was not even planting time. It was ground-breaking time. It was time to go into the fields, to get out among the crowds of hurting people and "break the ground" for the coming kingdom. For nearly a year, the men had been spectators of all that Jesus was doing and saying. The time had come for them to rise from their spectators' seats and enter the arena of service in order to advance the kingdom of God. Christ was sending them out into the fields—out among the people. It is only upon their return that we find them referred to as "apostles" (Mark 6:30). The word "apostle" literally means "one sent out, one sent forth."

We must not miss the importance of this early mission. It is part and parcel of their mission training, yet more on the level of "on-the-job" than what they had previously known. Before, it was Jesus who touched lepers, healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, and raised the dead. They only watched in wonder! With unlimited power (Mark 6:7), the discipline of dependency upon God (Mark 6:8-9), and unlimited knowledge (Mark 6:12), they went out.

The underlying message or lesson to be learned in this early mission of the disciples was that their place was out among men. The business of the kingdom is people—leprous, diseased, sickly, down-and-out, downtrodden, sin-sick people. They were not equipped to tell, but to serve. And serve they did.

Too often we take Matthew 9:37 too literally. Instead of observing the action Jesus took, with all its risks, we simply "pray." We spiritualize our unwillingness to become servants with the familiar, "I'll pray about it and let you know." Surely we need "prayer warriors" who will devote themselves night and day to praying unto the Lord of harvest to send out laborers into the fields, but not in place of their own willingness to serve.

It was "The Jesus Lifestyle" which first demonstrated "people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." These men knew very little. Their message was not even new. John had gone before them preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2, 10:7). But the purpose of this mission was not to impress men with their knowledge. It was to impress them with their compassion in the name of Jesus.

Our business today is still people. We will never impress the masses with our knowledge, despite our many diplomas, if we do not first demonstrate our compassion. We are not expected to tell the world what we do not know. We are expected to show them who we know. That is why we are seeing more and more medical missions today. That is why the Nigerian Christian Hospital has for years touched the lives of many. It is a crying shame, however, that we have not found a way to do in America what we see done on foreign soil. A willingness to go into fields—where the people are—is imperative if we hope to win souls to Jesus. Knowing this himself, Jesus sends them on this early mission a good two years before he commissions them to take the gospel into all the world. His name must first be established through service.

Can you imagine how timid they must have been as they became administrators and not just admirers of God's healing power? I wonder if it startled them just a little to see the transformation of leprous skin, the strength renewed to a withered hand, or the breath of life returned to a lifeless corpse. Perhaps we should leave a little room in our imagination for an uncontrollable, "It worked!" ringing up to heaven as they began to learn of their usefulness to God.

How did they fare? Stedman aptly points out two successes

of this early mission. First, the name of Jesus was magnified, a clear indication of their faithfulness to the mission. Jesus, not themselves, was magnified. Second, Herod was frightened out of his wits, which we clearly see in the words that follow (Mark 6:14-17).<sup>2</sup>

Why can we not do what they were taught to do? Willingness is the only thing which stands in the way. "Into the fields" is a mission for all, not just a select few (Matthew 25:31-46). May we open our eyes to see the importance of going and serving in the name of Jesus. And lest anyone view that what has been discussed up to this point as the whole work of the kingdom, let us move on to the second challenge.

## INTO THE WORLD

When Jesus sent them out on the first mission, they were instructed to "go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6). Among other reasons for this limitation was their own spiritual inadequacy. As described by A. B. Bruce, they "were not fit to preach the gospel, or to do good works, either among Samaritans or Gentiles. Their hearts were too narrow, their prejudices too strong: there was too much Jew, too little of the Christian, in their character."<sup>3</sup>

Let us not forget, Judas was involved in the early mission. He was not present, however, when this commission to "go into all the world" was uttered (Mark 16:15-16). Why? Simply put, the earlier training did not take. He never became. He remained preoccupied with self and his own selfish gain. Transformation did not take place—thus, he perished.

Going out among people, feeding the hungry, touching the lepers, visiting the sick, and serving their needs is imperative. But while the Twelve were administrators of God's powerful compassion, they also remained students of Jesus. The man who says, "I have no time for learning. I'm just going to go," has missed this very important point. You do not remove yourself from the role of "learner." You never do that. You simply learn—as you go. Get in the people business as soon as

possible, do what you can do to relieve the stress and pain, tell them what you know, and keep learning as you go. Learn the deeper things of God. Learn the fuller meaning of his grace. The news gets better and better as the days of service go by. That is a promise.

Years had passed. The price for man had been paid. Through his resurrection appearances, Christ had given both the early church and us reason to believe and rejoice. His time was short. He would soon return to the Father. This would be his final commission. They would need to draw upon all that he had taught them and give diligence to this their (our) final mission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

These words may not be, and do not have to be, a part of the best manuscripts in order to be true. They are simply a restatement of what the resurrected Christ had been both saying and doing since resurrection day—"I am back . . . go tell somebody!" Spread the "Good News" to others. A more literal reading would be, "As you go into all the world, preach the gospel!"

"As you go" implies that they would continue in that which they had learned so long ago (Mark 6:7-13). Their business was still people. Their lives would still be spent out among the people, displaying the powerful compassion of God. But Christ would no longer be walking among them. No longer would he be there to chide them for their little faith or teach a second time what they should have learned the first time. The risk he was taking this time was far greater than when they were being sent on their first mission. Only a maturing faith and a confidence that Christ is the risen Savior would keep them on the job.

"... into all the world." They would only begin with the household of Israel this time. From Jerusalem they would take the gospel to all Judea and Samaria and then to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). God's kindness and grace is indiscriminate. His gospel is for "all the world."

"... preach the gospel to the whole creation." The word

"gospel" means "good news." And nothing spreads more naturally than good news. It may be the news of a newborn baby, a shining new car, a promotion at work, or straight A's in school. Whatever the news, if it is really good—tremendously good—it spreads naturally. Jesus is saying, "Preach this good news everywhere you go. Let all creation know that the Christ indeed is risen. He has overcome the world. He has secured the victory for those who believe."

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." The scene at Pentecost (Acts 2), as well as the entire book of Acts, allows us to see the apostles' fulfillment of this their final commission. Their training for the mission—"The Jesus Lifestyle"—kept them going, kept them telling, and kept them training others in this all-important "mission of the disciples."

This is how it should be with his disciples today. This is "The Jesus Lifestyle" evangelistic method. It is not so much method as it is life! The love of Christ leaves us no choice. It controls us. It compels us to tell the Good News as we go. Reaching quotas has nothing to do with it, and we will have nothing to do with them. Christ has set us free. Christ has given us a mission. The two are not in opposition. It is the risk he takes. He has no other plan!

## INTO THE CHURCH

As stated earlier, our problem today is not that we do not know what we are to do. Our problem is that we do not want to do it. This presents our third challenge—getting "The Jesus Lifestyle" into the church. We are not breaking much ground or planting much seed. We are still trying to arouse the laborers. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38). We must begin as Jesus began (Mark 6:7-13), teaching the church that her place is in the fields, out among the people who desperately need to taste the compassion of God, in the name of Jesus. We must not make today's disciples feel that they cannot show who they know until they know all there is to know. We must inspire them to

go into the fields and break ground.

Then we must teach them to tell the Good News as they continue to go. We must see by faith that the disciples' mission is our mission. We must learn, as they did, from "The Jesus Lifestyle." We must preach a love of Christ that leaves them no choice. We must train, equip, disciple (if you please), and then "let them go" (Mark 6:7-13, 16:15-16).

### CONCLUSION

Any attempt to fulfill the mission by means of "disciples lording over disciples" must be seen as an unacceptable method. Any effort to portray the mission as a "selective service" must also be seen as unacceptable. Neither portray "The Jesus Lifestyle." Jesus trained them in a way that was radical in comparison with anything they had known. Then he let them go!

Some are failing today in that they are not training, equipping, or discipling the flock to fulfill the mission. Others are failing in that they refuse to let them go. They cannot and will not take the risk which Christ was willing to take. It will either be a matter of one's maturing faith and confidence in the risen Savior, or it will not be a matter of "The Jesus Lifestyle."

Our good brother, Douglas F. Parsons, has so appropriately reminded us that Christianity is still radical:

#### "Radical Christianity"

Christianity is radical. Mr. Webster defines "radical" as "pertaining to or proceeding from the root; reaching to the center or ultimate source; affecting the vital principle, hence, thoroughgoing, extreme." We need to restore *RADICAL* Christianity.

*RADICAL* Christianity is a lifestyle, not a mindset. *RADICAL* Christianity is concerned with conquering, not cajoling, with sacrifice, not superficiality, with victory, not verbiage, with penetration, not pandering. *RADICAL* Christianity is in first gear, neutral has been stripped! *RADICAL* Christianity is courageous, caring, compelling, convincing, and contagious!

*RADICAL* Christianity moves mountains, crosses seas, pulls down walls, walks through closed doors. It suffers regularly, soars often, sweats daily, saturates everything and spreads everywhere. *RADICAL* Christianity calls sin damnable, hell hot, hypocrisy evil, and judgment sure. It doesn't back down, sit down, blow down, go down, slow down, turn down, or stay down!

*RADICAL* Christianity doesn't depend on the strokes of others to keep it going; it doesn't acquiesce in the face of loud opposition, it doesn't fold under pressure, tarnish under time, die under duress, fade under technology, or rot under moisture. *RADICAL* Christianity *always* lifts up Christ, knocks down barriers, marches over objections, overwhelms pessimism, gobbles up cynicism and tramples under skepticism.

*RADICAL* Christianity gives lavishly, prays convulsively, claims abundantly, works feverishly and preaches powerfully. *RADICAL* Christianity dares to challenge the prevailing standard to make it God's; it never plays to the crowds, nor waters down its position, nor adjusts its principles, but rather it is a thermostat that controls its surrounding, never a thermometer to adjust them.

*RADICAL* Christianity is never popular, convenient, stylish, or wealthy. You'll never need to stand in line to enter its domain. But, when the fighting's done, the battle over, and the dust has settled, it will be its adherents of whom the coming Christ will say, "Well done!"

Oh, my dear people! We need to recover *RADICAL* Christianity!<sup>4</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ray C. Stedman, *The Ruler Who Serves* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1976), p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 155-56.

<sup>3</sup>A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1971), p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>Used by permission.

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## THE DISCIPLES' MASTER

PATRICK H. PECK

"Weird" Al Yankovic, "Smokin' " Joe Frazier, "Mean" Joe Green. It is so convenient to be able to summarize the character of some individuals in one word. What about Jesus? John said, "He did so much the world could not contain the books that would be written. . . ." (John 21:25). Luke said, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us . . . here is my effort" (Luke 1:1-3). There are twenty-three chapters. Matthew does not state things quite so succinctly. That Gospel has twenty-eight chapters.

If one were to look for a word by which Mark would have described Jesus, he would have no problem finding it. Jesus was *amazing*. When people were around him they were "beside themselves with amazement," "driven out of their senses," "utterly astonished," and "overwhelmed." A look at the lifestyle of the disciple's Master within the Gospel of Mark must begin from the perspective of "The Amazing Savior."

### JESUS WAS AMAZINGLY PURPOSEFUL

With the style of Mark being so dynamic, as Jesus seems to run helter-skelter from one miracle to another, it would be easy to overlook the intense sense of purpose within this Gospel.

"The beginning of the Gospel . . . John" (Mark 1:1-8). He was not the Christ, but he had the purpose of preparing the way for the Christ. This was enough said with the exception of a few allusions to him and the parenthetical chronicle of his demise in chapter 6.

After his brief preparation, Jesus came on to the scene knowing exactly where he was going. He had a clear-cut and concise

message, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). The first chapter does not close without some dialogue with his disciples expressing that sense of purpose, "Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (Mark 1:38).

Nowhere are we given more comprehensive insight into the purpose of the Master than in Mark 10:45. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The body of Christ has grown into an increased awareness of the concept of servanthood of late, largely due to this verse. That is commendable, and we need to apply this verse but not prematurely. A woman sat down with the Bible one day and decided to open it at random and do whatever the first verse that she read said to do. She opened to Matthew 27:5: "Then he went out and hanged himself." She knew that could not be right, so she tried again and turned to Luke 10:37, where Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." Both of these verses have application, but not without some thought.

Jesus came to be our example. We have a tendency to mirror him without always thinking things through completely. Jesus was a servant; we must be servants. Jesus washed feet; we must wash feet. Jesus healed; we must heal. We must admit that our ministries do not exactly parallel his.

This is an exposition of Mark, but a passage in John will serve well here. We remember the foot-washing scene of John 13. We also remember the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Peter was a right arm man to Jesus, quick to follow and fight. If Jesus grabbed a towel, Peter, too, would grab a towel and start washing. "You will never wash my feet. I already understand that you want us to serve." Here is the shocker. Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me."

In our efforts to apply and follow Jesus, we often look at him as the example of what man should be. This he is. We cannot forget, however, that Jesus did not come merely to show us what man should be like, but what God is like. When God came near, he tried to tell man that he wants to serve him. God wants to serve man. Jesus did not say, "I have come to be an example

of servanthood." In essence, Jesus tried to communicate, *our salvation does not depend on our serving God, but on him serving us*. "My desire is to serve you, and I must serve you or you have no part of me. Then, and only then, can you serve." Before we can ever be servants of God, we must be served by God.

Consider Israel in battle. When they went out to fight for God, they were defeated. When God fought for them, they were always victorious. One cannot help but think of David, Gideon, etc.

The purpose of the Master was to communicate that God wanted to serve man. We then follow his example of service.

The disciples also had a purpose from the beginning. "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). This verse outlines the cycle of discipleship: being called, following Christ, being remade by him to, in turn, draw others to Christ.

### JESUS WAS AMAZINGLY POWERFUL

One cannot discuss the ministry of the Master in the Gospel of Mark without mentioning his miracles. In the first ten chapters, over 40 per cent of the narrative deals with miraculous events.

The section Mark 4:35—5:43 divides itself neatly into an outline of the amazing power of Jesus.

The first part (Mark 4:35-41) shows the power of Jesus over the elements. He was in a boat full of seasoned fishermen that were scared to death because of the nasty weather they were experiencing. They woke Jesus, and he said, "Quiet, be still." Mark says, "There was a *great calm*"; "The disciples were *awestruck*" (vv. 39, 41; NEB). (Emphasis mine.)

Jesus then went to a place where there was a man possessed by demons. "*No one* could bind him, even with a chain"; "*no one* was strong enough to subdue him" (Mark 5:3-4). (Emphasis mine.) Yet, when he saw Jesus from a distance, he fell on his knees before him. Power over spirits! The people could not handle his power and asked him to leave.

Mark records power over sickness in Mark 5:24-34. Here is a woman that had been bleeding for twelve years. She had

suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all the money she had, yet instead of getting better, she grew worse (v. 26). She touched the hem of his cloak and was healed immediately. She came and fell at his feet.

Mark then concludes the account he began in Mark 5:21. A synagogue ruler came to Jesus on behalf of his sick daughter. While on the way to his house, they received the message that the girl had died. Jesus had power even over death. He raised her, and the people were "completely astonished" (Mark 5:42).

The miracles of Jesus were amazing and very helpful for those involved. In Caesarea Philippi, Mark put the miracles in perspective. Jesus was the Christ. He came to die. The disciples (mainly Peter) did not care much for the plan. On the Mount of Transfiguration, a cloud appeared and a loud voice came from the cloud and said, "This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7; emphasis mine). The reason behind the powerful miracles was to give him credibility for his powerful and eternal message.

His message was powerful. "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one with authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Mark 1:21). He used their sources and taught much of what they taught, but with power.

Some are surprised at the lack of original material within the teachings of Jesus. Gerald Friedlander said, "The Jews of Jesus' day had nothing to learn from his message." This is an overstatement, yet one must agree to a certain extent.

One might be disappointed in the amount of didactic discourses in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived, yet Mark did not record that much of what he said. Mark did not record great sections of teaching material because Jesus did not come to bring volumes of new information. Why did Jesus not bring more new information? Because man does not need reams of new information. The Jews already had volumes of religious information. They knew what they needed to do. Consider the rich man in torment in Luke 16. He wanted to return and warn his brothers so they would not go to that terrible place. Abraham said, in essence, "They know what they need to do; they do not need any more information." Paul said that even the Gentiles have no excuse

for their behavior (Romans 1:20). "The law written on their hearts either accuses or defends them" (Romans 2:14-15). Man does not need information as much as *motivation*, at times *confrontation*, and certainly *salvation* because the fact is that all have failed, and they know it (Romans 3:23).

The powerful message of Jesus was the new perspective that he announced. He taught the need for flexibility and sincerity. To summarize, Jesus taught the presence of the Father in the lives of his children.

The Master was amazingly powerful, and he passed on that power. John 1:12 says, "Yet to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave power to become the sons of God." Jesus was amazed at those who doubted him: "If you can?" He replied, "All things are possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:23). He encourages, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

### JESUS WAS AMAZINGLY POPULAR

There can be no doubt of the popularity of Jesus as emphasized in the Gospel of Mark. At the home of Simon and Andrew, "The whole town gathered at the door" (Mark 1:33). He became so popular that he could not even enter a town but stayed outside in lonely places, and people came to him from everywhere (Mark 1:45). The crowd was so thick in one instance that a sick person who wanted to be healed had to go through the roof (Mark 2:1-5).

Great crowds came from everywhere. Why was Jesus so popular?

Jesus was popular because of his confrontation with the power elite. Two sections in this Gospel show Jesus dealing with the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Herodians. In Mark 2:1-3:6, he went about his business, regardless of how they liked it. They responded with the old adage, "If you can't beat 'em, kill 'em." Another section, beginning with the cleansing of the temple in chapter 11, shows his willingness to confront their hypocrisy. They questioned his authority; he silenced them (Mark 11:27-33). He told the parable of the

tenants, and they wanted to kill him but could not because of the crowd (Mark 12:1-12). One of the teachers of the Law acknowledged that Jesus was right, and he responded, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." From then on, no one dared to ask him any more questions (Mark 12:28-34).

Jesus was popular because of his compassion for people. He had compassion for the crowds (Mark 6:34), as well as for individuals. He reached out his hand and touched a leper (Mark 1:41). He cared about their hurts and hunger. And he hurt with them.

Jesus was popular because of his commonness. He was one of them. One of the most successful strategies in running for political office is to claim, "I am one of you!" Jesus was certainly one of the common people—a carpenter from a relatively poor family. He did not have the education that those in power could have boasted. He was a real person and the crowds loved it.

It is not our ambition to be popular, yet if we intend to reach people we must do it as Jesus did, as one of them. We will not reach people simply by being great scholars. The average person does not know a Greek participle from a Hebrew idiom. They do not care, and do not care that they do not care. Jesus spent time with people. He did what they did, wore what they wore, ate what they ate, and drank what they drank. He was successful with people because he was one of them. Paul said, "I have become all things to all men that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). He accepted people that no one else wanted. He healed them, and then they went and told everyone they knew how much God had done for them (Mark 5:18-20). This is called "evangelism."

### CONCLUSION

Jesus was amazing. He came to serve and to save. The ultimate works of his purpose and power were his sacrificial death and resurrection. Mark does not include much commentary; he just states the facts and allows the powerful message of Christ to confront the reader. As a result, he leaves no choice. Everyone reacts to Jesus. Either they are amazed and

follow the Master, or they choose to follow the hypocrites into hell, "where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,' and everyone will be salted with fire" (Mark 9:48-49).

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## THE DISCIPLING MOVEMENT (AMONG CHURCHES OF CHRIST)

FLAVIL R. YEAKLEY, JR.

During the 1987 Harding University Lectureship, in two special late night sessions, I presented a critique of the discipling movement among churches of Christ. I do not know if tapes are still available of those sessions, but virtually everything that I said in those sessions can be found in the book *The Discipling Dilemma*. (The Gospel Advocate Company published this book which first became available in February of 1988.) I edited the book and wrote the first half. The three other writers were Howard Norton, Don Vinzant, and Gene Vinzant. I believe that this book gives an accurate picture of conditions that prevailed in the fall of 1987 when the writing was completed. Since that material is now available, I do not plan to review the development of this movement up through the fall of 1987. Instead, I want to focus on more recent developments.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BOSTON HIERARCHY OF CHURCHES

The Boston Church of Christ has continued to grow rapidly. They baptized 1,227 people last year. Their Sunday morning attendance at the Boston Gardens now averages 3,600. The network of churches being directly or indirectly controlled by the Boston Church of Christ is growing. The Boston Church is now directly overseeing what they call "pillar churches" in Providence, New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego—with announced plans to start pillar churches in Miami and Washington, D.C. In addition, they are directly supervising pillar churches in Toronto, London, Stockholm, Paris, Munich, Johannesburg, Bombay,

Hong Kong, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Kingston. Furthermore, their pillar churches have already started planting and overseeing additional churches. The church in London has already started a new church in Sydney and is in the process of starting many others. The New York church has already started a new church in Sao Paulo, and the Sao Paulo church is starting a new congregation in Rio de Janeiro. Most of the foreign churches in the Boston hierarchy, however, have not yet developed third and fourth level churches.

The best examples of how third and fourth level churches are being developed can be found in the United States. Most of Boston's pillar churches are not yet old enough to have developed third and fourth level churches. The Chicago Church of Christ is the oldest and most fully developed of Boston's pillar churches. The Boston Church of Christ started the Chicago church in June 1982. The Chicago church is now directly controlling eight churches at the third level in this hierarchical structure. These are the discipling churches in Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Champaign, Normal, Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati. Furthermore, the Chicago church has announced plans to start third level churches in Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Dallas, San Antonio, and San Juan.

Several of the third level churches that operate under the oversight of the Chicago church have already announced plans to start fourth level churches. The Minneapolis church plans to start new churches in Duluth, Minnesota, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, Des Moines, and Ames, Iowa. The Milwaukee church plans to start new churches in Madison, Oshkosh, and Green Bay, Wisconsin. The church in Champaign plans to plant new congregations in Peoria, Springfield, and Carbondale, Illinois. The Kansas City church will send teams into Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska, and Wichita, Kansas. The St. Louis church will start new works in Columbia and Springfield, Missouri. The Indianapolis church plans to start fourth level churches in West Lafayette, Muncie, and Bloomington, Indiana. The Cincinnati church is sending teams into Dayton, Cleveland, and Toledo, Ohio. The team that will soon plant a third level church in Detroit has already announced plans to

begin fourth level churches in Ann Arbor, Lansing, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Eventually, these fourth level churches are expected to start fifth level churches in the smaller cities and rural areas around them.

In preparation for starting some third level churches, several pillar churches are now being "reconstructed," and some pillar churches are "reconstructing" churches they supervise. The Boston church is preparing to reconstruct the Mission church in San Diego. They, in turn, have already started reconstructing a small discipling church in Albuquerque. In this case, virtually the entire Albuquerque congregation was required to move to San Diego.

A similar exodus was recently required by the Atlanta church for the discipling congregation in Birmingham. An article in the *Birmingham News* on May 27, 1988, listed this required exodus to Atlanta as one evidence of the cult-like control being exercised over the members of the discipling church in Birmingham.

Radical reconstruction sometimes involves the requirement that all the members of a congregation move to the congregation that is controlling them so that they can be disciplined before being sent back to begin their work again. In other cases, it is just the leadership that is moved away for further discipling. When this happens, the controlling church sends in its own leaders and a team of workers to take over the church that is being reconstructed. The Atlanta church has already announced plans to begin new congregations in: Raleigh, Durham, and Greensboro, North Carolina; Knoxville, Tennessee; Lexington, Kentucky; Little Rock, Arkansas; Jacksonville, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; Norfolk, Virginia; Huntington, West Virginia; and Jackson, Mississippi. Their plan is to take over and reconstruct any discipling churches already existing in these cities.

In a radical reconstruction, all of the members of the congregation that is being taken over are interviewed to make sure that they will accept this arrangement and submit to the leadership hierarchy. Those who will not submit and any others who are judged to be less than totally committed are disfellowshipped. The result of this approach has been that virtually

every discipling church that has been taken over by the Boston hierarchy has been split. Today, in those cities, there is a discipling church that is a part of the Boston hierarchy and an independent discipling church.

As the churches in the Boston hierarchy have greatly increased the level of submission and commitment required for membership, one result has been that their drop-out rate has greatly increased. In many of these churches, the number of members dropping out now exceeds the number of people being converted.

The attitude of people in the Boston hierarchy of churches toward other churches of Christ has become much more judgmental in recent months. On January 8, 1988, Tom Brown preached a seminar at the Mission church in San Diego. In his sermon he told about attending one of our church-related schools. He observed that his teachers were not evangelistic. He observed that students—many of whom were children of elders and preachers—were not evangelistic, and some were openly immoral. He said that he did not understand then, but now he understands. His explanation was: "They were not disciples; they were not Christians; they had never been saved; they were never taught right."

Recent comments by leaders of the churches controlled by Boston indicate that they have now decided that Alexander Campbell was not a Christian. They have concluded that the real Restoration Movement did not begin until the current discipling movement was started. More and more, they are seeing themselves as being a totally separate fellowship from other churches of Christ. Those who come to them from other churches of Christ are required to be re-baptized. They are even re-baptizing those who come to them from the older Crossroads-type discipling churches. I know of several of their preachers who have now been re-baptized three or four times. Last February, I was told that there were nine elders among all the churches in the Boston hierarchy, and six of them have been re-baptized. That includes Al Baird, one of the two elders of the Boston Church of Christ, who was re-baptized in April of 1987.

A controversy has developed within the discipling move-

ment over the issue of qualifications for the eldership. A few who were elders in discipling churches resigned from the eldership when they were re-baptized. They believed that their re-baptism made them new converts and thus unqualified for the eldership. The six re-baptized elders presently serving discipling churches in the Boston hierarchy did not resign.

Another controversy has developed within the discipling movement over the doctrine of "progressive revelation" now being taught by the Boston church. This doctrine seems to put the orders of their leaders at the same level of authority as the commands given in the Bible. If this doctrine spreads, we are likely to see even more radical changes in doctrine and practice in the future.

The final development in the Boston hierarchy of churches that I want to mention is, in many ways, the most tragic. There has recently been a tremendous increase in the number of emotional and spiritual casualties created by these churches. Counselors in Boston and the cities where Boston controls other discipling churches are being flooded with clients who have been seriously damaged psychologically and spiritually by their participation in these authoritarian groups. A major news item in San Diego this past spring concerned a member of the Mission congregation in San Diego who was kidnapped and "deprogrammed" by a counselor who specializes in working with cult victims. I would like to make it clear that in reporting this incident, I am not approving what was done in this case. Kidnapping is against the law, and deprogramming is just as manipulative and unethical as anything that is done by the cults. Furthermore, deprogrammers frequently destroy the faith of their "clients." I simply mention this case in San Diego as one example of the negative publicity now being given to the churches of Christ because of the authoritarianism of the discipling movement.

## THE RESPONSE OF OTHER CHURCHES OF CHRIST

One of the most significant developments in recent months is that many of the Crossroads-type discipling churches have made a clear break with the Boston church. The Crossroads

Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida, is where the discipling movement was first introduced into churches of Christ. Recently they decided to reject the Boston hierarchy and the various doctrinal changes now coming from Boston. Other discipling churches that have rejected the Boston system include: Miami-Gables and the discipling church in Tampa, Florida; the South Baton Rouge church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; the Rocky Mountain congregation in Fort Collins and the church in Boulder, Colorado; and the Central congregation in Huntsville, Alabama.

Some of the independent discipling churches now clearly recognize the mistakes that were made in the past in the churches of the discipling movement. They are taking positive steps to correct past abuses. They are moving much closer to fellowship with other churches of Christ. However, some independent discipling churches are still doing most of the things that other churches of Christ find objectionable in the Boston system. They just are not going quite as far as the Boston church; they deny that they are guilty of doing these things, and they do not use the false doctrines the Boston church uses to justify its practices.

Most churches of Christ never were identified with the discipling movement in any way. Indeed, most are still unaware that such a movement even exists. Some have heard about the errors of "Crossroadsism," although they do not really understand what that error is or was, and they have not even heard about the Boston hierarchy of churches.

Among churches of Christ that are not identified with the discipling movement, there are many different attitudes toward the Boston system. Some are still trying to build bridges of understanding and fellowship. Most who tried to function as bridge builders in the past have given up on that effort because of a total lack of responsiveness on the part of the leaders of the Boston-style discipling churches. At a meeting in Denver, Marty Wooten recently ridiculed these bridge builders. He said, "We don't want to build bridges to dead churches."

There is a growing awareness among the churches that are not identified with the discipling movement that a balanced

approach is needed in this matter. They realize that churches in the discipling movement have done many things that are good. They also realize that there are many ways in which other churches of Christ need to improve. This is the approach that Howard Norton, Don Vinzant, Gene Vinzant, and I tried to take when we wrote *The Discipling Dilemma*. We tried to make that study as balanced, objective, fair, and honest as we could.

That balanced approach, however, is not appreciated in all segments of our brotherhood. Some have told me that we should not have said anything good about "them" or anything bad about "us." Some churches of our fellowship have taken a totally negative attitude toward the churches of the discipling movement. Some of these churches object to the authoritarianism that is coming from the Boston church, although they are just as authoritarian in their own way. They strongly objected when the Boston church rejected our doctrine of congregational autonomy, but they have violated the autonomy of mission churches in order to save them from an imagined takeover by the Boston church. Some Christians have become absolutely paranoid when it comes to the discipling movement. They view any change in methodology as being "Crossroadsism." A widely-circulated tract that claimed to expose the errors of "Crossroadsism" from the inside is a good example. This tract outlined the authoritarian abuses of a bus minister in Granbury, Texas. I know this brother. He admits that many of the charges made against him are true. He now realizes how wrong he was. The only trouble is that he never had anything to do with Crossroads, Boston, or any other discipling church. The closest he ever came was when he heard Chuck Lucas speak at the Tulsa Workshop, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Of course, in the opinion of some, the Tulsa Workshop and the two congregations that alternate sponsorship of that event are shot through and through with Crossroadsism.

I can speak from personal experience on this matter. I was an elder of the Garnett Road congregation and later a member of the Memorial congregation—the two congregations that alternate sponsorship of the Tulsa Workshop. Those churches might be called "bus ministry churches," but they are not

discipling churches and never have been. If the Garnett Road church is a part of the discipling movement, why did a discipling church recently pull off from Garnett Road to form an independent discipling church in Tulsa? Why did the Garnett Road church refuse to have Chuck Lucas on their program any more after a meeting with him, the Crossroads elders, Kip McKean, Tom Brown, and other leaders of the discipling movement? I am sure that the Garnett Road church made many mistakes, and the Memorial congregation was not perfect either. There were things done and said at the Tulsa Workshop that I wish had never been done and said. But the Garnett Road church, the Memorial church, and the Tulsa Workshop are not and never have been identified with the discipling movement.

This one tract, however, is only a symptom of a much larger problem. There are people in our brotherhood who have decided that anything the Boston church is for, they are against. The Boston church is doing a lot of evangelism at home and mission work abroad. They are baptizing a large number of people. These brethren, therefore, have—in effect—become anti-evangelism, anti-mission work, and anti-church growth. In recent years I have seen a strong and growing rejection of church growth as a worthy goal. In *The Discipling Dilemma*, I tell about one congregation where the elders said, "We forbid any evangelism in this church other than the preaching our preacher does from the pulpit where we can control it and make sure it is scriptural." They would not allow their members to conduct home Bible studies or do any personal evangelism because they said, "That is nothing more than the Crossroads philosophy," which shows how little they knew about what was going on.

There are places where the church-as-it-is may have to die so that the church-as-it-ought-to-be can be built. When we look at the discipling movement, we need to recognize all its many errors. We must not, however, throw out the baby with the bath water. The Bible requires evangelism. Mission work is essential, not optional. Home Bible studies can be very effective. A small group approach can be useful in many situations. All of the "one another" passages in the Bible must be taught

and practiced. Christians need to learn how to get into one another's lives in a healthy, supportive, nurturing, non-manipulative way. We do not need "disciplers" who are over us in the Lord, but we sure do need Christian friends. It is not essential for every congregation to spend a large portion of its budget to pay for a church building. There are situations where rented facilities would work just as well. There may be places where existing congregations that find it difficult to be evangelistic need to encourage the formation of a new congregation in the same community and let that new congregation develop methods of outreach that might never work in the older congregations. Do not burn down the barn to get rid of the rats. In our effort to flee from Rome, we must not run all the way past Jerusalem and end up in Babylon.

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## EVANGELISM IN MARK: AN OVERALL VIEW

EARL EDWARDS

The word "evangelism" is never used in Mark, nor, indeed, in the New Testament. However, there is a story of evangelism in that book, and it is told, by and large, through the use of two Greek terms: *euangelion* (gospel or good tidings) and *kērussein* (preach or proclaim). In Romans 16:25 the gospel (*euangelion*) is used as a synonym of "preaching" (KJV) or "proclamation" (NIV). "Preaching" and "proclamation" in this passage are attempts to translate the Greek word *kerugma* (which can also be translated "thing preached").

The book of Mark starts by describing the "beginning of the gospel [*euangelion*] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).<sup>1</sup> Its beginning consists of the fulfillment of a prophecy of Isaiah who had said a person would come to prepare the way for Christ. That person had come in the person of John the Immerser who came "preaching [*kērussein*] a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). But John the Immerser made it plain that the fullness of the gospel (good tidings) was not to be sought in him, rather in the one who was "mightier" than he was and who was coming "after" him, the one who was to baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7-8). The context makes it clear he spoke of Jesus. (Cf. John 1:27-29.) So, in the introduction of the book we learn that the crux of the gospel (or Good News) centers in the activity and person of Jesus.

### JESUS EVANGELIZES

Then, as John had predicted, "Jesus came into Galilee preaching [*kērussein*] the gospel [*euangelion*] of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;

repent and believe in the gospel' " (Mark 1:14-15).

Notice the content of Jesus' message. It is called the gospel (Good News) "of God." That is, it originated in heaven with God rather than with men. For many centuries God had promised to send a great "anointed one" who would greatly bless his people by putting an "end to sin" (Daniel 9:24-27). For centuries faithful Jews had nurtured this hope of a Messiah in their breasts, and now Jesus comes preaching that the "time is fulfilled" and God's kingdom "is at hand" or near. That obviously meant the Messiah was near also, for he was to usher in the kingdom. In fact, about this time Nathaniel said to him: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (John 1:49), and Jesus did not rebuke him. Though Jesus was not openly declaring it yet, he was obviously implying that he was the Messiah who was about to usher in the kingdom. This is the first earth-shaking part of Jesus' message. No wonder it sent ripples clear to Jerusalem!

And since the kingdom was at hand, the Jews of that day needed to prepare for it by doing two things: repenting and believing in the gospel. To "repent" is to change one's mind. The change is brought about by godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10) and results in a change of lifestyle (Matthew 21:29). Jesus was telling the Jews of that day (who boasted about Moses' Law) to repent of their superficial, hypocritical half-observance of that Law in order to get back in a proper relationship with God (Matthew 15:1-8). Repentance is, in this case, placed before belief because they already believed in God but were not living up to that belief. The second thing those Jews needed to do to prepare for that kingdom was to "believe the gospel," that is, the Good News concerning the incoming kingdom and the salvation God was about to offer through Jesus, the Messiah. Later, in fact, Jesus will say "unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins" (John 8:24), and the context clearly indicates he was claiming to be the Messiah. This is the message Jesus preached. This is what evangelizing meant for him. And notice that he first preached this message in certain parts of Galilee, but then he also went elsewhere into other villages with the message, for, said he, I must "preach [*kêrussein*] there also; for that is what I came out for. And he

went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching [*kêrussein*] and casting out demons" (Mark 1:38-39). Jesus preached continually and over a broad area.

### THE APOSTLES EVANGELIZE

In Mark 3, after certain of his disciples have been with him for considerable time, he appoints some of them as apostles. This chapter says:

And he went up to the mountain and summoned those whom he himself wanted and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach [*kêrussein*] and have authority to cast out the demons (Mark 3:13-15).

The NIV, following certain early manuscripts, adds after the word "twelve" in this passage—"designating them apostles." And whether or not it was in the original text, such is implied. And this is logical because apostle means "one sent," and here he sends them to preach. Later, he once again "summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs" (Mark 6:7-13). That passage says they "went out and preached [*kêrussein*] that men should repent." Notice the similarity between their message and that of Jesus.

### THOSE WHO ARE HEALED EVANGELIZE

In Mark 5 we read of the Gerasene demoniac out of whom Jesus cast a plurality of demons which went into the herd of swine (Mark 5:1-20). Out of gratitude the liberated man desired to follow Jesus, but Jesus told him instead to go home to his people and "report to them what great things had been done" for him. And "he went away and began to proclaim [*kêrussein*] in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him." This was news that was too good to keep, and so he spreads it to his friends and neighbors just as Jesus commanded. Would that all who have been healed spiritually (forgiven of sin) would be as faithful in spreading the gospel (Good News). Jesus expects that of all his disciples. In fact, he said to the apostles (but such applies to us also; see part 3 in this

series), "Go into all the world and preach [*kêrussein*] the gospel [*euangelion*] to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

Note that he now expects that gospel to be preached in "all the world" and to "all creation." The apostles took him seriously and "went out and preached [*kêrussein*] everywhere" (Mark 16:20). Paul especially went out into the Gentile world and evangelized the nations. We, too, must realize what a precious piece of Good News (gospel) we are hiding (under a bushel!) and go out and let people know.

### CONCLUSION

In Mark 8 Jesus challenges all of his disciples (including us) to set our priorities right and "lose" our lives for his sake and that of the gospel (*euangelion*) (Mark 8:35). He says to save your life for yourself means selfishness and eventually eternal condemnation, but to lose it means selflessness and service to others and happiness and fulfillment here and eternal salvation in the hereafter. God help us to give our lives to evangelizing. Not all will go to foreign fields. Not all will do formal one-on-one teaching here, but all can and should talk to neighbors, pray for the lost, and support every effort to carry this gospel. This news is too precious to be concealed!

### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>All quotations of the Bible are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960) unless otherwise stated.

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## EVANGELISM IN MARK: AN AGRICULTURAL PARABLE

EARL EDWARDS

In the first of this series we observed that the story of evangelism in Mark is basically told through the use of two Greek terms: *euangelion* (gospel) and *kêrussein* (preach). Neither of these terms is used in our text for this lesson (which is Mark 4:1-20), and yet the passage has a great deal to say about evangelism. In fact, it is a parable which illuminates the various elements of evangelism.

A parable is something "cast down beside" something else. That is, Jesus would take something well-known to his audience and by that illustrate something about the unknown kingdom of God. This parable which we are about to discuss has sometimes been called the "parable of the sower" or the "parable of the soils," but I prefer to call it simply an agricultural parable.

At the time of this teaching Jesus is in Capernaum, a city in the northern province of Galilee. He had by now irked the officials, and the synagogues were no longer open to him for the most part. Thus he teaches from a boat on the seashore (Mark 4:1). He speaks about the sower, the seed, and the various soils. First, we will discuss what he says about the sower.

### THE SOWER

In verse 3 Jesus is quoted as having said, "Behold, the sower went out to sow" (Mark 4:3).<sup>1</sup> Maybe as he spoke, Jesus pointed from his boat to some farmer on the gentle slopes back behind Capernaum who had left the village and was working a strip of land he owned on the side of a hill. Perhaps he had a sack over his shoulder and was scattering small grain from side to side

as he walked across the field, first one way and then the other.

But in the spiritual realm, what does the sower represent? Jesus was the first sower. In fact, at this very moment he was scattering seed. The disciples (and especially his apostles) were to learn to be sowers. Later, he will tell his apostles to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). As they attempt to obey this command they are flogged, but "they kept right on teaching and preaching" (Acts 5:42) despite the danger to their physical persons. They did this because it was imperative that they be faithful as sowers. All Christians are to be sowers today. It is true that not all are "teachers" in the sense of public teaching (Ephesians 4:11; James 3:1). But, in the broader sense, all who have been Christians long enough to have learned the basic elements of the gospel message "ought to be teachers" (Hebrews 5:12). We ought to sow the word in the hearts of others. Our hearts should be so full of Jesus and his word that it would "spill out" and be absorbed by our neighbors. Remember how those who fled from Jerusalem because of persecution "went about preaching the word"? (Acts 8:4). The original word for "preaching" here is not limited to just public preaching; it can also be translated "announced." All of us can announce the love of God to our neighbors. We can and should be sowers of this message. We should learn to really mean it when we sing:

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach  
The precious things Thou doest impart;  
And wing my words that they may reach  
The hidden depths of many a heart.

O fill me with Thy fullness, Lord,  
Until my very heart o'erflow;  
In kindling thought and glowing word,  
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.

God help us to be conscientious sowers of his word. And let it be noted, that when we get to where our hearts overflow with gratitude toward Jesus like the hearts of those Christians of the first century, then we will be telling others about him.

## THE SEED

As the sower was sowing, his "seed" (Mark 4:4) fell on various types of soil. In the actual sowing Jesus referred to, the sower was probably scattering either wheat or barley on the cultivated hillside. These were common grains in Palestine at the time, and one would often see them being sown at certain times of the year.

Spiritually speaking, the "seed" Jesus referred to is the word of God. In fact, in the parallel in Luke, Jesus explains that "the seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). But notice the form which the "seed" takes here is that of "parables." Verse 2 says he "was teaching them many things in parables" (Mark 4:2). We have already defined the term "parable," but it might be well to make some other observations about parables: (1) This form of teaching was known to Jews (cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-7). (2) It is easier to get people's attention with this story-type teaching. (3) They both revealed and concealed. In fact, in private the apostles asked Jesus "about the parables." Jesus' answer indicates that these parables helped the sincere seeker to get even deeper into the truth, while it concealed the truth for his insincere critics who came to trap him in order to put him to death (Mark 4:10-12).

But again whether in parable or in other form, the seed is the word, and the spiritual sower, whether then or now, must be careful to sow it and only it, not the philosophies of men. As the poet has written. . . .

We search the world for truth,  
We cull the good, the true, the beautiful,  
From graven stone and written scroll,  
And all old flower-fields of the soul;  
And, weary seekers of the best  
We come back laden from our quest,  
To find that all the sages said  
Is in the book our Mothers read.

Only God's word is the proper seed, for as Jesus said, "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). As we go out to sow, let us be certain we are sowing only the

word of God, for only it is life-giving.

### THE VARIOUS SOILS

Jesus says that as the sower sowed, his seed fell on various kinds of soil. First, he notes that some seed fell on soil "beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up" (Mark 4:4). Even today, Palestine is, for the most part, unfenced. Therefore, there are frequently long narrow fields divided by foot-paths for wayfarers and sheep. These paths are hardened by hundreds of years of use. Thus, the seeds that fall on the edge of these roads had no chance of penetrating the soil. Therefore, as soon as the sower had passed on, the birds swooped down and consumed the seeds. It, therefore, never even began to germinate. What kind of human heart does this represent? The person who hears the gospel and maybe even has the "urge" to investigate further, but he puts it off and, as Jesus explains, Satan "takes the word away," (Mark 4:15) and he never "gets around" to acting on his "urge" because of his indifference to spiritual things.

Second, Jesus says some seed falls on "rocky ground where it did not have much soil" (Mark 4:5ff.). Much of Palestine, even now, has a thin layer of earth covering thick limestone rock. Thus the seed that fell there would germinate and grow a little, but since its roots could not go down, the plant would wither in the hot Palestinian sun. What kind of human heart does this represent? It is the kind of heart which enthusiastically receives the word when it is preached (in fact, in the explanation Jesus says this type of soil "immediately received it with joy," Mark 4:16). This is the type of person who probably even gets emotional about his conversation, but then, when difficulty arises (like "affliction or persecution," Mark 4:17), he falls away because he had not thought through the decision before making it. It may be troubles and disputes within his congregation or family problems, or economic difficulties. Whatever the immediate cause, the real cause of the fall is that he did not think the matter through before deciding; he did not put down roots. He needs to be, as Paul expresses it, "rooted and grounded in love" (Ephesians 3:17). Someone has well

said, "It takes a 5 per cent effort to begin, but a 95 per cent effort to continue faithful."

Third, Jesus says, "Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop" (Mark 4:7). Even today there are large thorn bushes around parts of the Sea of Galilee. Sometimes, in that day, the farmers would cut them but leave the roots of the plant. Of course, the plants eventually grew back. And since they grow faster than the grain, they would take both light and moisture from the grain, "choking" it out. What kind of human heart would this represent? The person who is a Christian but who crowds his life with so many other activities that he gives almost no time (other than possibly attending some services) to spiritual activities. He fills his life with some activities that have no purpose and others that may be good (i.e., civic clubs, parent-teacher associations, etc.) but which ought to be secondary to spiritual things. The end result is that he has almost no time to be really involved in spiritual things, and therefore, his soul is gradually dwarfed, and it shrivels. The final destiny of this type (even though he may "attend some services") is disastrous, for Jesus says he "takes away" (or cuts off) every branch that does not bear fruit and casts it "into the fire" (John 15:1-6).

In the fourth place, says Jesus, there is "the good soil" and the seed which fell there yielded "a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold" (Mark 4:8). It should be noted that even in the "good soil," some fields are more fertile than others; some fields produce thirty bushels for every bushel of seed grain, others sixty for each bushel, and others one hundred for each bushel. Probably the most fertile part of Palestine was the Valley of Jezreel where one might well have realized one hundred bushels for each bushel of seed grain. But what kind of human heart does this represent? Those who really "hear," that is, those who listen and "accept" it (Mark 4:20). They practice the word in their own lives and become advocates of Christ as the remedy for the world's ills, that is, they spread the glad tidings (gospel) to others. As Paul puts it "the fruit of the Spirit" is seen in their lives (Galatians 5:22-23),<sup>2</sup> and they will, as Daniel says, help "lead the many to righteousness" (Daniel 12:3). It may well be that hearts of "good soil" will not

necessarily be doing the public preaching or the one-on-one formal Bible studies with non-Christians, but they will be involved in some way in praying for, inviting and encouraging non-Christians to come to the light. They will influence them because good soil is productive. In fact, Paul says we are in Christ "that we might bear fruit for God" (Romans 7:4). And though "fruit" here is not limited to winning others, it certainly does include such.

### CONCLUSION

Parables, as Jesus uses them, normally have one major thrust or emphasis. What is the emphasis of this one? Jesus is saying here that when we try to influence others for him, some may not listen, others will obey and fall away, but, in general, if we will keep on teaching and refuse to grow weary in well-doing, some seed will fall on "good soil" and germinate, that is, *some will be converted*. Therefore, he says to us, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9). Are we listening? Generally speaking, he is saying if we are not bringing others to Christ, it is because we are not sowing the seed. What about you, Christian brother or sister? Are you a faithful sower who is bearing fruit for the one who redeemed you?

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>All quotations of the Bible are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960) unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup>The "fruit" stipulated here is "love, joy, peace, etc."

## EVANGELISM IN MARK: THE GREAT COMMISSION

EARL EDWARDS

We have treated the Greek words *euangelion* (gospel) and *kêrussein* (preach) and then the agricultural parable ("parable of the sower") of chapter 4. In this last lesson, we will treat Mark's version of the "Great Commission"<sup>1</sup> and compare it with its parallel in Matthew.

### MARK'S VERSION OF THE TEXT

The crux of Mark's version is this: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).<sup>2</sup>

### MATTHEW'S VERSION

The commission in Matthew reads: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; . . ."

### EXPLAINING MATTHEW'S VERSION

In Matthew's version Jesus mentions, in verse 18, that he has received "all authority in both heaven and earth." He then says, in verse 19—*poreuthentes*—the KJV translates this word "go." But, it is not an imperative; it is, instead, a first aorist, nominative, masculine plural participle.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the best translation is probably "*having gone*." Then, in verse 19, Jesus goes on to say that (once they are there) they should—*matheteusate* (this is the controlling verb and the form is imperative)—

"make disciples." Further, they are to make disciples of—*ta ethne*—"all the nations."

The next instructions in Matthew's version give the listener/reader *the way or manner in which the disciples are to be made*: by "baptizing" (v. 19b) plus "teaching" (v. 20a). These are two identical verb forms (participles) which are not connected by the "and" (*kai*) in Greek. This indicates the two actions are a part of *one process*: "making disciples." That is, disciples are made by both baptizing and teaching. It is also clear from this passage that one becomes a disciple *at his baptism* and not later (following months or years of post-baptismal training) as some in our brotherhood are teaching today.

### EXPLAINING MARK'S VERSION

Just as in Matthew's version, the word that is, in the KJV, translated "go" is *poreuthentes* (a non-imperative) and should be rendered "having gone." Then, after "having gone" they are to—"keruxate" (controlling verb which is in the imperative)—that is, preach or proclaim. So, the only two imperatives we have in the Great Commission are "make disciples" and "preach." What is sometimes translated as if it were an imperative (that is, "go") is actually not in imperative form.<sup>4</sup>

### THE APOSTLES' FRAME OF MIND

Why did Jesus not command the apostles to "go" out in order to preach? Does Jesus not intend for his apostles to go out to the various nations of the world? To properly answer this question one must understand the apostles' frame of mind. Take, for example, the apostle Peter. During Jesus' trials he is a halting, faithless person who denies Jesus with the use of profanity (Matthew 26:69-75). A few months later he is a courageous disciple who boldly withstands the threats of the highest court in the land and continues to declare the gospel (Acts 5:27-32). What brought about such a drastic change? In the meantime, he had seen Jesus resurrected from the dead and had, therefore, been "born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). After having seen the resurrected Christ he understood, as Paul affirms,

that Christ was, indeed, the "Son of God" (Romans 1:4). With this conviction burning in his breast he could do no less than "go" everywhere telling others of this Jesus. The news was too good to keep! Therefore, there was no need to tell him or the other apostles to go.

It is true, of course, that Peter and the other apostles had only a partial understanding of the Great Commission. Though they would have "gone," they would have limited their going to Jews had the Lord not spoken in a vision and sent Peter to Cornelius, the first Gentile to obey (Acts 10:1-48). Either they did not catch that the preaching was to be not just to the Jews in all nations, but to all inhabitants of all nations, or, more probably, they had thought those Gentiles would be preached to in order to make them Jewish proselytes and then Christians. However that may be, it did take a miraculous vision to get them to extend that message to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-48).

Now, returning to our question, since the apostles would have gone *without a command*, and Jesus knew it, he evidently presupposed their going and told them how to approach the task once they arrived on the various fields: "make disciples" by "teaching," "baptizing," or Mark adds, by "preaching." It is true that in Mark "going, preceding; in connection with the main verb [preach, E.E.], which is in the imperative, the participle also has imperatival force. . . ."<sup>5</sup> But, the participle takes on such "force," it does not have it per se. If this disciple properly understands (and this is the most subjective part of this lesson), Jesus would not have said "having gone" as he did, without the presupposition that the apostles would have gone without a command. They were already intending to go to spread the great news they possessed. Our point is that the apostles understood better than we do the necessity of spreading this great news and, therefore, needed no command to "go."

### CONCLUSION: WHAT ABOUT US?

But what about us? Suppose we think we can please God without going to other nations and peoples? We would face Matthew's version of the commission which says "make disci-

ples" (and this is imperative). And where are we to *make them*? "In all nations." This, therefore, necessitates that going be done by some of us (and sending by others) if we are to please our Lord. But, again we say, the apostles would have gone out to preach the gospel out of faith in him and out of love for him without a command. The more we grow spiritually, the more such faith and love will characterize us. May God help us to grow in faith and love and do more and more reaching out to others.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mark 16:14-20 gives the commission and its context.

<sup>2</sup>All quotations of the Bible are from the *New American Standard Bible* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1960) unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup>A participle, it will be remembered, has some characteristics of a verb and some characteristics of an adjective.

<sup>4</sup>Most literal translations point out that the precise literal translation of the passage in both Matthew and Mark is not "go," but is, instead, "having gone" or "going." See, for example, *The Greek-English New Testament* (Washington: Christianity Today, 1975), pp. 101, 161.

<sup>5</sup>Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (Leiden: United Bible Societies, 1961), p. 511.

## FAITH IN MARK

J. L. MAY

### PURPOSE AND DIRECTION

Mark does not state his purpose for writing, but it is not difficult to catch his purpose from the narrative itself. Mark does not deal so much with what Jesus taught as with what he did. His is a Gospel of action, a record of the activity of the man, Jesus, to validate his power.

To Mark, faith in Christ is not a blind leap in the dark. There are reasons for believing—reasons validated in verifiable events in Jesus' life. However, Mark is not as concerned with proving that Jesus is who he claims to be as with showing that Jesus can still enable his followers to live as he lived.

His Gospel is directed to those who are living in the Roman world, most likely those who are already Christians.<sup>1</sup> The general consensus is that Mark was written for Gentile Christians.<sup>2</sup> There are also indications that Mark was careful to communicate to the Christian of Jewish background who lived in the Roman world.<sup>3</sup> His readers did not need to be convinced that Jesus was God's Son. They needed to be convinced that his power had not diminished—that the mighty deeds he wrought while on earth were repeatable in their lives. If you had lived in that world, it would have been as easy to verify that these events were true as it is to verify the activities of a prominent public figure today. Thousands of witnesses both saw and heard these events.

To get the impact of Mark's message, we must put ourselves into the first century world and try to think like a Christian who lived in the Roman world. That world morally and philosophically was not too different from the one in which we live today.

One difference is the nature of the threat under which they lived. There are real threats to our faith today, sometimes heightened by the fact that we do not recognize them as threats. But we are not threatened with martyrdom as were many of them. Picture yourself facing the threat of being thrown into an arena to fight a hungry lion while thousands of cheering Romans watched. Visualize yourself covered with tar and being set afire to provide a human torch for Nero's garden.

Christians in the secular Roman world were tired of struggling for survival. For thirty years they had fought to achieve something worthwhile for their society, now they could only see darker clouds gathering on the horizon. Many were in danger of growing complacent. Why should they continue to struggle in a society that gave no awards for virtue? Why should they discipline themselves to develop character qualities that were not valued by their world? Why die a martyr's death? Why not make peace with the world for a change—end the personal struggle for the time and worry about the end when it comes?

### THE RELEVANCY OF MARK'S MESSAGE FOR US

Mark's purpose was intensely practical. He sought to make *believers* out of believers and *followers* out of followers. He challenged their complacency. He endeavored to show them why they could not give up the struggle and to strengthen them to die for their faith, if necessary.

Mark told his story with the excitement of a child who runs in, out of breath, to tell of something dramatic that happened to him. He liked to use words like "straightway" and "immediately." As we read Mark, we can see Jesus moving, vibrant, strong, determined. He walks in long, smooth strides, as a man walks who knows where he is going. Others practically run to keep up. Jesus is strong, formidable, and appealing to the crowds who followed him everywhere he went. On numerous occasions he spoke of their amazement at the feats of Jesus (Mark 1:22, 27, 2:12, 3:20, 4:41, 5:20, 6:56-57, 7:36-37, 10:24-25, 11:18).

Yet, Mark never forgot that Jesus was the divine Son of God. He never forgot the purpose for which Jesus came. Jesus' way was the way of the cross. Not only were his enabling powers repeatable in their lives—His way of life must be repeated in their lives.

Not only was Mark's Gospel intensely practical for his first century audience, it is just as practical for this century. Our world needs that kind of verifiable Lord. The liberal affirms Christianity to be a blind leap of faith. Why should we ask the world to believe in a Jesus whose activity cannot be validated? Mark's Gospel was written to make believers out of rational, logical, objective thinking men—not subjective fanatics whose only verification is a "better felt than told" experience.

That makes the Jesus of Mark even more relevant to the Christian community today. Today's secular mind will be most impressed with the validity of Jesus' power as it is demonstrated in our lives. How will today's world verify that Jesus is still the powerful Lord the Gospels say he is if that power is not verified in the quality and strength of our lives?

Everything Mark recorded was designed to instill faith in a powerful Jesus—a Jesus who was more than capable to meet their greatest needs.

This study will not be exhaustive, but we will look at some of the more important areas in which faith in a powerful Jesus fulfills human needs.

### FAITH FOR FORGIVENESS

Mark 2:1-12 is a powerful story. Why did Jesus say in verse 5, "Son, your sins are forgiven"? Did Jesus know that this man's sickness was a result of sin? Some sickness could be due to sin, but Jesus began his cure here because that is where the Jewish mind began in dealing with sickness. The Jewish mind integrally connected suffering with sin. The rabbis believed that no sick man could be healed of his sickness until all his sins had been forgiven him.<sup>4</sup> This was the argument of Job's three friends who came to see him when he was sick (Job 4:7). This thinking is also reflected in James 5:15. Logically, if no sickness could be healed until sins had been forgiven, then

Jesus' power to heal must also include power to forgive sins. Jesus is not advocating that the Jewish mind is correct in its conclusion that all sickness is a result of sin. In fact, he argues to the contrary in John 9:1-3. When he announced forgiveness of sins before he told the sick man to take up his bed and walk, he challenged not only the Jews' thinking about sin and sickness, but also their faith in him.

Those who brought the paralytic to Jesus had so much faith in his power to heal that they removed part of the roof of the house where he preached to get the man to Jesus. The teachers of the Law took Jesus' statement as an insult to God. "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" This is precisely the point as far as Mark is concerned. He is God! To him, it is just as easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven," as to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk." He clearly stated his purpose for his procedure: "That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat, and go home."

The people all watched with amazement as the man gathered up his bed and walked out. They had never seen power like that.

### FAITH THAT FORGES SOLUTIONS

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell the story of the nine failing in their attempt to cast an evil spirit out of a boy (Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 9), but it is Mark that records the more personal conversation between Jesus and the boy's father. The father said to Jesus, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" asked Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes" (Mark 9:22-23).

Mark's confidence in Jesus' power made him a possibility thinker. Most people seem by nature to be more prone to think of problems than solutions. Some years ago, I was trying to help a fellow Christian find solutions to a problem. I could see the possibilities in several solutions. But each time I made a suggestion, he said, "The problem with that is. . . ." He would proceed to tell me why that solution would not work. That is

the way we are—especially when we have wrestled with an unresolved problem so long we are tired and have lost hope in finding a solution. Even if a suggested solution does have possibilities, it is often unacceptable after we have become so tired of it we are not willing to put forth any more effort. If there is no easy solution, we would just as soon forget it.

Mark depicts Jesus dealing with problems in a positive, head-on manner. For example, in Mark 10:27, after the encounter with the rich young man, Jesus took advantage of that event to teach his disciples the dangers of trusting in riches. He told them it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven. They were amazed. They immediately saw a problem. "Who then can be saved?" they asked. Jesus told them, "With man, this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Jesus took care of two great principles in this one profound statement. First, he wanted them to understand that man was impotent by himself. We are not the solution to our own problems. Second, with God, it can be done. Mark's audience needed to hear that. They needed to believe that, and so do we!

Mark told story after story of how Jesus solved people's problems. He solved their problems of sickness and physical impairment (Mark 1:40-42, 5:21-34, 7:31-37, 8:22-30, 10:46-52). He solved the problems of those possessed with demons (Mark 1:24-27, 32-34, 5:1-20, 7:24-30, 9:14-26). He even took command of the elements (Mark 4:35-41, 6:45-51) and solved their hunger problems (Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-9). Ultimately, his power was demonstrated in solving their problems with death (Mark 5:35-43).

### FAITH TO OVERCOME FEAR

Many of the Christians to whom Mark wrote lived in daily fear. The manner in which Jesus faced and solved problems was a great source of courage, but Jesus specifically addressed the problem of fear in his followers. A classic example was when he was on his way to the house of Jairus (Mark 5:21-43) to lay his hand on Jairus' sick daughter. Jesus was delayed in his journey by a lady with a twelve-year-old issue of blood for

which she had found no cure. When she touched the hem of Jesus' cloak, he felt power go out from him and stopped to ask who touched him. While Jesus was talking to this woman about her faith, some men came from Jairus' house and reported that the girl had died so there was no need to bother Jesus any longer.

Imagine the hopeless, helpless feeling Jairus must have experienced when he heard that news. His only hope for his daughter's recovery lost while Jesus talks to the woman! Jesus knew that fear gripped Jairus' heart. Notice how Mark put the response: "Ignoring what they said. . . ." The thing that caused such fear and remorse in the heart of Jairus was ignored by Jesus. It was no problem to him. How often do we become paralyzed by fear when faith would ignore it. Jesus' next statement reveals that fear and faith have no place in the same heart. "Do not be afraid. Just believe." Just believe! *Just* believe?! To Jesus it was so simple to just believe. This statement might have inspired the poetic affirmation that I learned somewhere years ago:

Fear knocked.

Faith answered.

No one was there!

On another occasion, Jesus' disciples had labored almost all night to cross the Galilean sea by boat. They were still in the middle of the sea when Jesus finished praying and went to them walking on the water. Thinking he was a ghost, they were terrified. He calmed their fears by saying, "Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid." As he climbed into the boat, they were amazed that the sea suddenly became calm too. How could you be afraid with someone that powerful in the same boat with you? Mark wanted his readers to know Jesus was in their boat. Believing that produces great courage.

Though our threats today may be of a different nature, they are no less real—and our fears are just as real. We need this Jesus in our boat too.

## CONCLUSION: A FAITH THAT EMPOWERS

We cannot but conclude that this is an empowering faith—and that a lack of it impairs. The same story reveals both these truths (Mark 9:14-29). The nine who had attempted to cast the evil spirit out of the boy while Jesus, Peter, James, and John were up in the mountain, were impaired by a lack of faith (vv. 19, 29; cf. Matthew 17:20).

He assured his disciples that if they had faith in God, without doubting, they could order "this mountain" to throw itself into the sea and it would be done (Mark 11:22-23). ("This mountain" was probably Mount Moriah, on which stood the temple and thus represented all the power of Judaism. That mountain had to be removed for the cause of his kingdom to be advanced.) He further assured them that whatever they asked for in prayer, with this kind of faith, would be theirs (Mark 11:24). In context, he meant whatever they asked for that related to his redemptive purpose and the advancing of his kingdom. He certainly did not mean they could ask for any selfish thing they desired and expect it to be forthcoming. He promised them power over demons, sickness, and poisons as signs to confirm his word (Mark 16:17-20). This was only a few days after they refused to believe the reports that Jesus had risen from the dead (Mark 16:9-13), and after Jesus had met with them and rebuked them for their stubborn refusal to believe eyewitness reports of his resurrection (Mark 16:14).

Mark's big, bold, powerful concept of Jesus equips the believer to face obstacles. It is not an option, but an absolute necessity if we expect to live victoriously in our present age.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Frederick C. Grant, *The Interpreter's Bible: The Gospel According to Mark*, Vol. VII. (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), p. 633.

<sup>2</sup>Wendell Willis, *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Living Word Series (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing Co., 1972). p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*. The Daily Bible Study Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 47.

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## REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM IN MARK

J. L. MAY

The faith that Mark's Gospel calls for is not mere mental acceptance of a historical Jesus. It calls for results in changed lives, changed attitudes, changed ideas and actions. It calls for repentance and obedience as expressions of this faith. Obedience is symbolized initially in baptism as a means of expression through death, burial, and resurrection with Christ—a fact the reader of Mark's Gospel did not need Paul's letter to the Romans to understand, for baptism in both the pagan and Jewish world had that meaning. They did not struggle over the meaning of "baptize" as we do today. Their backgrounds had already taught them what it meant, whether they were Jew or Gentile.

To the Jew, baptism was a death rite—a means by which a Gentile proselyte died to his old faith, his former culture, family, and background. By this process he was adopted into the Jewish faith, culture, and family.

To the Gentile, immersion (sometimes in the blood of animals) was a rite of various mystery religions whereby they were inducted into the priesthood of the religion or into fellowship with the gods.<sup>1</sup>

### PART OF A BIGGER PICTURE: ACTING OUT FAITH

In Mark's Gospel, repentance and baptism are not considered an entity within themselves. They are considered a part of the total faith picture.

At the very outset of the book, we are introduced to John's baptism in connection with repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). At the end of the book, baptism is connected with faith (Mark 16:16). Jesus preached that men must repent

and believe (Mark 1:15).

We have already taken note of Jesus' announcement "that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." This was to be accepted as a matter of faith, validated by his power to make a sick man well again (Mark 2:10-11). Since baptism and repentance are for forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4), for salvation (Mark 16:16), and faith in Jesus results in forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:5), there must be a common context into which all fit.

The fact is, we cannot speak of repentance and baptism in any biblical context apart from faith. Repentance and baptism are "acting out" faith.

### A PREPARATORY BAPTISM

John was the first prophet to preach baptism. He came especially as a trailblazer to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. He clearly understood and proclaimed this. His baptism, like his total mission was preparatory. There was one definite particular in which John's baptism differed from that which Jesus' disciples would preach and practice. It was devoid of the Spirit (Mark 1:7-8; Acts 19:1-5). His baptism was to prepare people for this totally new concept related to a right relationship with God. Jesus would preach and practice baptism. He himself would be baptized by John (Mark 1:9). Jesus would order his disciples to preach and practice baptism as a prerequisite to a right relationship with God (Mark 16:16), so John preached it in preparation for that baptism Jesus and his followers would practice.

John's message of repentance and baptism did not fall on deaf ears. "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Mark 1:5).

He did not deceive them about who he was or his mission. He emphasized that his power was minute compared to that of the One who would come after him. He said, "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie" (Mark 1:7). He also stressed the difference between his baptism in water and Jesus' bap-

tism with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8).

### BAPTISM AND THE SPIRIT

Jesus' own baptism by John was the first baptism in which the Holy Spirit was mentioned. In this case the Holy Spirit's presence in the form of a dove verified that Jesus was God's Son (Mark 1:9-11). Following this, nothing more is said about the Spirit in connection with baptism until Jesus' final commission to his apostles before his ascension, in which he told them, according to Matthew's account to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Mark omits this detail from his account, but clearly connects baptism with believing as an equal prerequisite to salvation (Mark 16:16). Baptism is, therefore, an integral part of the believing process. After Jesus' ascension, all apostolic preaching included instruction on baptism (Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18) and was connected with receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 5:32, 19:1-5).

### REPENTANCE AT THE HEART OF JESUS' MESSAGE

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near, Repent and believe the good news!' " (Mark 1:14-15). When he sent the Twelve out to preach, "They went out and preached that people should repent" (Mark 6:12).

Mark gives us several "visual aids" to illustrate how tough Jesus was on repentance:

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off . . . and if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" (Mark 9:43-48).

Call it illustrative extravagance, an hyperbole, or whatever you like—the message still comes through. Jesus wants us to sever ourselves from those things that cause us to sin. He

wants us to give them the axe. The axe is obviously repentance.

Now, in the context of Mark's powerful Jesus, his message is—if Jesus orders you to repent, he is able to supply you with the power to repent. It would take a lot of grit to lay my hand on the chopping block, take an axe in the other hand, and chop it off. Jesus supplies the “grit” to sever ourselves from our beloved sin. He alone can supply the power to change.

This tough attitude toward anything that stands between us and a right relationship with God is seen again in Mark 10:17-22 in his encounter with the rich young man. This is not illustrative extravagance—it is an actual conversation between Jesus and the young man. (Some commentators believe the young man to have been Mark himself.) The young man fell on his knees before Jesus, indicating humility and penitence, asking Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the Law and cited several of them. The man insisted he had done these since he was a child. Jesus then told him the one thing he lacked: “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

In the language of Mark 9:43, he is asking the young man to give his wealth the axe. His desire for earthly wealth was far greater than his desire to go to heaven. That desire stood between him and God. He turned and walked away from the only source of power to repent.

Repentance has often been depicted as the most difficult of all biblical commands. Repentance is so difficult most men will do anything to keep from having to do it. The secular mind of today has all but absolved itself of any need to repent. Many are almost totally devoid of any sense of wrongdoing. A sense of wrongdoing is seen only in comparison with the average peer-person. As long as he can find someone else who lives just as he does, or worse, in his judgment, secular man needs no repentance.

Mark is pointing men to Jesus. He forces us to compare our lifestyle with his. We are challenged to evaluate the quality of our lives in comparison with his, not that of our secular neighbors.

## CONCLUSION

To Mark, faith that is not acted upon is an impotent faith. Repentance and baptism are the basic, initial manifestations of faith. If faith does not “act out” in these basic, fundamental ways, it certainly will not “act out” in meeting the daily needs of life.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 96.

## GRACE IN MARK

DAVID JACKSON

The King in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* tells the White Rabbit that there is only one way to tell a story. "Begin at the beginning, continue until you come to the end, and then stop." In a very real way, that is Mark's Gospel. The very first line is, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

### GRACE IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Mark's Gospel addresses conflict. Conflict in human relationships and human lives is not new to the twentieth century. It was a part of the first century human experience as well. The Romans had military and political control in Palestine. The Jews were looking for a political leader—a hero like David—to lead them in a holy war against Rome and drive them out. Jesus had to change their understanding of his Messiahship and what they were expecting as the kingdom of God.

In addition, for the first century church, there was conflict between the Jews and Christians. The Jews never accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Acts tells us about the persecution instigated by Saul of Tarsus. Christians were being dragged from their homes to appear before the religious authorities. They were persecuted, even put to death, as Stephen was.

It has been traditional to consider Mark as a Gospel addressed specifically to Roman citizens. Nero had singled out Christians as objects of his hostility to deflect the responsibility for the fire that had destroyed much of Rome.

There may have been a conflict in the church between those Gentile Christians who had remained in Rome and the Jewish

Christians who, forced to leave under the edict of Claudius (Acts 18), had now come back. Which element was more important to the church? You see, there has always been conflict.

When we as Christians are in the world, and we have conflict on the job with those who do not appreciate our standards, or who are not sensitive to the needs and human situations of others, or when there is conflict at home in the relationships with our spouses and our children, the relationships that are closest to us, or when we do not get along with our parents, or whatever the situation, conflict is not new. And as it challenges our faith, it challenged the faith of those first century Christians as well.

When our Anglo-Saxon forebears coined the term, "Godspell," which is the background for our word "gospel," they meant "good news communicated by word of mouth." Mark's news is that the curse of sin is no more. God has dealt with the problem himself. He has made a plan, through his control, through his wisdom, because of his love. You and I do not have to suffer the consequences of our own sins, which is conflict on every level of our existence. If we really understand the curse that is lifted; if we really understand that burden that we do not have to bear anymore, then it does become good news.

### NEW TESTAMENT GRACE IN OLD TESTAMENT TERMS

God's gracious Good News is introduced in Mark's Gospel by the ministry of John. But he does it in Old Testament language (Mark 1:2-3). All of the ministry of Jesus and his teachings are set in the context of the Old Testament expectation of what God was going to do. "Jesus Christ" is the Old Testament Messiah. It is set in the context of God's covenant with Israel.

God had promised the descendants of Abraham that he would be their God and that they would be his people and he would make them a great nation. But the story of the Old Testament is disappointing. Through lack of faith, through hardness of heart and unfaithfulness, they broke the covenant. God had come to them in grace. He initiated the covenant. It

was not because they were a great people. It was because God is a God of love, because he is motivated by grace. But they broke the covenant, and they missed the promise.

The prophets began to say that God is still working in history. God is going to send one special person, one who is anointed to bring his will to reality in the world. He will usher in the kingdom. He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the one that God called for this specific task.

John's quotation is from Isaiah 40. The context of the chapter is important. Isaiah says,

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go upon the highest mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout. Lift it up and do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, Here is your God. See the sovereign Lord comes with power. And his arm rules for him. See his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. He gently leads those who have young (Isaiah 40:9-11).

When the Lord comes to be with you, when he enters our world of conflict in the form of that Messiah, it will be as though the shepherd has come to tend his flock, to carry the lambs close to his heart. There will be a closeness of a relationship with God that the world has never known before.

At the end of the chapter, he says,

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:28-31).

When God has brought his kingdom, when the Messiah comes in the form of God's servant, it will be as though

physically one is perpetually young, as though one never grows weary or tired, as though with the wings of eagles one can soar above the conflict that goes on in the world.

## GRACE AND COSMIC CONFLICT

When Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, he was proclaiming the Good News of God, proclaiming the gospel. "The time has come [or the times are fulfilled]. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." That is a summary, but it tells us a great deal about Jesus' understanding of the Good News and of his mission in the world. The time has come. The kingdom is knocking at the very door. And it is time to make some kind of response, some kind of preparation for participating in it. God's hour has struck. The battle for God's reign is already joined in Jesus.

Immediately after the baptism by John, Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to do battle with Satan. This is so because not only was there conflict in Palestine between the Jews and the Christians, and in the church in Rome between Jewish and Gentile Christians, but there was also a cosmic conflict. It is in the background of the story of Job. It is God and Satan struggling over the relationship of faith to God. Why will people make a response to God? Is it just because of what they get out of it? Is it only because of the blessings that they get? That was Satan's charge in the book of Job.

The New Testament describes warfare against principalities and powers. Paul says it is not against flesh and blood that we struggle. It is a cosmic conflict that has been raging since the third chapter of Genesis. It is between God pulling us to himself, drawing us to himself, with his love, with his grace, and Satan saying it is not true. "If you disobey him you will not die. The reason God gave you these rules is that he does not want you to be wise like him. He does not want you to rise to the place where you do not need him. You can be like God, knowing good and evil." That conflict still rages.

## GRACE TO FOLLOW

The kingdom was coming. It was there in the person of

Jesus. And it was time to decide. Shall I participate or not? Will I be in God's kingdom or be in Satan's kingdom? Those were the two choices. And Jesus came to say that the kingdom was not going to be accomplished by driving the Romans out of Palestine in a holy war. The reign of God would come in the establishment of his rule over individual hearts, as individuals committed themselves to follow God in Jesus' way, to follow the path that Jesus himself laid down. The time has come to decide.

Jesus says, "Repent and believe the gospel." Repentance for the prophets in the Old Testament and for preachers in the New Testament means to turn around, renouncing sin, expressing sorrow for it. It is not simply sorrow for the consequences of sin. When Saul, the first king of Israel, confessed to Samuel, the prophet, that he had sinned, he was just sorry that he had been caught. When David, the second king, said, "I've sinned," he realized that, "against thee, O Lord, and against thee only have I sinned." Repentance means sorrow for sin, not just sorrow for the consequences. God's grace cannot operate otherwise.

"Repent and believe the gospel." Believing becomes the shorthand word in the Gospel of Mark for the total life commitment to following Jesus. Mark records the call of the first disciples: Simon and Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, who were preparing their nets. Jesus said, "Follow me." That is discipleship language. That means walk with him, not just intellectualize what he has taught, but live as he lived. Change your attitudes to his. It was an invitation based on pure grace. They left their fishing and followed him.

His promise, "I will make you fishers of men," is a practical application to where they were. That was what they knew. But there are other ways in the Gospel to describe what a disciple does. Later on he talks about discipleship as a farmer, builder, reaper, as a shepherd, and as a servant. There are abundant word pictures to let us know what discipleship means. What it boils down to is life commitment, centering our hearts, ourselves on something other than ourselves, on something other than the world. It is a challenge to change our per-

spectives. "Follow me." "Repent and believe the gospel." Commit yourself because it really is good news.

Jesus describes his mission in Mark 1:38. When they were wanting Jesus to heal more people and teach further in a given locality, Jesus responded, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages so I can teach there also. That is why I have come."

The mission that he calls the disciples to is his mission—preaching, spreading the message, the good news of the gospel. "Because," Jesus says, "that is why I have come." That is still the most effective way of spreading the news: one by one by one. We enter into relationships with people; we know who they are; they know who we are. Those are the ones who should most grab our attention for spreading the message. That is so if we really believe it is good news, if it really addresses things with which we struggle.

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## GRACE IN THE MIRACLES

DAVID JACKSON

Charlie Brown was having one of his typically depressing days, and Lucy observed, "Charlie Brown, you know what the problem is? The problem is, you're you." Charlie Brown said, "Well, what am I supposed to do about that?" Lucy said, "I just diagnose the problem. I don't give the solution."

Jesus came into the world full of conflict and suffering as the personification of God's love, grace, and compassion. There is a powerful message here for us about the concern God has for us as we struggle and as we come into conflicts, whatever they are.

One way to define the problem is, "We are us." In the Gospel, in Jesus' ministry, Mark makes it clear that the problem is Satan, sin, the control that Satan has been able to exert in the world since the fall in the garden. The first miracle Mark records takes place in a synagogue on the Sabbath. In the casting out of a demon, the very presence of Satan himself, the conflict is joined. In the battle Jesus is going to attack Satan at every front where he has been able to cause problems in human existence.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, and the people were impressed by his authority. Jesus knew the mind of God, and this caused a difference in the way Jesus talked from the message of the teachers they were accustomed to hearing. Then one came in, possessed by a demon, someone under the control of this emissary of Satan. (Imagine the disruption!) The demon cried out, "What do you want from us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. The Holy One of God." Yes, Jesus had come precisely for that reason. To destroy, to confront Satan and his influence everywhere. Notice the way this spirit is described: "Unclean,"

incompatible with the presence of God. A demon-possessed person would be ostracized from society, but more significantly, separated from the presence of God. In all of the authority that was his as the Son of God, Jesus commanded the spirit, "Be quiet." The flavor is that of a court of law, where the judge renders a verdict on the criminal. In this case it is the evil spirit. The verdict is that there is no place in the presence of God for that spirit. Jesus does not send the individual away; he commands the spirit, "Come out of him." He did, and the man was restored to his home. The people were amazed because they realized here was something that they had not seen before.

We feel like the problem is us. Even if we identify our own sins, sometimes we feel like, "What can we do?" As long as we are by ourselves, the answer is, "Nothing." But by God's grace through Christ, we have the power to defeat Satan.

### MADE CLEAN BY GRACE

In verse 40, there is healing of a different kind, but it is still related to Satan, and sin, and uncleanness. A leper comes to Jesus. Leprosy is used in the Bible as a more general term than just Hansen's Disease. Any kind of disorder of the skin would be called leprosy. Whatever this man had, it was still true that because it was associated with leprosy, he was ostracized from everybody and everything. He was cut off from his friends, from the village where he grew up, from his family who could not have anything to do with him. The only people he could associate with were people who had the same problem. That could be criminals, people who came from completely different backgrounds, people he had nothing in common with. They had to proclaim from a distance when they were approached, "Unclean!" It is the same word used to describe the demon.

Now it was physical disease. It had spilled over into the spiritual, into the emotional, into the state of mind. In a heart-rending physical posture, he fell to his knees, almost grabbing Jesus, and said, "If you will, you can make me clean." There was no crisis of confidence as far as he was concerned. Jesus could do it "if you will."

Mark says that Jesus' response was to be filled with compassion. There is a possibility that there is another way to understand what Jesus felt. It is a strong emotion, but some of the texts have a different word here. Rather than compassion, it is indignation. Jesus understood, as he understands, that so many of the problems that we are in are as a result of Satan. Jesus' indignation was at what Satan can do to people.

He reached out and touched him. Can you imagine what that would do to the sensibilities of the people of Jesus' day? It was culturally inbred that a person did not have anything to do with lepers. He must stay far away from them and certainly not touch them. Jesus touched him and said, "I am willing. Be clean." He was healed. Is this how Jesus would respond to someone with AIDS?

The compassion of Jesus, maybe the indignation of Jesus at Satan, is clear. It shows his willingness to clutch to himself those who are undeserving, those who are unworthy, those who have no right to expect to be in a relationship with God because they, we, are unclean because of sin. Jesus came to say that that is not the way that God is. We may set up barriers between ourselves because of the ultimate effects of sin. God does not. Jesus came to make a difference, to do things differently.

### CONQUEST OF SATAN

From here through chapter 10 of Mark, there is a series of different kinds of healings and miracles of Jesus in which he contests Satan's control of the world. In chapter 2, there is the paralytic who was let down through the roof. Jesus was so moved, the first thing he said to the paralytic was, "Your sins are forgiven." Then he healed him and made the connection between the two, that only God can do either. Satan will not control the way things go anymore. The power of God is never in question. There is never a concern of whether God will be able to win this battle.

In chapter 3, Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and there was a man with a shriveled hand. Mark says Jesus was filled with discouragement and anger because of the closed hearts of the Pharisees. His emotions were involved

because of stubbornness on the part of those who ought to have had a better idea than anybody else on what he was about. He healed the man on the Sabbath. He taught that God's will is expressed not by legalism, but by compassion for the suffering of people.

In chapter 5, Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, rushed to Jesus with all the anguish of a father and said, "My daughter is dying. Come and heal her." He did with the words: "Don't be afraid. Only believe." Sometimes we cannot know how God will help, what the means of his compassion will be. His message is, "Don't be afraid; only believe." It is *not* an assurance that all of our problems will come to the answer that we want. It is the assurance that God will work and that his compassion expressed through Jesus is just as real now as then.

Interspersed in the story about Jairus' daughter, is the account of the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage. She reached out just to touch the hem of Jesus' robe. He said, "Your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

At one time or another, that is the desire we all share—peace. It is the root of so many interpersonal human problems. The connection is faith, peace, faith, forgiveness because of the compassion of God, because of his mercy. Still, after two thousand years, sin clouds our world, distracts our lives, and causes suffering in every way, in our families and among friends and the people we try to relate to. What Mark would have us to understand is that in every sphere of life, in every activity, God's power is greater than Satan's power. That is always the struggle. Nothing else is involved. The problem is Satan. The solution is God and what he has done through Christ. He will assure us of the victory.

A poem by Henry Twells addresses Jesus as the Healer and our continuing need. It is the hymn "At Even, When the Sun Was Set."

### WE ARE BLIND—HAVE MERCY ON US

On the one hand, the problem is Satan and sin. On the other hand, the problem is that we are blind. The last miracle that Mark records is in chapter 10. Jesus was on his way to Jerusa-

lem for the last time and encountered Bartimaeus. The large crowd was most likely Passover pilgrims. Jericho was just fifteen miles from Jerusalem, and as Jesus approached Jerusalem for the last time, Passover was coming. Yet, when Bartimaeus, who because of his physical malady was reduced to begging in the dust at the side of the road, began to call out for Jesus of Nazareth, it was these God-fearing, spiritually-minded people who rebuked him. Why? Do you suppose it was because they were trying to listen to the words that Jesus was speaking as they traveled along the road to Jerusalem? The compassion of Jesus somehow had not filtered down to those who were following, those who were listening to his teachings.

Jesus heard the cry, "Have mercy on me." Is that not the human cry? Is that not precisely our plea to God in any circumstance? If we realize our weakness and his power, is our cry not, "Have mercy on me"?

Jesus called him and said, "What do you want?" He said simply, "I want to see." Someone has suggested that when Mark recorded this miracle, he intended for those first readers to understand that what we need is to see who Jesus is, to understand what the heart of his ministry is all about. When we respond, when we claim to follow, when we wear his name, we must clearly understand the nature of Jesus. Immediately, he was healed and, Mark says, he followed. It is the language of discipleship—"Follow." Follow the leader; follow the Master.

Even in the cross is his glory and God's victory over sin and ultimately over death. It is promised to us in our problems. The problem is us—we are blind. The problem is Satan—he deceives.

For centuries Christian art has portrayed the four Gospels by the figures that are introduced by Ezekiel and repeated in Revelation. Matthew is represented as a lion, Mark is an ox, Luke is a man, and John is an eagle. The ox is a beast of burden, a servant. Mark would have us to understand Jesus as not so much the king, or the teacher, or deity in human flesh, but the servant. He is the one who came to help us understand God's concern and compassion by service, by humility, by touching the lepers, the sinners, and by bringing God's message of hope and healing and release from sin.

A British writer reflected the ministry of Jesus in two contrasting pictures of King George VI, the British monarch during World War II. The first one was the picture of the coronation. He had on the royal jewels, the crown, the ermine robe. It was impressive, an awe-inspiring picture of the ruler of England. But the other picture was the one that showed the true king of the people. It was after the Nazis had bombed East London into little more than a heap of rubble. He says, "King George VI was there with Winston Churchill to inspect the damage. He wore no crown or ermine robe. Just a suit and derby hat. He looked unremarkable except for one thing. As he walked through the debris, he cried. As he saw the damage, his suffering people, the Unionjacks his subjects had draped over the wreckage of their homes, he wept. Churchill's memoirs record, as the people watched their king weeping in the midst of their ruin, that they said again and again, 'He loves us. He loves us.'"

As we understand the ministry of Jesus, and understand the compassion, the mercy, the love that God showed in having his only Son to hang on the cross for the sins of the world, surely we must say with feeling, "He loves us. He loves us." How can we possibly respond? How can we show our love for him?

Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

## GRACE IN THE PARABLES

DAVID JACKSON

Jesus frequently used parables to teach the crowds about the coming kingdom of God. The "parable of the soils" stands first in Mark's collection of parables of the kingdom (Mark 4:1-20). Jesus indicated the importance of this parable by the way he introduced it. By using "hearken" or "listen," Jesus was letting the hearers know that this was important. My mother used to say to me, "Put on your thinking cap." That is what Jesus was saying. See if you can figure this out.

He said the sower sowed some seed on four different kinds of soil; there was the harvest. It is a very simple story. The disciples wanted to know why he taught in parables. Jesus said, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything has been said in parables so that they may ever be seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding. Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven."

He was not saying that he was teaching in parables for the express purpose of making the message of the kingdom a secret. Just imagine the irony of even suggesting that God would hide the secrets of the kingdom from people who need it the most! God, throughout history, has been characterized by grace—giving people a second chance. Adam and Eve is one example. Another is Israel in the wilderness; even when they had gone into captivity in Babylon, he brought them back and established them in Jerusalem. Eventually God sent his Son to bring the message of the forgiveness of sins because of his grace. How could anyone ever imagine that it would be God's design to so hide the nature of the message of the kingdom that it would be an incomprehensible mystery?

The context of this quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10 is not that

God is hiding his message from them. Isaiah 6 is describing people who claim to be people of God, but by their practice of life and by the condition of their hearts they have shown that they have no real regard for God. They are faithless. That is why they hear the words, but it does not mean anything. They can see what is going on, but they do not perceive that there is a message from God because of their hearts.

The parable was explained by Jesus to the disciples. It leads into some other parables about the kingdom, describing what Jesus was about, what the kingdom is about, and what it means to be a disciple. "The farmer sows the word," It is what Jesus came to preach. The sower, initially, was Jesus, later it was the apostles themselves, and later, you and me.

He said, "Some people are like the seed along the path." The soil became so hard that it was practically like rocks. Jesus said some people are like that. When the word comes to them, it has no effect whatsoever. So it is taken away. The birds here represent the activity of Satan. Eventually people become so hard that they are controlled by Satan, not by God. The monotony of the same old routine every day, the atrophy of curiosity, the mounting insensitivity to the cries for help of people around us—all those things can make us become hardhearted.

Others, like the seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. They have become Christians, having responded positively to God's word. But because they are so shallow, it lasts for only a very short time. Superficial things do not meet the needs of life, particularly in difficult times. These are the shallow hearts.

He said still others are like seeds sown among thorns. They hear the word, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. This is the crowded heart. That heart is so full of other things, there is no room for God's message. This person lets schedules and demands and everything that is going on in the world around him or her distract him or her from what is most important. William Tyndale, one of the earliest translators of the Bible into English, uses the word "strangled" here. That is what happens when we become

distracted by the things in the world.

The fourth kind of soil is good soil—that which receives the word and produces a harvest, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold. It is obvious that there is room in God's kingdom for differing abilities. There is a simple faith, and there is the mature faith. All of those are in the kingdom. But Jesus was also saying that you have never really heard the word until you produce a harvest, until it means something in your life. It rules out punching the clock for an hour on Sunday or punching the clock three times a week or fifty times a week.

Those first three categories in this parable have nothing whatsoever to do with God's kingdom. Only in God's kingdom is there grace. That is the only place salvation is found. But the true kingdom includes a harvest too.

Jesus' quotation in Mark 4:21f. sounds like the parable in Matthew about lighting the lamp and putting it on the stand so that all could see. That is not Jesus' teaching at this point in Mark. The context is still the need to understand the message of the kingdom. God intends people to understand the Gospel. If people fail to understand it, it is because of the condition of their hearts. It is intended to be just as obvious as lighting a lamp and putting it on a stand because God is gracious.

Another teaching of Jesus that occurs in a different context in Matthew is in verse 24. He says, "Consider carefully what you hear." I wonder sometimes whether people try to make any distinction about what they hear and what they see in movies and television. "With the measure you use it will be measured to you even more." A paraphrase of this saying of Jesus says, "The attention you give is the profit you will receive from the message of God."

In another example of what the kingdom of God is like (Mark 4:26-29), the kingdom will grow by God's power not human power. Just as God's power is visible everywhere in the kingdom of nature, so his grace brings in the spiritual kingdom. It is not human endeavor. Those who are becoming a part of the kingdom are doing so with God's help by God's plan. The farmer may not know how or why, but the little kernel produces the full grain in the stalk. Every farmer knows what to do at harvest. Jesus was saying that that is the way it is

intended to be in the kingdom as well.

Again he said that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32). There is no doubt about the future growth of God's kingdom. The question is this: Will we be beneficiaries of that growth, not by anything we have done, but because God is doing it and invites us to be a part of it?

Jesus said finally that there are two categories of people hearing his words: the outsiders and the insiders. The outsiders are those characterized by the first kinds of soil. They are the ones who do not get the point. They do not respond to the message. They will never participate in the kingdom. They will never know God's grace; they will never understand or receive the forgiveness of their sins.

The insiders are the disciples, the Christians, the ones who have heard the message, who have been open to it, and have responded to it. It is important to recognize that it is God's power working his will, not working our will according to our time schedule. Jesus went to the cross knowing that there would be the hard hearts, the shallow hearts, and the crowded hearts, but also knowing that there would be those who would respond thirty and sixty and a hundred fold.

### GRACE FOR SELF-DENIAL

In the heart of the Gospel of Mark there are three predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection. They come only after a very important question has been asked: Who is Jesus, and what will it cost him? The second very important point to be made in Mark's Gospel is, Who is a disciple of Jesus, and what does it cost? What kind of person could demand from his followers that they deny themselves and take up their cross in order to follow him? What could he possibly offer as a response to that kind of self-denying dedication?

In the first instance, Jesus only talked about his suffering and rejection after the confession from his disciples about who he was. There is no doubt that Jesus knew what the future held. But if Jesus was human as we are, then he surely must have been as challenged by it as we would be. There was no guarantee that he would be able to faithfully carry out God's

plan. Would he be able to continue to resist the temptations of Satan not to do the Father's will? Perhaps that is why he uttered the shocking rebuke to Peter. Satan had found a way to get at Jesus, not through a frontal assault as he had done in the wilderness, but now through those who were closest to him.

As someone observed a long time ago, God's grace is not cheap grace. In other words, God has freely offered his love and forgiveness, but it requires a powerful response on our part. Jesus' summary of it is, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Denial of self is the hardest thing that we could be called on to do. We want to save self, not lose it. He says, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it (Mark 8:38).

Every one of us continually is confronted with advice on how to save life and how to keep from losing life. The world says grab for all the gusto you can; you only go around once; everything that there is is material; it is here and now. It is what you can see, and taste, and touch, and smell. It is what you can measure, quantify. The message is powerful. What profit is there if you gain the whole world? The world says, "Plenty!"

Jesus was challenging his followers, "That is the wrong advice. That is the Father of Lies speaking. That is the sure, guaranteed, unfailing way to lose life. If you want to save your life, you link it up with the only one who has the power to save life."

Do you remember playing the game "Follow the Leader"? I remember enjoying it as a youngster at school. Then later somebody came up with the idea of playing it in the swimming pool. That could get to be dangerous if somebody knows how to do a flip off the diving board, and you do not. But you are playing "Follow the Leader," so you have to try it anyway. The thing about playing "Follow the Leader" is even if you do not know how to do what the leader does, you do it because you are committed to the game. A part of the function of grace is that he tells us what life as a disciple is about. He shows us the right way to save life. He is the leader.

The second prediction of Jesus' death follows a unique experience witnessed by three of the disciples. The trans-

figuration of Jesus seems to be a visual representation of what would be involved in his death and resurrection. It is the glorification of him as the Son of God. This is unmistakably spelled out by the Creator himself: "This is my Son. Listen to him." Jesus is not one among equals; he is unique. He is superior to Moses who gave the Law. He is superior to Elijah who did great and mighty things, who stood alone, who was a powerful spokesman for God in a time when it was not popular. Only Jesus is the Son, and he is going to the cross, not for his own sin, but for the sins of individuals, of people. That is the cost of God's grace.

Is it not a striking contrast that the thing that was on the minds of the disciples was their competition with one another—Who will have the greatest place in the kingdom? Who will be most important? Then there is Jesus' example of service. This is what the call to discipleship means and what a place in the kingdom means. He says if anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and servant of all. Jesus shed his blood as servant, suffering servant, servant of God, servant of humanity.

### GRACE FOR LIVING

The third prediction occurs in Mark 10:33. The fear and the anticipation of the future was heavily on the minds of those who were following as Jesus approached Jerusalem. The rich young ruler had just refused Jesus' invitation to follow because he would not abandon all the things that held him to the material world. He did not understand Jesus' teaching about ultimate loss, even if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul. The contrast is provided when Peter speaks for all the disciples: "But Master, we have left everything to follow you." The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus takes on a different perspective when viewed with that kind of commitment. Jesus' response is that even though discipleship means leaving those things behind, you do not really lose anything. Those who are willing to cut the ties with the things that bind people to the earth in exchange for following him gain much more in this life and in the world to come, eternal life.

That is the answer to the question about the cost of discipleship. What kind of person can demand a self-denying follower? The answer is the one who can give a new quality of life now and in the life hereafter.

Jesus guaranteed it by entering the tomb and bursting forth from it with the power of God. He showed once and for all that death is not the final answer. Satan no longer holds control in the world by his threat of death. It is overcome through faith in God by the power of his Son, Jesus Christ. Denial of self for the sake of bearing the cross and following Jesus means you do not lose; you gain life.

## THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

IAN FAIR

The Gospel of Mark is a magnificent but often overlooked Gospel. In the mind of many, Mark was perhaps the first Gospel written, coming from the inspired pen of Peter's co-worker during his last days in Rome. It was intended for the Roman mind and was thus characterized by power. What better setting for a study of the Holy Spirit, especially since it is Mark who records the words of Jesus proclaiming the coming of the kingdom *with power* (Mark 9:1).

My assignment in this lectureship is to develop the theme of the Holy Spirit in Mark. The problem with this assignment is that the Holy Spirit is mentioned precisely six times in the Gospel (Mark 1:8, 10, 12, 3:29, 12:36, 13:11), and I have to give three one-hour lectures on this! Our problem is not serious when one notices that these six references to the Holy Spirit in Mark have their parallels in the other Synoptic Gospels. We can expect from this Synoptic reference to the Holy Spirit that there must be a larger pattern or theology surrounding Mark's emphasis on the Holy Spirit that is important to the theme of the Gospel message. It is only as we see the Holy Spirit in the Gospels against this larger pattern of biblical theology that we can understand the significance of the Holy Spirit's role in Mark's Gospel and the other Synoptic Gospels.

My intention in this study is initially, therefore, to broaden the context of the study beyond Mark's Gospel, and to place the role of the Holy Spirit in the larger context of biblical theology. Having done this, we will be able to examine the Synoptic references to the Holy Spirit, and consequently be in a better position to understand the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in New Testament theology. It is only when the Holy Spirit is seen thus in the total framework of Scripture that one is able to

"rightly divide" those Scriptures that remind us of the importance of God's Spirit in our lives. When the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is studied, as it most often is today, in the emotional confusion of miraculous claims, one has prematurely prejudiced the discussion by setting it in a negative light. To grasp fully the significant role of the Holy Spirit in God's purpose, especially in the Gospels (and one is reminded of the admonition of Jesus that one who "blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness"), one has to understand this role in the full scope of the New Testament, and in fact, the overall perspective of biblical theology. It will be our goal in this lesson to establish this perspective.

### BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

The term biblical theology is not one with which we in the American Restoration Movement are comfortable. The concept, however, is quite familiar since it finds meaning in our use of the term "scheme of redemption." Biblical theology is in one sense synonymous with the concept of a scheme of redemption. Our understanding of the Bible is that it explains God's eternal plan of salvation. This plan or scheme of redemption is understood to be the unfolding of God's saving love for his fallen creation, man. This is the theme of the Bible and hence, the theme of biblical theology. Biblical theology is, therefore, an attempt through the careful exegesis of Scripture to understand this overarching salvation as the central message of Scripture. It is an attempt to understand more clearly the connections and relationships of the individual themes of books to the overall scheme of Scripture.

In terms of our study, biblical theology attempts to set the doctrine of the Holy Spirit into the overarching theme of Scripture, or into the overall scheme of redemption, and then to investigate the relationship of the doctrine to the central message of the Bible, namely, God's plan of salvation for man. Biblical theology, therefore, attempts to set the parameters of the discussion within the context of the central message of God's revelation, thereby safeguarding against an abuse of Scripture.

Biblical theology is important to our heritage since we have long claimed to be a people of biblical faith, a people who "speak where the Bible speaks," and who "remain silent where the Bible is silent." We have always believed that to divorce a passage from its context is to do Scripture the gravest injustice.

It is my conviction that much of our discussion on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has arisen out of polemics against charismatic abuses or unfounded claims for charismatic experiences. That we should oppose such error is natural and proper, but that we should typically approach such a significant study out of polemic concerns has some serious limitations. By doing so we permit error to set the tone or framework of our study, thereby denying biblical theology its rightful role of determining the proper parameters of the discussion.

Without having to defend this conclusion at this point, we will assume that the central theme of the biblical message is *God's steadfast love* for his creation expressed in his *scheme of redemption* for man. This scheme, expressed through God's love, reached its climax in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Everything in Scripture prior to this event leads up to this climax, and everything following derives meaning from it. Into this theme, or scheme of redemption, is inserted the person and role of the Holy Spirit. To divorce the role of the Holy Spirit from this theme or context is to do both the Holy Spirit and the scheme of redemption a gross disservice. In keeping with this theme of the Holy Spirit and God's love for and redemption of man, Paul assures us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which he has given to us" (Romans 5:5). It is in this scheme of biblical theology of God's love and redemption that we will endeavor to understand the role of the Holy Spirit, especially in Mark. This central theme of love and redemption will, therefore, supply the unity and meaning of the biblical message and the context of our study.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

It is not surprising that Peter introduced his great Pentecost

sermon of Acts 2 with a quotation from Joel 2:28. He did it with such ease and with no explanation, clearly indicating that the promise alluded to by Joel was clearly understood by his audience. Joel promised that "afterward" (Joel 2:28) in the "last days" (Acts 2:17), God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. This would be accompanied by miraculous manifestations, but its chief interest would be an indication that all who "call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Calling on the name of the Lord is a Hebraism for believing in him. Peter interpreted the miraculous events of Pentecost as an indication that the redemptive promises made by God were being fulfilled. He culminated this great sermon with the significant command of Acts 2:38-41.

*"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord calls to him."* And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, *"Save yourselves from this crooked generation."* So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Emphasis mine.)

Notice the relationship between the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and belief, repentance, and salvation. It was this dynamic relationship that formed the ground of the promise of God in Joel, not simply a promise of the performance of miracles. Certainly miraculous manifestations were present, but only as confirmation that God had finally fulfilled his promise to redeem man.

This connection is clearly borne out in another similar instance in Acts 11:13-18. On this occasion Peter was preaching to Cornelius, a Gentile. This naturally would cause considerable concern to Jews. Peter reinforced the propriety of this preaching by relating its connection to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and those associated with him. Establishing the legitimacy of his preaching to Gentiles, Peter succinctly observed, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). In an earlier reference to

this in Acts 10:47, Luke had recorded Peter's question, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Clearly, Peter had made the vital connection between the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, belief, repentance, baptism, redemption, and a worldwide mission.

What these and several other passages clearly indicate is the dynamic relationship between the promised pouring out of the Holy Spirit and God's scheme of redemption. Miraculous manifestations are indeed attested to in Scripture and accompany this outpouring, but these occur only in a confirming role. Jesus and Mark both testify to this confirmatory role of the Holy Spirit when Mark records Jesus' promise: "These signs will accompany those who believe; in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues. . . ." Mark concluded, "They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (Mark 16:16-20). Several other passages reinforce this view. The writer to the Hebrews observed that the message of salvation was "declared at first by the Lord, and that it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Hebrews 2:3-4; emphasis mine). Finally, when Philip preached in Samaria, the multitudes listened carefully "when they heard him and saw the signs which he did" (Acts 8:6).

That the Holy Spirit would be associated with repentance and forgiveness should come as no surprise since it was Jesus himself who had introduced the Spirit into his discussion of the new birth with Nicodemus. He assured Nicodemus that the new birth would be brought about from above by "water and spirit" (John 3:3-5). Paul later stressed that we are not saved by our own doing, but "by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7).

We conclude this brief survey of the role of the Holy Spirit in

biblical theology by observing that it is only in the context of God's scheme of redemption, of God's promise to restore his kingdom in the last days, of belief, repentance, baptism, forgiveness and the new birth that one comes to a mature understanding of this complex subject. To limit the Holy Spirit to performing miracles and to charismatic expressions of faith is to incorrectly understand the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in biblical theology.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit who gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6), who makes the new birth a reality (John 3:3-5), who ushers in the last days and the kingdom of Christ (Acts 2:17-41), and whose promised indwelling is a guarantee of our sanctification and salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Admittedly, he confirms the message of this redemptive activity with signs and miracles, but these play a secondary role to his fundamental primary redemptive purpose.

When Peter selected Joel 2:28 as the text for his great Pentecost sermon, he did so fully aware of the implications of his choice. Carefully and deliberately, he set the scene for his sermon. Knowing that Jesus had set his ministry in the context of Messianic expectation, and having personally experienced the powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Peter carefully and deliberately proclaimed that the Messianic kingdom had in "the last days" (the Christian age) broken powerfully into human experience. The miraculous signs that followed the apostles were a confirming and convincing sign that their proclamation regarding salvation in Jesus and a realized kingdom had been fulfilled! The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was both the dynamic power and the confirmation of this truth.

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## THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

IAN FAIR

In these three specific lessons we are focusing our thoughts on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Mark. Thus far, we have attempted to set this role in the context of biblical theology and introduce the significant work of the Holy Spirit in God's scheme of redemption. To miss this primary connection is to do an injustice to the person and role of the Holy Spirit. We have stressed that miraculous powers attending the operation of the Holy Spirit were not his chief concern, but rather played the secondary role of announcing and confirming that God had at last fulfilled his long-standing promise to establish his Messianic kingdom; that he had in fact granted repentance and redemption to both Jew and Gentile.

### NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

It is a fundamental principle in biblical theology that the message of the New Testament should flow naturally out of the Old and that the themes of the Old should form the background for the New. It is this principle that formed the presupposition for Old Testament citations in the New. The New is in fact the fulfillment or arrival of the Old. The magnificent theme of God's steadfast redeeming love, so clearly laid out in the Old Testament should, therefore, be the presupposition of the New. We see this clearly demonstrated in the Gospels where the writers formulate their argument for the kingdom and Messianic role of Jesus out of Old Testament promise. Jesus, the Gospel writers argue, is the long-awaited and prophetically fulfilling Messiah. To remove Jesus from the context of prophecy and fulfillment, as is the tendency of some radical theologians, is to do irreparable harm to the theme of

the Gospels and Jesus' Messianic role.

This same principle holds true in regard to the Holy Spirit. The New Testament role of the Holy Spirit must be seen as a fulfillment of Old Testament expectation. That Peter understood this principle is clearly demonstrated in his use of Joel 2:28 in his great Pentecost sermon of Acts 2:17ff. Where the New Testament draws attention to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's redeeming love, we will find the same principle true in the case of the Holy Spirit. The fervently awaited pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Jewish expectation, so clearly associated with the theme of God's redeeming love and his promised restoration of the kingdom, found fulfillment in the established Messianic kingdom of Acts. That Jewish expectation hung on the fulfillment of this promised outpouring is clearly seen in Jesus' instruction to his disciples in Luke 24:44-49:

"These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." And he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. *And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.*" (Emphasis mine.)

When in the next few weeks this promised outpouring of the Spirit was finally realized (Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-42), the apostles knew clearly that repentance and forgiveness in the person of Jesus was a present reality (Acts 2:38-41). God had brought his redeeming love to maturity in the death of Jesus and the outpouring of his Spirit.

That the Holy Spirit plays a significant and fundamental role in God's scheme of redemption and steadfast love was obvious to the apostles, and to fail to make this connection is to ignore Peter's association of these two themes in such notable passages as Acts 2:17-42, 10:44-48, and 11:15-18. In this

scheme, the Holy Spirit is the dynamic "Spirit of Life."

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

It now remains to demonstrate that the above premise setting the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical theology clearly into God's scheme of redemption is consistent with the biblical text. We begin by noting several passages that identify the role of the Holy Spirit with forgiveness and the new birth. A good place to begin is with Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 where he contrasts the work of the Holy Spirit with the Law. The Law kills, but the Spirit gives life. In the "dispensation of the Spirit" we are changed into the likeness of the Lord, for the Spirit is the *Spirit of life*. Paul makes a similar case against the law in Romans 8 where he speaks of the "law of the Spirit of life" available in Jesus as opposed to the "law of sin and death." It is through the Spirit who "dwells in us" that we have life and that our mortal bodies will be raised (Romans 8:1-17).

This fundamental principle of life should come as no surprise to those familiar with the Gospel of John, for in chapter 3 John records Jesus' significant discussion of the new birth with Nicodemus. Although Nicodemus did not understand Jesus, being unable to think other than in human or earthly terms, Jesus explained that to be born again from above demands the involvement of the Spirit in addition to water. We are well acquainted with Jesus' statement that unless one is born of water and the Spirit one cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). Clearly, water and the Spirit are brought together almost as one in Jesus' teaching on the new birth. It comes as no surprise, then, that Paul argued for the unity of all believers on the ground that all have been baptized into one body by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). He is not arguing here for the baptism of the Holy Spirit as Peter had done in Acts 10 and 11, but simply demonstrating that in baptism, the Holy Spirit works with the water, giving life and a new birth from above. Like the wind, the action of the Spirit is not noticeable to the human eye, but its activity is borne out by its results. From baptism we are raised, therefore, "through faith in the working of God" (Colossians 2:12), to walk in newness of

life (Romans 6:1-4).

This same principle underlies Paul's position in Titus 3:4-7. It is out of the loving kindness (grace) of God that we have been saved, not because of our righteous deeds. This has been achieved by the "washing of regeneration and renewal in [of] the Holy Spirit which God has poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Several critical concepts have been drawn into juxtaposition by Paul in this interesting passage. Notice the connection between grace, mercy, salvation, washing of regeneration (baptism), and renewal (a synonym for rebirth). Into the matrix of these concepts, Paul inserts Jesus our Savior and the Holy Spirit. Clearly we see inferred here the activity of the Holy Spirit as the regenerative Spirit of life.

In another interesting passage, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul again connects salvation and the Holy Spirit. On this occasion he inserts the term "sanctification." He states that God had chosen the Thessalonians from the beginning to be saved (Ephesians 1:3-12), and that the dynamic of this salvation was to be the "sanctification of the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth." In this case, our faithful obedience and the work of God through the Spirit are brought together in order to explain that our salvation is not simply by our works, but by God's grace and power. The dynamic of this sanctification is the Holy Spirit, not our work of merit (Titus 3:5-7).

It is no wonder, then, in Acts 2:17ff. that Peter, having introduced his sermon with Joel 2:28, and having demonstrated that the experience of Pentecost was nothing less than the keenly anticipated eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, brought repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit dynamically together with "calling on the name of the Lord." The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was clearly understood by the apostles to be inextricably interwoven with prophetic expectation predicting God's scheme of redemption ultimately brought to fruition in Jesus. The Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of life" was the dynamic and vital catalyst of this scheme.

Neither Jew nor Gentile was immediately willing to accept this apostolic interpretation of Messianic fulfillment in Jesus.

Some dramatic confirmation was needed. Paul alluded to this in 1 Corinthians 1:22 when he observed, "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom." God did not, however, leave his apostles without convincing confirmatory testimony. He gave them gifts by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). These gifts were not for self-aggrandizement, but for service to others and for confirmation of the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus. In Mark 16:17-20 Jesus had promised that miraculous signs would follow those who believed. Mark concludes his Gospel by observing that the disciples "went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the sign that attended it."

Again in 1 Corinthians 1:6, a similar claim regarding confirmation of the apostolic message is made by Paul. Praying that the Corinthians might be enriched with all speech and all knowledge, which in the context of Corinthians is obviously a reference to miraculous gifts, Paul argued that "the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you. . . ." He concluded the next verse by observing that the Corinthians were "not lacking in any spiritual gift."

In a similar vein, the writer to the Hebrews reasons in Hebrews 1:2-4:

For if the message declared by angels was valid. . . how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, *while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.* (Emphasis mine.)

Finally, we notice the same confirmation of the apostolic message in Acts 8:4ff. Philip had gone into Samaria preaching the word. Verse 6 informs us that "the multitude with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and *saw the signs which he did.*" (Emphasis mine.)

It would be difficult to fail to notice this clear-cut testimony to the confirming role of the Holy Spirit. Gifts of the Spirit were not given to make Christians feel good, or merely spiritual. The super-spirituals of Corinth failed to see this, and Paul

spent three chapters of his first letter to Corinth addressing this abuse of Holy Spirit gifts. It would be helpful if those today claiming miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would confirm their message with some similar sign! First John 4:1 and Revelation 2:2 attest to such a request for confirming proof.

As a reminder of God's love and of the inheritance Christians have, God has given his Spirit to his people in a unique manner described in the New Testament as the indwelling of the Spirit. Several passages discuss this interesting phenomenon, but the clearest statement is found in Acts 2:38 and 5:32. In the latter passage Luke explains that God has given his Spirit to those who obey him. In keeping with this, Peter promised in Acts 2:38 that those who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of their sins would receive the Holy Spirit as a gift. Elsewhere (1 Thessalonians 4:8; Romans 5:5, 8:11; 2 Timothy 1:14) the New Testament writers affirm that God has given his Spirit to his people, and that this Spirit as the Spirit of life dwells in them.

It is unfortunate that many confuse this promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit with miraculous gifts of the Spirit, seemingly unaware that the Holy Spirit worked in Christians' lives in many different ways, not all of them necessarily miraculous. Miraculous manifestations were only one of a variety of workings of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11), and served the purpose of confirming the apostolic message, not merely of assuring the Christian of spiritual maturity. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is one of those truths confirmed by faith in his inspired word, much in the same manner as knowledge of the existence of God. That we accept the existence and regenerative work of the Holy Spirit by faith and not by personal experience is no more difficult a principle to grasp than to accept the existence of God by faith and not simply by personal experience.

It is a prominent principle of Pauline theology that the indwelling Holy Spirit is a guarantee, to be accepted by faith, of salvation and inheritance in God's family. Second Corinthians 1:22 affirms that "he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." Similarly, in Ephesians 1:13-14 Paul observes that Christians are "sealed with

the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it. . . ."

## CONCLUSION

From this brief study of the Holy Spirit in New Testament theology we have learned that the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of life" plays a fundamental, vital and dynamic role in God's scheme of redemption which was finally brought to fulfillment in the person of Jesus. The Holy Spirit's role in the new birth is as vital as is Christian baptism (John 3:3-5; Titus 3:5-7) and the obedience of the believer (2 Thessalonians 2:13). A secondary role of the Spirit involved his confirmation of the apostolic message. Finally, the indwelling Holy Spirit is an expression of God's love for us (Romans 5:5) and a guarantee of our salvation and inheritance in Jesus. The miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, although more dramatic than other gifts of the Holy Spirit such as faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13), were, contrary to the views of modern charismatics, not the primary function of the Spirit in Christian experience.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPELS

IAN FAIR

My assignment in this three-part series was to investigate the role of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Mark. As indicated in the first lesson, the Holy Spirit is mentioned directly only six times in this brief, yet powerful Gospel (Mark 1:8, 10, 12, 3:28, 12:36, 13:11). A common trend in biblical interpretation is to isolate a topic from its biblical context and to handle it either dogmatically or polemically. We have argued that to deal with the Holy Spirit in this cavalier fashion is to do a gross injustice to this pivotal biblical theological doctrine.

It has been the purpose of these studies thus far to outline briefly the central thrust or unity of biblical theology and to set the Holy Spirit within this context. We identified God's steadfast redeeming love as the central and controlling theme of the Bible. If the Holy Spirit is, as we have suggested, a significant factor or participant in God's scheme of redemption, then the Holy Spirit must be a prominent factor in biblical theology.

### THE UNITY OF BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

In the mind of some, the Bible is nothing more than a collection of scattered yet vaguely related stories of different religious experiences. Those of a more conservative mind have, however, identified within the numerous experiences of the Jewish people a common thread running through sacred history, binding it together into a remarkable scheme of redemption.

The Old Testament account of this thread clearly identifies the steadfast love of God for his people as the common thread or central message of this scheme. It is this theme that binds the sometimes loosely related stories of the Old Testament into

a unified theology, and it is into this stream of thought that the diversity of theological emphases must be inserted to find their meaning.

We noticed in our previous lessons that the Jewish mind had a clear understanding of God's scheme of redemption and of the role of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, as the life-giving power, was to usher in the final redemptive days (Joel 2:38; Acts 2:17ff.), and to indicate the arrival of the Messianic age with its message of repentance and forgiveness. To fail to see this pivotal connection and to divorce the role of the Holy Spirit from this context is to lose the binding unity of biblical theology. One is then left with a confusing diversity of unrelated doctrines. One of the significant failures of systematic or dogmatic theology has been its tendency to identify or interpret doctrinal emphases within the context of church tradition rather than biblical theology. Most studies of the Holy Spirit from an apologetic or polemic platform have been guilty of this error. It is imperative to the proper interpretation and understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit that we permit the parameters of the unity of biblical theology and not the context of church tradition and polemics to become the parameters of Holy Spirit doctrine.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN THAT UNITY

Careful investigation of the role of the Holy Spirit indicates that the Spirit does not occupy a tangential or minor role in the biblical scheme of redemption. The Holy Spirit is identified by God's promise as the inaugurating power of his scheme of redemption. As the life-giving Spirit, he is the dynamic power responsible for the forgiveness and redemption essential to God's kingdom. It comes as no surprise, then, that at the announcement of the pouring out of the Spirit, repentance was called for. Before God, through his life-giving Spirit, could, by his love and grace, bring about his new creation and new birth, so powerfully made possible by the death of Jesus, believing men and women had to surrender their lives to him in repentance. This pivotal emphasis on repentance and the role of the Holy Spirit in redemption need not, and does not, detract from

the crucial role of Jesus in that scheme. The forgiveness and new birth won by Jesus on the cross is vitalized by the Holy Spirit in the life of every believing, penitent and obedient person. The Holy Spirit's involvement in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus, and in the new life for everyone made possible by Jesus is an essential ingredient to the story of the four Gospels and Acts.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPELS

That there are four Gospels should come as no surprise when the story of universal salvation in Jesus is set into God's scheme of redemption. The events surrounding Jesus' life and death, set within a unique Jewish milieu, needed translation into a universal message for the Gentile mind. Matthew obviously is the most Jewish of our Gospels, while Luke addresses the Greek mind, Mark the Latin Roman, and John the Gentile.

It is no surprise, then, that Matthew sets the role of the Holy Spirit clearly within the role of the Spirit anticipated by the Jew, namely, their Messianic eschatological hope. The Holy Spirit would usher in the final kingdom, and would be the harbinger of the Messianic age and the divine agent in the anticipated regeneration. His name (authority) would be invoked in the commission to make disciples of all nations.

A closer look at Matthew verifies these points. His birth was the result of the life-giving power of the Spirit (Matthew 1:18). At his baptism, it is announced that he would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11). The Holy Spirit then descended on him like a dove (Matthew 3:16). He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan as a part of his Messianic duty (Matthew 4:1). He cast out demons by the power of the Spirit as a sign of the kingdom breaking into human experience (Matthew 12:28), and he commanded his followers to make disciples in the name of his Father, his own name, and that of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). In each of these instances, we clearly see that the Holy Spirit played a significant role in the dynamic of the Messianic kingdom and God's scheme of redemption. The miraculous emphases were never intended to be the pinnacle of Holy Spirit activity as the

Spirit played a vital role in this redemption. He is, after all, the "Spirit of life in Christ" (Romans 8:2-17; 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6).

We notice as we turn to the Gospel of John that the Spirit is also vital to this Gospel, being mentioned specifically sixteen times. Two passages stand out. In John 3:3-5 the Holy Spirit was obviously included by Jesus as part of the dynamic of the new birth. This truth was also confirmed by Paul in Titus 3:5-7. In a similar vein, Jesus observed in John 7:37-39 that the Holy Spirit is the life-giving water, flowing from his heart. On several occasions Jesus mentioned his Messianic gift of life-giving, soul-quenching water (John 4:7-15). In John 7 he somehow connected this gift with the Spirit. This would come as no surprise to the Jewish mind, one well prepared for associating the Spirit of God with the regenerative Spirit or water of life.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Although the Holy Spirit is not as prominent in the Gospel of Mark as in some of the other inspired writings, being mentioned specifically only six times, he nevertheless, underlies the whole Gospel. In keeping with the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical and New Testament theology, the Spirit is clearly the life-giving power of Mark's Gospel. The striking characteristic of Mark's Gospel is that it is a Gospel marked by power. Jesus has power over demons, the sick, and the forces of nature. He forgives sins and moves powerfully through the brief and direct account of his ministry.

While in Matthew's Gospel the emphasis is on Jesus' fulfillment of prophecy and teaching, in Mark's Gospel it is unquestionably on Jesus' dynamic, powerful deeds and finally on his passion. In the mind of some, Mark's Gospel is indeed nothing more than a powerful passion narrative supplying the historical framework for the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, thus emphasizing the powerful activity of God in the ministry and passion of Jesus. This reasoning is not altogether wrong and has much to be said in its favor. The Roman mind was not impressed by fulfillment of prophecy or rabbinic teaching, but could be swayed by a powerful manifestation of

God. Mark sets out to impress the Roman in precisely this manner. Paul had already alluded to this Roman interest in power (Romans 1:4) where he argued that God had designated Jesus his son by the powerful resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Throughout Mark's Gospel the unmistakable powerful activity of the Holy Spirit is discernible. Although not as prominent as in the other Gospels such as Luke and John, he is nevertheless present, fully in keeping with the role of the Spirit in biblical theology. He is unmistakably the life-giving Spirit of God, always present in the life and ministry of Jesus, and therefore, vital to the development and fulfillment of God's scheme of redemption.

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of these three lessons has been to set the role of the Holy Spirit in the context of biblical theology. It is only when the Spirit is seen in this context that one can fully understand the meaning and significance of this great doctrine. Once one comes to grips with the central message of biblical theology, namely, the steadfast redeeming love of God, then one can understand the significant role of the Spirit in the scheme of the Bible.

We have noted several passages that indicate the pivotal role the Spirit plays in redemption, how he is the harbinger of the Messianic kingdom, and as the Spirit of life, how he is present in the new birth of every child of God. His indwelling is at the same time a confirmation of that birth and the power of that new life.

The Gospels indicate the same role of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus. His powerful presence in the life of Jesus was a sign of Jesus' divine activity. His presence in the life of the apostles, confirming their message, was a further sign of his continuing eschatological activity. His being poured out on Cornelius was convincing confirmation to Peter that God had also granted life to the Gentiles. Finally, his indwelling of Christians is confirmation of his life-giving activity.

As we examine the Gospel of Mark, we notice this same activity of the Spirit is evident. He works quietly and powerfully, not always clearly understood by human eye and mind, yet to the eye of faith, convincingly in the life of Jesus, and later, in the life of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel message. He is the divine harbinger of the eschatological hope of Israel realized in the person of Jesus.

As the life-giving Spirit of God responsible for the new birth, his presence in the gospel message is essential to the purpose of the Gospels, namely, in calling and bringing men and women to redemption and new life in Jesus.

## THE KINGDOM IN MARK: SERVANT OF ALL, 1

DOUGLAS E. BROWN, JR.

He was a carpenter in Nazareth. He had few possessions. He had heard the cries of the oppressed. He knew neglected beggars, grasping for pennies at the city gate. He had seen the diseased and maimed. He had surrendered much-needed money to exploiting tax collectors. He had listened to friends feverishly lash out with revolutionary invectives against the occupation army of Rome. He saw widows manipulated out of their meager means by religious leaders in the name of honoring God. He had neighbors whose hearts could no longer be stirred by talk of a Messiah, and others who could be taken in by any charlatan offering hope of deliverance and restoration of the old days of Israel's glory under David.

Aware by about age thirty that the time of his mission had come, he left Galilee, traveling to the Jordan where his cousin John was baptizing those who responded to his preaching of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. After baptism and several heart-searching weeks alone in the wilderness, Jesus began to attract followers as he made his way back through Bethany and Cana to Capernaum, preaching the gospel of God: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). After keeping Passover in Jerusalem, he returned to his hometown, Nazareth, where he announced to a Sabbath audience his mission by reading from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

A riot broke out in the synagogue. People he had known for years cast him out of the city and were ready to throw him down the hill upon which the city rested. Narrowly escaping, he returned to Capernaum, where he began demonstrating God's rule over nature by relieving a man with an unclean spirit. He preached from town to town throughout Galilee.

With exuberant testimony from healed lepers, paralytics, and the blind, rumor spread rapidly about the miraculous effect of his touch or glance and the authority in his voice when he said the citizens of God's kingdom are "servants of all." The crowds he attracted swelled both with the curious and the serious from regions far and near—in today's terms, grisly miners, polished executives, central American refugees, tinsel TV evangelists, bag ladies, divinity professors, maimed war veterans, streetwalkers, public defenders, children, and even AIDS victims.

One morning Simon told Jesus, found in a lonely place praying, "Everyone's searching for you" (Mark 1:37). Some sought personal relief. Some were drawn by his words. Some were ready for him to declare the "holy war" against Rome. Some began plotting his death because in the name of God he flaunted religious tradition (Mark 2:23—3:6, 6:63—7:13), forgave the sins of the socially marginal (Mark 2:1-12), and reduced the Law to one commandment—to love (Mark 12:28-34). The one common denominator to the crowds—they all felt driven to some verdict about this man. "What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him. We never saw anything like this! Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands!" (Mark 1:27, 2:12, 6:2). They thought, "Could he be Immanuel? God with us?"

To keep spiritual balance, Jesus frequently sought the isolation and quietness of the high places. Matthew recalls that after one such all-night prayer retreat with his many disciples, he came down to another great multitude gathered to hear and receive. When he sat down on a level place, his disciples publicly confessed their allegiance by moving close to him. Within hearing distance of many in the multitude, he

looked silently into the eyes of his disciples and then began explaining what it means to be "the servant of all":

As long as you follow me, you will be poor in spirit if not in substance, mournfully touched by the human condition, teachable, driven by desire for justice, forgiving, singleminded in your devotion to God, peacemakers. You will be like salt, or a city built on a hill, or a light on a lampstand before a society that will laugh, ridicule, and abuse you, just as their forefathers did to those who stood up for mercy and justice. But as my disciples, you will be consumed by the vision of brotherhood God has willed through the Law and the Prophets. You will manifest the kingdom to the world. The standards in God's kingdom are not satisfied when the secrets of the heart contradict observable behavior.

Then—after demonstrating this extraordinary righteousness with case study instruction about murder, adultery, and oaths—he pushed his disciples' commitment to the breaking point:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matthew 5:38-44).

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: 'Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, and do good to them'" (Luke 6:27).

According to the report, Jesus did not stop there. But the attention of some of his disciples surely stalled. Perhaps a few slipped back into the multitude. And us? Do we want to pause now and sing "O To Be Like Thee"? Do we want God to grant the petition, "Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart" if

being the servant of all means turning the cheek? Or if the kingdom means loving our enemies?

I confess two reasons why I find myself balking at this expectation. First, I am a participating member of a society that rewards self-promotion, coercion, power, intimidation—a society whose values promote a weak benevolence at best—a society whose worldview does not stretch much beyond a "survival of the fittest" ethic. Predictably but lamentably, and often in spite of church and family training to the contrary, the roots of self-preservation, retaliation, and revenge reach deep into our attitudes and habits. This is a leftover of what Scripture calls "the old self." Language reveals the heart—"sweet revenge," and "even the score"; "I'll get you"; "Serves him right"; "Just wait"; "Your time is coming"; "Make my day." We learn to dehumanize an adversary with names—"Jap," "nigger," "honkie," "commie," "kraut," "queer," "junkie," "chink." We draw demonic caricatures of adversaries. We justify resisting the evil one with evil of like kind. We even relish the kill. We start each day poised like a boxer: "You smack me, and I'll smack you back." We are not ready for Jesus to say, "Do not fight back. Be the slave of all, even your enemies."

Second, I balk at this command because so many collisions in life test my obedience. Every day people who sit by us, live by us, work by us, or drive by us put us on the defensive:

- A couple walks out of the restaurant to find their car window smashed and possessions stolen.
- A teenager is taunted by classmates for refusing to participate in their "fun."
- A local fisherman discovers that tourists have absconded with the prized boat he lent them the night before.
- A World War II veteran, still offensive to look at after nineteen operations to minimize the damage from being shot in the face, returns to the Iwo Jima battlefield.
- A Jewish physician, imprisoned by Soviet authorities for political reasons, has to do emergency surgery on his ruthless prison guard.

- A grief-stricken mother views the mutilated body of her son, beaten to death in Mississippi for simply speaking to a white girl.

Every key in your pocket that opens a lock silently objects to Jesus' words—"Do not resist an evil person."

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## THE KINGDOM IN MARK: SERVANT OF ALL, 2

DOUGLAS E. BROWN, JR.

Interpreting such jolting statements as "become the servant of all, even your enemies" is especially difficult because we are both the interpreters and the ones spoken to by the text we interpret. With such power over Scripture, we can hardly resist the chance to defuse a text that is ready to explode in our lives. Wary of this temptation, I still must venture a few opinions about what Jesus does *not* mean:

- Jesus is not requiring that his disciples like everything about their adversaries. The action word *agape*, rather than the more intimate *phileo*, indicates good deeds, not warm feelings, are enjoined.
- Jesus is not instructing his disciples to overlook evil with a smile or fold their hands in passive resignation. He advised his closest followers, "... if someone has no sword, let him sell his cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36).
- Jesus does not expect a slavishly literal application of his illustrations. When struck by a servant of the high priest, Jesus himself questioned the motive for the attack rather than turning his other cheek to be struck (John 18:23). Paul refused to leave Philippi without a public apology for his mistreatment (Acts 16:35-40) and later lashed back with a curse on those who struck him at the high priest's command (Acts 23:3).

Lest you conclude Jesus' teaching is harmless after all, I hasten to add that Jesus is not reversing his insistence that justice is God's measuring rod of human behavior. The prophets Jesus so often quoted related covenant fidelity to economic and political behavior (Isaiah 1:11-17, 58:1-10; Micah 6:6-8; Habakkuk 1:1-4). In his hearing were victims of

oppression, senseless injury, or exploitation. They had no cause to doubt his standing by them or his opposition to their plight. Whip in hand, Jesus drove away from the temple those who had turned the house of prayer into a den of robbers (Matthew 21:12-17).

What then is Jesus saying when he stretches "servant of all" to include "love your enemies"? The Mosaic teaching of "eye for eye" compensation for inflicting injury had been a step forward in the legal justice of that day. "Tooth for tooth" guaranteed proportional compensation for the injured party and restricted unwarranted penalty for the offender. However, Jesus leads his disciples even further away from ever-escalating retaliation and toward the sanctity of life. He put restraint in place of an in-kind response to injury or abuse. Listen to his hyperbolic visual aids:

- When insulted, he said, "Facilitate a second blow."
- When sued falsely, he said, "Ask the plaintiff if he expects your last garment as well."
- When weighted down like a beast of burden with the baggage of a haughty Roman legionnaire, he said, "Do more than you are commandeered to do; go an extra mile."
- When beggars grab for loose change, he said, "Give, expecting no return."

My guess is that not a few of you have been waiting for me to use a word like hyperbole to explain this hard teaching. Before sighing with relief as if finally reassured that Jesus is not to be taken too seriously, remember that a hyperbole is an exaggerated comment designed to put in bold print the utter importance of the point being made. Jesus' four exaggerated illustrations underline the painful disengagement from self-importance and material possession that following him necessarily entails. The citizen of heaven's kingdom will come to know no spirit of retaliation or revenge-seeking. Vengeance is the Lord's. As witnesses to that kingdom on earth, those who bear the imprint of Jesus Christ will be liberated from a weak self-image that depends on respect from peers or that crumbles when deprived of material things. Thus freed, Jesus' disciples

will surpass an instinctive "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" reaction to ridicule or theft. Our estimate of the "blessed" life will not be threatened by insult or material loss. We will not deny in word or deed the name of Christ for fear of damaged reputation. We will take the victory out of violence by the tactic of restraint. We will stand against injustice without losing the distinction between the offense of exploitation and the redeemable worth of the exploiters. We will appeal to conscience in the midst of power politics. We will not judge an evil deed as a full expression of all the offender is. We will be angry but not sin. We will not find the model for our actions in the behavior of our adversary. We will receive the strength and courage to love those who languish in the irresponsible habit of doing unto us and others only what benefits their self-interests. We will break rank with the dehumanizing march of destructive self-promotion.

In *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque described the terror and distractions, the filth and dullness, the savagery and camaraderie, the cowardliness and courage experienced by a platoon of bewildered young German soldiers caught in the barbaric trench fighting of the last chaotic days of World War I. In close combat, survival dominated the instincts of the main character:

We crouch behind every corner, behind every barrier of barbed wire, and hurl heaps of explosives at the foot of the advancing enemy before we run. Crouching like cats we run on, overwhelmed by this wave that bears us along, that fills us with ferocity turning us into thugs, into murderers, into God only knows what devils; this wave that multiplies our strength with fear and madness and greed of life, seeking and fighting for nothing but our deliverance. If your own father came over with them you would not hesitate to fling a bomb into him.

Away from battle, reflection slipped back in. When guarding Russian prisoners, the same German soldier pondered that "a word of command has made these silent figures our enemies." Eventually a veteran of numerous attacks and counterattacks, the German youth was sent out at night to discover how far the

enemy position had advanced. He played dead, dagger in hand, in a crater half-filled with water as the enemy unexpectedly rushed by in attack and then back-stepped in retreat. When a French soldier crashed into the shell hole, the German soldier stabbed him madly three times. The crossfire kept him trapped with his French adversary through the night. During the daylight hours, he could not avoid his victim. Finally, he bandaged the dying man's wounds and scooped up dirty water in a handkerchief to relieve his thirst. Groping by mid-morning on the outer limits of his reason, the German soldier started talking to his victim:

I did not want to kill you. But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your life and our fellowship. Why do they never tell us that you are just poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying, and the same agony—forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?

When the Frenchman died that afternoon, the German promised, "Today you, tomorrow me. But if I come out of it, I will fight against this that has struck us both down; from you, taken life—and from me?—life also. I promise you. It shall never happen again." As he crawled toward the German line that night, he repeated, "I will fulfill everything I have promised you"—but knew he merely babbled these words to avert ill-luck. He knew he would not do as he promised.

That fleeting moment of insight in the shell hole is the enduring effect Jesus intends to have on his disciples' sense of fellowship. To say "yes" to Jesus' call is to say "yes" to the unnatural and seemingly foolish perception of an enemy as a brother to serve, as a neighbor to love. The eye of Jesus still detects the image of God in an enemy. Jesus has left no wall standing between us and any fellow struggler in this life—even an enemy. Unlike the tax collectors and pagans of Jesus'

day or their descendents in our day, we can no longer settle for a "birds of a feather flock together" brotherhood.

## THE KINGDOM IN MARK: SERVANT OF ALL, 3

DOUGLAS E. BROWN, JR.

Jesus mentioned two signs of being "the servant of all." First, he asks, "Can you pray for your enemy? Can you seek God's blessing for your enemy?" The rabbi in *Fiddler on the Roof* knew the limits most worshipers will tolerate. When asked, "Is there a blessing for the Czar?" the rabbi replied, "May God bless and keep the Czar—far away from us." My guess is that a review of our praying would reveal much in common with the imprecatory Psalms which call down the wrath of God on enemies and their children (Psalm 17:13ff., 54:7ff., 69:23ff., 137:8ff., 139:19-22). But what familiarity do our prayers show with Moses, who five times interceded for the Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who for four centuries had held the descendants of Joseph in slavery? What similarities do our prayers have with Jesus' prayer from his cross—"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34)?

For a second indication of the "servant of all" spirit, Jesus asks, "What will you do for your enemies?" Jewish Scripture included no instruction to "hate your enemies." The nearest parallel to "hate your enemies" is found in the instruction of the Dead Sea Scrolls to "love all the children of light and hate all the children of darkness." Old Testament wisdom warns, "Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice" (Proverbs 24:17; Job 31:29). Instead, "if your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Proverbs 25:21). However, rabbis did debate two texts from the Books of Moses. Exodus 23:4 says, "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him." The parallel found in Deuteronomy 22:1-4 reads "brother" instead of "enemy." Jesus

took a position in this debate. He stressed the Old Testament's instruction to do good to an enemy. But can you think of Israelites or Christians remembered in Scripture for doing good to an enemy?

- What about David's good deeds for troubled King Saul? Perhaps, but David said he acted out of respect for the office of king.
- What about Paul and Silas after the earthquake in Philippi? Perhaps, but the shaken jailor hardly remained a threat to them after the calamity.

Joseph's care for his brothers, Elisha's intercession for the captured Arameans, or Paul's assisting the soldiers fighting a storm in the Adriatic Sea are more compelling examples.

Even so, I find the few human examples in Scripture striking. But their absence does permit magnification of the example—the behavior of God. Jesus links "love your enemies" with being "sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Christians have extended Jesus' appeal to the testimony of creation. God's work through Jesus is pointed to as the ultimate demonstration of "become the servant of all," even your enemy.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we

were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . For if, when we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:7-10).

Perhaps this hard saying—"become the servant of all"—is boldly parallel to the gospel itself:

- Do we not preach that God in Christ received the blows and taunts of insult to reconcile his enemies—us—to himself?
- Do we not preach that God in Christ gives a gift which no receiver can match?
- Do we not preach that God in Christ pursues his wayward and rebellious children far beyond any human standard of obligation?

Whether Galilean or American, Jesus' hearers want to know: What is the point of swollen cheeks, empty closets, strained backs, closed-out bank accounts? In response, Jesus makes no mention of waiting on God's vengeance as did the Psalmists (e.g., Psalms 1-13), no mention of converting the foe into a friend by "heaping coals of fire on his head" as did Paul (Romans 1:17-21). Why "love your enemies"? Jesus' answer is, "Because of who your Father is." "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

A few days into the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin Luther King answered a midnight phone call and heard: "Nigger, we're tired of you and your mess now. If you ain't out of town in three days, we're gonna blow your brains out and blow up your house." Weary, frustrated, and fearful for his family, King told himself he had to "call on that something and person Daddy used to tell you about, the power that can make a way out of no way." He discovered that "religion had to become real to me, and I had to know God for myself." King correctly judged that the demand and the strength to love those midnight callers in life originate outside ourselves. The God we long to know, to whom we yield ourselves as clay in a

potter's hands, is the servant of all, even his enemies. Dare we hate someone whom God loves?

Jesus did not attempt to tell his first disciples what they should do in every situation involving adversaries. It should go without saying that the list of situations in which disciples have to respond to aggression has grown through the centuries. Jesus did teach his disciples that, as children of the heavenly Father, they will be distinguishable in their attitude and behavior toward their enemies. Even if forced to harm an enemy in defense of those for whom they have overriding obligation, their process of decision-making and their reaction to the painful consequences that befall an enemy will leave a trace of God's kingdom.

Jesus realized his view of "blessed" living would offend the common-sense wisdom of many a realist. Still he called for a verdict, once illustrating the import of his hearers' decision with a story of two builders—one wise, one foolish. "The Wise Man" song creates for many a child an early impression of Christian faith. The third verse accurately locates the Christian's source of hope. We do not sing, "So build your hope on the Sermon on the Mount," as if instruction or ideals can sustain a hope that does not disappoint. We do sing, "So build your hope on the Lord Jesus Christ," the preacher on the Mount:

- It is his intimate communion with God the Father that infects us with the heady vision of heavenly living.
- It is his marketplace ministry that places us in a social, political, and economic milieu so entangled in evil that we will never perfectly accomplish God's ethical will as it is done in heaven.
- It is his presence where two or three gather in his name that washes our soiled hands, renews our sagging hearts, counters our inclination to linger in retreat, rekindles our zeal for what deeply matters to God, accepts our reconfession of trust, and restores our courage to return again to our stations in life.
- It is his promised return that shields us from the inevitable despair that settles on those whose hope rises and falls

with their ability or inability to so walk "in his steps" that the kingdom of heaven becomes the kingdom of this world.

In the musical dramatization of the tale about Medieval England, King Arthur objected to the logic that "Might is right." Instead, his Camelot would be the heart of a new order of chivalry committed to the idea—"Might for Right." Heralds announced the king's dreams and steadily, Arthur's map of England was covered with the royal seal as knights from across the land and sea laid down their arms to join the Knights of the Round Table. When Lancelot and Queen Guenevere betrayed their king "in their hearts," Arthur momentarily tilted toward revenge, but recovered, determined not to let passions destroy the dream. However, even as peasants reported that their villages no longer needed door locks, and their children walked free on the roads, insurrection stirred among the knights. Finally forced to set punishment for Lance and Genny, Arthur saw the Table die. Once Lancelot rescued Guenevere from the stake and fled across the channel to his castle in France, battle was inevitable. The knights thirsted again for "that most worthless of causes—revenge." Arthur's dream had underestimated the hold of evil on the human heart. While putting on his armor at dawn of the day of conflict, Arthur despondently recalled all they had been through for "the idea" and saw only folly. Then he heard rustling in the nearby brush and called out, "Who's there?" A young lad sheepishly stepped out, expressing his intent to be a knight. The king asked the stow-away how he had decided on this "extinct profession." The boy enthusiastically responded, "Only by the stories people tell—Might for right! Right for right! Justice for all! The Round Table where all knights will sit." After knighting the boy Sir Tom of Warwick, Arthur, the gleam in his eyes restored, ordered the boy,

Hide behind the lines till the battle is over. Then return to England alive to grow up and grow old. Ask every person if he has heard the story and tell it strong and clear if he has not. Don't let it be forgot that once there was a spot for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.

Now shout it out with love and joy.

To which Tom responded, "Camelot! Camelot!"

The message of Christianity is more than the memory of an idea; it is an announcement. In the Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth, for a fleeting moment God was uniquely in our midst, the will of God was perfectly done on earth; mercy and justice merged. The angels understood. With shepherds as audience, the heavenly host celebrated his birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14). His mission finished a few years later, Jesus sent his disciples into the world to keep alive, by life and thought, his good news of an eternal way of life so extraordinary as to meet injurious aggression by the seemingly foolish and impossible standard of becoming "the servant of all." That a trace endures of what he envisioned is our mission and his victory.

## THE LAST THINGS IN MARK

(Mark 13)

TED CARRUTH

Efforts to penetrate the meaning of Mark 13 may be grouped into four major schools of interpretation. (1) The material applies to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 only. This view represents Roman Catholic scholarship until recently. Gould, Swete, and Carrington are proponents. (2) The material applies to the end of the world only. Much of modern Protestant thought, especially among German exegetes, reflects this view. Loisy, Rawlinson, Bultmann, Branscomb and Haenchen are representatives. (3) The material applies both to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the end of the world, although Jesus understood that the fulfillment of the second event was distant or could be distant to the first. This is usually considered as the "traditional" view because it speaks for the majority of interpreters over the centuries. This position has a wide range of advocates, including the rationalists, Strauss and Renan, the conservative liberal, Rowley, and the Baptist scholar Beasley-Murray. It has been the typical interpretation among our own brethren. (4) The material applies to both the fall of Jerusalem and the final Judgment. In contrast to the third view, it affirms that Jesus' own generation experienced both. This view makes the fall of Jerusalem a part of the predicted end of the age. Among those holding this position is Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology*.

The shape each interpretation takes and the conclusions to which each comes are determined largely by the presuppositions with which one begins. Even students who start with the same convictions regarding the inspiration of the Scriptures and the integrity of the text may give a different interpretation to the meaning of the chapter. Perhaps no variable is

greater in the interpretation of Mark 13 than the issue as to whether or not Jesus' words are to be understood literally or metaphorically.

In spite of the varied, even contradictory, opinions held on this chapter, one should be appreciative of the efforts that have been devoted to its study. Careful analysis has called attention to the issues and has collected the information that may be helpful in understanding the meaning of the most difficult passage in Mark, and indeed, of all the Gospels. While one is indebted to those who have preceded one in study, each student has the privilege of laying all other interpretations aside and asking his/her own questions and allowing the text to lead to his/her own conclusions. If such a search does not do discredit to the Lord or his word and assists one to a greater appreciation of God's work in Christ, the effort will have been worthwhile.

In this particular study an investigation will be made of an interpretation of Mark 13 not mentioned above. This endeavor begins with two questions: (1) How important was the fall of Jerusalem to the early church? Three of the major interpretations conclude it was a highly significant event, i.e., A.D. 70 was a focal point in the history of the Christian community. Is this correct? Have our perceptions been shaped unduly by secular writers such as Josephus? (2) What did the early Christian proclamation teach about the parousia of Jesus? Did they believe he could return at any time? Did they believe that his coming was restricted by the fall of Jerusalem, i.e., could he have come back prior to A.D. 70?

These questions could be answered in other ways, but is it possible that interpreters have misunderstood and that Jesus was not speaking about the events of A.D. 70? No attempt is made here to examine the evidence that Jesus did have the events that transpired in A.D. 70 in mind. The focus here will be on whether or not Jesus' remarks may apply to another event, i.e., his death and resurrection. It is a reasonable question, but only sufficient evidence can answer it.

Our study begins on the premise that these thirty-seven verses are integral to the rest of the book. They help fulfill Mark's overall purpose. Most students of Mark agree that he

endeavors to reinforce a believing community which lived in the midst of opposition, either in the form of persecution or heretical teachings. To undergird these Christians, Mark sought to enhance their perception of Jesus as the Messiah by showing that his work and words were "Good News" or gospel. Chapter 13 significantly contributes to that objective.

Mark encourages his readers in their afflictions by demonstrating that their Master's course was *via dolorosa*. The way of the discipleship is the same—the way of the cross. Not only does the passion narrative set forth this theme, but it is found when in his temptation episode he struggles with "wild beasts" (Mark 1:12-13), when his family misunderstands him (Mark 3:21, 31-35), and when his opponents attribute work to satanic powers (Mark 3:22-30). Jesus also taught his disciples the cost of discipleship (Mark 8:34-38) and informed them that he and they would be persecuted (Mark 10:30, 33, 34, 45). The nature of the Christian's life conforms to the nature of the Messiah's. One must take up his cross, follow his Lord, and enter his glory by the way of suffering and seeming defeat. The character of his Messiahship explains why God's Messiah could experience a criminal's death and why he was not recognized as God's Messiah. The way of gaining by giving, winning by losing, and living by dying is not the human perception of the way to glory.

The manner in which Mark arranges the material reveals how he endeavors to guide his readers to his goal. He divides the Gospel into two distinctive parts, each with its own particular characteristics. Mark 1:1—8:26 places emphasis on miraculous deeds of Jesus and teachings directed to crowds which are formulated largely in parabolic form and which deal with the coming of God's kingdom. In this first section, the Messiahship of Jesus is not openly perceived, but is "secret."

A marked change occurs after Mark 8:26. Miraculous events are rare. The emphasis falls on teachings which for the most part are directed to the immediate disciples. This section begins with the open proclamation of Jesus as Messiah by his disciples. Throughout the remainder of the book, their knowledge is assumed. The interest lies in the nature of the Messiahship, not its fact. Although both he and his followers suffer, the

outcome is a glorious triumph. This was the goal that traditional expectations of the Messiah envisioned, although the particularity of that triumph was not the same. His victory did not focus on factors measured by human, earthly standards.

It is within this second division that the subject of our study, Mark 13, is located. In view of Mark's general aim of reinforcing struggling Christians by calling attention to the victory of Jesus, albeit by means of seeming defeat, what function does this chapter have, and what message did Mark desire to convey to his readers?

## THE TEXT

As an examination of the text begins, it is appropriate to call attention to four features characteristic of the chapter. First, while Jesus expounded privately on his public pronouncements elsewhere (Mark 4:1-34, 7:17-23, 9:31-50, 10:10-12), only on this occasion in Mark does Jesus in a speech bring together several aspects of a single theme. One finds parallels to this format in the Gospel of John, e.g., the farewell discourse of chapters 13 through 16 as Jesus prepares his disciples for his approaching death. (One perceives the value the discourse had in the early church by observing that this is the only lengthy discourse recorded in all three Synoptics.)

Second, the chapter is replete with exhortations, containing nineteen imperatives in verses 5 through 37. In particular, the exhortations to the disciples focus on the maintenance of their conviction that Jesus is Messiah, regardless of the situation facing them. This feature indicates that Jesus is more concerned with strengthening the disciples to face the future than in satisfying curiosity. Mark wishes for the Lord's message to do for Mark's readers what Jesus did for his immediate disciples, i.e., assist them to live victoriously as they witness their faithfulness in a world of opposition.

Third, it is the concluding episode in his ministry. It thus immediately precedes chapters 14 through 16 which recount the passion narrative. (Many scholars feel chapters 14 through 16 circulated separately as a unit of early Christian proclamation before the Gospel writers wrote a unified narrative of both

the work and words of Jesus and his humiliation and vindication.) By its position in the book, chapter 13 serves as a link to the ministry narrative which centers on the growing understanding of the nature of Jesus' Messiahship and the passion/resurrection narrative which describes how Jesus dramatically manifested it, i.e., by agony, death, and resurrection.

Fourth, much of Jesus' reply reflects language similar to apocalyptic and eschatological sections in the Old Testament, especially Daniel, and the intertestamental literature. The use of words and expressions in these literary genres, e.g., "earthquakes," "famines," "the sun will be darkened," and "stars will be falling from heaven," may be understood in a symbolic or metaphoric manner. The presence of such expressions does not demonstrate that the entire passage is to be understood as an apocalyptic section. They do indicate that the events for which the words are symbols may have a meaning that goes beyond the surface meaning.

For purposes of organization the chapter will be divided into four segments: (1) verses 1-2, Jesus' prediction of the temple's destruction; (2) verses 3-4, two questions by his disciples regarding "when" the prediction would be fulfilled and the "sign" of the event; (3) verses 5-23, Jesus' reply regarding events until the end of the "tribulation"; (4) verses 24-37, events after the tribulation and how the disciples should respond.

### VERSES 1-2: THE TEMPLE TO BE DESTROYED

As Jesus emerges from the temple (into which he had last entered in Mark 11:27), a disciple calls attention to the majestic grandeur of the size and beauty of its buildings and stones. By any set of standards, the building enterprise begun by Herod the Great more than four decades earlier (John 2:20) would be impressive. (Josephus, in *Antiquities* 15. 11. 1, says work began in Herod's eighteenth year, 20/19 B.C. while in *Wars* 1. 21. 1 he says in the fifteenth year.) It was the third temple built for Jewish worship on the site. After the destruction of the Solomonic structure in 586 B.C., Zerubbabel replaced it with a building which lacked the glory of its predecessor considerably. By the time Herod came to power, it had

fallen into unsightly disrepair. When the king wanted to rebuild the temple, the Jews feared Zerubbabel's old temple would be demolished and not replaced. The king assured them with very careful preparations. He provided one thousand wagons, hired ten thousand workmen, and trained one thousand priests to be master masons and carpenters for the work on the most sacred portions of the structure.<sup>1</sup>

Herod was dedicated to making the temple a display to the world. He doubled the size of the entire temple area (to approximately 400 x 500 yards) in order to accommodate the crowds at the time of the Jewish feasts. To compensate for the sharp slope on the mount on the southeast, a huge retaining wall was built which held the enlarged platform in place. At the southeast corner, the temple platform towered two hundred feet above the Kidron Valley. Today, the massive stones used in the wall may still be seen because part of the wall escaped the destruction of A.D. 70.

After the old foundations were replaced, the temple itself was increased in height from sixty to one hundred cubits. Huge white stones measuring 25x8x12 cubits were used.<sup>2</sup> The double entrance doors were adorned with embroidered veils or curtains and the lintel was decorated with a golden vine bearing huge clusters of grapes. The entire temple was surrounded by a large paved court, which was bounded by extensive porticoes of colonnades. Ten gates provided entrance into the temple area, nine of which were overlaid with silver and gold. The one on the east of the Women's Court, probably the "Beautiful Gate" of Acts 3:2, 10, was of Corinthian bronze and exceeded the others in value. The outside of the building was covered with so much gold that one viewing the structure could barely look at it in bright sunlight. All stones not overlaid with gold were pure white. Golden spikes prevented birds from defiling the roof. The architectural masterpiece, with its courts and colonnades, covered about one-sixth of the city and dominated it with its size and location. One can well understand why a disciple remarked on its massiveness and beauty ("what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings").

In addition to its artistic beauty and prodigious size, the temple took on profound religious significance because it was

perceived as the place of God's meeting with humans (John 4:20). Although there had been past destruction (586 B.C.) and desecration (167 B.C.), it would be preserved in the Messianic era which John 12:34 indicates was widely believed to be unending. For it to be destroyed would raise serious questions about the inauguration and/or maintenance of the Messianic reign. One can well understand why speaking against the temple produced severe reactions (Acts 6:14; Mark 14:58).

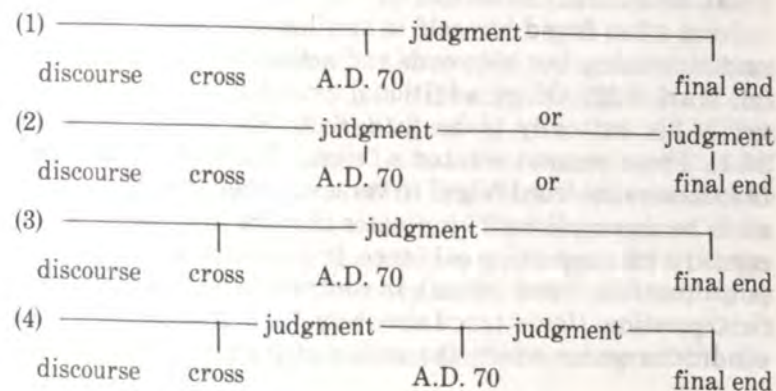
Jesus sees the disciple's remark as an opportunity for giving instruction. He begins by posing the question, "Do you see?" (*blepo*) which is a common expression and method for appealing to the disciples to perceive the spiritual dimensions of their lives (Mark 4:12, 8:15, 18, 12:14) and which occurs four other times in chapter 13, all in the sense of "taking heed" or "being carefully aware" (vv. 5, 9, 23, 33). He then makes the startling pronouncement that "not one stone would remain on the other."

How one understands Jesus' words at this point charts the course for the interpretation of the remainder of the chapter. Is Jesus predicting that at a point in continuous time (A.D. 70) the temple of Herod would be destroyed? The traditional view understands this to be Jesus' meaning. Accordingly, Jesus is understood as making a prediction similar to Micah (Micah 3:12) seven hundred years before and repeated by Jeremiah. "Zion shall be plowed as a field," a prophecy fulfilled in 586 B.C. In both instances the basis for the fall was judgment on the people for covenant breaking. Jesus' prediction would, therefore, be similar to the prophecy of Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the temple leaders and worship and who foretold its fall as reported in the Talmud.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Jesus' meaning would be as the Old Testament prophets and similar to a contemporary, i.e., destruction of a brick and mortar structure in continuous time.

On the other hand, is it possible that Jesus had a more comprehensive destruction in mind? In John 2:19, Jesus' statement regarding the destruction of the temple took on a meaning other than its normal surface meaning. John also indicates that on the occasion of the cleansing of the temple, Jesus' comment was not understood (cf. John 3:3, 4:10, 32;

Mark 8:15 for other instances when an earthly situation takes on a more comprehensive meaning). Is it possible that in Mark 13 Jesus means something other than the events of A.D. 70? Is Jesus stating that there will be an ultimate, final end when he predicts that no stone would be unturned? Is he, like John, connecting the ultimate end to his own death, i.e., the destruction of the temple of his body? These questions do not offer evidence Jesus does. They should cause one, however, to be willing to examine Mark 13 to see if it also is such a case. What Jesus meant by his statement determines the meaning of his subsequent explanation. If he had in mind the physical destruction of Herod's temple in A.D. 70, his words carry one meaning. They take on another significance if he refers to his approaching death and the ultimate end of all things. It is one's contextual understanding that leads interpreters into different directions.

The following diagrams illustrate the issues involved. In Jesus' comments: (1) Are there two points of judgment, i.e., the fall of Jerusalem and the final end? (2) Is there only one point of judgment, i.e., either the fall of Jerusalem or the final end? (3) Is the tension between the death of Christ and the final end with the fall of Jerusalem an incidental event? (4) Are there three points of judgment in mind, i.e., the death of Jesus, the fall of Jerusalem, and the final end, all of which are closely interrelated?



### VERSES 3-4: THE TWO QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE DISCIPLES

Our dilemma is further complicated by the fact that we are not informed in Mark 13 (cf. Matthew 24:3; Luke 21:7) of what the disciples understood Jesus to mean as we are regarding another issue in Mark 8:15-16. We can only perceive their understanding by the situation and by their questions. Mark carefully notes that they asked Jesus two questions while they were on the Mount of Olives and looking at the temple from across the Kidron Valley. (1) When would "this" be, and (2) what "sign" would indicate that "these things" are to be accomplished? Therefore, one may reasonably conclude that they understood the destruction to refer to an event in continuous time, although the final consummation may also have been included (cf. Matthew 24:3; Luke 21:7). Some interpreters affirm that the final end definitely is in view, but unfortunately, we are not informed of their understanding regarding the final end or how they might have related it to Jesus' prophecy regarding the destruction of the temple.

The questions do reveal certain aspects of their perceptions. The first question expresses their concern to know the time "when" the destruction would occur. Some interpreters suggest that the second question is a request for evidence that would verify that such an event would take place. In the prophetic tradition "signs" were often supplied to establish certainty of a prediction (Judges 6:36-40; 1 Samuel 10:1-9; Isaiah 7:14, 37:30, 38:8; Jeremiah 32:14-15).

Jesus often found himself in similar situations. He did or said something, but his words and actions were not sufficient (cf. Mark 6:52). Often, additional evidence was requested to verify his authority (John 2:18, 6:30; Mark 8:11; Matthew 16:1). Those present wanted a "sign." The modifying clause that follows the word "sign" in verse 4, "when these things are all to be accomplished?" indicates that the disciples are concerned with supporting evidence. It is introduced by the temporal particle, *hotan* (when), in contrast to *pote* (when) in the first question. *Hotan* (used also in vv. 7, 11) often indicates the conditions under which the action of the main clause takes

place.<sup>4</sup> Also, the words translated "about to be" (*mello*) often denote an action that necessarily follows divine decree in the sense of "destined" (cf. Matthew 17:22 for the same usage).

In effect, the disciples interpreted themselves. Although they acknowledged Jesus as Messiah (Mark 8:27-29), they still wanted to underscore them with observable actions in order for his statements to be accepted. In other words, the issue at stake is their belief and commitment to that belief of Jesus as Messiah.

One must note that the above assessment of what the disciples meant is crucial to the remainder of the discussion, and therefore, is in the position of being the Achilles' heel of the interpretation. If the disciples' question was merely a request for information about an event regarding which they had no doubt would occur, then Jesus' reply will have a meaning in keeping with one of the four major interpretations. Here, the connotations attached to the disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3 and Luke 21:7 become extremely important.

### VERSES 5-23: CIRCUMSTANCES UNTIL AFTER THE TRIBULATION

When Jesus begins his reply, he does so in an unexpected manner. He does not use the formula which elsewhere in Mark introduces answers to questions (Mark 10:3, 15:2). Instead, he utilizes the formula that introduces teaching situations (Mark 4:1, 6:2, 8:31). The alteration of formulas may not be significant because one finds in the Matthean parallel (Matthew 24:4) Mark's usual formula for introducing answers to questions. At this juncture another issue of interpretation becomes crucial. Is Jesus responding to a direct question with a direct answer, or is this a case analogous to John 6:25-26? In that instance, when people asked Jesus a direct question, instead of informing them of the time of his arrival as they requested, he speaks to a larger issue, i.e., why they were seeking him. Here, also, Jesus' response appears to be much broader in scope. Support for this conclusion rests on the fact that Jesus begins with an exhortation to faithfulness to him as Messiah and then gives what are sometimes called the "remote signs," the dis-

cussion of which centers on faithfulness to Jesus. This portion of his response has three parts: verses 5-8, verses 9-13, verses 14-23.

*Verses 5-8.* First, the conviction that "I am he" (Mark 14:62) repeatedly will be tested as other contenders present themselves and as disturbances in human society occur. Such "wars" should not be surprising because this is part of the process that occurs when humans reject God.

*Verses 9-13.* Jesus then again exhorts his disciples to be on guard. During the time when humans are endeavoring to establish a substitute for God's method of operation (false Christs) and having conflicts among themselves, the disciples will suffer in their persons by being delivered to councils, beaten, and hauled before officials. (Luke notes that the persecution comes "before" the wars and famines, cf. Luke 21:12.) This abuse is because they are not part of the world in which they live (cf. Mark 13:9c, "for my sake, to bear testimony before them," with John 15:18-24). However, the distress in which they find themselves will not prevent the proclamation of the gospel (v. 10). Then, as in the speech of Jesus preparing his disciples for the interim after his departure in John's Gospel (John 14:25-26, 15:26-27), the Lord assures his disciples that they will be sustained by the Holy Spirit. The paragraph closes with a statement regarding the agonizing intensity of the opposition from within one's own family (cf. Luke 12:51-53; Micah 7:2-6) and a call for endurance.

The usual interpretation given to verses 9 through 13 presupposes that the death/resurrection of Jesus are past events. Proponents often do not acknowledge that the same basic statements regarding the experiences of the disciples occur in the mission charge in Matthew 10:17-22, which concludes with the affirmation that they will not have traversed all the towns of Israel "before the Son of Man comes." The coming of the Son of Man occurs later as a theme in Mark 13:26. Also, Luke 12:11-12 repeats Mark 11:11 in a different context. Therefore, one may reasonably ask if one is required to infer that Jesus is speaking of a time *after* his death? Verse 10, "the Gospel must first be preached to all nations," may be cited as evidence that a time after the death of Jesus is in view. However, if Jesus is

using the word "gospel" as a synonym for his death and resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1), the verse could still have reference to experiences prior to those events. One may question, however, whether "gospel" is such a synonym.

*Verses 14-23.* To this point Jesus' concern has been on the faithfulness to his Messiahship. Jesus has focused on (1) the human opposition to it (vv. 5-8) and (2) the ordeals the disciples would face because of their faith (vv. 9-13). The prospects of standing before governmental officials who have the power of life and death would be extremely stressful. The treachery and abuse of one's closest relatives would be equally difficult to bear (cf. Psalm 55:12-13). Now (vv. 14-23), Jesus declares that the situation the disciples face will not only produce greater anguish, but that only intervention from God would enable them to endure. The common interpretation concludes that Jesus is speaking in reference to the siege and destruction of the physical city of Jerusalem. One may reasonably ask, however, why, in a passage in which faithfulness to the Messiah is central (cf. vv. 6, 20-22 and the exhortations of vv. 7, 9, 11) would the fall of Jerusalem, no matter the deprivations and gruesome conditions, be a greater test to faithfulness than the ordeals described previously? (Mark 9:1-3). Is Jesus merely foretelling a more intense physical test or does he have a different kind of trial in mind, i.e., the cataclysmic defamation and destruction of the one who is the basis of their faith? The following observations are some of the factors that might suggest this possibility.

(1) Mark's phrase in verse 14, "the abomination of desolation," reproduces the Greek of Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 with only slight variation, but in the Hebrew text the emphasis is not so much on the desolation of the temple in the sense of its being destroyed or deserted, as on the idea of it being horribly profaned. Both 1 Maccabees 1:54-59 and 6:7 understand the Daniel phrase in the sense of the desecration of Antiochus IV, Epiphanes, in 167 B.C., not its destruction. (Some interpreters argue that Romans practiced vile abominations where the temple stood or brought in the Eagle Standards which were abominations to the Jews because of the representations of the Emperor they bore. Others maintain that the outrages of lust

and murder perpetrated by the "Zealots" which drove worshipers in horror from the sacred courts<sup>5</sup> would fulfill the stipulations of the prophecy of desecration.)

(2) Doubtless what befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was indescribably horrible. Verse 19 declares that the abomination is greater than any event of the past or future. If taken as a literal statement, however, can one maintain that what happened to the residents of Jerusalem at the fall of the Herodian structure was more frightful than what Jews suffered under Hitler, who ordered the extermination of the entire race, so that as many as six million Jews were murdered? If it is a statement not to be pressed literally, but is to be understood as expressive of the intensity of the suffering, the case for the literal interpretation of other expressions is considerably lessened. On the other hand, is there anything that can match the willful degradation and slaughter of one who takes upon himself the concerns of the entire human race?

(3) Luke's parallel expression (Luke 21:20), "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near," could refer to the Lord being surrounded and reviled by his enemies as predicted in Psalm 22:16, the psalm the early Christians saw as being fulfilled in his death (John 19:24/Psalm 22:18; Mark 15:29/Psalm 22:7; Matthew 27:35/Psalm 22:16). Mark 10:32-34 (parallels are Matthew 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34) particularly links Jesus' cruel passion with "Jerusalem." In the three Synoptic accounts of the cleansing of the temple (Matthew 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-46; Mark 11:15-17), only Mark specifically mentions going into Jerusalem. From the theological point of view, Jerusalem is the setting in which the institutions of the Jewish faith, the cult and the law, are taken up in Jesus' action and for which the leaders sought to kill him (Mark 11:18).

(4) The Herodian temple is never specified in Jesus' private explanation (vv. 5-37). One does find the enigmatic statement, "where it ought not to be," to which Mark adds the parenthetical entreaty, "(let the reader understand)." In a different context the author of the fourth Gospel makes a similar parenthetical explanation to help the reader understand that Jesus' remarks regarding his opponents tearing down the "temple" refer to

Jesus' death and not to the Herodian structure (John 2:19).

(5) Jesus depicts the nature of the crisis as so great that one must "flee," "not go down," "not enter," "not go back." Whereas previously they were exhorted not to be "alarmed" (v. 7) nor "anxious" (v. 11) and encouraged to "endure" (v. 13), they now encounter that which goes beyond their resources. The pictures of a refugee in winter, a nursing mother, and especially the dependent infant depict one's abject helplessness.<sup>6</sup> One is not obligated, therefore, to understand these directives to be speaking of a literal resident of a city fleeing an invasion. It may express the helplessness one faces when the source of sustenance, protection, and strength is removed.

(6) Verse 20 continues the preceding theme by stressing that the event is so severe that the Lord must intervene to "shorten the days" or give it a fixed length (cf. 2 Baruch 20:1-2, 83:1; Epistle of Barnabas 4:3; Psalm 105:6; Isaiah 42:1). Without God's active intrusion, no human being "would be saved." Some interpreters see the relatively brief period required for Titus to capture Jerusalem, in contrast to the extended siege of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., as the time reference. Others project it to a grievous period of tribulation before the Lord's return. One, however, does not need to go beyond the events of the Lord's death and resurrection to see meaning in the statement.

First, his death occurred so rapidly that the crucifixion ordeal was not prolonged, not only for Jesus, but for the disciples as well. The longer the excruciating agony lasted on the cross and the debilitating effects to his mind and body progressed, and as he lost all control of physical functions, the less confidence one could maintain that he was the Messiah and the more evidence would be required to re-establish the conviction.

Second, his burial touched three calendar days as he predicted (a fixed time). When the angels announced the resurrection (Mark 16:6-7), the process began for (a) reaffirming their belief and (b) changing their confidence in the physical, tangible Messiah to the Messiah that transcends time and space. The conversation of Jesus with Mary Magdalene in John 20:11-18 serves as a commentary on this process of tran-

sition for one of the women present in Mark 16:1.

(7) The efforts to undermine and discredit his Messiahship and the exhortations not to regard such endeavors (v. 21) also conform to the trial and crucifixion scenes. Luke 17:23-25 couples false exhortations of "Lo here" and "Lo there" with the sufferings of Christ.

One may regard the following actions as efforts to discount Jesus' claims. (a) False witnesses gave testimony regarding his pronouncements about the temple (Mark 14:55-58). (b) The Jews tested his claim by calling upon him to prophesy (Mark 14:65). (c) The preference for the "murderer" Barabbas over Jesus indicates that Jesus and his claim were utterly contemptible. (d) The fact that Jesus was unable to set their mockery aside supplies evidence that he is not Messiah (Mark 15:18-19). (e) Equally, the challenge to come down from the cross to prove that he was the Christ and his failure to do so shows his lack of Messianic power (Mark 15:32). (f) Likewise, his revilers interpreted his cry of "Eloi" as an appeal to Elijah, the patron of lost causes. If even Elijah would not help Jesus, then it could be reasoned that Jesus' claims were meaningless (Mark 15:36).

(8) Jesus concludes the paragraph in a way reminiscent of the manner in which he prepared his disciples for the ordeals after his death in his closing speech to them in the Gospel of John (John 16:1-4). He equips them by telling of what they will experience in advance (Mark 13:23).

(9) From a strictly technical point of view, not every stone was literally removed. Some of the stones of the retaining walls may still be seen. All the stones of the sanctuary did topple and that may have been Jesus' meaning.

#### VERSES 5-23: A SUMMARY

Jesus does not directly respond to the disciples request for "the" sign that would indicate his prediction is to be fulfilled. Instead, Jesus encourages his disciples to faithfulness in his Messiahship during (a) disturbances in their environment and (b) attacks against their persons. (c) He also indicates a tribulation of greater intensity than these will occur which will

necessitate God's intervention. Although one may reasonably see this terrible anguish as an event at some point after his death, some evidence makes verses 14 through 23 a possible reference to the Lord's own tribulation at the hands of his enemies.

#### VERSES 24-37: THE AFTERMATH OF THE TRIBULATION

Attention now will be given to the question: Do verses 24 through 37 refer to events in A.D. 70 (or later) or may they be applied to Jesus' glorification at the time of his resurrection? Three paragraphs comprise this section: verses 24-27, verses 28-31, verses 32-37.

*Verses 24-27.* The opening words, "In those days," is common in eschatological passages (Jeremiah 3:16, 18, 31:29, 33:15-16; Joel 3:1; Zechariah 8:23). With this expression Mark couples two events: (1) the tribulation and (2) the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew is more explicit by indicating a time relationship, stating that the second event "immediately" follows the first (Matthew 24:29). One also observes that the cosmic upheaval involving changing states of the sun, moon, and stars and the powers of the heavens which are characteristic descriptions of the change from one aeon to another (Amos 8:9; Isaiah 13:10, 24:33, 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:28-32) can refer to Christ's work on the cross. Acts 2:19-20 specifically applies Joel 2:28-32 to the inauguration of the Christian era. Thus, it is not necessary to consider the passage as a metaphoric reference to the destruction of Herod's temple nor as a statement of the literal breakup of the universe at the second coming of Christ.

One may also understand the predicted appearance of the "Son of Man" in verse 26 as a reference to the resurrection of Jesus. In the trial scene of Mark 14:62, Jesus confesses, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (clouds symbolize divinity). This statement combines Daniel 7:13 with the thought of Psalm 110:1, a psalm interpreted by Peter in Acts 2:34-35 as Scripture that teaches the resurrection, not the

ultimate consummation of all things. Stephen, in Acts 7:56, utilizes the same language when referring to the resurrected Lord (cf. also John 6:62, 12:23-24).

Third, Messianic agents (cf. 1 Enoch 61) will be sent to gather the elect, a common idea in Judaism (Isaiah 11:11, 16, 27:12, 64:4, Micah 4:1-7; Zechariah 2:6-11, 10:6-11; 1 Enoch 57; The Psalms of Solomon 11:3). Most interpretations of this passage affirm that these verses refer to either God's actions after the A.D. 70 debacle or to God's actions at the final Judgment. The theme of God gathering his elect occurs, however, in the New Testament in connection with the work of the cross (cf. Romans 9:25 with Hosea 2:23; 1:10 and Ephesians 2:17 with Isaiah 57:19; and 1 Peter 2:10). One does not need to project the passage to the physical collapse of the old Jewish economy or to the final consummation to see its application. The resurrection (coming of the Son of Man) also signals a new age in which God brings from captivity those who accept his election (his work in their behalf).

*Verses 28-31.* According to the interpretation that Jesus' glorification at his resurrection is in view in verses 24 through 27, Jesus now would be crystallizing his answer to the second question of the disciples, i.e., what "sign" indicates the veracity of the pronouncement? Just as the appearance of leaves on the fig tree indicates the certainty of summer, so also (a) the death (as a result of the rejection of the eternal and the placing of confidence in the earthly) and (b) the resurrection of the Son of Man (the vindication of the eternal) signals the final Judgment of all earthbound confidences, which the Herodian temple symbolized. One's faith should rest in what cannot be seen or touched. The one who comes with great power and glory (v. 26) is the standard and is making the demands for one's allegiance ("is near, at the very gates," v. 29). If this interpretation is valid, the material in chapter 13 is an organized restatement of material he has given at various points in his ministry. The uniqueness of the presentation is that (a) Jesus puts it in the form of a consecutive, extended speech and that (b) he couches it in apocalyptic-style language.

Also, if the passage (vv. 14-27) is a statement of his death and resurrection as the sign, and not a description of some other

sign, such as the events of A.D. 70, then the Lord is describing the sign of Jonah. "So shall the Son of Man be three days and nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40, 16:4).

This interpretation enables one to understand "this generation" in its usual sense of a contemporary life span (as in Matthew 11:16, 12:39, 41, 42, 45; Mark 8:38; Luke 11:50, 17:25) rather than resorting to an attempt to find a broader meaning for *genea* to mean the human race or Jewish people. In an earlier episode (Mark 8:38—9:1), Jesus uses language that expresses the same affirmation as 13:30. On that occasion, when foretelling the coming of the Son of Man in glory with the holy angels, Jesus states "there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come in power."

According to this interpretation, "all these things" which the disciples "see" (v. 29) refer to what one "sees" in verse 14, i.e., the desolating sacrilege (the desecration of crucifixion) and what one "sees" in verse 26, i.e., the coming of the Son of Man in glory. (All three "sees" are from the same root, *horao*.) Combined, "these things" become the sign that would enable them to "see" (perceive, *blepo*) the significance of the fall of the temple in verses 1 and 2.

Verse 31 supplies one final clue that Jesus is not concerned primarily with supplying signs to support his pronouncements. His concern focuses primarily on the disciples understanding of his Messiahship. If he is Messiah, his words are sufficient. Not only does Jesus introduce the solemn nature of his pronouncement with "Truly, I say to you" in verse 30, but in verse 31 he categorically affirms that what he says will occur: "My words will not pass away."

Jesus does not begin his comments in verse 5 with a direct answer to their question. The reason for not doing so is because a larger issue is at stake. They were asking for a sign to support his word. Instead, he describes the supreme sign which will demonstrate that he is Messiah. No other signs are necessary. His words are sufficient.

Earlier in the book (Mark 2:10) Jesus, in the healing of the paralytic, did that which was capable of being proved in order to vindicate his authority and power to do that which, in its

very nature, is incapable of being proved, i.e., forgiving sins. Likewise, by his death and resurrection, he establishes his authority for being the agent for the consummation of all things and the one who transcends physical, earthbound confidences.

This feature would be especially meaningful to the original persecuted readers of the book a generation later. They would be sustained by the sign of the vindicated Lord, rather than by non-abiding human-based confidences which competed for their loyalty. John 20:29 would be a capsuled commentary. "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

#### VERSES 32-37: REPLY TO THE FIRST QUESTION

In this concluding paragraph Jesus changes themes and addresses the disciples' first question, i.e., "when" would the end come? He signals the shift with the expression, "but concerning [*peri de*]." Jesus affirms that the decision for determining the time of the culmination of all things solely rests with God. Jesus will act in his death and resurrection to demonstrate, as stated in John 5:22, 27, that "the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man." However, it is God's prerogative to determine the final assize. In view of the unknowability of that time by the disciples, they must ever "watch" or be prepared. With this theme in the parable of the doorkeeper, Jesus concludes the Olivet discourse.

#### VERSES 24-37: A SUMMARY

While these verses usually are applied to the Lord's vindication of his death when Jerusalem fell or to his Second Coming, they possibly may refer to his resurrection. If so, his death and vindication signals that he is the ultimate judge. Since the time when he ultimately will manifest himself is unknown, the disciple is to constantly live prepared.

#### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

From this writer's perspective, the view that Mark 13 focuses on Christ's work has at least three weaknesses. (1) It is highly "spiritualized," abstract, and not an understanding that would naturally come to a reader. (2) Although it presents possible alternative interpretations of some passages, it has so many uncertainties that definite conclusions cannot be drawn. (3) If it has significant validity, why, in all the centuries of wrestling with the material, has it not become one of the major interpretations?

It does have the following in its favor. (1) It gives meaning to some of the cryptic expressions by showing analogies to Christ's suffering and death. (2) As an extended speech which summarizes Jesus' previous messages regarding his coming ordeal and the relationship of his disciples to him, it aids in understanding why it appears immediately before his passion and immediately after a series of hostilities. (3) It clarifies why the speech contains many exhortations regarding faithfulness to the Messiah. (4) It is in harmony with Mark's general purpose of assisting suffering readers by setting forth the Messiah as one triumphant over opposition. The major value derived by this writer by reviewing the described interpretation is to see afresh why Jesus could refer to his death in John 2:19 as the tearing down of the temple.

The concern in this study is not to declare one view is to be received and that others are to be rejected. Discussion on the meaning of Mark 13 has been in progress for many years. One can expect it to continue. The purpose for examining the material from another perspective is to stimulate the student to reflection and examination of the text. If such investigation assists us in appreciating God's message for us, then our study has been successful.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 15. 11. 2. Our chief sources are *Antiquities* 15. 11, *Wars* 5. 5, and the Mishnah tractate *Middoth*.

<sup>2</sup>*Antiquities* 15. 11. 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Joma*, 39b.

<sup>4</sup>Compare Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* revised by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 592.

<sup>5</sup>*Wars* 4. 3. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Compare 2 Esdras 5:8, 6:21 for a similar description of eschatological woes.

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## LOVE IN MARK

(Mark 12:28-34)

CHARLES B. HODGE, JR.

Mark blesses us with insights missed in Matthew and Luke. Study the text only in the context. Familiar Scripture must be read more closely. Jesus is under siege. The enemies have brought their big guns. Prior to our text, the Sadducees tried to trap him. This is the only time the Sadducees appear in Mark. It is difficult to be a leader/teacher. People try to trap, harm, yea destroy. Enemies try to put you on the "horns of a dilemma." Beware of religious questionnaires. A prominent religious denomination is at war now on "questionnaires." Questionnaires fail because they do not ask the right questions. Questionnaires fail because they trap, not unite. Your speaker will gladly answer any biblical question. He will not fill out questionnaires. Questionnaires fail because they are creedal. People loyal to Jesus do not need questionnaires. It is sad that men unite more over hate than love.

Questionnaires fail because they label, then libel. Pressure is then exerted. One cannot appear in a lectureship because someone else is. Shame on us. This is "sectarianism gone to seed." It is factious. It is heresy. Jesus was being "worked over" by the orthodoxy. He was not exempt.

Observation . . . preach on the great principles, commands, doctrines. Do not denigrate the pulpit with molehill issues. Unite men in Christ; do not divide men over "positions," "issues." Church creeds are still wrong, wrong, wrong! Do not force people by "lining them up." By the way, love is a doctrine! Encourage all to study the Bible prayerfully, developing their own Christian conscience and maturity. There is the priesthood of all believers. There is only one religious guide—the Bible. Respect this.

## THE QUERIST

A scribe, a religious lawyer. He was an enemy but he was a candid enemy. He did ask a vital question. He did not bring a questionnaire that was loaded! He did not bring a Pharisee, Sadducee, Herodian "pet prejudice." He did bring up the eternal question! Give the man credit; also sense his humanity, his bias. Man for centuries had probed "The Greatest."

- (1) Shammai said there were 613 commands, 365 negative and 248 positive.
- (2) David reduced the 613 to 11 in Psalm 15.
- (3) Isaiah reduced the 11 to 6 in Isaiah 33:15.
- (4) Micah reduced the 6 to 3 in Micah 6:8.
- (5) Habakkuk summed it up in 1 in Habakkuk 2:4.
- (6) Study these Scriptures, the eternal principles.

Our querist had a great question, but it was also current conversation. "What is the primary, greatest command?" One good question! Jesus answered the man with more than he asked.

## THE ANSWER OF JESUS

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 22:35-40, and Luke 10:25-28. All accounts in the Synoptics differ. Jesus made a startling reply! *Love!* The primary, the greatest is love! Jesus quoted "The Scripture" of the Jews, Deuteronomy 6. This was their daily recitation. Jesus quoted their Law, their Scripture. He then added Leviticus 19:18. Rabbis taught Deuteronomy 6. They never connected Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. Jesus literally ran two Scriptures together. Jesus took an old law and gave it new meaning. He said Christianity is not theology—it is life . . . abundant life. Laws, commands are for living. Loving God and loving man sum up all the Law and the Prophets. This was a mind-boggling answer to a valid question. Paul said love fulfills the Law (Romans 13:8-10).

This profound answer enforced the "Person" of God. This was not abstract theology. Deuteronomy 6 enforces the unity of God, the reality of the Trinity. Jesus brought the querist back to "square one." This answer enforces the sovereignty,

demands of God. Christianity is a "God" religion. Jesus is God; Jesus revealed God. The foundational reality is God! We must have a personal relationship with God. *God!* The great command is God! God is love! Jesus was not interested in "dos" and "don'ts." He was not interested in "pet peeves." Jesus went to the jugular! It could not be denied.

Jesus then gave an "inspired commentary" upon Deuteronomy 6: ". . . with all your heart, soul, mind, strength." How emphatic! Jesus expands Deuteronomy 6 with his commentary. It is said of England, "God is dead, but we pray just in case." It is said of the USA, "God is alive, yet we live as if he is not."

We love with all our hearts. There are "priorities in love" and "lesser of evils." Life is not all that simple. We do not merely choose between the right and the wrong. We must choose among good. God is #1, family #2, self #3, people #4, and enemies #5. Do not get these loves out of place. Do not major on minors. All of our loves are conditional except love of God. The love of God is transcendent. If we are wrong here, we are wrong everywhere. The other loves are good only in connection with God! The love of God purifies our other loves.

We love with our souls, our lives, the depths of our beings.

We love with our minds. Our minds are renewed (Romans 12:1-2). God loved us first. I used to worry about my love for God. I now try to grasp God's love for me. We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:7-11). John 3:16 is still the Golden Text in the Bible. The love of Christ motivates us (2 Corinthians 5:14). The only permanent motivation in Christianity is the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10); when you awaken daily, tell yourself two things: (1) "God loves me" and (2) "Jesus died for me." Do not try to pump yourself up with pop psychology motivation. We all leak! Ground yourself in the love of God!

We love with our strength. Love works, obeys, dedicates, serves, commits, endures. Love is action. We serve God with all our might. Jesus concluded, "This is the first commandment."

## THE LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

Familiar Scripture must be read more closely. This state-

ment has been both misunderstood and misapplied. "Neighbor" in its primary definition here is man. "Love God and love man." This is all Jesus is saying. Christianity is not theology. It is a relationship with God and with man, *period!* Get right with God. Serve man. Jesus is not saying a neighbor has priority over family. It is God and people. There are no commands like these! *Pow!* Question: How are you doing?

The love of God is lived among people. Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). You cannot preach your way to credibility; you can serve your way to credibility. This is teaching by actions (1 Peter 4:10-11). We cannot truly love God while not loving man.

Usually overlooked in our text is the simple statement, "as thyself." Christians have problems with this. A selfish love is wrong. Self-hate is equally wrong. To run down self is as wrong as running down others. We cannot properly love others until we know how to understand/love ourselves. Christians are not to love themselves too much or too little. "Get your mind off yourself and yourself off your mind."

"Am I a neighbor?" is the real question. God serves us. We serve others. Do what you can where you are with what you have.

Brotherly love is emphatically involved. Jesus said in John 13:34-35 that love is the badge of discipleship. We have not done well in this. When one picks God, he picks the ones God has picked. We do not pick for God. You do not get to pick your brothers and sisters. I pick my friends; my enemies pick me. God calls his children. Any son of God is my brother, *period!* Jesus loved the disciples unto the end (John 13:1), permanently, ultimately. He loved them when they needed to be shot. We are to love, regardless of how we are treated.

The cross does express the love of Jesus for us. However, the cross best displays the love of Jesus for God. Read John 14:30-31. Jesus did the will of God. The cross best examples his personal love for God—the love Jesus had for God!

## THE FINALE

What a fascinating conversation. The querist who came in

conflict now dares to comment. He salutes the answer of Jesus. He had a degree of honesty and openness. He further adds his own insight—love is **greater** than burnt sacrifices. Jesus answered the man as he had answered him. He said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

No more questions . . . no more conflicts . . . the people were happy. Members are always ahead of leaders; voters are always ahead of politicians. The enemies were silenced. Truth triumphed.

## COMPASSION IN MARK

(Mark 1:41)

CHARLES B. HODGE, JR.

The New Testament begins with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—not Acts. You cannot perceive the work of the church without Christ. You find Christ in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Mark is the “Action Gospel.” There is more action in Mark than lecture. Jesus was out among men, serving their perceived needs. You cannot preach your way to credibility. You can serve your way to credibility. Jesus accepted men where they were as they were—not where you would wish them to be. Jesus never taught men on empty stomachs. He handled their perceived needs before he discussed their eternal needs. Every word and every action of Jesus came from compassion. People did not like the Pharisees, yet they loved Jesus.

We need to be more like Jesus. When I was young, I admired clever men; now that I am old, I admire kind men. Leadership qualities for church leaders are located in the heart and not in talent. Select preachers for their hearts—not their heads or mouths. *Relationships!* Christianity is relationships. Christianity is people. Christianity is life. People count. People matter.

### COMPASSION

Jesus was “moved with compassion.” This word is only given to Jesus. He cared. He revealed the Father’s heart to fallen men. Jesus practiced what he preached. We are saved by grace; do not ever forget it. Never choose mechanics over mercy. “Go and learn mercy,” Jesus said! Be gospel preachers. God is far more willing to save than we proclaim him to be. Jesus died for those “we have written off.” The elder son could

not receive the prodigal because he could not grasp grace. Read John 3:16-18; Romans 5:5, 8; 9:15. Do not have the audacity to tell God how to dispense grace (Matthew 9:13, 12:7). A weakness in compassion comes from a weakness in grace. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus.

Why are we afraid of emotion? Emotionalism is wrong, but not emotion (1 Peter 3:8; Colossians 3:12; 1 John 3:16, 17; Ephesians 4:31-32.) *Feel, brethren, feel!* Care! Cry! Share! Serve! Heal! Reconcile! Shakespeare asked, “How canst thou hope for mercy rendering none?” A sick church cannot save a lost world. We have too many dried-eyed preachers preaching dry-eyed sermons to dry-eyed members!

No man has the right to police the church. Do not be more interested in your pound of flesh than an ounce of mercy. *Save me from church saviors!* Beloved, the cure must not be worse than the disease.

Evangelism and benevolence go together. In breathing, which is the most important? Inhaling or exhaling? An individual gospel without a social gospel is a soul without a body. A social gospel without an individual gospel is a body without a soul. One is a ghost, and the other is a corpse. Compassion demands forgiveness. Compassion is the heart of forgiveness. “Shouldst not thou also have compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Matthew 18:33).

### COMPASSION OF JESUS IN MARK

Mark 1:23f.—The first miracle demonstrated power over demons. The fame of Jesus spread.

Mark 1:30f.—The mother-in-law of Peter was healed. She then served. We are blessed in order to share, to serve. The whole city came to the door. He healed many. He prayed. All men sought Jesus.

Mark 1:40f.—With a leper, Jesus was “moved with compassion.” *He touched him!* This defied ceremonial law, medical law. This meant as much to the leper as the healing.

Mark 2:1-12—The man carried by four came down through the uncovered roof. Jesus “forgave sins.” Man’s only real problem is sin. Jesus cared for bodies because he loved souls.

Mark 2:14f.—Jesus called a despised publican to be an apostle! At a dinner, Jesus reached out to sinners. Jesus came as a doctor, not a lawyer, to heal the sick.

Mark 2:21f.—New wine cannot be put in old bottles. Old wine need not be put in new bottles. The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This is the entire ministry of Jesus.

Mark 3:1f.—Hostility arises. Will Jesus heal on the Sabbath? Can we do good on the Sabbath? Jesus healed in anger. He did not ask the man to come back on Tuesday! Jesus grieved over hard hearts. Anti-ism is in the heart, not the head. The Pharisees and Herodians now plot to kill him. For doing good in compassion. Men came to touch him. Poignant. Even the friends of Jesus thought he was crazy!

Mark 4—Jesus taught in parables. Parables were wisdom revealing compassion.

Mark 5:1f.—Legion is healed. People cared more for hogs than Jesus.

Mark 5:22f.—The daughter of Jairus is resurrected. The woman with an issue of blood touched his garment. Jesus cared for women. Mark was honest about the failures of doctors. Even in superstition, Jesus accepted faith!

Mark 6:1-6—In Nazareth, his home town, Jesus could not heal because of their unbelief.

Mark 6:31f.—Jesus said there is a time to rest. We have missed this dimension. John the Baptist had been killed. It was time to regroup.

Mark 6:34—They were sheep without a shepherd.

Mark 6:55f.—People came in droves to be healed. Just to touch his garments, they were healed. Mark is nothing but compassion. There is more action than lecturing. Jesus even fed the five thousand from compassion. They were not starving—merely hungry.

Mark 7:24—He could not be hidden.

Mark 7:24f.—With the Syrophenician woman was the only time Jesus appeared impolite. But the lady revealed her thought and faith. The daughter was healed. This revealed hope to the Gentiles. They, too, would receive grace.

Mark 7:32f.—A deaf man was healed by touch. Jesus did all

things well.

Mark 8:1f.—Four thousand were fed.

Mark 8:22f.—A blind man was healed in two stages. This was an unusual miracle.

Mark 9:17f.—The disciples failed with a healing. Jesus healed, but the boy died. Jesus then raised the dead. This kind required prayer and fasting.

Mark 9:38-40—John had failed in the healing attempt. But he now is against a man successful in healing. Jesus would not be sectarian. You do not have to be in my bunch!

Mark 10:13f.—Jesus blessed little children.

Mark 10:46f.—Blind Bartimaeus is healed.

Mark 11:17—Jesus cleansed the temple.

Mark 14:3f.—Jesus rebuked the apostles when they fussed about Mary's alabaster box.

Mark 16:1f.—The first person to see the resurrected Jesus was a woman—Mary Magdalene—from whom he had cast out seven demons.

## HOPE IN MARK

(Mark 1:14-15)

CHARLES B. HODGE, JR.

Mark is a Gospel of hope, yet the word "hope" is not found in the book. It is a book of hope because it is gospel; the gospel is hope. I am a "gospel preacher." Do not turn the "Good News" into "Bad News." An unhappy preacher cannot build a great church. Preachers of Good News ought to have smiling faces. Preachers are not pessimists. There is hope; Jesus took captivity captive and we won! Beware of "joy robbers." Christians can sing "Blessed Assurance" without their fingers crossed! Christianity has a "cross of victory"; we must never change this symbol into "wringing hands." God wants his children to have security, assurance, hope.

The problem is not faith; the problem is hope. Read Hebrews 11:1 more closely. This is a definition of hope, not faith. We have, sadly, only given our children facts. Facts are not faith. The spring of faith is hope. "A cynic is not one bitter with the past. He is prematurely disappointed with the future."

Small lives are so  
Because they have small goals.  
Small loves are so  
Because they have small hopes.

Unbelief, Hebrews says, is not in the head—it is in the heart. Hope is a heart issue. We still accept the facts and win the debates, but we have lost our hearts. Weariness is not being tired. Weariness is in the heart. We have lost our hearts. "Tired faith" is nothing but a loss of hope. At the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. We can be strong in faith only when we are great in hope. The sin of unbelief is rooted in hopelessness. The answer to fear is not faith, but hope. The believer's hope transcends the unbeliever's despair. This is

why encouragement is always the great need, and discouragement the greatest problem. We were "without God and hope" (Ephesians 2). But Christ came; the gospel came! Because of him we have both God and hope. Mark is a gospel of hope. People do not drop out of church because they lost their faith—they lost their hope.

## LEVELS OF FAITH

There are stages, levels in faith:

*An inherited faith.* Preschoolers believe anything parents or teachers tell them. Children have no problem with God, the church, the Bible, miracles. They simply believe as told. This is a borrowed, inherited faith. It will fail in adult life. God has sons but not grandsons. Our children can become "lifters," "second-handers." They were given facts not faith, a creed not Christ.

*A joining faith.* In pre-adolescence, most of our children were baptized. This is good. This is normal. However, one can believe right—because of others—and still be wrong. You can be lost, yet be a member of the right church. One cannot live/grow upon another's faith. In most religions, 80 per cent of their members come by birth or marriage. Among us the percentage is 95 per cent! This means we are not very good in evangelism. Faith sure of itself is not faith. Faith sure about God is faith. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

*A searching faith.* We are now acting as adults. Why do I believe what I believe? This is the Restoration plea. Tragically, 80 per cent of members never get past the first two stages. Even more frightening—70 per cent of our church leaders never do! Doubts can be "ants in the pants of faith." An unexamined life is not worth living. Truth has no fears. Can we be open, honest, teachable? When was the last time we changed on anything? Even under God's instruction three times, Peter never ate in Acts 10! Faith must become personal (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus is a personal Savior.

*A personal faith.* David wrote Psalm 23 from experience as well as inspiration. "Great is thy faithfulness!" "I know in whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12). We will not be saved

by families, congregations, or brotherhoods. When Jesus returns, will he find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:8). This matured faith is a faith of hope. The other stages have no personal hope! What stage of faith am I in? Do not confuse evangelism with proselytism. It is easier to give a man our faith than allow him to have his.

Again, there are no "Golden Days" in the church. The apostles never had nostalgia. They never sat around the fire discussing "the good old days" when Jesus was on earth! It is interesting to read in Luke that the apostles returned from Mount Olivet (the ascension) with joy! They grasped the reality of the resurrection. We won! It is all over! There is no future jeopardy! It is finished! He is coming back! The Great Commission is simply, "Preach the gospel." This is not creeds! Do not scold. Tell men what God did in Christ on a cross for them. The gospel is not what men do for God; it is what God did for man. Hope lies in God, in the gospel. Preach it. Live it.

### GOD GAVE US JESUS

Christianity, basically, is two things: (1) God gave us Jesus. (2) We give Jesus back to God. We receive Jesus to give Jesus. Satan operates with bribes and threats; God operates with love and trust. God did not drop a "black book" out of the sky with a note in it, saying, "Good luck." Christianity is Christ. *Period!*

God gave us Jesus. (John 6:44-45, 48; 10:10; 14:6; Acts 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21). This is no problem with us. We are saved by grace; we cannot save ourselves. Jesus is the Lamb of God. The gospel is marvelously simple and simply marvelous. Our problem is a sin problem. The sin problem is a self problem. My problem is to take the "Almighty I" and bend it into the "Humble C." I am accepted in the Beloved. I have no righteousness of my own. It is neither a "poor self-esteem" or "good self-esteem"—it is a "Christ esteem." We do not have faith in our faith.

To be called to Jesus is a gift.

To be overcome by Jesus is freedom.

To die with Christ is life.

### WE GIVE JESUS BACK TO GOD

*Pow!* This is the missing link! We have reduced Christianity to a business transaction. God did his part; we do ours! God does it all! Christianity is not performance, perfection. Christianity is grace. The only thing God will accept is Jesus! Grasp this! I am saved by grace; I am kept by grace.

Jesus only had one command: "Follow me." Baptism is essential because one is totally placed in Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). Our faith is in Christ not us. We give our bodies to God in Christ. Therefore, we are new creations in Christ (John 3:3, 5, 7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:4). Only Jesus can live the Christian life. But he can live that life again in me. Christ is my life (Galatians 2:20-21; Philippians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 5:10). I have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5-9; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Romans 8:9). A new birth, life, body, love, hope, destiny! (Colossians 3:1-4). Everything I am is of grace (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The power is of God, not man (Philippians 2:12-13, 4:13, 19; Ephesians 2:8-10, 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:1; Colossians 3:17, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Colossians 1:27). "In Christ" is in the New Testament 164 times! It is all of God. We glorify God only in Jesus. Christianity is a faith, commitment, loyalty to a person. It is not faith in a creed; it is conversion to a person. The focus is upon that person. As long as the focus is upon Christ, the church cannot become denominational. The difference in the first century was Jesus; the difference in the twentieth century is Jesus. Christianity de-institutionalizes us! "How-to" religion fails . . . miserably. God does not call us to be successful; he calls us to be faithful.

Focus upon John 15. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. Apart from Jesus we are zero, zilch, nothing. Abide in Jesus, in his love, in his word. Without him we are nothing; with him we are everything. The fruit is found upon the branches. The fruit comes from the root.

### CONCLUSION

Three final thoughts are these: (1) The most important thing in the world is to be loved. (2) The second most important thing

is to love. (3) The third most important thing is to have the first and second most important things at the same time. God gives us Jesus—that we might give him back!

## THE MIRACLES IN MARK

JIMMY JIVIDEN

An understanding of the Gospel of Mark would be incomplete without an in-depth study of the miracles contained in it. Mark's use of the miracle narratives of Jesus are not only used to "confirm the word," but they also reflect the nature of the first readers.

At least eighteen miracles are recorded in Mark. This number may vary, depending on what one regards as a miracle. Jesus' resurrection was a miracle, but it is not included in the list of miracles he worked during his personal ministry.

In listing the miracles of Mark, the author notes eight general references to miracles.<sup>1</sup> Six times references are made to inspirational or direct acts of God.<sup>2</sup> There are eighteen times in which Jesus "worked a miracle."<sup>3</sup>

In the eighteen miracles in Mark, all but three are the same as those in Matthew.<sup>4</sup> Two are unique to Mark.<sup>5</sup> Mark records more miracles in ratio to other material than any other Gospel writer.<sup>6</sup>

### WORDS FOR MIRACLES

Mark used three words for the miraculous events he recorded.<sup>7</sup> The meaning of these three words will aid in defining the uniqueness of the miraculous events in the life of Jesus.

*Semeion* is used six times by Mark to refer to miracles.<sup>8</sup> It is translated "sign." Its meaning, like the English word "sign," points to something beyond itself. A street sign is not the street, but it points beyond itself to the street it identifies. The miracles in Mark are not to be seen as events centering on themselves. They point to Jesus, his apostles, and others to show that God approved of the man and his message. This

aspect of the miracles is shown in Mark's own explanation of miracles (Mark 16:17-20). *Semeion* focuses on the purpose of the miraculous event.

*Teras*, though often used to refer to miracles in the other Gospels, is used only one time in Mark.<sup>9</sup> Even then it does not refer to the miracles of Jesus, but "miracles" from false Christs and false prophets. *Teras* is translated as the English word "wonder." It refers to the viewer's response of awe and terror upon witnessing an event. The word reflects the kind of feeling one would have in viewing the Northern Lights in the Alaskan sky or seeing the Grand Canyon at sundown or the feeling a father would have in witnessing the birth of his child. The focus of this word is the viewer's response to a miraculous or wondrous event. Mark used several words to express this kind of response that people had to the miracles of Jesus. Upon witnessing a miracle, people were "amazed,"<sup>10</sup> "frightened," "afraid" or "terrified,"<sup>11</sup> "marveled"<sup>12</sup> and "astonished."<sup>13</sup>

*Dunamis* is used four times in Mark to refer to miracles of Jesus.<sup>14</sup> The term means "power" but is translated "miracle" when referring to the signs of Jesus. The English words "dynamite" and "dynamo" come from this word. The word reflects the power source of the miraculous event. The miracles of Jesus did not "just happen." They were caused by a power that could suspend the laws of nature. It was super-human power that was above nature. The focus of this word is on the power source by which the miracle was performed.<sup>15</sup>

The use of these three terms reflect different aspects of miracles. They came from supernatural power. They struck awe and wonder in the hearts of those who witnessed them. They pointed, not to themselves, but to the man who worked them or the message he spoke. They were confirming signs.

It should be noted, however, that all of these Greek terms are neutral. They do not, in the meaning of the terms themselves, carry the idea of being contrary to nature. All of these terms are used in other passages completely outside of the miraculous context. All of these terms are used in Mark to refer to events not connected with Jesus (Mark 9:39; 13:4, 22).

These three terms are used together outside of Mark to show the different dimensions of the miraculous events (Acts 2:22; 2

Thessalonians 2:9; Hebrews 2:4). One must go beyond the meaning of these terms, however, to understand the miracles of Jesus.

## THE UNIQUE NATURE OF JESUS' MIRACLES

The uniqueness of the miracles of Jesus is to be found in their nature, their source, and their purpose. Their nature was supernatural. Their source was from God.<sup>16</sup> Their purpose was to confirm.<sup>17</sup>

The miracles of Jesus were unique because they were contrary to the normal observable patterns of the universe. To walk on water, to cure a man born blind, or to raise a man who had been dead for three days are not normal happenings. The fact that they are not normal happenings makes them unique and allows them to fulfill their purpose of confirmation.

One can classify the events which happen in the world into three categories.

First, there are miracles. They are of supernatural origin. They are different from nature's order. The miracles of Jesus fit into this category.

Second, there is the normal. This is what one is able to observe by his senses and reason with his mind. The normal is so static that it is the basis for the development of the scientific method. Sometimes this normal is called the "law of nature." Such laws were spoken into existence at the creation of the world. They follow a pattern—a seed brings forth after its kind. The normal is orderly, consistent, and predictable. One is able to understand the cause and effect. An acorn growing into an oak is normal. It is expected because the same thing has happened in the same way millions of times.

Third, there is the paranormal—that which is "along side" of the normal. Such is not miraculous since it does not contradict the laws of nature. It is not normal because it is unusual. One does not know the cause and effect. Many things which fall into this category will be understood at a later time when more information is available. Hypnosis is paranormal. It is a real phenomenon and is often used by man. It is not miraculous since it does not contradict any law of the universe. Much

about the phenomenon is not understood, and therefore, it would be classed as paranormal.

## SUMMARY

Mark used three words to identify the miraculous events of Jesus' ministry—"signs," "wonders," and "miracles." These words reflect the purpose, the source, and the response given to the miraculous events in the Gospel. The miracles of Jesus were supernatural in nature. Only the God who created the universe and spoke laws into existence which control it could break such laws. This he did with miracles to confirm his approval of men and their message.

This is the understanding of miracles suggested in the Arndt and Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon*. Under the second definition of *semeion* is the following statement: ". . . A sign consisting of a wonder or miracle, an event that is contrary to the usual course of nature."<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mark 1:32-34, 39; 3:10-11; 6:2, 5, 13-14; 6:55-56; 9:38-39; 13:22; 16:17-20.

<sup>2</sup>Mark 1:9-13; 2:8; 9:2-8; 16:12-14.

<sup>3</sup>Mark 1:23-27, 30-31, 40-42; 2:3-12; 3:1-5; 4:35-39; 5:1-13, 22-42, 25-34; 6:34-44, 47-51; 7:24-30, 32-37; 8:1-9, 22-25, 9:17-29; 10:46-52; 11:12-14, 20-21.

<sup>4</sup>Mark 1:23-27; 7:31-37; 8:22-26.

<sup>5</sup>Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26.

<sup>6</sup>In a comparison in one New Testament text, it was found that John recorded a miracle on an average of once every 6.88 pages; Luke on an average of once every 3.52 pages; Matthew on an average of once every 3.45 pages and Mark on an average of once every 2.44 pages.

<sup>7</sup>A fourth word, *ergon*, was used particularly by John to refer to the miraculous events. It is not so used in Mark except in the compound verb form, *energeo*, in 6:14.

<sup>8</sup>Mark 8:11-12; 13:4, 22; 16:17, 20.

<sup>9</sup>Mark 13:22.

<sup>10</sup>Mark 1:27; 2:12.

<sup>11</sup>Mark 4:41; 5:15; 9:6.

<sup>12</sup>Mark 5:20.

<sup>13</sup>Mark 5:42; 6:51; 7:37.

<sup>14</sup>Mark 6:2, 5, 14; 9:39.

<sup>15</sup>This was the concern of the Jews in the synagogue at Nazareth who asked, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to him, and such miracles as these performed by his hands?" (Mark 6:2).

<sup>16</sup>See part 2, "The Literary Use of Miracles."

<sup>17</sup>See part 3, "Jesus' Teaching About Miracles in Mark."

<sup>18</sup>Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* revised by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 755.

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# THE LITERARY USE OF THE MIRACLES

JIMMY JIVIDEN

The miracles recorded by Matthew and Mark are almost identical. Of the twenty miracle narratives in Matthew, sixteen are recorded in Mark. The literary use of the miracle narratives by these two Gospel writers is quite different.

Matthew emphasizes that the miracles of Jesus were a fulfillment of Old Testament predictions of the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> The compassion of Jesus is emphasized in Matthew.<sup>2</sup> Matthew deals with the folly of sign-seekers<sup>3</sup> and counterfeit signs<sup>4</sup> more than the other Gospel writers.

Mark's use of the miracle narratives fits more a Roman rather than a Jewish readership. Although there are at least twenty-six Old Testament quotes and allusions in the sixteen chapters of Mark, care is taken to explain Jewish customs<sup>5</sup> and language.<sup>6</sup> The "action style" of the Roman mind is perhaps reflected in the often repeated term "immediately" that is used ten times in the first chapter. Perhaps nowhere is the Roman flavor of the Gospel more evident than in the miracle narratives.

## AUTHORITY

The Roman mind was concerned with authority.<sup>7</sup> If one had authority, then power would proceed from him (Mark 5:30). He would be able to give authority to others (Mark 3:5). Such authority would be recognized (Mark 1:22, 5:19, 6:7). Mark emphasizes the authority by which Jesus worked miracles.

1:22—Jesus taught with authority.

1:27—Jesus showed authority over unclean spirits.

2:10—Jesus affirms authority to forgive sins.

2:28—Jesus affirms authority over the Sabbath.

3:15—Jesus delegated authority to cast out demons.

4:41—Jesus showed authority over the wind and waves.

5:10—Demons acknowledged his authority and made requests.

5:30—Power proceeded from his person when he was touched.

6:7—The Twelve are given authority over unclean spirits.

11:28—Jesus responded to those who challenged his authority.

The idea of miracles being connected with powerful people was not uncommon in Roman thinking.<sup>8</sup> Tacitus writes of Vespasian healing a blind man in Alexandria. He put spittle in his eyes, and they were healed. He also writes of a man with a crippled hand being healed by Vespasian walking on it. These alleged miracles were associated with his visit to the Sarapeum. Tacitus suggests that these events showed that Sarapis gave divine approval to Vespasian.<sup>9</sup>

Mark is plain about the miracles of Jesus being the basis for both his divine approval and spiritual authority. He said to the questioning scribes:

"But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home" (Mark 2:10-11).

## A PUBLIC/PRIVATE MIRACLES MINISTRY

Mark not only emphasized the public nature of Jesus' ministry, but he also emphasized his desire for privacy.

The language of Mark speaks of the "whole city" (Mark 1:33) being gathered together, people coming to Jesus from "everywhere" (Mark 1:45) and "all the multitude coming to Him" (Mark 3:8). The popularity of Jesus' ministry is reflected by Mark showing the broad region which was influenced by his miracles.

And Jesus withdrew to the sea with his disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and

beyond Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude heard of all that He was doing and came to Him (Mark 3:7-8).

It was difficult to work miracles without attracting attention. Jesus often sought privacy. A focus on a miracle-working ministry would curtail his teaching ministry. Allowing miracles to become too prominent would have stirred greater opposition from his enemies and greater pressure from his followers to become a king. Jesus sought to follow God's timetable. His response to his brothers who wanted him to seek greater publicity was, "My time is not yet at hand" (John 7:6).

Jesus sought to keep his fame from spreading by forbidding the unclean spirits to reveal his identity (Mark 1:25, 34, 3:11-12).

And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, "You are the Son of God!" And He earnestly warned them not to reveal His identity (Mark 3:11-12).

Jesus warned those he healed not to tell others (Mark 1:43-45, 5:42, 7:36). This did not keep them from spreading the news everywhere about their being healed. Mark recorded how it happened: "And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it" (Mark 7:36).

Throughout the Gospel, Mark shows how Jesus sought to keep his disciples from revealing his identity (Mark 7:24, 8:26, 30, 9:9, 30). The privacy Jesus sought could not be because of the marvelous miracles he performed.

### THE TOUCH OF JESUS

Mark records Jesus "touching" and "laying hands on" those he healed ten times.<sup>10</sup> Such was also done by his disciples (Mark 6:13, 16:18). It seems that touching or being touched by Jesus was an important part of the miracle. "For he had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed about him in order to touch him" (Mark 3:10).

The woman with a hemorrhage "touched Him" (Mark 5:27).

The people sought to "touch" his cloak, and those who did were healed (Mark 6:56). He laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them (Mark 6:5).

The two healings which are unique to Mark focus on Jesus putting his fingers into the ears, touching the tongue and laying hands on the eyes of the afflicted (Mark 7:31-37, 8:22-26).

Even in the mission he gave to the Twelve, there is "anointing with oil" connected with healing (Mark 6:13). One of the signs which was to follow the preaching of the gospel was "laying hands on the sick" (Mark 16:17).

### THEOLOGICAL PURPOSE

Mark clearly shows that the purpose of the miracles of Jesus was to confirm himself as the Son of God and his message as being from God. Other factors may be stated as being connected with the miracles of Jesus, but this purpose is primary.

Compassion certainly was involved in the miracles of Jesus. Jesus was "moved with compassion" when he healed the leper (Mark 1:40-45). Jesus felt compassion for the multitude before feeding the five thousand and the four thousand (Mark 6:34, 8:2). Jesus' feeling of compassion was not so much the purpose of the miracles as it was a reflection of his identification with the sufferings of humanity (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15).

A secondary purpose of miracles found in Matthew was the fulfillment of Old Testament predictions of the Messiah.<sup>11</sup> Such is not found in Mark. A secondary use of miracles found in John was as a teaching tool.<sup>12</sup> After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus called himself the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). Such is not found in Mark. Certainly the miracles of Jesus brought publicity to Jesus, but such was not their purpose. As has already been shown, Jesus resisted the publicity which came because of his miracles.

Both the implied and expressed purpose of miracles in Mark was confirmation that Jesus and his message was from God. Only the Creator God who spoke the laws of nature into existence could change them to show approval of a man or message. This purpose is evident in the healing of the paralytic.

Before healing the paralytic, Jesus said, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). This brought criticism from the scribes who accused him of blaspheming because they reasoned, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The issue involved was authority. Jesus' response with a miracle showed that his authority was from God.

"But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home" (Mark 2:10-11).

This purpose is evident in Jesus' promise after giving the "Great Commission." The "signs" accompanying the preaching of the Gospel were miracles. These signs were for the purpose of showing that their message was from God. Mark, writing after the fact, states that what Jesus promised really happened and that the purpose of these signs was to confirm the message they preached. "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20).

The miracles were Jesus' "proof of claim" that he was God's Son and his message was God's will.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Matthew 1:4-5; 8:16-17; 12:15-20.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 9:36; 12:12; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34. Compassion is connected with the miracles of Jesus only three times in Mark. See Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2.

<sup>3</sup>Mark 12:39; 16:1-4.

<sup>4</sup>Mark 7:21-23; 24:24.

<sup>5</sup>Mark 7:3; 12:18.

<sup>6</sup>Mark 5:41.

<sup>7</sup>This emphasis is shown by Howard Clark Kee in his book, *Miracles in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 161-3.

<sup>8</sup>A broad discussion of miracles claimed in the Asklepios and Isis cults is given by Kee, *Miracles*, pp. 78-145.

<sup>9</sup>Tacitus, *Histories* 4. lxxxii and 4. lxxxii.

<sup>10</sup>Mark 1:31, 41; 3:10; 5:23, 27-31, 41; 6:5, 56; 7:32; 8:22-23.

<sup>11</sup>Jimmy Jividen, *Miracles From God or Man?* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 1987), p. 81f.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

## JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT THE MIRACLES

JIMMY JIVIDEN

One must look at the miracles in Mark in several different ways to understand their significance. First, miracles must be defined by looking at the meaning of the terms used to identify them in the New Testament and by their supernatural nature revealed in the Scriptures themselves. This was done in Part 1. Second, miracles must be understood in terms of their literary use and the theological purpose of the one who recorded them. This was done in Part 2. Third, miracles must be understood through the teachings of the text itself. This is the purpose of Part 3.

Four basic passages in Mark reflect the doctrinal teachings of miracles. The first passage, Mark 3:22-30, deals with the source of miracles. The second passage, Mark 8:11-12, reflects the unworthy motives of men seeking signs. The third passage, Mark 9:38-40, focuses on the problem of miracles performed by people other than Jesus' immediate disciples. The fourth passage, Mark 16:17-20, gives the theological purpose of miracles.

### MARK 3:22-30

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22).

The scribes accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul. They could not deny the validity of his miracles, so they tried to question the source of his power. Parallel accounts of this text are found in Matthew 12:25-32 and Luke 11:15-23. The response of Jesus recorded in Mark focuses on three things.

First, Jesus said that would be a contradiction if he were

casting out demons by Beelzebul, since such would be making Satan cast out Satan. Such would be as illogical as a house or a kingdom fighting against itself.

Second, Jesus showed that his power to cast out demons would only be impossible if he had not already bound the devil in some way.

Third, Jesus showed that what the scribes were doing—attributing the power of God to Beelzebul—was a grievous sin. It was a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit for which there was no forgiveness.

Matthew and Luke both contain fuller accounts of this incident and add this conclusive statement: "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28).

This passage shows that the source of the miracles of Jesus was God. The fact that Jesus worked them showed that God approved of his message and the kingdom of God was come upon them.

#### MARK 8:11-12

And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation" (Mark 8:11-12).

Mark's account of this incident is much briefer than Matthew's account,<sup>1</sup> but it contains the basic point Jesus was making—sign-seekers have impure motives, and Jesus would not work miracles to satisfy their demands.<sup>2</sup>

Notice that the text reveals the motive of the sign-seekers to be that of "testing" Jesus. Jesus had just finished feeding the four thousand by multiplying the loaves and fish. This was not enough for the Pharisees. They wanted more and greater signs.

Notice the text says that they wanted a sign from heaven. This no doubt alludes to the manna in the wilderness which God gave through Moses. The unworthy motive of the Pharisees caused Jesus to call sign-seekers "evil and adulterous."

Another example of Jesus' refusal to give a sign to one who tested him occurred during his temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-7). The devil tempted Jesus to work a miracle to satisfy his hunger, to prove that he was the Son of God and to test the promises of God in the Scriptures. Each time Jesus refused because such were unworthy motives for seeking miracles.

#### MARK 9:38-40

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:38-40; see also Luke 9:49-50).

This passage poses two questions about miracles. First, how could "non-followers" of Jesus work miracles in his name? Second, why did Jesus disapprove of his disciples trying to stop a "miracle-worker" who was not following him?

A lot of things about the miracle-worker in this passage are unclear. Was the one casting out demons in the name of Jesus not a disciple, or was he just not in the company of the Twelve? The context would indicate that Jesus was in the company of only the Twelve at that time. The lesson Jesus was teaching in the preceding verse was humility. The Twelve had been discussing who would be the greatest in the kingdom.

It could have been that the one casting out demons in the name of Jesus was one of the seventy men Jesus sent out. They were given power over unclean spirits (Luke 9:1-20). This explanation demands that one adjust the chronology of Luke in order to place this saying after the sending out of the seventy.

It could have been that the one casting out demons in the name of Jesus made the claim but did not have the real power to do so. Jesus was later to refer to those in the Jewish community who claimed to cast out demons (Matthew 12:27; Luke 11:19). There were Jewish exorcists at Ephesus who sought to

cast out demons in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:13-16). They were punished for their folly.

Jesus tells of those who made claims to cast out demons in his name. He rejected them as being lawless. He excluded them from his fellowship and participation in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). Such could have been the case in this text.

It should be noted that Jesus did not give approval of this unknown exorcist, but he only said what he was doing was not going to hinder his mission.

It is also unclear why Jesus disapproved of his disciples trying to stop this exorcist. It could have been that Jesus was disapproving of the selfish exclusive motives of the Twelve who had been arguing over who was the greatest. This explanation would certainly fit the context. It could have been that what these exorcists were doing was not worthy of that much attention. Jesus had been telling his disciples about the Son of Man being delivered unto the hands of sinful men and killed (Mark 9:31). At such a time as this, why should they get shook up about a questionable exorcist? After all, one who sought to cast out demons in Jesus' name would not speak in a negative way about Jesus. This was the summary statement of Jesus: "For he who is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40).

#### MARK 16:17-20

"And these signs will accompany those who have believed; in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and *sat down at the right hand of God*. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed (Mark 16:17-20; emphasis mine).

The first question to ask in the examination of this passage is the genuineness of the text. Many ancient manuscripts do not have this ending of Mark. It is missing from both the Vatica-

nus and Sinaiticus manuscripts, but there is a blank space indicating that something was missing. It is in the Alexandrian manuscript and is often quoted in the second century writings.<sup>3</sup> For these and other evidences, the author accepts the text as being a part of the Gospel of Mark.

There are three questions which need to be considered in this text. First, who were the believers who would have signs following them? Second, how were the signs to follow? Third, what was the purpose of these signs?

It is clear in examining the text that the believers who would have signs following them were those who had been baptized—Christians of every age and country. This understanding best fits the context. If the believers of verse 16 were baptized, it would seem that the same believers are referred to in verse 17.

It should also be noted that the pronouns in the text<sup>4</sup> would indicate this. When the first person is used, it refers to Jesus. When the second person is used, it refers to the apostles. When the third person is used, it refers to those who believed and were baptized.<sup>5</sup> One can say, that "these signs" will accompany baptized believers at all times and in all places.

One must be careful not to read too much into this text. This text does not say that signs "will be done" by those who believe. It says that signs "will follow" those who believe. There is a difference.

The second question is, "How were these signs to follow the believers?" The text itself does not say. The answer must be discovered from what happened in the beginning of the church as recorded in Scripture.

Certainly at first, signs accompanied believers in fact. On the Day of Pentecost, people saw signs (Acts 2:1-4). When the apostles preached, signs were done and the people witnessed them in fact.

As miracles began to decline, signs accompanied the preaching in the testimony from those who had seen the signs. This must have been the situation reflected in Hebrews:

... after it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing

witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles. . . . (Hebrews 2:3-4).

As eyewitnesses who had seen the signs died, another witness was taken up—Scripture. Those who were eyewitnesses wrote the Gospels, and that witness still remains. The apostle John shows the importance of this.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe . . . . (John 20:30-31).

Witness to the miracles of Jesus will never die as long as the gospel remains. Wherever the gospel is preached, the miracles of Jesus are told. The signs of Jesus are still following the preaching of the gospel.

The third question is, "What is the purpose of the signs or miracles of Jesus?" The answer is very clear in this text. Mark related how Jesus ascended after giving the Great Commission and how the apostles went out and preached everywhere. He then declares the purpose of the signs. They "... confirmed the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20).

Once a thing is confirmed, it does not need added confirmation. The Old Testament law was confirmed by signs which accompanied its revelation. The New Testament gospel was confirmed by signs which accompanied its revelation. Just as Jesus did not work miracles to confirm the Old Testament Law, contemporary Christians do not work miracles to confirm the New Testament gospel.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Matthew shows how the Pharisees could understand the physical signs which would indicate a change in weather but refused to see the "signs of the times" to which the miracles pointed. Matthew also called the sign-seekers a wicked and adulterous generation.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew's account uses the analogy of the "sign of Jonah" as the only sign given to the sign-seeker of that generation.

<sup>3</sup>A fuller discussion of the textual problem is found in my book, *Glossolalia From God or Man?* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Star Bible Publications, 1971), pp. 89-90.

<sup>4</sup>In the direct discourse of Jesus in verses 15-18, the third person is used to refer to believers who were baptized. There is a change to indirect discourse in verse 19. There is also a change of the third person to refer to the apostles.

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that the third person is used to refer to the apostles in verses 11-14. Here they are reproached for their unbelief. The third person is also used for the apostles in verses 19-20. Here Mark gave an historical account of Jesus keeping his promise of "accompanying signs" during the preaching of the apostles.

## THE PARABLES IN MARK

DON JACKSON

The word "parable" calls to mind some of the most well-known stories in the New Testament: the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and the sower. Most would quickly identify this form of teaching with Jesus. The New Testament use of the term supports this identification by using it almost exclusively with Jesus' teaching. Of the fifty times it is found, only two are outside the Gospels. In Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19, the term is used with the meaning of "figuratively" or "to illustrate." All three Synoptic Gospels agree in this identification. Matthew uses the word 17 times, Mark, 13 times, and Luke, 18 times. The word is not used, however, by John. The attitude of the early church in using the term "parable" seems to parallel the use of the phrase "Son of Man." They are both identified clearly with Jesus and are to be found primarily in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

It may be difficult to believe that these stories called parables which we have known from childhood would be a focus of controversy. But they have become some of the clearest examples of the mishandling of Scripture. Critics who have little or no regard for the inspiration of Scripture have dealt with the interpretation of parables throughout the twentieth century. They have dissected them to the point that, if you follow their reasoning, no one can know if any really are authentic teachings of Jesus.

Of course, students of the Bible who respect its inspiration and authority have long ago recognized the faulty presuppositions which dominate these higher critics. Although their writings may often do little other than raise questions, in the study of parables they have made a genuine contribution to conservative scholarship. But, as with any treasure hunt, one

must wade through the dirt to find the nuggets of gold to be cherished. The following material owes much to the writings of critics such as Julicher, Jeremias, Dodd, Perrin, and Moule. However, the use of such men should not at all be taken as endorsement of their writings or approach as a whole.

The contribution of critical scholarship in the study of the parables is to describe clearly the mishandling of them by scholars through the centuries. Even conservative scholars who approach Scripture with an appreciation for its nature as sacred text do not always so treat the parables. While acknowledging the authority of proper interpretation, they often feel at liberty to read into the parables any interpretation which proves the point they had set out to prove or fits the sermon they have planned to preach.

This lesson will argue that a proper interpretation of the parables will recognize their historical context, their literary form, and their application by the Gospel writers as fundamental to any proper application of their message to a contemporary audience. The approach will be to consider the interpretation of parables in general, the use of parables in the Gospel of Mark, and, finally, suggestions for preaching the parables of Mark.

### THE INTERPRETATION OF PARABLES

#### *The Definition*

What is a parable? The beautifully phrased "earthly story with an heavenly meaning" only tells part of the story. What kind of "earthly story"? What determines the "heavenly meaning"? The proper background for defining a parable within a first century Palestinian context (i.e., the life of Jesus) is found in the Old Testament and subsequent Jewish literature. The Hebrew concept behind the Greek "parable" is translated in such varied ways as "byword" (Job 17:6), "proverb" (1 Kings 9:7), or "parable" which in context may describe an allegory (Ezekiel 17:2, 24:3), a prophetic oracle (Numbers 23:7), or a discourse (Job 27:1). In each of the thirty-nine times the Hebrew word is found in the Old Testament, the Greek translation is the word "parable." Therefore, there was

a wide range of possibilities for the term "parable" by New Testament times.

The uses in the Gospels of "parable" parallel the variety found in the Old Testament. The word may refer to an instruction not to take the place of honor at a wedding feast (Luke 14:7) or the popular saying, "Physician, heal yourself" (Luke 4:23) as well as the more familiar stories mentioned earlier. Therefore, one should not be too restrictive in defining a "parable." This lecture is specifically concerned with the parables of Mark. Mark uses the term to refer to the enigmatic statement that it is not what goes into a man which defiles a man but what comes out of a man (Mark 7:17). Most of the time, however, the term refers to the stories traditionally associated with the term "parable" (e.g., the sower and the wicked tenants). Therefore, a definition which specifically has in mind these stories is appropriate to Mark.

One of the better definitions of the parable comes from Origen in the first half of the third century: "an account of an event which did not literally take place, but which could have done so. It is figurative representation of certain things by virtue of their correspondence to the things spoken of in the parable." This has the advantage of clearly distinguishing the parable from the fable. Whereas one can easily conceive of a sower scattering seed or a woman searching for a lost coin, the same is not true of trees anointing a king (Judges 9:8) or a thistle sending a message to a cedar (2 Kings 14:9).

#### *The Purpose of the Parables (Mark 4:10-12)*

The principles for interpreting the parables must assume that the parables were first spoken and later written for some particular purpose. This purpose has usually been seen as to illustrate or clarify a biblical truth. The Gospel of Mark contains the most complete description of the purpose of Jesus' parables. When Jesus is asked about the parables, he seems to say that the parables were intended for those "outside" in comparison to those who know the "mystery of the kingdom of God." Specifically, parables are spoken to those outside this knowledge "in order that" they may not see or believe or repent and be forgiven (quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10).

The implication for the interpretation and preaching of parables is tremendous. This "hardening" effect of parables became one of the arguments in favor of allegorical interpretation. Since the parables contain meaning that could not be understood but by those enlightened by the mysteries of the kingdom, a Christian could interpret a parable in a way which an unbeliever could not find in the context. Therefore, if this knowledge told Tertullian that the pigs in the story of the prodigal son were demons, who could dispute him? If that is not understood at the simple reading of the parable that is because at that level the parables were not meant to be understood but to harden one's attitude against the truth.

This implication of special knowledge giving insight to the believer which cannot be known by the unbeliever then naturally leads to the question of how such knowledge of the mystery is attained. Those who advocate predestination argue that the parables are only to be understood by the elect by the power of the Holy Spirit. Again, one should not be surprised that the interpretation does not coincide with the reading of the parable in context.

Another implication of the "hardening" purpose of parables is in the use of the parables in preaching. According to this interpretation, the parables are for those outside, not for believers (cf. Mark 4:11, 34). The parables, therefore, should not be used in preaching and teaching believers. Rather, accordingly, they were intended only to prevent any free will belief or repentance by the unbelievers.

Some scholars, recognizing the impossibility of relating such a view of the purpose of parables with Jesus' teaching elsewhere and with the rest of the New Testament, are content to say that Mark misunderstood or changed the purpose of the parables. (Jeremias goes so far as to argue that the passage is misplaced and was never meant to refer to parables.) They note that while Mark uses terms that most naturally are used to state a purpose (*hina*) in introducing the quotation from Isaiah (Mark 4:12), Matthew uses a term (*hoti*) which expresses results rather than purpose. Therefore, where Mark would properly be translated "in order that they may be seeing. . .", Matthew is to be translated "with the result that they may

be. . . ." Others argue that an Aramaic original lies behind the translation of each of these words which may be either purpose or result and that Mark simply mistranslated the term (Manson). Still another argument concerns the proper translation of the term used by Mark. Some argue that it may be either casual ("because they are seeing. . . .")<sup>1</sup> or result (cf. KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV) as well as purpose (NASV). The NEB takes the approach of using the term merely as an introduction to a Scripture (as Matthew's well known "in order that it might be fulfilled what was written. . . ." by translating "so that (as Scripture says). . . ." Other grammarians continue to insist that the term must be representing purpose.<sup>2</sup>

As you can see, there is a great deal of disagreement in the interpretation of Mark 4:10-12. Some of the questions raised are: "Why did Jesus speak in parables?"; "Does Mark contradict Matthew?"; "Did Mark misunderstand or mistranslate?" The answer to the first question hinges on the latter two. The latter also have obvious implications for the inspiration of Scripture. Simply arguing that you prefer Matthew's account, which makes the hardening of the hearts of some a result of the parables rather than the purpose of the parables, is not sufficient unless you are also willing to say that Mark made a mistake. The principle of interpreting one Scripture by another is axiomatic to Bible-believing people, but one must, at the same time, give due emphasis to the wording and grammar of every passage. Every word of Scripture is inspired and must be respected in interpretation.

Let us approach the parables in Mark to see if they reflect a hardening effect in which only those who know the mystery of the kingdom can understand the parable. One should note first that the very occasion of this passage demonstrates that the disciples of Jesus had no more idea what the parable of the sower meant than did those "outside." This fact surprised Jesus who said, in effect, that if they did not understand this parable they would not be able to understand any parable (Mark 4:13)). On another occasion Jesus spoke parabolically (although the word is not used) of the "leaven of the Pharisees and Herod" (Mark 8:15). The disciples thought only in literal

terms that he was complaining because they had no bread (v. 16). In his response Jesus said, "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (v. 18). This condition was certainly not limited to those who did not follow Jesus. For the disciples themselves to have to ask Jesus the meaning of parables (see also Mark 7:17) and to be accused of "seeing without perceiving and hearing without understanding" speaks against an interpretation that those "within" would know the meaning but not those "outside."

On the other side, the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12) resulted in an attempt by the Jewish religious leaders to arrest Jesus, "because they knew he had spoken the parable against them" (v. 12). The meaning was not hidden to this group of "outside" listeners. They did not repent, but that was not because the meaning was unknown. Therefore, one would conclude that there is no evidence in Mark's use of parables to support a purpose of parables which would supply teaching known only to the believers but not to the unbelievers.

Now let us look again at the text in question, Mark 4:10-12. Taking the purpose word (*hina*) of Mark as causal, consecutive, or a mistranslation does not solve the problem. Within the quotation itself is a term that suggests purpose: "lest" (*mepote*).

A correct interpretation which does justice to the Greek grammar of Mark, the use of parables throughout the Gospel, and to the integrity of Mark's text is to take the purpose of parables not simply to be illustrative or for clarification but also for confrontation. Moule's comparison to a political cartoon is appropriate.<sup>3</sup> Many will look at the cartoon and see only a picture. To use our terminology, they "don't get it." Others will look at the cartoon and understand quickly exactly what the cartoonist is saying. That does not, however, mean they will agree with the cartoonist. Some will get angry and write letters to the editor. Others will agree completely and cut the cartoon out to display in their office. When people heard the parables of Jesus, some (including often the disciples) heard only a story about farmers, rich men, or lost coins. When this was true, the purpose of the parable was completely lost. It accomplished nothing. Others heard and did not like what they were hearing. The leaders in Mark 12 were not reacting

to a story about some wicked tenant farmers, they were reacting to a clear condemnation of their attitude toward God and his messengers. In this case, the parable accomplished the purpose of Isaiah 6:9. They refused to turn that they might be forgiven. For those who did not understand but wanted more information from Jesus, such was always forthcoming. Therefore, the contrast of Mark 4:12 is not of those who accept the teaching of the parable versus those who reject it. Rather it is a comparison of those who reject ("those outside") to those who do not understand but desire to know more. To these, Jesus was always ready to explain everything (Mark 4:34).

What distinguished the groups was not the use of parables but rather what was in their hearts. It is no accident that this discussion of the purpose of the parables falls between the parable of the sower and its explanation. Just as in the parable, the result of the seed depends on the condition of the soil on which it falls, the result of the parables depends on the hearts which hear them. Jesus, as the preacher today, aimed to make certain that people understood the implication of the gospel. Once that has been accomplished, the preaching is effective. The reaction to the implications and demands of the gospel will then depend on the state of the listener. The purpose of the parables, therefore, was to confront the hearer/reader with the demands of the gospel. The challenge was to hear. ("He who has ears to hear, let him hear," Mark 4:9, 23.)

With this purpose of confrontation as well as illustration and clarification in mind, let us consider some principles for the interpretation of parables.

### *The Principles of Interpretation*

*Parables must be interpreted as parables, not as allegories.* A fundamental point of dispute in defining and interpreting the parables is the relationship between a parable and an allegory. An allegory, according to Neil Lightfoot, is similar to a parable in that it is a story told in order to make a comparison. It differs, however, in that each detail of an allegory has a hidden, inner meaning. In a parable, by contrast, the details of a parable "are there most often just to add color to the story."<sup>4</sup>

Another distinction is that whereas a parable portrays a picture that could be conceived as true, an allegory may include elements which cannot be true. In this, an allegory is closer to a fable than to a parable. In allegories, eagles can plant vines, beasts may have wings, and stars become bulls.<sup>5</sup> Such is not true of parables.

A biblical example of allegory is found in Paul's interpretation of Sarah and Hagar as representing Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 4:24-31). From later literature one finds Terullian interpreting elements of the parable of the prodigal son: the father is God, the prodigal son is the natural man, the property squandered is his innate knowledge of God, the citizen of the far country to whom he hired himself out is the prince of this world, the pigs are demons, and the robe he received from his father upon his return home is the blessed condition Adam lost as a result of his transgression in Eden. In both examples, the interpretation depends solely on the authority of the interpreter. Nothing in the original story suggests such interpretations. We have no problem with Paul's authority as an inspired apostle. However, since the first century, there are no other inspired interpreters. The only source of authority is the text itself, not an interpretation which comes solely from the interpreter rather than the text.

The allegorical method of interpretation held the ground in interpreting the parables among Protestant and Catholic scholars alike until the close of the nineteenth century. To illustrate the problem of allegorical interpretation, we consider an early dispute between Gnostic and Christian (if I may use the term in this context) scholars over the interpretation of Scripture in the early centuries of the church. Gnostics interpreted the three measures of leaven as either the threefold origin of life (Naassenes) or the three different natures of man (Valentinians). Origen argued, in opposition, that the three measures referred to the three sons of Noah, and thus to all humanity or to the Trinity. Which is correct? It is similar to an argument among people saying that God speaks directly to their hearts. Some may say that God told them that the world will come to an end in 1990; others may say that God told them the world would come to an end in the year 2000. There is no

way to adopt the same method and authority and still disprove such arguments.

This principle of interpretation can be applied to any text of Scripture. Any interpretation which cannot be proven from the text and context of a passage does not have the authority of that passage of Scripture. This is not to say that the teaching is false. Therein is the problem. Sometimes we may resort to fanciful exegesis of a passage to establish a point of doctrine which itself is true. Just as some denominational preachers take Paul's statement, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 1:17), out of Paul's theology and make it support a doctrine that baptism is not essential to salvation, so a Christian may be tempted to preach against drug abuse or immorality from the text in Colossians 2:21—"Touch not, taste not, handle not." While the teaching may be true in the latter example, the exegesis is not. Such a handling of Scripture sets a dangerous precedent. To handle correctly God's word (2 Timothy 2:15), one must give complete authority to the meaning of a text within its context (both historical and literary). Any other approach may as well say that we get our authority from what God tells us directly in visions. For that is just as appropriate.

Such an invalid approach to Scripture is especially tempting in the case of the parables. As a form of figurative language, a parable is not to be taken literally, but as an illustration confronting some basic truth. Therefore, Jesus did not intend for the audience to ponder the need to put seed in the correct ground when they heard the parable of the sower, but rather to examine themselves to see which types of soil of which they were examples. This should not, however, allow the interpreter to force any interpretation he desires on the text. One must seek to determine the meaning intended in the Scripture itself. Figurative language depends entirely on the text for its interpretation. Therefore, Jesus explains the parable of the sower so that we can know the meaning of the seed and the different types of soils. He does not, however, interpret every detail of the mustard seed. To give significance to the birds that rest in the branches is to go beyond the nature of a parable.

*Each parable must be interpreted in its own context.* Do not compare elements of different parables to interpret one another. The fact that the field is the world in the parable of the tares does not mean that the field in the parable of the hidden treasure is also the world. Figures of speech, including parables, must be limited in their interpretation to the context in which they are located. In a similar vein, the use of metaphors in general must be limited to their context. The "seed" as the word of God and the "body" as the church are valid only within contexts in which that application is clearly being made. In another context, the seed may be the Messiah (Galatians 3:16).

Another implication of this principle is that the parables must be interpreted as a part of an historical/literary context. A fundamental, though often neglected, element of the study of the Gospels is to recognize that two distinct historical contexts are involved. First, there is the context in the life of Jesus in which the events first occurred. Second, there is the context in which the Gospel is being written a generation or more later. The parables, therefore, have a context in the life of Jesus, which is often the only context considered. They also, however, have a context in the Gospel in which they are found. The inspired writer is applying an event from the life of Jesus to a situation in his own day.

The parables have a tendency to take a life of their own apart from the contexts of any of the Gospels. Due recognition should be given the context within each Gospel. The habit of discussing and writing on the parables as a group may lead to the danger of treating them as proverbs—groups of sayings whose meanings have no relation to any context. Such an approach would not do justice to their use in the Gospels themselves.

*The parable must be applied in light of the purpose in its original context.* This is dependent on the first two principles. One must determine the fundamental point of the parable in its context before drawing implications for a contemporary audience. Two abuses illustrate this principle: (1) Epiphanius used the parable of the ten virgins to support the practice of virginity, and (2) an unknown preacher used the parable which mentions a king going to war to argue against paci-

fism.<sup>6</sup> In either case, it is obvious that the application has no authority from the texts employed (regardless of whether the teaching itself is true or false).

The following discussion of the parables in Mark will seek to establish the purpose of each parable in its context and suggest ways they can appropriately be applied to a modern audience.

### MARK'S USE OF PARABLES

Mark's Gospel addresses a situation in which the original readers have misunderstood the implications of discipleship. They have adopted a view of Christ and Christianity in which the life of a Christian emphasizes the divinity of Jesus (the "Son of God") and the esoteric religious life of a Christian separate from his daily, "secular" life. Jesus, therefore, was treated as a divine being but in the pagan view of deity without contact with the daily lives of men. As a result, Christianity was "practiced" as a religion but not lived as a life of discipleship.

To this situation, Mark recounts the life, primarily, and the teaching, secondarily, of Jesus with an emphasis on Jesus the "Son of Man" who set an example of sacrificial living. Jesus' life was not simply a life of announcing God's kingdom so everyone responded with honor and praise, lifting him bodily upon his throne. Rather, he was ridiculed and hated by the upper class and religious leaders, misunderstood and abandoned by many followers. His life, the exemplar of a disciple, was not honored, but rejected. The key verse is: "Even so the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Best summarizes the theme of discipleship in Mark:

The call is not one to accept a certain system of teaching, live by it, continue faithfully to interpret it and pass it on, which was in essence the call of a rabbi to his disciples; nor is it a call to accept a philosophical position which will express itself in a certain type of behaviour, as in Stoicism; nor is it the call to devote life to the alleviation

of suffering for others; nor is it the call to pass through certain rites as in the Mysteries so as to become an initiate of the God, his companion—the carrying of the cross is not rite! It is a call to fall in behind Jesus and go with him.<sup>7</sup>

Until Jesus' followers understood the true concept of discipleship, he did not want them telling others. Thus one finds an emphasis in Mark on Jesus commanding certain ones not to tell anyone who he was (Mark 1:25, 29; 8:30) or what he had done (Mark 1:44, 5:43). They were still filled with preconceived ideas of what type of leader the Messiah would be and of what discipleship would be. The first time they were sent out to proclaim the kingdom, they returned with an army ready to go to Jerusalem to make Jesus king (Mark 6; cf. John 6).<sup>8</sup> The first time they were told that Jesus would suffer, Peter rejected this concept (Mark 8:32ff.). The second time, they kept their mouths shut but did not understand (Mark 9:32). When Jesus was trying to prepare them for his own suffering and death, they were more concerned about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (Mark 9:33-34, 10:35-45). Only after the ultimate suffering on the cross are they told to go proclaim this gospel to everyone (Mark 16:15). In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples represent those in Mark's day who still do not understand completely the nature of Jesus and of discipleship. When Jesus addresses the disciples he is also, in effect, addressing Mark's readers. The purpose of Mark is, therefore, to reinforce the gospel preaching by emphasizing the themes of Jesus' power as the Son of God and suffering as the Son of Man as well as true discipleship in order to motivate the reader to accept a religion of sacrificial, active service rather than ritual.

The parables of Mark must be considered within this broad context of the purpose of the book. The parables fall basically into three settings in Mark: controversy, encouragement, and warnings about the return and the Judgment.

#### *Controversy*

When the first conflict comes in the Gospel between Jesus and other religious leaders (2:1—3:6), Mark includes a short

section of parabolic sayings (called "parables" in Luke 5:36). In response to questions from John's disciples and the Pharisees about the lack of fasting by Jesus' disciples is found the statement about the children of the bridechamber (2:19-20), followed immediately by the new patch on an old garment and new wine in old wineskins (2:21-22). The first shows that the time of fasting will come after Jesus' departure (simple answer to the question of the disciples of John and the Pharisees), the latter that the gospel will not contain the traditions of the elders simply for the sake of tradition (in context the clashes with tradition came over issues such as Jesus forgiving sins, 2:6-7; eating with sinners, 2:15-17; fasting, 2:18; the Sabbath, 2:23-3:6). Later in chapter 3, Mark writes that the scribes from Jerusalem accused Jesus of being a servant of Satan (3:22). Jesus responded by "speaking to them in parables" with the story of a house divided against itself and the need to bind the strong man before carrying off his possessions. These short parables clearly confront the accusers with the absurd nature of their accusations.

In chapter 7, Jesus is again accused of violating the traditions of the Jews because his disciples ate with "unclean" hands. In his response, which included a quotation from Isaiah and a charge that the Jewish leaders violated God's commands by their traditions, Jesus concluded with the statement that what comes from a man makes him unclean, not what goes into a man (Mark 7:16). Mark adds the comment that Jesus' explanation of this parable declared all foods to be clean (Mark 7:17-18). Therefore, while in the original application, Jesus made reference to eating with unclean hands, Mark applied the parable to eating unclean foods. The principle was clearly the same, but the application had a slight difference. Finally, the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-11) is used against those who continue to question Jesus' authority (Mark 11:27-33). The Jewish leaders continued rejection of God's messengers would lead to their destruction.

#### *Encouragement*

The parables of Mark 4:1-20 all have as their theme the encouragement of the disciples. After telling that Jesus' own

family thought he was crazy and came to take him away (Mark 3:20-21) and of the rejection of his teaching by those who accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Mark 3:22-30), Mark records events designed to encourage the reader. The first is Jesus' statement that the true mother and brother of Jesus is the one who does God's will (Mark 3:31-35). This is followed by the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-20) in which the disciples are told that the power of the seed to produce depends on the soil on which it falls. Those who spread the gospel may become discouraged at the lack of response but must still sow the seed. The harvest resulting from the good soil will make the sowing worthwhile. Of course, the reader is also challenged to see which type of soil he would represent. The evidence is in the harvest produced.

After the parable of the sower come the parables of the lamp on a stand (Mark 4:21-23), the growing seed (Mark 4:26-29), and the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32). The disciples are to continue, in the words of the Sermon on the Mount, to let their lights shine no matter what the circumstances. The result will be growth even if the growth is slow and does not seem to them to be taking place. The power is in the seed, not in their ability.

#### *Warning*

Mark's apocalyptic chapter contains two parables of warning. In the first, the fig tree (Mark 13:28-29) demonstrates that there are signs that point to the impending harvest. In the same way, the disciples are to recognize the signs foreshadowing the destruction of Jerusalem, an event which would take place within that generation. The second parable, the porter on watch (Mark 13:34-36), warns of the lack of signs to suggest the time of the coming of Jesus and the destruction of the world. Since no one knows when that day or hour will come (Mark 13:32), disciples must be watchful at all times.

### PREACHING THE PARABLES OF MARK

With the single exception of the fig tree (Mark 13:28-29), the settings of the parables of Mark are still found today. Are there people who resist any challenge to change their traditional ways of thinking which may be foreign to God's

word? If so, Jesus' encounters with his own religious heritage and the resulting parables would be appropriate texts. The parables of the new patch and the new wine suggest that the gospel is always new and challenging to human tradition. The parable of the wicked tenants would apply to those who continue to reject God's message. There are still these people who refuse to repent and obey. They need to know the consequences of their actions.

Are there those who are discouraged at the seemingly slow progress of the kingdom? Surely this is one of the most needed lessons from the parables in Mark. The lamp must continue to shine; the gospel seed must be sown. The seed has the power and will grow even if the progress is hidden from view and the beginning is small. Our faith in evangelism and preaching is in the power of God, not in our own power. God does not always operate on our time schedule, but we can be sure that his word will produce fruit, and the kingdom will progress if we sow the seed.

Are there those who become complacent thinking that there is no need to prepare for the Judgment? The parable of the porter on watch joins with many other Scriptures to enforce the theme that the coming of Jesus will be so sudden and without warning that we must be prepared at every hour. The lack of preparation will bring the wrath of the Owner of the house.

Properly interpreted, the parables of Mark have tremendous relevance to the needs of the church and the world today. There is no need to resort to fanciful allegory or eisegesis to find a message to preach. These parables are more support to the eternal relevance of God's word. Preached within this context, the power of God's word is released on a world greatly in need of its message and authority.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A. T. Robertson, "The Causal Use of *Hina*" in *Studies in Early Christianity* ed. S. J. Case (New York: The Century Co., 1928), pp. 49-57. Cf. James Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3: *Syntax* by N. Turner (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Freidrich Wilhelm Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 187; Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3d ed. (Oxford, Eng-

land: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 212-15.

<sup>3</sup>C. F. D. Moule, "Mark 4:1-20 Yet Once More," in *Neotestamentica Et Semitica*, ed. E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1969), pp. 95-113.

<sup>4</sup>Neil R. Lightfoot, *Lessons From the Parables* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. B. T. D. Smith, *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1937), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>Both are from M. F. Wiles, "Early Exegesis of the Parables" in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958):298-99.

<sup>7</sup>Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1986), pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup>For a classic discussion, compare Hugh Montefiore, "Revolt in the Desert? (Mark Vi. 30ff.)" in *New Testament Studies* 8 (1961-1962):135-41.

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## PRAYER PASSAGES IN MARK

RICHARD ROGERS

Of all of the aspects of Jesus' life that have intrigued man, perhaps his praying has been the most intriguing. In the Sermon on the Mount, prayer was a featured subject. We are not to pray to be seen and heard by man (Matthew 6:5-6). Our prayers are not to be characterized by much talking (Matthew 6:7-8). Our praying is to express our concern (Matthew 6:9-10); for family relation with God (v. 9), for God's honor (v. 9), for God's kingdom (v. 10), for God's will (v. 10). Also our praying expresses our dependence (Matthew 6:11-13): on God's supply (v. 11), on God's mercy (v. 12), on God's power (v. 13). All of this is based on our trust toward God (Matthew 6:25-34). The person who relies prayerfully on God need never worry about anything—life, clothes, food, the future, or anything else.

Even more exciting is the fact of his constant praying. He prayed at his baptism, when he chose the Twelve, when questioned by John, when he fed the five thousand, when he healed a deaf man, on the Mount of Transfiguration, at Lazarus' grave, when he cleansed the temple, in the upper room, in Gethsemane, and on the cross.

Also, notice what he prayed for: evangelism (Mark 1:35), wisdom in choosing leaders (Luke 6:12), restoration of health (Mark 7:34), thanksgiving for the disciples' victories (Luke 10:21), Lazarus' resurrection, a pure temple (Matthew 21:13), the Father's glory (John 12:27-28), Peter's deliverance from the devil's grip (Luke 22:31-32), strength to do the Father's will (Luke 22:42-43), his enemies to be forgiven (Luke 23:34), the Father to receive his spirit (Luke 23:46).

We do not have room to discuss all that Jesus promised to those who pray: health, wisdom, strength. The list could go on and on. My favorite of his many promises is the following: "If

you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:8, 16-17).

We are centering our study on lifestyle and Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. The book of Mark is the most direct and concise of all the Gospel accounts. Matthew, Luke, and John discuss prayer much more than Mark, but what he has to say cannot be missed or misunderstood.

### A ROOM OF HIS OWN

The most difficult thing for Jesus to overcome was the crushing demand of the crowds, which more often than not kept him from fulfilling his "prime directive" to have made disciples of his closest followers. He knew that if he was to meet men and their needs, he would have to meet with God often.

Only in early or late hours, before others were out of bed or after they had gone to bed, could Jesus find "a room of his own" in lonely, quiet prayer. Such an occasion is found in Mark 1:35-39.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Mark does not hesitate to tell us by what secret fountain Jesus' river of life was constantly fed. The active labors of Jesus were inspired by secret moments of prayer. After feeding the five thousand, while a storm gathered over the trembling disciples, Jesus engaged serenely in prayer. When preparing to choose those who would take his message to the lost

world, he spent a night in prayer. He was on the mountain to pray the day he was transfigured. The traitor Judas knew where to take the soldiers who were to arrest Jesus—in the sweet garden of prayer—bittersweet Gethsemane. Prayer was the spring of all his energy. He himself said it well: “I live by the Father” (John 6:57).

Into this private, needed world of solitude comes well-intentioned but misunderstanding friends. “Everyone is looking for you” is at least a mild rebuke. “Why are you misusing your time by being alone. You need to strike while the iron is hot. A crowd awaits; why do you wait?” Jesus’ answer is noteworthy! Especially is it so today in these times of “mega” everything. Nothing is significant unless it is big! This is the day of “taking it higher” not of “going deeper.” We are trying to gather excited crowds around the cross.

Again and again Jesus had charged men not to tell anyone, not to make him known. He wanted to develop deep and real convictions and not draw sightseers and wonder-seekers. This city had heard the message. Those seeking salvation had found it. The message must now be told to others. That is why he had sought solitude, so that he and his men might “go and tell.” That, and that alone, is the reason for 3½ years of Jesus’ life.

There is a great lesson for us. If Jesus, in his great power and oneness with God, could feel the urgent necessity of communion with the Father, how much more do you and I need to spend long hours in prayer for the strength that overcomes our weaknesses, for the knowledge that fills our ignorance, and for the wisdom that ends our foolishness. Prayer brings power and fellowship that nothing else can.

Another application is possible. Jesus was always ready to go on to the next village (assignment). We who have been touched by the gospel must never turn inward to serve ourselves. We must never seek only to withdraw and only have fellowship with one another. Jesus was always moved by the need that lay ahead and beyond. So must we be!

### ONLY BY PRAYER

To be given an assignment is one thing; to receive the ability

to do it another; to have the faith to pursue it yet another. The disciples learn this in Mark 9:14-29. To the Twelve, Jesus had explicitly given power to cast out demons (Mark 6:7). But now, with Jesus and the inner three on the Mount of Transfiguration, the remaining nine have been overcome by the opposition and have slipped back into unbelief in Jesus’ promise of power (Mark 9:19). We can imagine the scene. What a contrast to what had just transpired on the mountain. In the center of all of it were an agonized father and a tortured boy. Peter must have thought, “Life was so much better on the mountain top. Why have I been brought back to such a low valley? This is why I wanted to build those three temples!” He needed to learn, and so do we, the difference between *solitude* and *solitariness*. Solitude is not meant to make us solitary, but to prepare us to meet and cope with the problems of our lives in the valley.

To the father of the boy, Jesus stated the conditions of a miracle: “If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23). It was as if Jesus said, “The cure depends on you, not on me.” The father of the boy is a study in himself. He, undoubtedly, had come looking for Jesus. Unable to find him, he had challenged Jesus’ men to do Jesus’ work. Their failure had so badly shaken his faith that all he could say was, “Help me, if you can.” But now, face to face with Jesus, he cries, “I believe; please remove all my doubts!” Let us learn a lesson: Sometimes we may disappoint each other, but if we press beyond the church to the Christ, face to face with him, we will never be disappointed.

The apostles provide us with another mirror in which to view our inadequacies and see his sufficiency. They had been promised power over demons (Mark 3:14-15). Why then had they failed? Jesus told them, “You don’t live close enough to God. You have been equipped with power but have not asked God for the power to keep and use that power. You have let the circumstances discourage you.”

Some assignments can only be fulfilled through prayer. God has given all of us gifts to be used for his glory (1 Corinthians 12:7). Unless we maintain close contact with God, that gift will wither and die, and us with it (1 Corinthians 11:28-30). The disciples had been given power, but they had not nurtured that

power with prayer, so they had not been able to use that power. Whatever gifts we have from God, we must keep them vital by constant contact with the God who gave them.

We will meet daily many "demons" that can only come out by prayer. Let us "pray without ceasing"!

### AT THE END OF HIS TETHER

What does one do when he has reached the end of the rope? One of three things: First, he can let go and fall to his destruction; second, he can tie a knot and hold on for dear life; third, he can find new strength and climb back up that same rope. Jesus, facing the place of the skull, reached the end of his rope in lonely Gethsemane.

Read Mark 14:32-42, and notice several things. First, Jesus had two, seemingly contradictory, felt-needs. He needed to be alone to pray, and he needed to be supported by his three closest friends. Second, Jesus was as low in his spirit as he could ever be. "He fell to the ground" (v. 35). The word translated "fell" many times denotes "throwing down," "to fall to pieces," "to be destroyed." In deep agony, as from a high precipice, Jesus hurled himself to the ground. Third, Jesus, viewed here as representative man, shrunk, for a moment, from his assignment and asked if there were not some other way for God's will to be done. Fourth, when strengthened by an angel (Luke 22:43) he, with the strongest resolve and the bitterest sweat, faced the Father's will on the tree. Fifth, in the disciples' inability to watch for a single hour, we learn that no affection and no zeal are substitutes for the presence of God realized and the protection of God invoked. Loyalty and love are not enough without watchfulness and prayer.

It was the failure of Peter which most keenly affected Jesus, not only because his professions had been so loud, but because so much depended on him in the future. Without Jesus' prayers for Peter, Satan would have captured and destroyed Peter. Surely he could have at least watched with Jesus for one hour. He was not expected to understand, withstand, or just stand, only watch. All they could do was sleep.

When Jesus went to Gethsemane, there were two things he

sorely desired. He wanted *human fellowship*, and he wanted *God's fellowship*. In times of trouble, we want someone with us. We do not necessarily want them to do anything. We do not necessarily want them to say a word. We only want them there. Jesus was like that. Mark this down, and remember it always: When all other friends sleep, there is One who does not. "He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you" (Psalm 121:3-5).

Just when I think I have mastered it and things are going well, I stumble, but "He is there."

Just when I feel I can go no more and I fall on my knees, "He is there."

Just when I feel the whole world has the best of me, "He is there" tugging at my heart.

Life is so good if we just remember "He is there!"

## STEWARDSHIP AND CHILDLIKE FAITH

JOHN MILLER

### CHILDLIKE FAITH IS A REQUIREMENT FOR STEWARDSHIP

In Mark 10:13 it says that they were bringing children to him (Jesus), and the disciples hindered them. "Do not bother the Master with these children. He has too many important things on his mind." It was customary in those days for Jewish mothers to have their babies blessed and kissed by great men. So bringing them to Jesus was a natural thing to do. However, the disciples felt as if Jesus was too busy. He was too concerned about important matters to have time for the children.

Jesus saw what they were doing and was angry. In English his response sounds sharp and in the Greek even sharper. His response was about as sharp as it could be and be respectful. He said, "Stop that! Let those children come to me!" His tone was strong and sharp. His disciples were doing the worst thing possible as far as Jesus was concerned. He was not far from the cross, but he had time for children. This tells you something about Jesus. The passage says he took the children in his arms and blessed them. He told the disciples, "Don't forbid little children to come to me. For of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Then he made an even more important statement: "Unless one comes to me as a little child he cannot get to heaven." That is significant. What is it about a little child that is so special? Three things shed light on what was about to happen with the rich young ruler, as we call him.

First, children are open, uncomplicated, and honest. When they are hungry, they want to eat immediately. When they are sleepy, they do not care who they are with; they go to sleep.

Second, children are eager to learn. Children are inquisi-

tive. Children are quick to explore. They want answers. They do not care what the question is. Children will usually accept your answers. Adults seldom will. Children are very teachable. Because of this trait, children are ready and willing to learn. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Third, children are trusting. They realize they are inadequate to handle most of life's affairs. They trust someone stronger and wiser. Usually that is mama and daddy. Adults are not so trusting.

### TO BE ALMOST CHILDLIKE IS FAILURE FOR STEWARDS

Jesus rebuked the disciples for thinking that he did not have time for the children and pointed out the children's importance and how he wanted everyone to be like little children. While Jesus' message was still ringing in the disciples' ears, a man came running to Jesus.

Matthew and Luke tell some things Mark does not mention about the man. He was a rich aristocrat. He was also a ruler of the Jews, probably of the Sanhedrin. He was not only at the top of the social economical ladder, but also at the top of the religious ladder. He was still in his youth. He had everything Americans want.

Can you imagine Jesus, the poor boy from up in the hills, the penniless teacher, with the rich man running to him, falling before him, and saying, "Good Master"? The KJV has those words in capital letters. The first thing he did was call Jesus by a religious title. I like him immediately because he started making mistakes. "Do you know what you are saying? No one is good but God. Do you know what you are saying?"

He said, "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Here was a man whose riches have not gone to his head. He had not lost sight of the fact that there is something beyond this life. He had not allowed his political and social power to become his god. He was still eager to learn. He believed Jesus had the answers to his needs.

Jesus said to keep the commandments and named several.

The young man's response was, "All these things have I kept from my youth up. What do I lack yet?" Look at this man. He was rich, he was popular, and he kept the commandments. Today such a man would be called a faithful member of the church. But there was something lacking. He felt it, and he knew it. He came to Jesus for help.

After Jesus gave him the standard answer, he knew there was something else. He asked the hardest question. "What lack I yet?" The passage says Jesus looked upon him and loved him. It was not with a critical eye. It was an eye of love. How often did he see a man that was so much like the little child? How often did he see someone run to him, someone so open, so simple, so frank and honest about a lacking and a need? How often did Jesus find someone who had tried to keep the commandments all his life and still knew there needed to be a little bit more and tried so hard to know what it was? I believe Jesus looked on that man with eyes of love because he was one for whom Jesus came to die.

Jesus came to die for sinners. And Jesus came to die for the good sinners too. The rich young ruler was a good bad man, and sometimes they are the hardest ones to convert. If the bloody dagger is in your hand, it is obvious you need to repent of murder. If the stolen money is found in your possession, it is obvious you need to repent of stealing, right? What about those good/bad sins? He was the victim of a good/bad sin. I mean good in the eyes of men but bad in the eyes of God. This did not set well. He knew something was wrong. There was a hollow lacking. There was a need inside. Here he was with all his money, his finery and the things of this life, all of these commandments he kept and all of these religious observations, and still there was an emptiness. Still there was a longing. Do you know it? I know you do. Jesus said, "Go sell what you have, give to the poor, and you will have great treasure in heaven and come and follow me."

He said to the young man what he had said to all the disciples. They left all to follow him. It was as if Jesus saw in this young man great potential for another follower.

Then comes a strange, strange passage. This man who had so much of what he needed suddenly hung up on this one last

requirement. This one last test of his trust was too much. We talked about a little child being so trusting, right? "Can you get along without your possessions, mister?" The Bible says he turned and walked away sorrowfully. He was deeply grieved. Why? Why was he grieved deeply at Jesus' words? It said because he had great possessions.

### THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF BEING CHILDLIKE IS MATERIALISM

Great possessions do not usually make people grieve. Find someone on TV who just won \$20,000. Is he grieving? No, he is rejoicing. How did you get from joy to grieving deeply? What happened? What went wrong? What is it about these things that can make you grieve when you hear the gospel?

Jesus tried to explain as the disciples watch the young man. I can almost see him. He who ran so quickly now walked away slouched and sorrowful. The agony just oozed from his pores, and the disciples watched him disappear.

Jesus turned to them and said, "It is hard for a rich man to go to heaven." That shocked them. They had never heard any one talk like that before. Everyone thought that when you were rich, it was a sign that God was blessing you. You were pleasing him. The disciples were astonished. They could not believe Jesus would say that if you have a lot, it will be hard to get to heaven.

Jesus was not putting down riches. He was helped by rich friends. The Bible does not put down riches. The Bible says there is a temptation in having things. There is a danger with things not present without these things. It was one of the first principles Jesus mentioned when he taught that no man can serve two masters. He will love the one and hate the other or cling to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. The rich young man gave his heart to God except for one thing. He gave his trust to his possessions. Jesus revealed the problem in his next statement.

When the disciples were so perplexed, when they could not believe their ears, he made it a little plainer. He said to them it will be as hard as a camel trying to get through the eye of a

needle as for a rich man that trusts his things to get to heaven. Get the biggest needle you can imagine, and get a big old hairy humpy, lumpy camel to go through it.

Jesus said when you get to trusting things here, you cannot get there. It is not wrong to have things. It is wrong to trust them. The Bible mentions trusting the uncertainty of riches. Some things are going to happen to us when we start getting things.

First, we get addicted to them. We believe we would not be happy without these things. Next, we start fearing losing them. Before we know it, we start serving the other master—the thing master. We pay lip-service to Jesus and call that Christianity. Oh, how easy we fall into that trap. The world helps us do it. If you have a little bit and you see somebody with a little less, it is easy to look down on him almost before you know you did it. He will even help you do it. If you have enough things, he will call you “sir” or “ma’am.” If you have more, he will take orders from you and let you be his master as long as you will give him some of your things. You can make the mistake of thinking, “Hey, I am pretty important.” No, the only thing important to him is your bigger pile of things. People bow and scrape because they have less than you and for no other reason. The reason is the whole world misunderstands the value of things, and this misunderstanding gets in our lives, our hearts, our souls, and our worship.

The parable of the sower tells us about seed that came up, but it was choked, and the parable calls it the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. There are good people in the church today who are unavailable to Jesus. They are so wrapped up in their businesses, they are so wrapped up in their things, they do not have time. They say, “I will be there for church service; you may have my money in the plate, but do not ask me to help. I will not teach classes, visit the sick, or do personal work.” They say, “I will give the money; you do the work. I am not available. I am too busy.” What are you so busy doing? We become unavailable when we start trusting all these things.

Jesus saw how deeply this young man was afflicted with this addiction to his things. Another problem develops. You forget

whose things they really are. If you can remember who really owns them and that you are only his steward, you can keep the other things straight. Whose things are they really? Whose house is it? Whose car, whose boat, whose business, whose investment is it?

To what are you tied? What if the Lord decided somebody else should have your house? You know he will do that someday. What if he decided somebody else should have your car? What if he decided somebody else should have your job? Who do you love anyway? How many of us have let our love for things take over our love for God? We have not been available for him, maybe, for a long, long time.

That is the reason for emptiness in our lives. The reason we cannot feel good about ourselves is we really are serving the wrong master. You do not have to be rich to have this disease. You could just want to be. Paul says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Many reaching after money have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. What are you living for today? What is important to you?

As they saw that young man disappear into the sunset, Peter piped up. “Lord, what about us? We did leave all.” Bless his heart. Peter always said what we would be ashamed to say. “Lord, tell us what we will get out of leaving all for you.” Peter is selfish. I am too. I used to feel bad about that until I learned to be selfish about the right thing. Be long-range about your selfishness. Be selfish about the abundant life in heaven. You will be a good steward, and then look what will happen.

“Everybody who leaves houses, land, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, or jobs for my sake and the gospel will receive a hundred fold [that is 10,000 per cent, if I get my percentage point in the right place] in this life with persecution and the life to come.” What is he saying? You are not going to lose anything by giving to Christ. He will return to you so much more in this life and the next, it is almost indescribable. This is the most fantastic investment opportunity you will ever have. Nothing in the world compares with it. You can even have it after you die. You need to learn to be good at being selfish. Be smart and selfish. This will make you the most generous steward in God’s kingdom. The rich young ruler was

dumb and selfish. He still lost everything he had and missed Jesus too. In less than forty short years, the Roman soldiers destroyed and took away everything he had, or he died early and lost everything then. It was a great day when I learned that it was all right with Jesus for me to be selfish as long as I would learn to be long-range in my selfishness.

The same God who promised to forgive your sin promised to take care of you. He says, "Don't you remember who feeds the birds? Don't you remember who grows the grass? Don't you think I can take care of you if you will just serve me?" Friend, you are not seeking first the kingdom, are you? That is dumb! You let all these other things get in front of you, and Jesus says if you will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all these things shall be added unto you. Today you need to realize God is in control. You need to trust him like a little child.

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## STEWARDSHIP WHEN THE VINEYARD IS IN THE HANDS OF ROBBERS

JOHN MILLER

There is no way to comprehend the psychological power and the emotional conflict Mark 11 and 12 describe. Chapter 11 pictures Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It describes how Jesus rode a young colt that had never been ridden. As he came, the people pulled off palm branches and laid them down before the beast. They rolled out the red carpet. They shouted, "Hosanna, to the highest! He that comes in the name of the Lord."

We have probably never been to a parade or a reception for a dignitary where there was more acceptance and honor paid than by those people in the streets of Jerusalem at that busy time of the year so near Passover. You better believe the religious leaders took notice of this. They were aware of his miracles. They knew of his teachings—all of which conflicted with many of the things they taught. Even worse, he pulled away followers from them. These were dangerous men.

You may remember the time Lazarus died. Thomas sensed the ugly climate. He understood the tension. He knew the danger. And he said, "Let us go that we may die with him." He knew, with his limited knowledge, it was a trip on which Jesus would die.

Jesus that day began an attack. No marine ever made a suicide charge any more directly than Jesus Christ as he came riding into that city. From there he went to the temple. He cast out money changers and cast out the animals for sacrifice. It all was a travesty. It was all rigged to make money. He knew it defamed God. He threw them out. Not only did he throw them out, but Mark mentions he also would not let anyone take vessels into the temple. No one dared stop temple worship. Who does he think he is?

The very next day he came boldly walking into the temple teaching. The high priests were Annas and Caiaphas. The high priest and his father-in-law (the power behind the throne), the scribes, the scholars of the Law, the elders, and the Sanhedrin made their counterattack. You could not gather a group with more authority in Jerusalem, and they had come for one reason. It was to challenge this rebel Rabbi, this upstart from the hills of Palestine. Their goal was to destroy him once and for all. They came with this demanding question, "By whose authority do you do these things? Is it by your own authority or is it by another? Who do you think you are coming into the city like that? Who do you think you are stopping the temple worship and driving out the sacrifice animals? Why are you doing this?"

This was a direct attack. They knew they must stop him. They felt they had the perfect way to do it. If he said he did it by his own power, he proved himself a rebel. No man has the right to stop the worship of God. If he said he did it by the power of God, he was a blasphemer. Either way they could accuse him and take him and kill him. Jesus knew why they were coming. He knew their hearts, and when they demanded of him the answer, he said, "I'll ask you first a question. The baptism of John, was it of heaven or of men?" It set them on their heels.

They had hoped it would all end right there, but it did not. Jesus was not ready to die yet; Jesus had more to do. He had some more things to teach. He came to give his life, but to give it when he was ready. No one took it from him; it was a sacrifice he made purposely.

They could not give either answer. If they said it was from heaven, they knew Jesus would ask why they did not believe him since John had testified of him. If they said it was from men the people would attack them because they believed John was a prophet. So they say they cannot tell.

Notice the hate these men had for the truth of God. They were not in religion for truth; they were not in religion for God; they were standing face to face with the Son of God wanting to kill him. The only reason they were religious was for their own glory and power. They found it was a ladder they could climb to gain power, control, and sway over the people. They could

not care less about God. They could not care less about the Bible. Outwardly, they went through all the motions, but inside they did not care.

They knew who John was. They knew what he had done. They knew what Jesus was and what he had done. One of the members of the Sanhedrin came to Jesus by night and said, "We know thou art a teacher sent by God. No one could do these things except God be with him." They did not care. Their answer was they could not say. Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by whose authority I do this."

### A LESSON TAUGHT ON STEWARDSHIP

Then he spoke to them in parables. He told them about something they all could understand. Vineyards were everywhere. More money could be made from grapes than anything else in the country. They all understood the parable very well. They knew how much work was in vineyards. It is hard work from the beginning.

He told about how a man built a vineyard. The ground was cleared, and the soil was made fertile. The man put a hedge about it. If he did not protect the vineyard, it did not have a chance. The wild animals would destroy the vineyard. Thieves would come in and steal.

Then a tower was built. The tower was more than a bell tower. This was a place where the fruit was stored. This was also a place of abode for the workers. The vineyard required care around the clock. Every month of the year the vineyard must be worked. Here was a place where the workers would live. Also, the tower was high where you could overlook the vineyard and watch for thieves who would come at night and steal your crops.

The man put much work into the vineyard. He built the vineyard, he built the tower, and he dug the wine vat. He made everything ready. Then he rented the vineyard to husbandmen and lived elsewhere.

This happened very often in that country. The country was rough and wild. People who could afford it might have their vineyard there but would live in a more secure place. They

would receive rent from the vineyard. In other words, the vineyard was an investment.

### THE LORD DEMANDS FRUIT OF HIS STEWARDS

This story was a restatement of a parable Isaiah had told in his fifth chapter about the children of God in those days. The scribes were there, and they understood. The psalmist said something very similar to this too. Those who had received the vineyard forgot to whom it belonged. The owner waited a sufficient amount of time to receive the fruit, but nothing arrived. The people who had the vineyard had not built it. They provided for themselves and moved in on what another man made. They took all his blessings, consuming all upon themselves. They gave nothing to the master. Nothing!

The master naturally sent the servant with a message. "Pay what you owe the master." And they beat the servant. The master sent another. They killed the second servant. He sent another and another. And those who had rented the vineyard beat and killed everyone the master sent. The vineyard was in the hands of rebels. Finally as a last resort the master said, "I'll send my own son. They will respect my own son."

But when they saw the master's son they said, "He is the heir. If we kill him there will be an end to the matter. We will inherit it." They acted as if God was dead, as if he did not exist anymore. Just kill the son, and end the matter.

Oh, how this parable applied to the religious leaders of that day. Just get the Son out of the way, and we will go on with our power play, and we will not be bothered with him anymore. The Scripture tells us, "They perceived he spake the parable against them." They knew. They understood. How perfectly the story fit. They knew he spoke the truth. They did not care about what they could get from the vineyard.

The master did not want it all. He wanted a share. They did not want to give him anything, so when the son came, they sought to kill him and did. The other writers tell us Jesus asked them, "What do you think will happen next?"

They told him, "The master will come and destroy these ruthless, godless, heartless husbandmen for their rebellion.

They even killed his son."

Why is this story in the New Testament? This instance lets us appreciate what Jesus did and what he suffered. There is another reason the story is included. Matthew, Mark, and Luke include the parable not only to tell us about what men have done to Jesus and how they have treated God, but also as a message for you and me today. Did God build a vineyard for us? Did he give us many blessings? Does the Lord want some fruit from his vineyard?

There has never been an opportunity like the one you and I have today. When the men of the New Testament were here, they did not have the many advantages we have today. We have better travel, better communication, better educated people, and we have more lost souls who need Jesus than all the generations since Jesus lived. We are in a vineyard. We sing the song about wanting to be a worker for the Lord. We sing about working in the Lord's vineyard. All of this applies, friend. Everywhere you turn, God has supplied us. He has blessed us. Our things are not ours, but his. Our houses are not ours, but the Lord's. Our cars are really the Lord's.

Paul said even our bodies belong to him. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Your body is his. He bought you with a price. Our life is his. Not a day goes by that you and I do not meet people who need the blessings of the kingdom. There is not a day that goes by that we do not talk to people who need to be saved.

### FRUITLESS STEWARDS DEMAND DESTRUCTION

I wish we could see the fire in Jesus' eyes as he told those religious leaders who they really were and what they were really doing. I wish we could see the look in their eyes as they faced the Son of God who loves their souls enough to die for them. Had they ever come to grips with what they were toying with? This they saw as another opportunity to build another power structure. Did they understand the eternal implication of this? They were wise and shrewd, but they were the most foolish people ever to live. Their own fruitlessness demanded their destruction. They would end up with

nothing but hell.

Fishermen and uneducated men had enough sense to follow him. These fishermen went down in history, and more importantly, they went down in eternity as fruitful stewards. They will be blessed beyond measure, beyond words, and beyond expectations because they worked in the vineyard giving the Lord his due.

Church members today forget why we are here. I remember nine years ago when a young woman walked into my office and told me she needed to be restored and needed help reaching her husband, Freddie. He was not a Christian. Later he told me he was twenty-six before he knew why Christ died. He was distant, cold. We were almost afraid to approach him. His wife had nagged about Jesus, and therefore, he was not interested. One elderly couple gave him some special attention. I remember the first time I met him, he had come to a Halloween party. He would not talk to me. As time went by, things mellowed between us. Eventually his wife told me I could come out and talk with him. Many members had influenced them in a two-year period. When I arrived at their home, I hardly got to study with Freddie; he was already converted. He let me baptize him.

About two years ago, Freddie came to my office. He knew what it meant to be lost, he could understand the value of being in the kingdom, of being in the vineyard, of seeing God's blessing, of understanding the meaning of his Son's blood on the cross, and of realizing where he would be without all of this. He understood he owed something to God. He said, "John, I have been doing personal work, I've been on campaigns, and I think I need to go into mission work." He has three small children. He has a good job. His wife was not very keen on the idea. I said, "Let's take it one step at a time. Why don't you go to India for four weeks? Your family can handle that. You can take a leave of absence from work." He said he would try that. He became part of a team of five men who went over to strengthen the church. They had an additional two thousand baptisms in just four weeks. Friend, some of you could do this kind of thing.

The Mormons are the fastest growing religious group today.

They attribute their success to their mission efforts. Do you know why the church of our Lord is shrinking? No one is working in the vineyard. The Mormons all understand they are missionaries. They commit two years of their lives in the mission fields.

A lot of folks over here think this lush vineyard they live in belongs to them. We are Americans; we are just special good. That is how the Jews thought.

These special blessings we take for granted are part of God's vineyard. There is not going to be any fruit for the Father unless someone gets to work. You do not grow grapes by accident. You do not have fruit by accident. The Son did not leave us any choice about it. Before he left this earth he called his disciples together and said, "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth." He is in control. "You go and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. And he that believeth not shall be damned."

This parable applies in a personal way too. What kind of vineyard has the Lord put you in? You know the vineyard is his. He deserves and demands the fruit of a life lived for him. He demands it of you personally. He demands it where you work. He demands it in your home. He demands you be a light for your friends and neighbors. Most of us think like those fellows in the parable. We imagine all this is ours, and God has gone off and died or forgotten about us so we can do what we want. We say, "I am running things. I do not care about God. I do not care about his church. I do not care about lost souls. I do not care about others who are trying to live for him."

## STEWARDSHIP FROM JESUS AND FRIENDS

JOHN MILLER

A television commercial says, "Yes, it's expensive, but I'm worth it." Every child of God should feel that way about his stewardship and Jesus. Let Mark introduce to you two ladies who knew more about stewardship than anyone else.

### STEWARDSHIP AND EXTRAVAGANCE

Let us turn to Mark 14:1-9. Here, we will learn about stewardship and extravagance. Jesus was eating in the house of Simon, the leper. The other Gospel writers fill in more details. Lazarus was eating with Jesus. Martha was serving, as usual. Suddenly Mary broke a very expensive flask of rare perfume and anointed Jesus' head and feet with it. The odor filled the house.

Everyone was shocked because the ointment was very expensive. The cost would be a year's wages, at least. Ten thousand dollars would be a conservative estimate. Today, ladies cherish a silver tea service or fine china. The flask of expensive ointment was the same kind of treasured possession for ladies in those days.

The disciples saw what had happened. Some of them were angry. John says one of them was Judas. They called such devotion for Jesus a waste. What was their argument? They said, "This ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor." The ointment was too expensive. They would not have criticized her if she had kept it for herself. But, giving it to Jesus was too much.

John tells us Judas' real problem. He was a thief from the beginning. He was one of those people who knows the price of everything but the value of nothing. There are a lot of folks like that around today. They are some of the most miserable people

you will ever meet. Watch out; there is probably too much of Judas' spirit in our hearts and not enough of Mary's spirit.

These disciples murmured against her. Jesus was only a few days away from the cross, and the disciples were murmuring over this example of devotion for him. The song says, "Jesus is all the world to me." Not to them! Jesus gave his reaction. He said, "Six things I want you to take home."

He first said, "Let her alone. Why are you troubling her? Haven't you caught on to Christianity? Don't you understand?" His disciples did not understand. The result was that a truly devoted person was under fire from disciples of Jesus. That can still happen. They did not understand Christianity. I fear today the vast majority in the Lord's church does not understand the very essence of Christianity. That is the reason stewardship in areas like attendance, giving, pure living, and evangelizing the world are problems in the church. All the rest of the people smelled the perfume that day, but only Jesus smelled the sweet odor of Mary's devoted heart. Paul writes in Philippians 4:18 about their devoted life and calls it a sweet odor unto God. Jesus appreciated the same act of love that the disciples criticized. They did not know the meaning of giving one's life to Jesus. Mary was not just pouring a bottle of sweet fragrance on Jesus. She was showing how she felt.

He went on to say, "She has done a beautiful thing to me." He says, "Whenever you see someone who is devoted enough to the Lord that they give over and beyond what anyone could expect of them, that is beautiful."

Third, he said, "The poor you will have with you always. You will not have me much longer." Mary had the good sense to seize the opportunity. Opportunities come and go so quickly. Today, you will have opportunities you will never have again. Sometimes a need touches your heart, and your impulse is to help. Mary says, "Do it. Jesus is worth it. Do not worry what others say." Real love is responsive. It seizes opportunities. Jesus was such a spontaneous person. We need to become more spontaneous with our love.

Number four, he said, "She hath done what she could." Mary is one of the most beautiful people in the Bible. She could see what was happening. Remember Thomas' words, "Let us go,

that we may die with him." She also knew what was happening. What voice did she have with the Sanhedrin? How could she possibly change the minds of the chief priests? How could she stop her precious Lord from dying? There was not a thing she could do. She could not even feed him. Martha was doing that. What could she do? All she had was her precious flask of ointment. She did what she could. You can do things no one else can do. These things may seem small in our estimation. You cannot feed all the hungry. You can feed one hungry child. You cannot teach everyone the gospel. There is someone who would become a Christian if you would just watch for the opportunities and do what you can. All Jesus asks of you is to do what you can.

Number five, he said, "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." I like the saying, "Give me my roses while I am living because I will not know about them when I am gone." Mary did that. She did what all the other disciples would want to do after Jesus was dead. You may remember Nicodemus bringing expensive spices to anoint the body of Jesus. To bring precious ointments to anoint the dead was customary. To break the flasks to prevent their use again was customary. Mary understood more about the gospel than these disciples. Is there anyone you love? Let them know it. Tell them now. It will save so many tears of regret once they are gone. Is there someone with whom you need to make peace? Do it now! Many people have psychological problems after the death of a loved one because of unfinished business. Keep your business current. This will bring peace and joy to your life.

Last of all, he said, "... wherever the gospel is preached... what she has done will be told in memory of her." Jesus wanted you to know about this. Mary teaches us a great lesson on stewardship and extravagance.

### STEWARDSHIP OF SMALL THINGS IS NOT SMALL

There is yet another lesson I want to examine with you—"Stewardship of Small Things Is Not Small." In Mark 11:41-44, Jesus was watching the people cast money into the treas-

ury. I do not think that was polite, do you? Jesus is the Lord, and he peeks. One church published everyone's contribution in the bulletin. Would that not be embarrassing? Jesus saw a widow drop in two small coins worth less than one cent. Who would notice a gift so small?

Jesus knew his disciples missed the greatest lesson they could learn that day. Jesus saw a widow give her last two pieces of money. He said her two mites were more than all the other gifts combined.

What she did was not commanded but commended. She did more than was commanded. Why would anyone do that? I have been in Bible classes where the discussion was whether a Christian should give less or more than 10 per cent. I never heard Christians seriously discuss giving everything. Oh, no! We have reduced our concept of stewardship to a ritual for Sunday morning.

Jesus says she did not have anything else. How could anyone give everything and walk away with nothing? Back in those days the state did not care for the poor. That is why you read so much in the Bible about caring for the widows and the orphans. What the widow did was so very brave, it was almost foolish. The strange thing is Jesus does not scold her for it. He commends her. What is there about stewardship that she understood and we have missed?

First, she understood from whence things come. She understood we do not have anything on our own. If we have a nice house, God gave it to us. If we have the abilities to work and earn a living, God has given us those abilities. The widow knew her two mites were God-given.

The second reason for giving all she had was she knew how to get more. She understood how to get more mercy and love. She knew how to get more things. There is a formula in the Bible, and no one believes it. It sounds more insane than the Golden Rule. No one believes the Golden Rule. We all quote the passage in Bible class, but no one practices it. We do not practice the Golden Rule where we work, on the highway, or in our homes. Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it

will be measured to you." This is true in everything. There are no limits. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 6:14-15 as he teaches us how to get more forgiveness: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. . . . For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

The widow understood when she gave to God, God would take care of her needs. The widow understood you get more than you give. And if you do not give, you do not get anything. What happened to her? She had nothing else. Think how Jesus loved her. Did God take care of that widow? Did any blessings come her way? I want to challenge you. When you see those who are lonely, reach out to them. I know this is risky and dangerous. They may slap your hand. You may give someone your last dollar, and they may spit on you. It can happen. Someone may not appreciate your kindness, but Jesus will.

Malachi 3:10 is a strange passage. It is the only time God ever says, "Just try me. I dare you." I used to have a daddy that would give me some rule and then say, "If you don't believe me, just try me." Did you have a daddy or a mother like that? God says, "Try me. Be the steward you should, and see if I do not open the windows of heaven and pour out so great a blessing you will not have room for it." That is scary. I have to work on believing this message.

Jesus tells us of the great reward in trusting him. In Mark 10:29-30, he tells of an investment which will pay me back 10,000 per cent, and I can even take it with me when I die. Does that sound too good to be true? The gospel is always like that. Jesus not only takes care of your sins. He also takes care of your things when you realize they are really his anyway.

That poor widow knew the way God works. We see it working every day in our world and still do not believe it. We have a common saying that goes, "Smile, and the world smiles with you. Cry, and you cry alone." Guess who gets the most smiles in the world? The biggest smiler! Try to be a big smiler tomorrow, and see how many people smile at you. If you frown, see how many people frown at you. Just try God with the little things for a while. You will begin to grow in your stewardship.

Try giving a little kindness away, and see what happens. See how much more you receive.

Third, she understood if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly. I can almost see the gleam in that woman's eye when it was her opportunity to give. She understood the essence of stewardship and that is, God is in control. He has given us all things, he loves us, and he will take care of us if we trust and obey. He says, "Love me, serve me, live for me, be my light, be my salt, spread my Good News, make this world a better place, and I will reward you now and in eternity." With a gleam in her eye, she could not wait to give what she had.

I hope tomorrow you cannot wait to give someone a smile and to share some of the blessings you enjoy as a Christian. I hope we can get excited about giving. It is the most exciting thing in the world. We have the world by the tail. Is it not awful how we get like Judas, wanting to hang on to the money bags, and impoverishing ourselves? How much richer we would be if we would open up and let our lives be channels of blessings.

I want to conclude with a statement from Malachi. God talked to those people about their stingy attitudes by saying, "Will a man rob God?" We hear about robberies all the time, but how dumb can you be to rob God? Someone held up a bank and wrote his holdup note for the teller on the back of his pay stub. The police met him in his home that night. That is dumb, right? How much dumber are you to try to rob God? Jesus is peeking. Jesus knows what kind of steward you are. Jesus noticed a widow who gave two tiny coins worth less than a penny. She did her part, and he was thrilled with her. Is he pleased with you?

## THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST, 1

JOANNE HOWE

I am deeply grateful for the honor that has been conferred upon me to share the story of my conversion from Roman Catholicism to New Testament Christianity and the power of God's grace that caused this change to occur.

Each time I speak of my nineteen years as a Roman Catholic nun and my encounter with the truths of the gospel, I am reminded of our brother, Paul the apostle, who like myself, had diligently sought to please God through a rigid obedience to the law, and found only futility and despair. Unlike our brother Paul, I was not confronted with a flash of lightning and a thunderous boom; rather, after an extensive study of God's word, I was convicted of the ugly, repulsive disease called "sin" that had ravished my soul and had prevented me from receiving God's divine and healing grace.

Today, as a member of Christ's church, I have found joy in my priestly ministry for the Master in telling the world that, like the apostle Paul, I was blind, but now I see!

As I share with you the wonders of God's grace that have affected my life, I would like to focus on a verse from the book of John: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32; emphasis mine). It is with this focus on God that I give my praise, thanksgiving, and adoration to him for the gratitude I have in turning my life around from a strongly committed Roman Catholic nun to the dedicated and totally committed member of God's royal priesthood that I am today. To God alone be the glory, for he has done great things in my life!

In the first of these lessons, I would like to share with you my personal struggles and restlessness in groping for a life with God that would satisfy the longings of my heart. In the first

lesson, I will incorporate the marks of a cult and a Christian's response to them. During the second lesson, I would like to share with you how I discovered God's manifestation in my life and the spiritual strength, meaningful happiness, and the purpose in life I have received from obeying the gospel. Since, changing one's habits is a monumental task in anyone's life, I would like to suggest some biblical principles that can be applied as a solution to this human problem. In the last study, I would like to share with you some practical advice in sharing the gospel with my people—Roman Catholics.

The story I share with you today has many similarities with those human beings who are involuntarily confined to a dismal prison cell, whose main object and goal is the procurement of their freedom. As I voluntarily committed myself to a life of self-surrender and self-sacrifice as a Roman Catholic nun for nineteen years, I was totally unaware of how simple and how accessible God's plan for my release and freedom could be. Only after an intense search and study of God's word was *his* Master plan for my life fully revealed to me.

On May 23, 1968, the huge bronze doors of the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Baden, Pennsylvania, closed permanently behind me and with them, the experiences and memories of nineteen years of service and surrender to what I had understood to be a special calling from God. With my former life as utterance of my values and convictions of faith, I stepped into a world that embodied situation ethics, humanism, and disharmony within the Roman Catholic church itself.

I am the firstborn of nine children of profoundly devout Catholic parents from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My father had studied for the priesthood for eleven years. The year preceding his scheduled ordination to the priesthood, he met and married my mother. After several years of marriage, he succeeded in converting her from the Russian Orthodox faith to Roman Catholicism.

In those days, it was a ruling of the Roman Catholic church that any child produced from the marriage had to be reared in the Catholic faith. My mother very religiously complied with the church's wishes and reared her children conscientiously

according to the dictates of Roman Catholicism.

Growing up in an atmosphere of conformity to strict doctrine and discipline, I developed a deep longing and a sincere desire to know and please a God whom I both loved and feared. Everything in my life was centered around pleasing this awesome supreme being. Often when I failed, I was cautioned by my mother and the nuns that my actions hurt Jesus, and if I continued displeasing him, I would be sent to hell. I was taught and I learned that the only way I could be totally acceptable to him would be if I made the ultimate sacrifice in my life and became a nun in the religious life. Throughout my elementary schooling, I was taught, and I sincerely believed, that a nun was an object of "holy glamour" and was a very special member of God's royalty. Virginity was held up as the perfect state and was pleasing to God. Marriage and motherhood were spoken of disparagingly as a lower form of morality, designed for the less perfect. Consequently, as a young teenager seeking an ideal in life, becoming a nun was to become a replica of the Virgin Mary herself! And too, after learning from my catechism of all the evil influences of the world, I believed that once I entered the convent, I would be sheltered from all of these evil influences, and would, therefore, be assured of eternal happiness.

At the age of ten, I experienced the disappearance and death of my nine-year-old brother, Raymond. The search for him over a period of three months caused my parents tremendous suffering. As a child, I was overwhelmed, seeing them so distraught and in constant anguish. One night, as I knelt down to say my prayers, I promised God, that if he would reveal the whereabouts of my brother, I would dedicate my life to him as a nun. Unbelievably, the very next day my prayers were answered and the remains of my brother's body were recovered in a densely wooded area several miles from our home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We discovered later that my brother had died fighting for his virtue at the hands of a practicing homosexual. From that day forward, I vowed that I would never forget my commitment to God because of his answer to my earnest prayer in a desperate time of need. My faith in God as a child was unwavering, and even today, I see his hand

guiding and directing me in paths of righteousness!

At the tender age of thirteen, I chose to satisfy the yearning of my heart in serving a God whom I adored and loved deeply. I entered a preparatory school for girls who desired to become nuns. I remained in this school for three years. During these early years of preparation for my religious calling, my identity as a "special person" in the Catholic church was to be directed toward assuming the characteristics and mindset of a person "set apart" from the wickedness of worldly influences. I was not permitted to wear make-up of any kind. My clothing consisted of a black serge dress, complete with starched white collar and plastic white cuffs. Initially, it was very difficult for me to adjust to wearing long woolen stockings, a corset with heavy stays, and black granny shoes that were so ugly to me as a girl of just thirteen.

During this period of time, I became semi-isolated from the world. My visits home were limited to holidays and summer vacations—always with strict rules and supervision. I was not permitted to date, nor was I permitted to form close ties with anyone who would have an adverse influence on my vocation. I attended a regular high school where girls from outside the school were bused in from surrounding communities. I can remember watching these girls come and go, having mixed emotions because I could not do what they did, wear what they wore, or go where they went. Often, I recall wishing I could go to my mother and share with her the perplexities of adolescence. Instead, I was told that I was to learn to give up my family and dedicate my life completely to God.

At the end of my junior year, I was permitted to make application to the community to which I was aspiring. At that time, my father was very hesitant in granting his permission for my admission. He felt I had not had enough experience in the outside world to make such a serious decision with respect to my future. At this request, I then entered another girls' Catholic high school, where I completed my senior year of high school.

A year after leaving the preparatory school, I entered the postulancy of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a community I had been taught by in grade school. It was here at the Motherhouse in

Baden, Pennsylvania, that I would once again pursue my lifelong dream of serving God as a nun. It would be twenty years later that I would finally discover in Acts 5:29, that I had chosen man's way rather than God's direction for service and total commitment to him. However, at that time, I truly believed that I would find all the answers to my human needs in convent life, and that it was God's direct will that I leave my family to follow him as a nun in the religious life.

Upon entering the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph, where I was to reside for the next sixteen years, I was clothed with a postulant's black cape, a black headdress, and a black gown that came in sizes of small, medium, and large. There were twenty other girls who entered with me that day, and there was a total of ninety novices in the community's novitiate. The novitiate is the probationary and training program designated for those who are entering religious life. At this time, I was singled out to have my picture taken for a magazine called *The Prepster*, which was circulated throughout the diocese of Pittsburgh for those girls who were interested in religious vocations. I was beginning to feel very "special" and extremely happy. If this was the way in which I could best serve God, then I wanted to contribute all that I could to further the kingdom of God!

My adjustment to a change in environment and the regimentation required of me seemed not too different from that which was required of me in the preparatory school. As a postulant, however, I would learn that stronger disciplines would be expected of me. I was to run the instant a bell was sounded. I was to walk through the hallways with my eyes downcast. If I was ill during the night, I was to endure my situation in silence. Disturbing the Mistress of Novices was discouraged. I was to hand in all personal belongings—even the pictures of my loved ones. I was to witness them destroyed before my eyes! To discourage vanity from creeping into my life, I was not permitted to own a mirror. Several mirrors were installed in the general bathroom areas for public use. Every letter I received was opened and read, as was every outgoing letter. I was forbidden to have any communication with the "outside world"—either through visits or phone calls. As I

tried to acclimate myself to these rules, I consoled myself that for God nothing could be too difficult to endure. I was there to become his bride, and I was to be strong in the event that anything unpleasant would occur. Having made the forward step, I believed that there was no turning back.

When the six months of my postulancy ended, I was presented to the Mother Superior and her council for acceptance into the novitiate. The novitiate is a period of training for two years whereby the candidate for the religious life is carefully observed by the Mistress of Novices. During these two years I was trained intensely in the art of prayer, meditation and study in the laws of the congregation, Canon Law (the official laws of the Roman Catholic church), and the doctrine written for the Baltimore Catechism, which I would later teach in the parochial schools.

As a form of induction into the novitiate, I was presented in a ceremony to the public, dressed as a bride. This ceremony took place in the chapel of the Motherhouse and was officiated by the Bishop of the diocese of Pittsburgh. In the normal course of life, marriage is a woman's natural God-given privilege. Using this matrimonial concept, a ceremony was held for my friends and relatives publicly proclaiming me as "Christ's wife." During this ceremony, a long black cloth was draped over my beautifully embroidered white wedding gown, symbolizing that I was now officially dead to the world, and I would now be identified in the future as a nun with a new name and a new image. My new name, Sister Jean Raymond, was chosen as a remembrance of my twin sister, Jeanne, who had died at the age of 3 weeks, and my brother, Raymond, who had been murdered. I considered them both "saints" in heaven. We were to choose a saint whom we could exemplify and whom we were told would pray to God for us. The distinctive garb and new name I now wore was designated to keep me constantly aware of the fact that I was now committed totally to the service of the Roman Catholic Church, and thus an impassable gulf existed between me and the world.

Following several hours of rejoicing with my family and friends, I returned to the novitiate to have every lock of my long blonde hair shaved from my head. A woman's hair was

considered her most important asset, and I had to offer it all to God.

During this period of the novitiate, all of my actions were strictly monitored. My abilities and talents and their potential for the betterment of the community were constantly scrutinized. I was closely observed on my ability to acclimate to the rigorous disciplines that were imposed upon me.

Upon entering or leaving a room, I was required to acknowledge the person in charge and request permission to enter or to leave. Whenever I was late for any type of exercise, I had to excuse myself before the superior in charge on my knees, with my hands joined inside of my long black woolen sleeves. I kissed the floor before going to bed at night. I kissed the floor as a lesson in humility. I was never permitted to speak to other nuns in the hallways, and I was forbidden to speak to "Finally Professed Nuns"—those religious ones who had taken their final vows. Once a week, on Friday evening before retiring for bed, I performed a ritual called "The Discipline." This ritual required me to whip myself on the bare buttocks with a small five-pronged iron chain, and in the process, I was to chant a prayer called "Out of the Depths." This same prayer was chanted over the bodies of deceased nuns. The reasoning behind this ritual, I was told, was twofold: (1) Our flesh was weak and sinful; therefore, we were to punish the body for its many sins. (2) We were to atone for the sins of all mankind.

I was unaware that this atonement has been completely fulfilled once and for all by Jesus at Calvary.

Another form of public humiliation was a practice known as the "Chapter of Faults." Here, each one publicly confessed her faults to the entire group once a week. If anyone had an accusation to make against another, she could do so at this time. Depending on the seriousness of the fault or accusation, the individual was given a penance that consisted of imposed absence from meals, recreation, or total isolation from the community in a special room provided for this type of punishment. I had the privilege to experience this once (and this one time was enough) during my two years of probationary training.

At the end of my novitiate training, I was presented to the

Mother Superior and her council for formal acceptance into the community. They questioned me thoroughly on my motives for wishing to remain in the congregation. Inasmuch as I was considered suitable, I was admitted to temporary profession for a period of three years. During this time I was sent to several of the community's missions where I was highly trained in the art of teaching—which would be my life's work while remaining in the community.

The Roman Catholic Church seeks to convey the idea that a nun is the happiest of women, and that a convent is the most holy, delightful, and peaceful place of abode. Although convent walls were to keep the world out, they could not prevent human weaknesses, frustration, and sin from abounding throughout its fortress.

In the next study I will share with you the reasons for the decision I made to leave the convent life and my eventual adjustment to society.

In recalling the various rituals and indoctrinations I encountered during my nineteen years in the convent, I am now convinced that I adhered to a cultic way of life. A cult is any religious group which differs significantly in one or more respects to general beliefs or practices and demands a passionate and irrational devotion to a cause. A cult represents the earnest attempt to find fulfillment of deep and legitimate needs of the human spirit which the individual cannot find in an established and recognized group in society. A cult demands devotion to a religious view centered in false doctrine. It is organized heresy. The promoters of old and new religious cults are becoming increasingly active and are growing as never before. The result is that millions of naive Christians and untutored seekers after truth are being drawn into fascinating religions that are nothing but false and satanic cults.

Most people gain an image of what cults are and how they operate through the news media. Accounts of bizarre behavior, including mysterious rites, promiscuous sex, occult practices, and robes of white sackcloth make for good journalistic material. As a result, when the public thinks of cults, the images conjured up include flower-pinning Hare Krishnas at airports, zombie-like followers of Myung Sun Moon, or Eastern

evangelists who claim to have talked with Jesus or Buddha in the spirit world. Popular depictions of cultists include unconventional methods of chanting, meditation, and various forms of yoga.

Sincere, but sentimental believers who are ignorant of biblical doctrine (such as was I) are sitting ducks for clever cultists who are pushing their doctrines.

Cultists had arrived in the city of Galatia where the apostle Paul was preaching, and he quickly moved to refute them in the strongest language when he said: "I marvel that you are so removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another, but there may be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:6-7).

I, myself, feel compelled to take a stand against the teachings and rituals prescribed for salvation, as taught in Roman Catholicism, that are anti-biblical and are condemned in the strongest language scripturally. To me, these false teachings are a deadly poison that works against the message of the gospel of Christ. Unfortunately, I have met members in the church of our Lord Jesus who sincerely believe that there will be some Roman Catholics who will be saved while maintaining their beliefs in the doctrines of their religion. The apostle Peter (1 Peter 2:2) admonishes us to "desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." God's word clearly points out that our only spiritual guidance is in and through the word of God.

What are the characteristics by which we may recognize the message of those who preach another gospel? I have outlined ten identifying marks describing any given cult. You may be able to add more to the list, but each category incorporates ten of the basic elements found in cultism.

## TEN CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTS

### I. AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP

- A. A central charismatic human leader who commands total loyalty and allegiance. This is shown in their titles: "Father," "Papa," "Messenger of God."

- B. The leader of the cult exercises interpretation of both doctrine and religious practices. He represents divine authority that must not be violated.
- C. The organization system interprets the *facts* to the cultists, generally making the Bible and/or their respective founder the ultimate source of authority.

### II. TAKES AN OPPOSITIONAL AND ADVERSARIAL STAND TOWARDS MAJOR INSTITUTIONS

- A. The cults beliefs, practices, and values are counter to those of the dominant culture.
- B. The cult demands painful distancing and separation of the youth from their parents.
- C. Cultist belief systems are characterized by genuine antagonism toward their hearer and Christian beliefs. They use a process of "closed mindedness," often unknown to the searcher for truth.

### III. THE CULTS DISPLAY ELITISM AND EXCLUSIONISM.

- A. The cults believe they are the only ones who possess the "truth" (usually based on a new revelation given to the group's prophet).
- B. Cults do not accept the opinions of others as valid.
- C. All cultic systems have a pronounced intolerance for any position but their own.
- D. Outwardly, the cultist manifests a peaceful co-existence of beliefs, but have many contradictions within their philosophy.

### IV. CULTS OPERATE ON A LEGALISTIC FRAMEWORK.

- A. A cult is tightly structured, governing both the spiritual matters and details of everyday living.
- B. Cults dictate the mode of dress or outward appear-

ance of its members.

- C. Members of the cult are urged to exhaust their economic resources for the furtherance of their existence.

#### V. CULTS PLACE EMPHASIS ON THE "SUBJECTIVE."

- A. Feelings and emotions are not to be expressed.
- B. Putting down rational processes of thinking and devaluing knowledge and education are encouraged.
- C. Constant repetition of beliefs is required, even though these often change with every new wind that blows.

#### VI. CULTS PERCEIVE PERSECUTION FROM THE MAINSTREAM OF SOCIETY. In-house indoctrination teaches the members of the cult that they are an oppressed minority.

#### VII. CULTS ARE SANCTION-ORIENTED.

- A. Cults require conformity to established practices and beliefs and readily sanction (use control methods) against the wayward.
- B. Raising questions or open rebellion are punished by excommunication.
- C. Signing of covenants and loyalty oaths are means of achieving control of the membership.
- D. Leaders employ fear, intimidation, and impune guilt as punishment for failure to conform.

#### VIII. CULTS ARE A RELIGION OF SECRECY AND CONCEALMENT.

- A. One picture is projected to the public, and an "inner reality" is known only to the group.
- B. Members are required to keep "inner" practices confidential.

- C. The vocabulary used by the cult is not the vocabulary by definition known only to the cult members. They develop their own "jargon."

#### IX. CULTS REQUIRE SALVATION BY WORKS.

- A. Cultists are interested in producing continuing obligation rather than religious freedom, and they keep their followers in the hopeless bond of an insecure relationship with God.
- B. Members are taught they can never be sure of their salvation as it is constantly affected by the changing circumstances of life.

#### X. CULTIC PHILOSOPHY IS "ANTI-BIBLICAL."

- A. Interpretation of the Bible is alleged to a specific individual.
- B. Their teachings contain major deviations from historic Christianity.
- C. Cults capitalize upon the failure of the Christian church to understand their own theology.
- D. Cults have a general historic knowledge of Christian practices and can discuss it intellectually.
- E. Well-trained cultists will carefully avoid definition of terms concerning the following major doctrines: the Trinity, deity of Christ, atonement, bodily resurrection, salvation.
- F. Cult members are taught to manipulate their terminology and capitalize on the hearers inability to understand their act of redefining biblical theology.
- G. An indefinite system of doctrine that changes is seen in their beliefs and values. Cultists pose questions they do not answer—they confuse rather than clarify.
- H. The cultist claims a "token respect" for the Bible, but adds extra-biblical revelation other than that found in the New Testament.

The Bible is clear that not every person who comes speaking in the name of Christ or God is a teacher to be trusted. Christians are repeatedly warned that they must always be on the lookout for the enemy of their souls who comes disguised as an angel of light. These are the days when we should heed the warning given us in 2 Peter 2:1-3:

... But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Jesus himself warned against false prophets that would deceive his name and his Father's word (Matthew 24:5; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 11:13-15).

What must a Christian's response be to the cults? Each of us must be able to present a clear testimony of our own regenerative experience with Jesus. The cultist must be able to see that Jesus is truly Lord of our lives and that there is no other Lord! Then with a genuine love for the spiritual welfare of the cultist, the Christian (whose attitude should be tempered with patience) should strive to direct the conversation to the wonderful message of the gospel that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, to rise again on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Every opportunity must be taken to share God's plan for man's salvation; all else is sinking sand!

In Joshua 24:15-16, we read that the servant of God made the decision to live for God, die for God, and lead his people to a military victory because God had become Lord of his life. As his death neared, he gathered his family together and said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve—but as for me and my house—we will serve the Lord!" Jesus said, "Be ye holy, as my heavenly Father is holy." With a deep and intimate walk with God we, as women of God, will be able to fulfill the

Scripture in Philippians 1:6 that says: "Being confident of this very thing—that he who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

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## THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST, 2

JOANNE HOWE

My decision to leave convent life was not reached without tremendous inner torment and struggle. For years, I had dug into the depths of my soul for understanding of the will of God. For years, I had struggled with my duty, submissiveness, and loyalty to the community versus the repression of guilt and the pursuit of my self-identity.

During the course of my nineteen years in convent life, I had tried desperately to fulfill my dream of becoming perfect and serving God completely. If perfection was to be achieved in this lifetime, I was not discovering it in religious life. I began to realize that life in the convent had become so many meaningless symbolisms and rituals—so many frustrations of each individual struggling with her own desires and preferences that the original intent of the monastic fathers for true communion with God and *agape* love had become stifled and lost in outmoded practices and traditions. A dual set of values began to emerge among the fellow religious, questioning the validity of the church's authority and the celibate rules that were imposed upon them.

In January of 1965, a questionnaire came from the Vatican as a result of the Second Vatican Council. This questionnaire was an appeal to the superiors in each mission house to undertake a renovation of the lives of the religious in their community. Two of the questions on the questionnaire stand out poignantly in my memory: "Have you found among your fellow nuns, superiors, or others help for your spiritual life?" and "Have you found a true friendship in the community to which you belong?" My thoughts became enveloped in the years of service I had provided for the congregation: elementary school teacher, music teacher, a zealous and dedicated worker to any

task to which I had been assigned. Two problems had consistently manifested themselves: (1) I had no friends and (2) I was not happy. As I thought about my answers to the above questions I had to reply in the negative. No, I had never experienced true, unselfish affection among my fellow nuns, or for that matter, the congregation at large. I had seen only an outward pretense of love. A portion of the questionnaire had to do with the attitude of my superiors. Generally, my superiors were too occupied with outside matters to attend to my specific spiritual needs. They had become too busy with "things" and seemed incapable of sharing their time and love with their subordinates.

Throughout my years of training, and even during my years as a Final Professed nun, I was constantly reminded that my perfection consisted in the perfect observance of my vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The word of God was never looked upon as a source of guidance or authority in my life.

By vow of obedience, I was expected to obey the command of the lawful superior in all things that pertained to the rules of the congregation and the laws of the Roman Catholic Church. I was not allowed to question, and I was kept spiritually dependent upon her decision. The superior even had the permission to interpret God's will for me.

The vow of poverty required that all my personal property be given to the community. I was to own nothing. I was forbidden to dispose of any personal property without the explicit permission of the superior—even such small items as buttons, pins, pencils, and books. I was never permitted to carry money on my person, nor keep it in my possession overnight—not even a dime! (In my book I relate an eye-opening experience that occurred one night as I attempted to retrieve some money I had left in my music room where I taught piano.) If I disobeyed any of the rules of personal possession, I was guilty of mortal sin and charged with theft.

Perhaps the vow that was most difficult for me to understand was the vow of chastity. This vow required strict observance of the sixth and ninth commandments of the Roman Catholic Church. This meant that I was to avoid idleness, dangerous reading, and familiarity with seculars. I was not

allowed to be seen with the same religious person too often, or I would have been accused of having a "particular friendship." Particular friendship became the altar upon which intimacy was sacrificed. This type of relationship was regarded as having a potential for lesbianism. Fearful of this, even though I had no earthly concept of lesbianism and its meaning or purpose, I learned to avoid involvement with others.

To further avoid any type of closeness between two nuns, we were put on total silence at 9:00 p.m. This silence was known as the "Grand Silence." From 9:00 p.m. until 5:30 a.m. the next day, I was forbidden to have any type of communication with another person. I was not permitted to undress in front of another nun—as this might provoke impure and immodest thoughts. I became more confused than ever about having a friend, as I was discouraged in establishing any kind of relationship that might hinder my relationship with God. Consequently, I became very confused about friendship, and ultimately never really developed a close or sincere friendship until after I left the community.

Finally, after wrestling with my conflicts and experiencing much torture from within myself, I requested permission from the Mother Superior to seek the advice of a psychologist. My request was given approval.

The psychologist confirmed my earlier conviction that convent life had produced many conflicts and contradictions within its system. I was facing an identity crisis!

After a year of much prayer and self-introspection, I finally decided to leave the community, feeling that I had weighed my decision from every angle and had considered every alternative. My preparations went smoothly. I called the Mother Superior and applied for a dispensation from my vows. This would be forwarded to Rome, where it would be received at the Motherhouse in Baden, Pennsylvania, a year later, at which time I would return to sign my Indult of Secularization. This decree would release both parties from any responsibility we had to each other. The community was sorry to see me leave, and they were very loving in granting me their blessings, hoping that I would find the peace and happiness for which I was searching. Unknown to either of us at that time, I would

discover it three years later—in God's Word!

Many nuns leaving the convent are completely unequipped to meet the problems of everyday life in society, and I was no exception! However, this challenge forced me to try new ways of acting, thinking, and feeling! My new role forced me to tap resources and abilities I never knew I had!

My new residence was in Laurel, Maryland. I chose this area because I had planned to live with my brother until I was financially independent. However, I began to discover how incredibly innocent and vulnerable I was and consequently began walking through a jungle that was entangled with deceitful and wrong directions. I became involved with several married men and amassed so much guilt that I attempted physical suicide.

A teacher friend with whom I had sought consolation encouraged me to seek the advice and counsel of a friend of hers, who happened to be a preacher of the gospel. However, he was a minister of another faith—the church of Christ. My guilt and depression was so crucial that I made the decision to seek the only alternative available—the guidance and direction I had hoped this preacher would provide.

Upon entering this preacher's study, many thoughts ran through my mind. I knew I was vulnerable, and I feared this man might subtly coerce me into accepting his religious beliefs. I was too loyal to my Roman Catholic faith to want to jeopardize my conviction or be deceived in any way! I had not sought help to find a new religion, but rather to find an answer to life and living!

During the next study, I will discuss the events that followed and the process that occurred that produced my conversion to the gospel.

Regardless of how sheltered or permissive our past, all of us have had regrets accompanied by feelings of guilt. "If only" becomes our password. John Greenleaf Whittier said it more succinctly when he commented:

For the sad words of tongue or pen  
The saddest are these: "It might have been."

Each of us must deal with our past before we can experience

freedom in the future. The sin that troubles us today sank its roots into our lives yesterday. None of us can break our sinful habits until we have a new beginning.

Habits of a good nature as well as bad become steadfast by repetition. They have a domino effect if they are performed more than once—one habit leads to another.

The chains of habits are so light that a person cannot feel them—until they are so strong they cannot be broken. They become so comfortable that they evolve into acts that are performed with ease and enjoyment.

Can we have a new beginning in breaking our sinful habits? Our enemy, the great deceiver, wants us to believe that since the past cannot be reclaimed, there is no way to break with its power.

Jesus believed that the cycle of being enchained by sinful habits can be broken. He told a story that illustrates the most important single principle in breaking a sinful habit—watchfulness! He said: "A man who had been inhabited by a demon rejoiced when the sinister spirit was expelled. The wicked spirit then passed through waterless places, seeking rest. Finding none, it decided to return to its original abode. To its satisfaction, the demon saw that its original house was unoccupied, swept and put in order. It then found seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they went in and took occupancy. The last state of the man became worse than his original state" (Matthew 12:43-45). Jesus warned that the evil spirits he had cast out would return, and if they found the man unrepentant, they would take possession of his heart with greater malignity than ever and would hasten him on to ruin.

Changing one's sinful habits takes time, discipline, and sincere repentance. God's grace, however, is greater than any of our sins. There is no reason for any of us to be trapped in the sordid paths of our past lives. God promises forgiveness. In Isaiah 1:18 he says: "Come now, and let us reason together. Though your sins are as scarlet, though they be red like crimson, they will be as white as snow." And in Jeremiah 29:12 we are told: "You will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. And you will seek me and you will find me when you search for me with all of your heart."

All sinful habits have a common source. All sin originates from the corruption of our rebellious sinful nature (the flesh). The flesh is a tree with different kinds of branches bearing many kinds of sin. As diverse as each of us are, we are all controlled by the flesh.

Some habits are more engrained than others. Consider the following list and ask yourself if you have ever been conscious of any of these sins existent in your life? Now is the time to take stock of your life by asking yourself if any of these behavior patterns or thoughts must be changed by God.

### UNCONSCIOUS BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS

(By Erwin W. Lutzer)

1. *A secret pride*—an exalted feeling in view of your success of position, because of your good training and appearance, because of your natural gifts and abilities; an important independent spirit; stiffness and preciseness.
2. *The stirrings of anger or impatience*—which, worst of all, you call nervousness or holy indignation; a touchy, sensitive spirit; a disposition which dislikes being contradicted; a desire to throw sharp, heated words at another.
3. *Self-will*—a stubborn, unteachable spirit; an arguing, talkative spirit; harsh, sarcastic expressions; an unyielding, headstrong disposition; a driving commanding spirit; a disposition to criticize and pick flaws when set aside and unnoticed; a peevish, fretful spirit; a disposition that loves to be coaxed and humored.
4. *Carnal fear*—a man-fearing spirit; a shrinking from reproach and duty; reasoning around your cross; a shrinking from doing your whole duty by those of wealth or position; a fearfulness that someone will offend and drive some prominent person away; a compromising spirit.
5. *A jealous disposition*—a secret spirit of envy shut up in your heart; an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of another; a disposition to speak of the faults and failings rather than the gifts and virtues of those more talented and appreciated than yourself.
6. *A dishonest, deceitful disposition*—the evading and cov-

ering of the truth; the covering up of your real faults; the leaving of a better impression of yourself than is strictly true; false humility; exaggeration; straining the truth.

7. *Unbelief*—a spirit of discouragement in times of pressure; lack of faith and trust in God; a disposition to worry and complain in the midst of pain, poverty, or at the dispensations of Divine Providence; an over-anxious feeling about whether everything will come out all right.

8. *Formality and deadness*—lack of concern for lost souls; dryness and indifference; lack of power with God. ("Traits of the Self-Life.")

In thinking of the particular sinful habit you would like to overcome, ask yourself: What would God want to put in place of this habit? Then read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-10, and find the character qualities that seem to be directly opposite to the trait you would want God to change in your life.

Satan's mission in life is destruction—destruction of every precious soul who has chosen Christ as the Lord of his or her life. In Ephesians 6:12-17 is a list of seven pieces of armor that will protect us in our battle against Satan. Included is a brief description of what each piece ought to mean to each of us personally.

### A CHRISTIAN'S ARMOR

1. *The belt of truthfulness*—an attitude of complete honesty.
2. *The breastplate of righteousness*—all sin must be confessed and we must constantly look to Christ who is our righteousness.
3. *The feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*—an eagerness to present the gospel whenever possible.
4. *The shield of faith*—a life lived with implicit trust in God's Word.
5. *The helmet of salvation*—confidence in the hope of salvation and the sufficiency of the cross.
6. *The sword of the Spirit*—knowing the specific statements of God to apply at the point of temptation.
7. *Pray always*—A prayerful attitude of thankfulness and dependence.

Habits do not change because we have not dealt with the deep-rooted habit, nor have we dealt with unresolved conflicts stemming from underlying causes. God wants us to look at the sin we do not want to give up—that is growing in the roots of our stubbornness. He sees that we are resisting surrender to him. He wants us to know that Satan (his enemy as well as ours) encourages us to be comfortable with our sin, as long as it does not get out of hand. We need to remember that Satan has no rights unless we give him rights. We need to confront Satan the way Jesus did when he was tempted. He said: "Begone Satan!" In Jesus name it is written . . . (then quote one of your favorite Scriptures). Remember, too, if you have lived with the habit for a long time, the stronghold of your imagination will not be easily toppled. It will take twenty-one days for your mind to be renewed. Never forget that each of us was born with a nature which combines a response to outward with its inner twisted passions of greed, selfishness, anger, rebellion, and lust. Follow the apostle Paul's admonition in Romans 6:12-14:

Do not, therefore, let sin rule your mortal body and make you obey its lusts; no more shall you offer the members of your body to sin as weapons for evil. Rather, offer yourselves to God as men who have come back from the dead to life, and your bodies to God as weapons for justice. Sin will no longer have power over you—for you are now under grace, not under the law.

### SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS FOR CHANGING HABITS

1. *Receive the Spirit's power* (Galatians 5:16).
2. *Renew your mind* (Philippians 4:6-9; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5).
3. *Be prepared for spiritual warfare* (Psalm 1:2).
4. *Live with your feelings and not by them* (Hebrews 12:1; Ecclesiastes 7:8; James 5:7-8).
5. *Learn to tame your will* (Colossians 1:29).
6. Remember that Satan's *greatest weapon* is *fear of failure* (Psalm 46:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:7).

7. *Follow the principle of "replacement."* None of us can overcome evil by simply renouncing it. Rather, we can only do so by substitution of the good in its place. Sinful habits cannot be broken without replacing them with good ones (Psalm 119:11).

8. *Accept God's grace* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

9. *Believe that deliverance is possible* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

10. *Begin each day at the foot of the cross.* Take time to give thanks that Christ has already conquered the problems you will face that day. Accept by faith the victory Christ won at the cross before you are tempted to sin.

## THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST, 3

JOANNE HOWE

My nineteen years as a Roman Catholic nun had developed within my character a spiritual dimension that sensitized my spirit to godly ways. But, since I was introduced to the world and its morality, my conscience struggled with the focus that was being placed on the philosophies of situation ethics, existentialism, and humanism, which were becoming widely acceptable within Roman Catholicism itself.

To know God has always been the need of my soul and the highest aspiration of my spirit! I always had a thirst for a true knowledge of God, and this urge could not be quenched by the confusion that was emerging from these various philosophies which were springing up throughout the Roman Catholic Church.

I began to feel a lack of identity. The dogmatic values that once gave me security as a Roman Catholic were being questioned, even by those in the church's hierarchy! This caused me to feel a deep need for stability, stability based on firm convictions that were anchored to something more than just a plurality of religious movements!

Emotionally and psychologically I was very immature, and this was reflected in my dealings with the opposite sex. This led to many frustrations, and I found myself walking through a forest so entangled with wrong directions that I became confused and discouraged. Through the urgings of a teacher friend, I sought counseling in adjusting to a world where I encountered moral and ethical values I could not accept. Because of my over-protective life, I found it difficult to identify myself with a society where "anything is acceptable"! I believed that I would be held accountable for my actions, and I was not fitting into the mold of society's values.

At first, I hesitated in going to see this counselor, for he was a minister of another faith. I had always been taught that salvation and direction was in the Roman Catholic Church. As a Roman Catholic, I had no idea of the wide chasm that existed between the claims of Catholicism and the word of God. Since I had never been exposed to any denomination outside of Roman Catholicism, I was hesitant in communicating my religious beliefs to him. However, much to my surprise, I was told that the answer to all my problems were in "this book," as I was shown the Bible. It answered for me the questions for which I had been searching answers for so long. . . . "Who am I?"; "Why am I here?"; "Where am I going?"; "How do I get there?" No one throughout my entire religious life had ever shown me this direction. As a religious, I was encouraged to read the Bible to acquire spiritual indulgences, but I was never permitted individual interpretation of it! In fact, as a novice in the novitiate, I was told to put a Bible under my mattress. The philosophy behind this instruction was that the Bible would ward off any demons that might cause me temptations during the night. The Bible was to be interpreted by only those in authority. Any in-depth study of its contents was pursued only by the clergy. I had taught religion and had studied theology for years, but I had never studied God's word for the direction I needed in my life.

As we proceeded into the counseling sessions, Brother Coffman was able to identify the symptoms of my major problem. He saw a person who felt total loss and rejection. It was at this point that he began pointing me in the direction of building my self-worth and self-esteem. Because of his many years of counseling lost souls, he could sense and recognize my need for acceptance, affection, and approval. His starting point was to deal with some of these basic needs and the directions I needed in life.

If memory serves me correctly, the first thing that caused me to suspect the fallacy of Roman Catholicism was the concept of baptism. As a child, and even as a religious, I learned and taught that the beginning of man's earthly life takes place at birth, but his spiritual life takes place at baptism. When I was asked the question whether or not I was saved, I wanted to

know what God's word said I had to do to become saved. I sincerely believed I was saved as an infant when water was sprinkled over me at my baptism. When I was shown the Greek meaning of the word for baptism—"baptizo" which is defined "to submerge, plunge, or immerse"—I then realized that I had not been spiritually baptized! As a baby, I was not an acceptable candidate for baptism, not only because I had not been immersed, but as an infant, I did not have the ability to believe. Belief, I learned, was one of the necessary requirements for salvation. Jesus said: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Consequently, a person is saved by faith—plus baptism—and that eliminated me!

Looking back, I recall the transitional moment when the seed of the word of God was implanted in my heart. When Paul conveyed to me in my initial interview that the message of the gospel could bring me the inner peace I was longing for, he set the stage for the whole new spiritual genesis that would take place in my life.

As I pursued an in-depth study of the word, I began to wrestle with my conscience, weighing whether I could pay the price of accepting all the word told me, or becoming eternally damned in rejecting God's way for my eternal salvation. I felt like the "Hound of Heaven" that Francis Thompson speaks of in his poem entitled *The Hound of Heaven*. God was pursuing me, and I was desperately trying to elude him. However, I had not come to a full realization of the scriptural meaning of salvation. I did not understand the full meaning of the term "justification" or "righteousness" before God. The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus died for our sins, yet it substitutes the Mass to show the substitutionary death of Jesus for our sins. I eventually learned that this very concept disregarded the biblical concept that Jesus sacrificed himself in "full payment" for all my sins once and for all at Calvary. I had been taught that Jesus did not die as a penalty for sin, but rather he died to give man the opportunity to save himself, and it was therefore necessary that man do his part by faith, by keeping the commandments of God and of the church, and by leading a good life. Only then could I "merit" salvation. This "merit" would be achieved through works, the help of God, and

through the sanctifying grace I would receive by participating in the Sacraments of the church.

The doctrines of "grace," "born again," and "redemption" were terms I had to understand in God's plan for salvation. Even though I knew I was a sinner, I needed to understand the biblical concept of sin and how this condition had estranged me from the God whom I loved and had desired to serve all my life.

Faith started the salvation process in my life; the power of the word of God took hold of my mind and began to change my thinking and the purpose for my life. Finally, baptism changed my relationship with Christ and allowed me the right of eternal happiness with God!

Fifty-seven generations ago, the greatest of all Christian evangelists wrote: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation!" Just as our brother Paul was bold in sharing the truth with those whom he met, so too, I stand firm on God's word with all those I perceive to have an open mind and a willing heart to learn the truth. Paul also had a burden for his people—the Jews, and I, too, carry that same burden for my people—Roman Catholics. They are so lost and so confused in their world of religious traditions and man-made rules! There are thousands of them just waiting for you and me to share the "Good News" of their salvation with them!

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus gives a very direct command. He commands his followers to make disciples. Jesus was asking them to tell others what they had learned and to follow in his steps. The apostle Peter said in Acts 4:12 that there is salvation in no one else; there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved! Since one can only be saved through faith in Jesus and the acceptance of the gospel, as he taught it, most of the world is lost! The only way the world can be won to Christ is by doing it Jesus' way—making disciples!

There is a gigantic mission field within the Roman Catholic Church today. As a former Roman Catholic, I am acutely sensitive to their hurts, their pain, their ignorance, and their commitment to scriptural error, as well as the beautiful love of

Jesus they possess in their faith. My mother is a prime example of this commitment. I admire her reverence and her faith in Jesus, and I know that she sincerely believes that what she is doing is acceptable before God. My mother is the one who taught me how to pray and instilled the concepts of purity and integrity and godliness in my life!

There is a great revival going on in the Roman Catholic Church today, and, even though many changes are taking place, the basic structure of the hierarchy and its dogmas will not change in your lifetime or mine! There is a tremendous harvest among the Catholic laity—and some of the most sincere, loving, and beautiful people in the Roman Catholic faith conscientiously serve a God of whom they are totally ignorant scripturally. Unless Christians understand the beliefs of a Roman Catholic and understand why each person remains in the Roman Catholic faith, we will never be able to penetrate the surface of the Roman Catholic mind, much less get him or her to understand the Gospel!

Most Roman Catholics do not know what they believe. They accept the fact that their faith is adequate for their salvation. They have doubts and misgivings about the hierarchy and most take an apathetic attitude toward religion in general. They fear the hereafter and believe that the offerings of prayers said at Mass will merit them eternity with God. Most Catholics believe that they have a personal relationship with God by the mere condition of their heritage as a Roman Catholic. They have little confidence in the Bible as an authority figure in their *life* and use situation ethics as their rules of faith.

When sharing with a Roman Catholic, basic reasoning and scriptural quoting is almost as foreign to them as another language. To a Roman Catholic, God speaks through the Church. The Roman Catholic Church claims continual revelation through the pope when he speaks "ex-cathedra" (meaning infallibly). Catholics do not realize nor do they know that the Holy Spirit cannot speak against himself!

Simplicity is the key to effective witnessing with Roman Catholics. It is very important for them to see the personal relationship you have with your God and how he has been

effective in your life. The average Catholic is deeply concerned about his/her relationship with God, but does not know how to establish one biblically. They have no concept of "the Law" as taught in Romans and Galatians, and it would be wise for the evangelist to know these books well before proceeding in an intensive study with a Roman Catholic.

Each time I converse or share with one of my people the beautiful, soothing, and comforting words of the gospel, I keep in mind the freedom I have found in release from the fear, guilt, and ignorance to which I was subjected. I will never forget that there was nothing the world had to offer me in the way of inner peace and true happiness that Christ offers me! He is the only doctor who can heal a sin-ridden soul!

In searching desperately for answers to the questions: "Who am I?"; "Where am I going?"; "How will I get there?" I have found a treasure that I am anxious to share with the world—for they, too, will discover the depth of its riches and a peace and joy that can only come with accepting the love that only Christ can give!

No man is in as much danger as the man who believes that he is already safe and saved without God's grace. This is true of many adherents of different religions, but it is particularly true of Roman Catholics who believe they are in the only true church. They also believe that because of this, their salvation is sure, since they are taught that there is no salvation outside of their Church. You and I as Christians know that no church system guarantees one's salvation.

I have a burden and a longing in my heart that my people, Roman Catholics, who know not the redeeming love of Christ, be brought to him through the discipling process that Jesus entrusted to us in Matthew 28. The gospel will not fail that which it was sent forth to accomplish—if we as disciples of Christ remain faithful and committed to its beliefs and power. We are partners with God. With a balance of urgency and a sense of timing, we can accomplish more than we ever dreamed for God—for to him through Jesus goes all the glory and the power!

## DISCIPLESHIP AND SERVICE

### DIETLINDE SPEARS

When the theme "Discipleship and Service" was given to me, I looked through many books, pamphlets, and brochures available on this wonderful and needed subject. I collected much material and was ready to write it down when it occurred to me that I am at my best talking from my life experiences. While pondering on how God can use any of us in his service, I remembered myself growing up in a Nazi home till I was six years old, as a young Communist in East Germany, and now as a New Testament Christian in this great country of America. The power of God in my life astounds me.

I kept on thinking about the many people who have greatly influenced my life. We all know people who have naturally motivate and draw us to follow them. For many months now we have watched the presidential candidates. They each have thousands of volunteers campaigning for them, because these people believe in their candidate. If a man, with his human limitations, can have this great an effect on us, how much more should God and Jesus inspire us for service!

In the book of Mark, we read how Jesus also motivated people. He did this in a unique way—by serving others. We see his compassion and love of mankind as he served, to the point of giving his life for all of us (Mark 10:45). "All" includes the greatest sinner and even the least lovable person. Often we have difficulty understanding why God could love us so. We think of ourselves as no good, with no talents, and with no hope of becoming a better person, but he is able to see something of value there. If we only could trust God, see his goodness and love, we all could become great servants, for he is able to make someone out of us, if we only let him. I had to learn to let God use me. After considering my talents and abilities, I deter-

mined to let the Master Potter shape me into a speaker—hopefully one who will give glory to his name. But whatever our individual talents or abilities, we each can use them to serve others and, in this way, glorify him with our lives.

Of course, we need to have the right motivation and be constantly careful that we do not serve for the wrong reason. The love of God and Christ should always be the prime reason for service. It will draw others to him and also sustain us. As Alan Bryan said it so well in his book, "If we will break the alabaster box often" (Mark 14:3-9) and practice it day by day, we would become great servants for Christ. Our homes would be full of joy, happiness, and peace. Our jobs would be more pleasant, congregations would have less strife, and neighbors would live more peaceably—if we could just learn to break the alabaster box—that is, give and show love by serving.

We need to remember more often that it is our honor to be his disciples. We must remember that a Christian may be of service, regardless of formal degrees, like B.A.s, M.A.s, Ph.D.s, etc.—as long as we do our very best at whatever station and place in life we find ourselves. We must learn not to make excuses for circumstances and wait until we get better, smarter, have more time, raise the children, have more money, and so on. . . . Rather, we must give of what we have *now*. Everyone can give in this way, but does everyone *want* to? If we understand that by doing "what we can"—even if it appears insignificant to us—we are serving Jesus. Only then can we begin to learn the lesson of servanthood. Remember the cup of water.

I believe this would motivate us to serve for the right reason: out of love and concern for one another, and not for personal gain, honor, praise, or reward. What a happy place we could create here on earth! With what great anticipation we could look toward the eternal place of joy and peace.

Often, as we serve, we need to remember to be givers and not getters only. We all have opportunities daily to help someone spiritually, mentally, financially, or physically. If love motivates us, we will find chances at home, at school, or at the office, bus station, gas station, store, church building, airport, or on the street to serve our fellow man and, in turn, to serve

Christ. How much fruit we could bear for Jesus! Even though we know that God promised to return to us much more than we can ever give, we should not serve for that reason alone. We will need to be motivated by love for Christ, God, and our fellow man, and always remember to be committed to the right course for the right reason. Too often, however, we let greed and pride motivate us.

We are all familiar with the philosophy behind Nazism. The communists also have a cause which motivates them to serve, yet it is a false and evil one. Hitler thought it right to establish a pure race. He felt justified to deport or exterminate the Jews, gypsies, or his political opponents for his cause. In many ways he was a great servant to the nation, a dedicated leader and giver of himself, but all for the wrong purpose. What a misuse of one's talents and abilities.

The communist leaders give of themselves and encourage others to do likewise because they truly believe their cause will bring happiness to the world. Yet we know that their system brings brutal reprisals and a heavy yoke on the people whom supposedly it serves.

I lived under this kind of system for thirteen years and suffered hardships, lack of freedom, and indoctrination because of a false ideology and wrong motive of service. However, Nazism only *seemed* to work, and many believed it to be a noble cause. Its actual results were terror, death, and destruction of lives and happiness for millions. We, too, could be motivated by a wrong commitment; therefore, we need to always examine our purposes and reasons for service. Mark 10 shows us that even Jesus' disciples did not always understand what it means to serve, help, and give to others. Even they were caught up in the philosophy of the world and its reasoning. They let the world get to them and accepted service *from* others, enjoying the prestige of the world and forgetting the importance of service to others for the good it could bring to them. Jesus gently explained the true meaning of greatness which comes from serving—not from being served. Jesus demonstrated this kind of service in his life—he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). In his life and death, Jesus showed great com-

passion for suffering humanity and served others in the most loving, humble, and selfless way. We need to do likewise because we want to be like Jesus. When we pray often, serve others, and draw close to God, as Mark 1:35-42 instructs us, we will be able to develop the right motivation and learn to love through service as Jesus did.

Christ sets us free from the slavery of sin and shows us how we can become servants of man. Our sinful natures tell us that we do for others *only* in expectation of getting something in return. When set free from this sinful way of thinking, we can begin to understand the blessing which service brings to the giver as well as to the receiver. Through serving we will find peace and abundant joy. Again I am reminded how service differs if one has the proper motivation. Under communism, I really had no choice but to accept the area of service I was assigned, but in Christ, I am free to choose the type of service that I render. I may even reject opportunities to serve. Yet most people I come in contact with are Christian servants and *have* a responsive attitude toward serving. Why? I believe it is because of this servant attitude they have learned from Christ, as in Mark 10. In Poland, I wanted to be great for personal gain. I knew that leaders and successful people would have a better physical life: a little more to eat, a better apartment, a little more praise. As Christians, we should try to serve because of the joy it brings to the Lord, to others, and to ourselves. We should want to be an encouragement, to be a helper, and to challenge people for good, knowing it will in turn result in their becoming better people and servants for Christ. Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before him (Hebrews 12:2). Even in the face of troubles, we, too, must endure and look forward to the reward of heaven.

In January of 1945, as my family and I walked between thirty and thirty-five miles a day to get away from the Russians, we endured hunger, subfreezing temperatures, abuse, and fear. Most such refugees endured it because of the hope they saw at the end of this "Death March," i.e., Prague, Czechoslovakia, which was considered our "haven of rest." Often I heard it said: "We can stand it all, if we only make it that far." I saw so much cruelty and unkindness during that march. Even

if people did see an opportunity to serve and help another, it was all forgotten in the selfish battle for survival we fought each day. What opportunities for good were missed daily! Oh, but yes, after many weeks of nothing but selfish attitudes, greed, and disservice, there emerged this wonderful family which not only knew how to give, but also how to give graciously and how to love unselfishly, sharing with us their beds, their buttermilk, their potatoes, and the precious warmth from their fire. For the first time in weeks, we did not need to go to the stables to sleep, lie down on soiled straw, and wake up hungry. What service these people provided! Remembering their kindness blesses my life over and over again, because as often as I remember them, I want to do likewise. Their example is the reason I am not bitter, hurt, and hateful today, as so many other war victims are. I can be happy, loving, giving, and *forgiving* toward others, and try harder each day to become a more compassionate person in the service of my King—the one who is greater than any this earth has known or will ever know.

Can we truly find joy in serving as we follow Jesus, who said, "Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple"? How can we leave everything behind and go serve the Lord in that manner? Are we willing to give up our time, our families, our friends, and serve *everyone* in need and also everyone *equally*. We *can* when we realize that *every* person is important and deserving of our care and compassion. To Jesus, no one and nothing was too insignificant. He was interested in the popular as well as the unpopular, the one with a high social position as well as the common person. He served without expecting praise or personal reward. He served from a motivation of love. We also should do likewise.

If we remember that God is the giver of all good gifts and that we are responsible for the proper use of our talents, our minds, bodies, and intellects, this will truly help us to spend them on others. We will serve one another with joy, realizing that we will receive more blessings than those whom we are serving. We must remember what Jesus said: "I will make you to become." We must not lose heart. He can work in our lives to make us the servants he wants us to be *if* we allow him to do so,

remembering the example he lived before us—as in his washing of the disciples' feet. By giving little things like a smile or word of encouragement, making a hospital visit, writing a note of cheer, phoning a lonely person, or preparing a meal, we truly influence others for Christ.

Before I became a New Testament Christian, it never occurred to me to serve out of the pure joy of serving. It was always a duty, "the thing to do," rather than giving because I enjoyed it. The greatest influences which I remember from my pre-Christian times were the occasions when I observed "the church of Christ people," as I called them helping others. When some of them gave me a shower and also helped with the wedding, my astonishment grew even more, because it was still very hard for me to understand that someone of no relation to me could give so much of their time and effort, expecting nothing in return. Little did I understand the joy they received from their giving. It took years of practicing before my duty and service turned into joy. I am grateful for the wonderful examples I saw lived before me. When asked, most people will say that it was a *person* who influenced them the most. It brings to mind this poem by Beatrice Holland:

To me 'twas not the truth you taught,  
To you so clear, to me so dim,  
But when you came to me  
You brought a sense of him.

And from your eyes he beckons me,  
And from your lips his love is shed,  
Till I lose sight of you  
And see Christ instead.

In order for people to say such as this of us, we need to be optimistic, kind, of a cheerful disposition, and of a loving heart. Because of the great love our Lord Jesus had for us, we need to be mindful of one another. We *can learn* to give ourselves away, even at a moment's notice if need be; and God will bless us by letting us experience this joy—our reward. Too often our motivation for service is recognition alone—if a sufficient number of people will hear of my good deeds, only *then*

will I consider doing it. We forget that God will know and be pleased, and that is all that should matter to us. Our goal in life should be serving others by being committed to the teachings of Christ, showing his love and care to the ones we serve and not being concerned with showing off our know-how and abilities. Remember, in *all* we do, God should receive the praise, and it is his approval alone that we should seek.

Once we have determined that we will follow Jesus' example of servanthood, we must find a work which is right for us. Not every area of service can be every woman's cause. The fight against abortion, for example, or the war against pornography, or even speaking in public—as I have chosen to do—is not the right thing for everyone, but we all can serve *somewhere*. One might be able to physically care for the ill or elderly, while another is able to give emotional support to those experiencing a loss in their lives. The important thing is to give it our all, remembering that we are doing it "as unto the Lord."

Let us remember, however, that we may have to learn to enjoy some duties and better improve our attitudes toward them (and this *can be learned*); then, the more ready we will be to give of ourselves with joy. We will have to overcome some obstacles and make sacrifices, but often that is what it takes to be Christ's true disciple. We have to be willing to let ourselves be troubled by others, willing to get involved with pain, conflict, sorrows, and hard work. It often means we have to change our schedules, plans, and dates in order to help others. When we give up everything for Christ's sake, when we truly want to serve with joy, we will give our all and become the Lord's true servants in times of convenience and inconvenience. As we read in 2 Corinthians 8:5, "... First, they gave themselves to the Lord." All this will work together to enrich the quality and depth of our faith and develop Christian character. Certainly this will see us through all of life's difficult experiences. Jesus continually "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), even in the face of criticisms and hardships. He never stopped caring for the needs of others.

May we all be able to say at the end of a day that we have given our best in the service of others and that we have used

our abilities to the glory of God. Whatever we have sacrificed for the privilege of being called a true follower of Christ will seem like nothing when we come to the end of the way and hear him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

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## WOMEN OF FAITH SEEK JESUS: IN SPITE OF FEAR

JEANENE REESE

Wonder. Action. Decisiveness. Fear. Discipleship. Gentile. Secrecy. Revelation. Misunderstanding. Recognition. Tradition. Confusion. Betrayal. Passion. JESUS.

The Gospel of Mark moves its readers briskly through the life of Jesus, intent on involving us in the central message of his life and death. Though sometimes criticized for its lack of detail and absence of specific teachings from Jesus, Mark portrays a stark reality of the Messianic mission and people's reaction to it.

Three stories about women stand out in the midst of Mark—stories which show at least some surrounding Jesus seem to understand. They reach out in faith and find relationship. They seem to comprehend his purpose and are rewarded with participation in his life. Stepping out of the cultural, traditional, religious, racial, class restraints of their day, each seeks Jesus in a special way. The Gospel writer uses these incidents to tell the story of their relationship to Jesus, to expose the lack of understanding that surrounds him, and to challenge us to examine our own faith.

The first woman's story comes to us quietly, unexpectedly, almost without notice. She is a woman with a great need, and she knows that Jesus can meet her need. She is a woman who has exhausted all other alternatives; she is desperate.

Her story is contained within the context of another—Jairus and his sick daughter. Jesus has just returned to a familiar shore and is again surrounded by the multitudes. Falling at his feet, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, beseeches Jesus to come and lay his hands on his gravely ill daughter.

A great crowd follows as Jesus accompanies Jairus to his home. On the way, a woman, who has suffered an incurable

hemorrhage for twelve years, encounters Jesus. Having heard reports about him, she reaches out to touch his garment knowing that she will be healed. Immediately, the hemorrhage ceases, and she is well. Jesus perceives that power has gone from him and inquires about who has touched him.

The disciples think it incredible that Jesus questions who has touched him since the crowd is so large and the possibilities endless. Jesus, however, seeks the one. Compelled, the woman comes forward in great fear and trembling and falls at Jesus' feet. Jesus addresses her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Meanwhile, messengers arrive from Jairus' house telling him that his daughter is dead and that Jesus is no longer needed. Jesus ignores them, and pointedly tells Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." Proceeding to the deathbed, Jesus admonishes the mourners for their noise and declares the child not dead, but sleeping. They mock Jesus with their laughter.

Allowing in only the child's parents and Peter, James, and John, Jesus enters the girl's bedchamber. He takes the child's hand and instructs her to rise. The child gets up and begins to walk. The witnesses are utterly astounded. Jesus charges them to tell no one of this event and then requests something for the girl to eat (Mark 5:21-43).

Several significant differences emerge between these two stories which occur almost simultaneously. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, is a Jew of high standing and regard in the community. The woman who has suffered the hemorrhage is ceremonially unclean according to Jewish Law (Leviticus 15:19-27). The woman has been banned from the synagogue and every form of community life. Jairus is a man of position and power; the woman is helpless, powerless, an outcast.

Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus because of a desperate need to have his daughter healed. She is twelve years old, on the brink of womanhood. Jairus disregards his position, power, and prestige to solicit the help of Jesus. He requests that Jesus come and lay his hands on his dear daughter. His only thought is for her to be made well and alive.

The woman approaches Jesus quietly, unknown, desiring only to touch his garment for healing power. She has exhausted

all medical resources and is, in fact, worse because of some of the treatments. As long as Jairus' daughter has lived, this woman has suffered from her hemorrhage. She does not address Jesus; she demands nothing; she simply touches him from among the throng.

Jairus is driven by fear—fear of losing his precious daughter. As the story is told, we can almost feel his mounting tension as Jesus is delayed first by the presence of the crowd and second by the healing of the woman. Imagine Jairus' frustration when Jesus insists on finding the one who has touched him! His worst fears are realized when the messengers arrive with news of the child's death. Jesus specifically addresses his fear and urges him to have faith.

The woman who has been healed is driven by her faith to seek the one who can heal her. Her fear does not emerge until Jesus demands that she come forth. She then falls at Jesus' feet (as Jairus did in the beginning) in fear and trembling. In contrast to his conversation with Jairus, Jesus does not acknowledge the woman's fear, but addresses her more personally. Recorded only in this instance in the New Testament, Jesus uses the endearing name "Daughter" to speak to this woman. She who has lived as an outcast is precious to Jesus.

Finally, a significant difference exists in the fact that Jesus charges the company in the sick girl's room to silence while he openly exposes the woman and her healing. In keeping with the "Messianic secret" of Mark, Jesus does not want his mission misunderstood or acted upon out of the context of his plans and purpose. It is important that restoration of life, resurrection from the dead be known only to those who can receive him as the Son of God. According to an old rabbinic saying, "Three keys are in God's hand, which are not entrusted to the hand of any other, however fully authorized by God, namely, the key to rain, the key to motherhood, and the key of giving new life to the dead."

In keeping with his daily walk, Jesus has compassion on those he meets. This woman could have easily slipped away, to have become "one of the crowd." Instead Jesus insists that she understand several important things: (1) She has nothing to fear. (2) She has been physically healed. (3) She has a special

relationship to Jesus. (4) She will walk in peace. (5) Her faith in him, nothing else, has brought this all about.

The significance of this story within a story can only really be seen when placed in the larger context of Mark. The Gospel writer clearly has some purpose in including it with other stories of fear/faith. The sequence of stories begins with a familiar one, the stilling of the storm (Mark 4:35-41).

Evening has come, and Jesus, after teaching all day, wants to leave the crowd and cross to the other shore. Jesus and his disciples get into a boat and begin the short journey. A great storm arises and water begins to fill the boat. The disciples, not knowing what else to do, quickly awaken the exhausted Jesus from his sleep in the stern. Rebuking the winds and the sea, Jesus quiets the storm. He then addresses the tumult that has occurred within his disciples. He asks them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" They are filled with awe that even the winds and the sea obey their Master.

Arriving in Gentile territory, Jesus encounters the Gerasene demoniac who lives among the tombs, who cannot be bound with chains or fetters or by any one, and who continues to physically abuse himself. Upon seeing Jesus, the demoniac runs and worships him. He cries out with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."

Jesus, however, commands the unclean spirit to come out of the man and discovers that, in fact, the demon(s) are many and are named Legion. The demons beg not to be sent out of the country, so Jesus sends them into a nearby herd of swine. As the Legion enters the two thousand swine, the herd rushes down the steep bank into the sea and drowns.

The herdsmen flee and tell the people of the surrounding area what has happened. The people come to Jesus and find the demoniac seated, clothed, and rational. They are frightened. The people beseech Jesus to leave the country. As he departs, the now healed demoniac begs to go with him. Jesus refuses him, instructing him rather to share the news of the Lord and what has been done to him with others. The man goes about the entire region doing as Jesus requested (Mark 5:1-20).

Reviewing these four miracle stories—(1) the stilling of the

storm, (2) the cleansing of the Gerasene demoniac, (3) the raising of Jairus' daughter, and (4) the healing of the hemorrhaging woman—we find some interesting parallels. We will examine them by comparing the first and third, then the second and fourth.

In both the stilling of the storm and the raising of Jairus' daughter, great fear is expressed over impending death. The disciples in the boat are terrified of losing their lives; Jairus does not want his precious daughter to die. At some point in both stories, Jesus addresses their fear and urges them to have faith. With the disciples he asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" With Jairus, Jesus tells him, "Do not fear, only believe." We do not know in either case, as these stories end, how the disciples and Jairus will respond. In both incidences, Mark tells us that they were amazed at what happened.

In stark contrast to these two stories stands the demoniac and the woman with the issue of blood. Both of them receive the great healing they need—the demoniac, almost in defiance, and the woman by quietly touching the Lord's garment. Neither the woman nor the demoniac is afraid of Jesus. The people who see the change that has occurred in the healed man are frightened. The woman, when she is called into the full view of Jesus and the crowd, is terrified. Both of them, however, find themselves cleansed, whole and loved. He makes it known that his presence in their lives has just begun. All of life has taken on new meaning because of their relationships with Jesus.

What makes the difference in all of these stories? Why are some able to experience such simple faith with little fear while others have such great fear and little faith? The things that are feared—manifestation of supernatural power, control of the universe, threat of physical death, even the presence of the Son of God—are enough to frighten anyone. The answer to these questions is not at all what we might expect.

In Mark, the *religious standing* of those mentioned seems to be a greater deterrent than help. First, the disciples, whom Jesus has called and is carefully teaching, are afraid of what is happening. Likewise, Jairus, a member of the religious establishment of the day, seems to have difficulty grasping how far

the power of Jesus can extend.

*Specific expectations* seem to hinder the growth of faith and possibly create fear because of the great potential for misunderstanding. The disciples have long developed Messianic expectations—Jesus does not seem to meet any of them. They continue to hope for a physical Savior and King; he continues to teach them great spiritual truth. Similarly, Jairus comes desperately seeking Jesus to heal his daughter's infirmity. He must have come as a last resort. He hopes Jesus will restore the girl's health. He cannot imagine that it will be life itself that Jesus imparts.

Third, *personal need* does not seem to play a part in the faith relationship with Jesus. All four stories indicate a great need on the part of the people encountering Jesus. In all four situations, the greatest need seems to be physical, not spiritual. Jesus takes care of the personal need in each instance, yet that does not always guarantee either understanding of Jesus or a greater relationship with him.

Faith seems to come not from right religious convictions, not from specific expectations, not even from personal needs. Faith in these stories comes by allowing Jesus to reach out to the individual. The demoniac defies Jesus, asking to be left alone. Yet Jesus cleanses him. The hemorrhaging woman reaches out to Jesus for physical healing, but he provides full restoration. With the demoniac, Jesus instructs him to share his good news with others, and he does. With the woman, Jesus tells her to go in peace, and she does. Both the demoniac and the woman go beyond physical healing and receive spiritual relationships with Jesus. He continues to reach out to each one of us. . . .

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## WOMEN OF FAITH SEEK JESUS: IN SPITE OF PREJUDICE

JEANENE REESE

The second story of a woman of faith in Mark comes to us in a most unexpected and interesting way. The story of the Syrophenician woman is found in Mark 7:24-30. Like the woman with the issue of blood, the Syrophenician woman has no name. Both women interrupt Jesus as he is engaged in other pursuits. The hemorrhaging woman touched Jesus as he headed for the home of Jairus to heal his gravely ill daughter. The impression is left that, although she sought Jesus' healing, this meeting was a chance one.

The Syrophenician woman finds Jesus, not in the middle of healing, but in the midst of solitude. He has crossed to the region of Tyre and Sidon (Gentile territory), has entered a house anonymously, and has indicated a desire to remain hidden; he cannot. This woman takes no chances—her meeting with Jesus is immediate and purposeful. She enters the house and falls at his feet, imploring him to grant her request. Her daughter is demon-possessed, and the woman wants Jesus to cleanse the child.

The dialogue between the Syrophenician woman and Jesus provides some of the most disturbing conversation found in the New Testament. Jesus tells her that the children (meaning the house of Israel) must be fed first, that it is "not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Undaunted, the woman answers Jesus, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Jesus tells the woman that because of her response to him, the demon has left her daughter. The Syrophenician woman returns home to find her child in bed, the demon gone.

Why would Jesus seem to respond so harshly and heartlessly to the woman's request? Is he irritated at being found when he

desires to remain hidden? Is the mission to the Jews so important that it cannot include even a simple request for the healing of this woman's daughter? Is not that an ironic twist since the Gerasene demoniac Jesus healed (Mark 5) is also a Gentile? What is the meaning of this conversation?

To answer these questions, we must first take a closer look at the Syrophenician woman and then at the details of her conversation with Jesus. Second, we must place this story in the larger context of Mark and see what the writer intends by its placement in the Gospel.

Several clues about the Syrophenician woman are given in the telling of her story. We have already mentioned the boldness with which she approaches Jesus. This Gentile woman walks straight into the house where Jesus is staying, uninvited, unannounced, and unwelcomed. She also enters unimpeded. Jesus does talk to her.

With all her boldness, however, the Syrophenician woman also enters respectfully, even reverently. She falls at the feet of Jesus, a sign of homage and worship. She listens to his words about his mission to the Jews and accepts them. She challenges the Jewish Messiah to let his mission to Israel benefit others as well.

The Syrophenician woman exhibits faith in Jesus. Not only does she address him as Lord, a title not many have given him at this point in time, but she also asks him to heal her daughter from a great distance. Jairus, the synagogue ruler, insisted that Jesus come and lay his hands on his sick child to heal her. This woman asks Jesus to cast out the demon in her daughter with a word.

Jesus responds to the Syrophenician woman. He seems to acknowledge her courageous faith and also to challenge it. It is not uncommon for a Jew to call a Gentile a dog. Jesus has done what is culturally expected and socially acceptable. The woman is not shocked, probably not even offended. Yet in the Greek, the word normally used for Gentile dog is not found here. Instead the diminutive form is used, implying puppy or lap dog. The tone, of this seemingly harsh message, is softened,

and the woman is given a glimmer of hope.

Quick-witted, the Syrophenician woman meets Jesus' challenge. She may be a Gentile dog, but she is willing to be even the house pet to Jesus the Son of God! Because of her faith in him, her ability to stand the test, and her willingness to challenge him in return, Jesus grants her request. Rather than being as disturbing as the story first appears, it stands out in Mark as a rather refreshing moment of truth.

Before we look at the larger context of Mark, let us look briefly at two other Gentile stories. Following the story of the Syrophenician woman, Jesus journeys throughout the region of the Decapolis where a deaf-mute is brought to him. Jesus takes the man aside, puts his fingers in his ears, spits, and touches his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, Jesus sighs and commands the man's ears and tongue be opened. As in earlier incidents, Jesus charges the people who witness the healing to keep quiet, but they cannot. They are "astonished beyond measure" and actively proclaim what Jesus has done.

As expected, a great crowd gathers to hear Jesus teach. They spend three days with him and have nothing to eat. Jesus calls his disciples together and expresses his concern for the crowd. The disciples seem unable to respond to the needs of the crowd, so Jesus collects the corporate food supply—seven loaves of bread and a few fish. After giving thanks, Jesus feeds the four thousand people present. Seven baskets of leftovers are gathered after everyone is fed.

These two Gentile stories of healing and the one of feeding are significant because they represent important themes that are central to Mark's Gospel. One is the importance of Jesus' mission to the Jews; another is the Messianic secret that cannot be kept, and third is the hunger of the people for Jesus' message. The Syrophenician woman recognizes Jesus' plan and purpose—his mission to feed the children of Israel—and affirms it in their conversation. The people who witness the healing of the deaf-mute are urged to keep it quiet, but instead, they spread the news of Jesus everywhere. The crowd of four thousand is so hungry for the teachings of Jesus, they are willing to go for days without physical nourishment.

In stark contrast, the Jews, whom Jesus has come to serve,

seem trapped in confusion, misunderstanding, and hard-heartedness. The Gospel writer clearly distinguishes between the Jews, who consistently misunderstand Jesus, and the Gentiles, who eagerly receive him. Jesus must have been discouraged, even lonely, in his mission to Israel.

Several events recorded in Mark prior to these Gentile stories further indicate the difficulties Jesus faced. Jesus suffers rejection in his hometown of Nazareth—he can only heal a few, and he marvels at their unbelief (Mark 6:1-6). Although his Twelve are sent out on a successful mission where they preach repentance, cast out demons, and heal the sick, they do not seem to grasp the significance of Jesus' mission. Later they do not share Jesus' compassion for the five thousand hungry people, nor do they have the power to feed them. Jesus must take care of it himself (Mark 6:7-13, 30-44).

The news of John the Baptist's death, Jesus' friend, cousin, and predecessor, comes at a difficult time (Mark 6:14-29). Perhaps this lone individual understood Jesus and his ministry.

After the failure of the disciples to feed the five thousand, Jesus sends them to the other shore in a boat. As he walks on the water later that evening, the disciples are frightened, thinking him a ghost. When Jesus gets into the boat and the wind ceases, they are utterly astounded again, although this is the second time Jesus controls the elements in their presence (Mark 6:45-52; cf. 4:35-41).

Immediately following the sea incident, Jesus crosses over once again to Gentile country, Gennesaret, and receives widespread acclaim and accomplishes powerful healing. When he next encounters the Jews, it is the Pharisees who confront him with the failure of his disciples to keep the tradition of the elders (Mark 6:53-56, 7:1-13).

Is it any wonder that Jesus has sought solitude in the region of Tyre and Sidon? (Mark 7:24). That he did not want anyone to know where he was staying? That he might be a bit testy when he encounters the Syrophenician woman? Is it possible that her wit and determination, her overwhelming confidence in him, won him over?

One final question must be considered from the Gentile section before we make our final comparison. When Jesus

heals the deaf-mute (Mark 7:31-37), he looks into the heavens and sighs before he completes the healing. The Greek word used here means literally to sigh deeply, groan, moan, or bewail. What made Jesus sigh?

The obvious answer is the physical condition of the deaf-mute. Another may be the spiritual condition of God's people. Jesus is able to heal the man's physical infirmity, but the spiritual malady of the people remains. A short time later, Jesus sighs again (Mark 8:11-12). This time the Pharisees come to seek a sign from heaven and to test him. Mark says, "He sighed deeply in his spirit." Always the people test, they question, they probe, but they do not understand.

As if the Pharisees are not exasperating enough, Jesus gets into the boat to go back to Gentile country, and his disciples are worried. They have forgotten to bring bread—they have only one loaf with them. In their presence, Jesus has fed five thousand people with only seven loaves and had twelve baskets of food left over (a symbolic number for the Jews). He has fed four thousand with five loaves and had seven baskets left over (a symbolic number for the Gentiles). They, who have been offered the very bread of life, are unable to partake of it (Mark 8:11-21). The Syrophenician woman is content with a few crumbs.

Jesus comes to Bethsaida, and a blind man is brought to him. After first attempting to heal him, the blind man only regains partial sight. At the second healing, the blind man is completely healed (Mark 8:22-26). The blind man symbolizes the children of Israel. Many do not see Jesus clearly the first time, but do later. Sadly, there are also those who never see Jesus at all. By contrast the Gentile deaf-mute was healed immediately.

We started with a story about racial tension and pressure—a Gentile woman, a dog, asking for crumbs from the children's table—she receives them. She, and others like her, gladly receive Jesus.

We have looked at the disciples, who have been specifically chosen by Jesus, closely involved with his ministry, and carefully trained by him. They continue to misunderstand; their hearts are hardened.

We have seen the Jewish leaders, God's chosen people, so

tradition-bound and caught up in their religion that they miss the Son of God entirely. He came to save their nation, and most of them never knew it.

All three sets of people represent prejudice. The Syrophenician woman and the other Gentiles of the stories symbolize *racial prejudice*. She, a Gentile dog, is unafraid to stand before the Lord and ask to have even a small part of him. Jesus grants her request. Later, Gentiles freely participate in the kingdom of God.

The disciples represent a sort of *perceptual prejudice*. They have difficulty in understanding Jesus because he does not meet their expectations. Consequently, not only does he not see things the way they see them, neither can they understand what he is trying to teach them. They must witness Calvary and his resurrection before they are really able to see them. (Even then, according to Mark, their vision is dim).

The Jewish leaders in Mark exemplify *religious prejudice*. They are so confident in their law-keeping, pious acts, and tradition that no other point of view is conceivable to them. Constantly bickering with Jesus, they not only frustrate him on a daily basis, but they eventually kill him.

Are we able to overcome our own racial, perceptual, and religious prejudices today? Would we rather continue year after year isolated from other people, other views, even truth itself? If we were to come face to face with Jesus, would we be more like the courageous Syrophenician woman, the near-sighted disciples, or the pious Jewish leaders? Only Jesus knows the answer to these questions. And he sighs.

## WOMEN OF FAITH SEEK JESUS: IN SPITE OF DISCOURAGEMENT

JEANENE REESE

Our final woman in the Gospel of Mark offers a climactic end to our series. She also provides a poignant moment of faith in the final days of Jesus. As he moves toward Jerusalem and the completion of his mission, Jesus attempts to make his Messiahship perfectly clear. He faces great difficulties.

Using one of his favorite literary techniques of grouping things in threes, Mark has Jesus foretell his death, burial, and resurrection in three distinct settings. Just after Jesus heals the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26), who symbolizes the blindness of his followers, he confronts the disciples with the question of his identity.

Rightly claiming Jesus as Christ, Peter opens the door for Jesus to teach them plainly about his suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter quickly shuts the door, however, by rebuking Jesus. In fact, Jesus calls Peter "Satan" and declares him on the side of men and not God (Mark 8:31-33).

After his transfiguration with Peter, James, and John as witnesses, Jesus once again tries to teach that he will be killed and will rise again. The disciples do not understand and are afraid to ask him. Later as they journey to Capernaum, the disciples begin a discussion among themselves about who is the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus humbly places a child before them and gently begins to teach them (Mark 9:30-49).

On his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus once again foretells his crucifixion and resurrection. He is specific now as to what will be done, who will do it, where it will take place and when it is to happen. Rather than grasp his meaning, James and John come forward and ask to be granted places of honor. Still expecting a physical Messiah and king, they proclaim their desire to fight for him and serve him (Mark 10:32-45).

Three times Jesus teaches clearly, three times they miss the point. Now he will simply have to show them by living out the events he has prophesied. In a moment of irony in Mark's Gospel, Jesus encounters yet another blind man, Bartimaeus. As Jesus walks by, Bartimaeus cries out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Rebuked but unyielding, he cries out again, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" This beggar, who cannot see, who has never met Jesus, who has never been taught by him, recognizes Jesus as the Son of David—the Jewish Messiah. Jesus restores his sight and tells him, "Your faith has made you well." (Mark 10:46-52).

Jesus enters Jerusalem with a band of confused disciples. Even the triumphal entry in Mark is not as glorious as described in the other Gospel accounts. Chapters 11 and 12 are filled with controversy for Jesus. Following his Olivet Discourse (Mark 13), we find the plot to kill him is mounting. Were it not for the Passover, the chief priests and scribes would take action (Mark 14:1-2).

In the midst of this turmoil and confusion of Jesus' last days comes the story of our final woman of faith. Like our other women in Mark, she has no name. Only her relationship with Jesus give her identity. She alone stands out as one who recognizes and honors Jesus as the Son of God.

Her story unfolds at a dinner table. Jesus is eating at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. A woman comes in with an alabaster flask of expensive ointment. She breaks the vase and pours its contents on Jesus' head.

Some among the crowd become indignant, thinking she is being wasteful. They feel the ointment should be sold and the money given to the poor. Some even begin to reproach the woman.

Jesus, however, intercedes on the woman's behalf:

Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me, for you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the

whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her (Mark 14:3-9).

The story is obviously a significant one. It is the only time in Mark's Gospel that anyone recognizes Jesus and yet demands nothing from him. In her simple act of devotion, this woman does five important things for Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

She has done a *beautiful thing*. She has anointed Jesus' head, a symbol of royal or priestly honor. Without abandon, she has broken an expensive jar and poured out its contents on him. The ointment itself is expensive, probably worth a full year's wages, and yet she has used it all.

The Greek word used to describe her good deed, *kalos*, literally means good and lovely. This woman has performed an act of love. Not only has she recognized and honored Jesus, not only has she poured out this expensive gift to anoint him, she has given herself—poured out her heart—to the one she loves.

Our woman of faith has done a *prophetic thing*. When all of his disciples do not understand Jesus' teaching about his death, this woman does. She has anointed his body for burial. The broken flask is symbolic to the Greeks. When a corpse had been anointed among the Hellenists, the broken flask was placed near the body.

Also, by anointing Jesus before the Passover, the woman has openly declared him the Jewish Messiah. The literal meaning for Messiah is "anointed one." Thus, Mark begins the passion week with Jesus proclaimed as Lord.

The woman has done a *timely thing*. Jesus himself says that she has "done all that she could." This saying could have two possible meanings. First of all, she has seized the opportunity presented her. How else could a Jewish woman, who believed Jesus to be Messiah, King, and Lord, have made her faith known? She has one small chance, and she takes it.

Second, the woman probably has done all that she could financially. Spending a full year's wages on this expensive jar of ointment is an extravagant deed. Much like the poor widow who gives all the money she owns to the temple treasury (Mark 12:42-44), this woman has given over-generously. Once again Jesus is moved by the gift and the giver.

This woman of faith has also done a *personal thing*. Not only has she acted in love, proclaimed him as Lord, and given to him generously, she has also met his human need. As we read the Gospel accounts, we are able to see Jesus as the Son of God. His divine nature is obvious to us after nearly two thousand years of Christian tradition. We often forget, however, that Jesus was also a man.

As Jesus approaches his shameful and cruel death, his followers are unable to comprehend what he is saying. How much more difficult it must have been to understand what he is feeling. This lone woman anoints his body in recognition of what he is about to experience, and in so doing, she soothes his spirit. No wonder he comes to her defense and declares her act an appropriate one.

Finally, this woman of faith has done a *memorable thing*. She recognizes Jesus when all others misunderstand him. She honors him when others deny him. She spends money on him when others are piously concerned for the poor. She anoints his body for burial as well as pours out her heart of love.

Jesus declares that her act will serve as a memorial to her whenever the gospel is preached all over the world. Ironically, however, Mark does not even tell the woman's name! Is the memory then of her or her deed or of Jesus? I believe it is a memorial of the Lord. The greatest honor that could be bestowed on this woman is to honor the one she loves.

This woman does these five important things for Jesus in spite of the discouragement she receives from those around her. No one seems to understand what she is doing or why she is doing it. The attitude of the others is indignant and reproachful. Only Jesus responds to her with approval.

Several significant lessons speak to us as Christians today as we look at this final woman of faith: (1) We should take every opportunity presented to us to serve. (2) Simple acts of service, especially the menial ones, may glorify Jesus most when done with a heart of love. (3) Sometimes we should give, without reservation, all that we have, deeply from our heart. (4) We should never be discouraged in our service, even when it is misunderstood. (5) Jesus should always be the reason we serve. Not only is he the one who responds to our service, but our

service should be an outgrowth of our response of faith in him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Women of faith sought Jesus in his lifetime; they continue to seek him today. Several specific lessons can be learned by comparing the three women we have examined from Mark and by making applications for our own lives.

First, not one of the three women we studied—the hemorrhaging woman, the Syrophenician woman, or the anointing woman—is given a name in the Gospel of Mark. Their identity rests solely on their encounters with Jesus. Each of them indicates a relationship of faith with him.

We live in an era in which many women search for an identity but are confused as to where to find it. Although many of us are most recognized in our roles as wife, mother, career person, church worker, volunteer, friend, these should not be our priorities. How wonderful if our relationship with Jesus were the central identifying mark in our lives!

Second, each of the women of faith found themselves in a position of worship. The woman with the blood flow did not begin in a worshipful position but finds herself in one when she faces Jesus. The Syrophenician woman falls at Jesus' feet as she first meets him and begs for her daughter. The anointing woman maintains a position of devotion throughout her encounter with the Lord.

Our identity in Jesus and our relationship with him can best be maintained if we too are in a position of worship. We need not actually place ourselves in a specific physical posture but rather a spiritual one of devotion. Our worship to the Lord should extend well beyond our corporate meetings and become routine part of our daily lives.

Finally, the women of faith we have discussed from Mark experienced tremendous barriers because they were women. The hemorrhaging woman was ceremonially unclean according to the Law of Moses. She dared to step out of the bounds of the Law in order to reach Jesus. This fact may account for her great fear when Jesus calls her forth (she has also rendered him unclean with her touch). Yet Jesus does not reprove the woman. Rather he declares her whole and instructs her to

walk in peace.

The Syrophenician woman—pronounced a dog by Jesus—defies the racial and social obstacles of her day. As a Gentile and a woman she has no right to approach Jesus, yet she does. She even challenges Jesus in his statement about his mission to the Jews alone. She is rewarded with the healing of her demon-possessed daughter.

The woman who anointed Jesus at the dinner table went against cultural and social practices in order to perform her act of love. Those who witness the anointing find reasons to reproach what she has done, but Jesus will hear none of them. He praises her act and declares the anointing an honor to him.

In our world and in the church today, we seem extremely uncertain about the role of women. Many barriers exist for women because of their gender. Some people would attack the barriers; others would attack the women. In either case no one is able to win. In fact, we may all lose.

Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from these women of faith is that nothing—no barrier in existence—can hinder us from reaching out to Jesus. He is able to overcome every obstacle. Only when our desire is to find him, to serve him, to honor him will he reward us with healing, with peace, with contentment, and with greater glory to him.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Joe D. Schubert, *Mark, Introduce Us to the Master* (Searcy, Ark.: Resource Publications, 1987), p. 254-56.

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## HOW TO PREACH ON A GOSPEL

C. PHILIP SLATE

My own introduction to a thoughtful preaching of the Gospels was G. R. Beasley-Murray's *Preaching the Gospel From the Gospels*. I had been taught the Gospels were "biographies," and had heard sermons from the Gospels; but with few exceptions the sermons I heard had little biographical substance. Biographical sermons, preaching on biblical characters, is a very acceptable way to preach, but in such sermons, themes and emphases are drawn from the life of the person studied. I had not heard, however, strictly biographical sermons from the Gospels. But if they were biographies, why not?

Beasley-Murray's thesis was that the Gospels were written versions of material originally preached by the apostles and other early Christians, and that modern preachers of the Gospels should see in them "Good News" materials. After all, the Gospels do not come down to us as biographies, but as "Gospels." Of the four Gospels, only John specifically states his objective in writing, viz., to produce belief in Jesus as the Son of God (John 20:30-31), although Luke stated his intention: "that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed" (Luke 1:1-4). But not one of the Gospels claims to be a biography; nor does one of them look like the biographies or "lives" written at that time by the Jews, Romans, or Greeks.

Assuming, then, the Gospels have "Good News" value, that they can be preached so as to produce faith in Jesus, how does one go about it?

#### UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Attention to the meaning of the text should have two inter-

ests: (1) to avoid misusing the text, employing it for purposes not remotely related to the original intent of the author, and (2) to assure, as far as possible, that one preaches the intended meaning of the text as it was written by its author.

To understand the Gospels, one may wish to consult one or more of several helpful works on the Gospels. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (chapters 7-8) and R. V. G. Tasker's *The Nature and Purpose of the Gospels* are useful beginning points.

As an overall consideration, to preach a Gospel book one must deal with it in terms of three time periods: (1) One must think of the original deeds and teachings of Jesus. As surely as John is correct in saying the world could not contain the books which record all Jesus did (John 21:25), and that John himself had been selective in what he wrote (John 20:30-31), it must be concluded that Jesus said much more than is written about him. (2) Each Gospel writer selected certain events and sayings of Jesus to meet particular situations in the church of their time, just as the apostles did with the Epistles. Usually, some set of circumstances called forth an Epistle; and while that is true of the Gospels, one does not find it quite as easy to determine those circumstances. Nevertheless, the effort must be put forth to determine the emphases of each of the Gospels if one is going to preach the messages of each book. (3) Eventually, the preacher must decide how each text (in its context) may be meaningfully related to the people to whom he preaches—that is, if he wishes to preach helpfully as well as accurately.

While there is no substitute for getting into the text and reading it repeatedly, one can profit from working through the responsible commentaries and other studies on the individual Gospels.

### TYPES OF MATERIAL

Narratives, miracle stories, parables, pronouncement stories, teachings, personal encounters—a wide variety of literary forms make up the Gospels. This variety is both a problem and an advantage for the preacher. They are a problem in that

the form of the literature must be dealt with to determine the point(s) of a passage. For example, one should not treat in the same manner both a teaching section (like the Sermon on the Mount) and a parable. Usually, the miracle stories, especially in John, are not designed merely to show that Jesus had power. Rather, the miracle had "sign" value and pointed to some additional spiritual principle (cf. John 9:4-5, 39-41, 20:30-31). If a preacher is to get over to his hearers the basic points the original authors had in mind, it will be necessary to grapple with the way in which the points are made in the Gospel books.

On the other hand, the literary variety is a boon to the preacher's need for variety in his preaching. The long teaching sections of Matthew and Luke may be attractive to the preacher because they are hortatory in nature, like the Epistles; but people often are more attracted to narrative sections and stories than to hortatory material. Thus, preaching through a Gospel, if done properly, enables the preacher to deal with different types of materials. That provides variation in both form and impact. A parable, for example, will have greater impact with a truth than will the same truth when it is stated as a propositional statement. This point will be elaborated in the next section.

### SERMON OBJECTIVES AND WRITER INTENTIONS

A sermon is supposed to have a behavioral or attitudinal objective. If a preacher does not strive for some type of change in people's thinking or acting, he will likely give a religious lecture rather than a sermon. But the preacher's objective cannot be open-ended if he obligates himself to preach the message of a Gospel book. If his sermon does not make the same point the passage makes—or a legitimate extension of that point—then he is using a Gospel text as a jumping-off point; and in that case, it makes little difference whether he jumps off from Matthew, Isaiah, or Leviticus. Thus, the sermon objective should arise from the message of the text itself.

In Matthew 6:1-8, teachings of Jesus are reported to make the point that one's religious deeds (alms, prayer, fasting) are to be done sincerely and not as a means of pleasing people.

Negatively, it is an anti-hypocritical text; positively, it has a sincerity objective. If those points—and even a legitimate extension of them—are not made in the sermon, a preacher will not have expounded the message of the section.

It is somewhat more difficult to preach meaningfully on the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke and relate them to a contemporary audience. The points made by the two writers are somewhat different, and the faithful preacher will honor the respective emphases. Matthew's emphasis was much more Jewish in character; while Luke, who devotes more space than Matthew to the birth of Jesus and subsequent events, makes a wider variety of points and has a broader appeal, especially in the incidents involving Simeon (Luke 2:22-35) and Anna (Luke 2:36-40). But Good News can be preached from the birth narratives.

The parables must be treated in their contexts if the preacher is to make the points intended by the Gospel writer. That intention is easier to detect in some cases than in others. For example, the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15:3-32) seem to be tied together both by the incident in verses 1 and 2 and the recurring emphasis in each that God is joyfully willing to forgive the penitent sinner (Luke 15:7, 10, 32). Both context and crucial pronouncements in the parables are important in determining the author's intent. The preacher must then bridge to the modern situation to make that point in his own time.

A particularly challenging point is the thesis that, in the case of impact parables, the preacher should strive for comparable impact in the lives of contemporary hearers. For example, the parable of the "good Samaritan" (to the Jews there were few, if any, such characters!) was particularly explosive in a Jewish context since a despised Samaritan (cf. John 4:9) was the hero of the story (Luke 10:25-37). It is one thing for a preacher to tell that story; it is another thing to preach it so it has a comparable impact on modern hearers. If the parable's purpose was to make the point about being a neighbor, and to make it with impact, should not a preacher seek to do the same? As Fee says, the act of explaining a parable is about like explaining a joke—the punch is taken out

of it. What the preacher must do is figure out suitable ways to instance or illustrate the point in modern time. The substance would come from the lips of Jesus; the impact would come from the way in which it is comparably packaged for modern hearers. Parables are not to be turned into propositional statements since they represent a lively way of communicating a propositional statement.

Tasker has argued that one reason the Gospels appeared was that the apostles were gradually disappearing as the eyewitnesses of Jesus, and Christians in remote areas were in need of some account of Jesus' teachings so they would know how to honor him or live the kind of life to which he had called them. Thus, one sees especially in Matthew and Luke relatively long teaching sections. Tasker's point is likely correct, and when a preacher is intent upon preaching those teaching sections, he should strive to see in context the points the original writer was making. It will be helpful to read Robert H. Stein's *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching*<sup>1</sup> for help on the way in which Jesus used figures of speech, questions, poetry, etc.

## CONCLUSION

It is a methodological blunder to teach people how to become Christians before and without teaching them something about the person of Jesus himself. I know missionaries who use Mark and John as means of getting people to face up to who Jesus is. Where people know little about Jesus, it is gratuitous to assume they have real faith in him. But faith is produced by hearing the story of Jesus. It should be particularly exciting to a preacher to know that the Gospels are, among other things, designed to produce faith in Jesus.

What Jesus did and taught (Acts 1:1) is fundamental both to coming to faith in him and to following him responsibly as a disciple. That bedrock material is found in the Gospels, and a discerning preacher will give due attention to understanding it and presenting it to a hurting world.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup>See Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1978).

## HOW TO STUDY A GOSPEL

PAUL POLLARD

I start with two major assumptions: The first is that the Gospels are inspired. I believe that this is the dividing line between those who see in the Gospels God's authoritative word and those who undermine the reliability of these documents and understand them as merely human productions. The second is that all of you here can learn how to be good students of the Gospels. Some of you know Greek and can work from the original text. That is great. But I do not assume that most of you know Greek and will proceed on that basis.

I hope to accomplish two things. First, I want to give an approach to the Gospels which will enable you to feel confident in your study. In fact, much of the method presented here will apply to other parts of the New Testament. Second, I want to interject into the general principles which apply to all Bible study, those which specifically apply to the Gospels.

## READ THE TEXT AT ONE SITTING

The first and probably the most important recommendation I will give is to read through the Gospel being studied several times. Nothing will help you more in understanding the text you want to exegete than this, although it is much underestimated. Read the Gospel two, three, or more times and preferably in several different versions. If you really want to get inside a Gospel, try this: Read it once per week for one year. That is fifty-two times. If you do that, you will be teaching this session the next time around, and I will be asking you questions!

The purpose of reading the Gospel at one sitting is to give a perspective of the whole before you begin to analyze the text

for details. After several readings of the text, you are then ready to make notes about the following: (a) everything you can about the purpose (Does the author indicate either directly or indirectly why he is writing?) and (b) everything you can about special emphases or concerns. (Observe any special words, ideas, or characteristics which stand out.)

In reading, especially pay attention to the plot, the characters, and the settings. One of the best ways to discover the plot is through analysis of the conflicts—note who initiates the conflict, what issues are at stake, how it is resolved, and the consequences of the resolution. For example, Jesus often had conflict with the authorities. Knowing something about the life and times of the first century helps to explain some of the political and cultural assumptions involved in these conflicts. In the narratives, the opponents are more than religious leaders. There is no distinction between state and religion in the story of the Gospels; the governmental leaders believe themselves to be ruling by God's decree.

Pay attention to the characters. How do the Gospel writers bring a character to life? In Mark, for example, the author shows the characters to the reader rather than describing them. We evaluate the characters in the same way that we size up people today—by what they say, do, and how others react to them.

In reading, observe the settings. They provide atmosphere for the story by giving the context for the conflicts and the actions of the characters. The importance of settings is seen if we reflect on their presence in modern stories; for example, the sea in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*; the settings relating to journeys in Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Chaucer's *Cantebury Tales*; and the wilderness in Jack London's novels. If the settings were altered, the stories themselves would be changed considerably.

In Mark the first half of the story is set in Galilee, the second half in Jerusalem. The story unfolds as Jesus travels from Galilee toward the confrontation and death in Jerusalem. Along the way many local settings contribute significantly to the story and its impact; the river, the desert, the sea, the mountains, and many other places such as houses, boats, syn-

agogues, and the temple.

Many of the local settings in Mark recall Israel's past.

*The river.* John baptizes at the river, and the river provides a link with Israel's past history. After leaving Egypt, the crossing of the Jordan signaled the entrance into the promised land. Even in the first century, Jewish prophets led followers to re-enact the crossing of the Jordan River as an anticipation of Israel's liberation from the Roman Empire. Mark's story opens with people coming to be baptized at the Jordan River, preparing the way of the Lord.

*The desert.* In Mark the desert has a hostile and threatening atmosphere. It is important as a place of preparation—John prepares for Jesus there, and Jesus is driven there to face Satan as he begins his public ministry. The desert is associated in Israel's past with the exodus and the people wandering for forty years in preparation for entering the promised land. This wandering was connected with new beginnings, and early in Mark's Gospel the desert settings prepare the reader for the coming new activity of God which is to be described.

The desert is also a place of testing in Israelite history. Jesus faces Satan for forty days, and the desert tests the disciples, who do not have the faith that God can provide bread in such a barren place. Jesus' abundant provision of bread provides an association with the desert where God provided manna through Moses.

*The sea.* In Mark the sea is a place of chaos and destruction. It is the place to throw someone with a millstone tied around the neck, and where the herd of two thousand pigs and the demons possessing them are destroyed. A dramatic storm on the Sea of Galilee also threatens to destroy Jesus and the disciples. Such storm episodes recall for readers the chaos of the waters in the Genesis creation account and the destructiveness of the flood.

*The mountains.* The mountains are a place of refuge and safety in Mark. Jesus warns that at the threat of war in Judea, the people were to "flee to the mountains." Frequently, also, Jesus went with his disciples to rest and pray at a mountain. The mountains were also a setting for revelation. At the Transfiguration, Jesus is revealed to be God's only Son. On the

Mount of Olives, Jesus reveals the future to his disciples. In Israelite history God gave the Law to Moses on a mountain, and there God was made manifest to Moses and later to Elijah. These mountain settings in Mark would trigger these associations, and enrich for the reader the meaning of the events which occur there.

After making notes about the plot, the characters, and the settings, make a general outline of the entire Gospel. Resist the temptation to be too detailed. At this point you are only interested in the general framework and not the specifics.

### LIMIT THE PASSAGE AND ESTABLISH THE TEXT

Try to make sure that the passage you have chosen to study is a self-contained unit. Even if you are working on only a single verse or part of a verse, make sure that it is placed into its own paragraph or pericope. The best way to do this is to compare several modern versions. Note where they break the thought. If the versions differ, ask why. One version may divide a section into two or more paragraphs, perhaps seeing more than one thought unit, whereas another may see only one topic under discussion. If the versions differ in their paragraph division, you will have to make up your own mind which one best handles the data.

At this point you also need to establish the text. First, however, make a note as you compare the different translations how the punctuation differs. Know what a period does, and how a semi-colon functions. If one version in a particular place has a period and another has a question mark, it is worth asking why they differ. What possibly accounts for the differences in punctuation? Second, to establish the text (or best reading), try to notice places where the translations differ and the difference is *not* due to synonyms (i.e., words that have the same meaning). Often translations differ, but only because they translated a Greek word by two different words in English which are equivalent in meaning. When the difference is not due to synonyms, you may have a textural variant. Most modern versions, however, will note for you such places as Mark 16:9-20, involving textual variants. You probably will

not be able to settle most of the textual problems, but you should be aware of them, and later you may get information about them from secondary literature such as commentaries and journals. Often different versions are examined only to see which one has the "freshest" translation. To move beyond that concept and to use them as suggested here will yield much valuable information helpful in interpretation.

### STUDY THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The epistles basically have one dimensional historical and literary context. Paul, for example, wrote to Corinth hoping to solve their specific problems. The Gospels, however, have at least two historical dimensions: (1) the historical situation of Jesus as he taught his disciples, engaged in conflict with the opponents, and did other things, and (2) the historical situation of the Gospel writer as he selected, arranged, and adapted the Gospel materials to the specific problems encountered by his community of believers.

The first historical level involving Jesus as he taught and worked miracles, etc., can be best understood by studying general works on first century customs and life such as F. F. Bruce's *New Testament History*, Joachim Jeremias' *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, and Edward Lohse's *New Testament Environment*.

The second historical level, that of the Gospel writer, concerns the question: Why did he write this Gospel? This step involves some guesswork, since each of the Gospels are anonymous (they are not identified by name in them), and we do not know their place of origin. We can, however, be fairly sure of each Gospel writer's intention and the problem he was trying to address by the way he selected, arranged, and adapted his materials. To get at this intention involves the use of a study tool called a synopsis and is discussed later.

### STUDY THE FUNCTION OF A PERICOPE

At the stage of studying the function of a pericope (i.e., paragraph), the goal is to trace the argument in the section or least several paragraphs before and after the paragraph

being exegeted. To do this step well is absolutely essential for solid exegesis. A person will never do good exegesis until he learns to do this step competently. Bible study is a skill, and as it is practiced, a person will get better and better.

The point you are after is this: *Why* did the Gospel writer under the influence of the Holy Spirit include this material at this particular place? Why does he say what he does just here? How does this pericope help his argument or contribute to what he is trying to accomplish? How does this pericope fit in with what he has just said, and how does it prepare for what follows?

An example of how getting at the function helps in interpretation is the parable found in Matthew 20:1-16. These verses are in a context having to do with discipleship as the narrative of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 indicates. He refused Jesus' offer of discipleship. Next follows a section in which Peter makes the statement that the disciples left all to follow Jesus. The Lord commends this model of discipleship and finishes in verse 30 with, "But many that are first will be last, and the last first." Mark has the same sequence as Matthew and concludes in Mark 10:31 with the same words: "But many that are first will be last, and the last first." After these identical words in Matthew's Gospel, however, Matthew inserts the parable of the vineyard workers and concludes in 20:16 with a reversal of the order of Matthew 19:20 and Mark 10:31, saying: "The last will be first, and the first last." The point of the parable is God's gracious, undeserved grace, and it functions in a context of discipleship to show that those who forsook all to follow Jesus are the last who have become first. This point is vividly made, since the religious leaders thought that they were first in the kingdom of God. Instead, as the parable pointedly indicates, just the opposite is true! This example shows just how fruitful finding "function" can be. In studying the parable it is seen that the question must be asked: Why is this material placed just here?

Another classic example of function is the sermon of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth found in Matthew 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6, and Luke 4:16-30. In Matthew, the sermon is situated rather late in the ministry of Jesus—he has been tempted, has

given the Sermon on the Mount, and has healed several people. The same is true in Mark. By the time he preaches in Nazareth, much of his ministry has already taken place. The reverse of Matthew and Mark is found in Luke. There, the sermon is placed by Luke at the very beginning of his account of Jesus' ministry. It is clear from its placement that the sermon functions as Luke's way of showing the nature of Jesus' ministry which he then proceeds to unfold in the rest of the Gospel. Thus, many of the main features of Luke's later story of Jesus are set forth in the Nazareth sermon.

Not only should the Gospels be studied in terms of the "vertical dimension"—that is, their function in terms of what precedes and follows, but the "horizontal" dimension must also be observed. This means that one must be aware of the parallels in the other Gospels. Despite the fact that we have four Gospels, each written to deal with four different problems facing those particular communities, they should not be studied in isolation from each other. However, the purpose of studying the Gospels in parallel is not to fill in the details lacking in one Gospel from the others. To engage in harmonization by filling in what is lacking from one Gospel to another is to blur the distinctive features in each Gospel placed there by the Holy Spirit. The fact that we have four Gospels, each with its own distinctive features, instead of one Gospel is evidence enough against the practice of harmonization.

The most important tool for use in studying the parallels from one Gospel to another is a Gospel synopsis. The best for serious study of the Gospels in Greek is Kurt Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* which can be purchased through the Bible Society. An English translation of Aland's synopsis is also available. Albert Huck's *Synopsis of the First Three Gospels* also has a long history of usefulness.

There are two major reasons for using a synopsis. First, it will help you in discovering the distinctive features in the pericope under study. These distinctives help in showing why each of the four Gospels was written. Second, noting the parallels helps in discovering the different contexts in which the same or similar materials were placed. For example, in Matthew 10, instructions are given to the Twelve as Jesus sends

them out. However, these nicely arranged sayings about how they are to conduct themselves are found scattered all over Luke's Gospel. For instance, Matthew 10:17-22, having to do with the disciples being brought before governors and kings for the Lord's sake, is found in Luke 21:12-17, not in a context of sending out disciples, but in a section describing the last days.

Before going on to the final three aspects of how to study a Gospel, a few words need to be said about the principles of selectivity and adaptation which help to explain most of the so-called discrepancies among the Gospels. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel writers selected from the materials available about Jesus that which best suited their needs. John states unequivocally that he has been very selective. In John 20:30-31 he says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." Then, speaking in hyperbolic fashion in John 21:25 he expresses what must have also been true for the other Gospel writers, that "there are also many other things which Jesus did; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

The principle of adaptation is used by all the Gospel writers. John specifically states that his purpose was to lead people to "believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God." This may help explain why most of John's Gospel has to do with Jesus' ministry in Judea and Jerusalem, whereas the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) overwhelmingly concentrate on the Galilean ministry. The Jews believed that the Messiah's true home was Jerusalem, and John emphasizes Jesus' work there.

Another example of adaptation concerns the cursing of the fig tree. In Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 the fig tree is cursed. Next an intervening section follows in which Jesus cleanses the temple, and the fig tree withers the next day. Mark relates the cursing of the fig tree in order to show the symbolic judgment on Judaism by Jesus (the cleansing of the temple also served the

same function). In Matthew, however, the cursing and the withering happen at the same time in order to emphasize the lesson on faith which is the point of his story. Both accounts are inspired by the Holy Spirit who led each writer to adapt the story to fit his special needs and audience.

## STUDY THE KEY WORDS IN THE PERICOPE

Much of what passes for exegesis begins with "word studies." The problem of beginning the study of a pericope with an examination of the words is that of getting too specific too soon before the context and setting are understood. It is more logical to begin very broad, finding the general features of the text, and then gradually doing more detailed study. Words get their meaning from the context, and if the context is ignored by working on words first, then faulty exegesis results.

Frequently, the most important words for study are not the most obvious. Many times words such as "light" or "darkness" are used repeatedly in a Gospel. We might be able to define "light" without trouble, but when the word is used in certain contexts it acquires a technical meaning peculiar to that text. In other contexts it might have another flavor.

Certain precautions should be observed so that the exegete does not use faulty word study techniques and reach incorrect conclusions. Especially avoid the "root fallacy." The basic fallacy is to assume that a word has a basic meaning or "original meaning," and that regardless of the context it always carries that meaning. The fact that a Greek word had a certain meaning in Classical Greek does not necessarily mean that it has that meaning in a particular context in Koine Greek. The word *ekklesia* is a classic example of misuse. It does, in fact, derive from *ek* and *kalein* (to call out), but by New Testament times it does not mean that. It means "assembly" or "congregation" and does not mean "the called-out ones" in any New Testament context.

Gospel writers were no more aware of the history of each word they used than we are. Most of us do not know the histories or original meanings of words before we use them, nor do we care to know unless we are a historical philologist.

Words take their meaning from context. If I say that I am going to the ball park, you have no idea whether I am referring to a football, baseball, softball, soccer, or rugby ball park unless I give you some hint in the context. If I say that I am going to the ball park to watch the Atlanta Braves play Philadelphia and hope to see Mike Schmidt, you immediately know that the ball park I have in mind is a baseball park. Words in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, as do words in any language, frequently possess a wide variety of meanings. It is not until you examine their function in context can that meaning be discovered. The past history of a word (or its root) really tells you nothing about its present meaning. Only the present context can indicate that.

Probably the most underestimated tool for doing word study is the concordance. It enables the exegete to examine the Gospel writer's use of a term in other places and also to compare this with other portions of the Bible. The purpose of using a concordance is not simply to amass all the places where a word occurs, say in Mark, but to look for word clusters. If, for example, you notice in your pericope that the word "love" is found in close proximity to "faith" and "righteousness," look for contexts in Mark where "love" is found in conjunction with the other two words. If so, then contexts which deal with the same topic as the one under examination may have been found, and extra insight into the passage may be gained by a study of the others.

When studying words in combination with each other, the realm of the grammar and syntax of the passage has been entered. Very often at this point, it is helpful to diagram the passage in order to see relationships. This does not have to involve a complex or highly developed scheme. Often by looking for the main topic sentence, usually the first one in the paragraph, and then the sentences which support that main idea, a feel for the basic structure and relationship of the difference sense-units can be gained.

### CONSULT SECONDARY SOURCES

After having done your work on the passage, a great sense of

accomplishment is experienced. Now is the time to look at other studies on the passage in journals and commentaries for the purpose of evaluating what you have done and making revisions if necessary. Now you are in a position to dialogue with others who have exegeted the same text. It is incorrect to begin with studying a commentary and to call that exegesis. There is a place for examining secondary literature, but it is not at the beginning of the exegetical process.

### APPLY THE PASSAGE TO THE MODERN SITUATION

The idea is to move from the "then" to the "now." Once the function of the pericope is understood, then it should be possible to find a parallel situation in the modern world. List the life issues that are mentioned explicitly, implicitly, or are logically to be inferred from the text. How do these life issues provide instruction for yourself or to others?

### CONCLUSION

What I have intended to do is provide a systematic way of interpreting a pericope. At this point, however, you may feel overwhelmed by the steps which I have outlined. Bible study is a skill, and the more you practice the steps, the more skill you will develop. At first this method will seem very mechanical, but the more you practice, the easier and more natural it becomes. As more skill is gained, you will realize that there is not always with every text a rigid set of steps to be followed. And, as you will discover, not every step is relevant for every text. For example, not every text will have a textual problem.

The best way to study is to let the text raise the questions as they are read and re-read; then the "steps" are applied in whatever order best fits that text. This discernment comes with time and practice.

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## THE "MESSIANIC SECRET" IN MARK

PHIL WARE

### THE NEED

Mark the evangelist must have spent many sleepless nights in prayer for his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Their Christian walk, which had begun with such joy, now had become difficult and clouded with persecution (4:16-17, 13:9-11). Their faith, apparently built around the powerful wonder-worker Jesus of Nazareth, was fading into disillusionment: He seemed so distant and disinterested (4:35-41, 6:45-52), his much speculated triumphant return nowhere in sight (13:5-37). New disciples, and older untested ones, appear to be falling away, possibly in shocking numbers (4:13-19). Others appear to have never really left their Graeco-Roman values of success and self-indulgence and have found ways to "adapt" their Christianity and protect themselves from this growing hostility (8:34-38). The stability of the Christian community was in a precarious place!

In such a climate, the once exciting message of Jesus' victory over demons, disease, disaster, death, and the deep became irrelevant and hollow (4:25—6:29). The triumphant Son of God, the glorious Son of Man, the victorious Son of David, the kingdom-building King of the Jews, the Lord of the church, the magnificent Son of God were important messages. Yet eventually they must have sounded like empty phrases and Sunday window-dressing for a second generation church unprepared for the passionate and gritty discipleship demanded in difficult times.

Mark's first words would identify his message as "... the good news proclamation of Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1:1). Yet his probable last words more appropriately described the

situation of his churches: "They said nothing to anyone, for they were fearing" (16:8). Mark's churches confessed the risen Christ, the miracle-working Son of God, but in their time of struggle, yearning to catch a glimpse of the conquering Son of Man, they were a church in fear and confusion (4:40-41, 6:50, 9:32, 10:32, 49; cf., 5:15, 33, 36).

Mark did two remarkable things to speak to their needs by sending this pastoral biography of Jesus. First, he gathered together the stories and teachings of Jesus' ministry and interwove them with the dreadful story of the cross and the mysterious story of the resurrection. He shaped the story by ordering the events into a unified whole. His introductions to each story, his carefully chosen words, his choice about what to include and exclude, all helped shape his message. By interweaving these elements with the story of Jesus' passion and resurrection, Mark presented more than a record of the great deeds of Jesus: He used these to show who Jesus was and what Jesus called his disciples to do in their hostile world.

Second, Mark called this story of Jesus, "the Gospel," the Good News proclamation of "Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1:1). Mark wanted to redefine the Good News of Jesus for his brethren who were caught in fear, blindness, and confusion. He sought to bring sight to them so they could truly see the nearness of their servant Son of Man in their own struggles and the likeness of their way of struggle to his own—the struggle they were called to when they first took up the cross and followed him (8:34-37).

## THE SECRET

Mark utilizes the scheme of a reluctant Messiah, identified as the "Messianic Secret" in 1901 by William Wrede, to accomplish his task. This scheme dominates the first ten chapters of Mark's Gospel. Then, in the final six chapters, the Messiah drops his reluctance and boldly enters Jerusalem, almost as if to force his passion.

In the early chapters (1:1—8:21), Mark blends four remarkable threads to produce his secrecy motif. He then uses the middle section of his Gospel to illuminate this secrecy theme

and outline the life of discipleship for Jesus' followers (8:22—10:52). Then Mark uses the last part of his Gospel for Jesus to claim and define his Messiahship by both his words and deeds (11:1—16:8). (See Outline of the Gospel of Mark.)

### *The Four Threads of the Secrecy Motif*

The first thread Mark weaves into his matrix of Messianic secrecy is the reader's knowledge of Jesus' identity. Mark uses his prologue to make known this identity (1:1-13). The Gospel begins with the title "Jesus Christ, Son of God" (1:1). Then John the Baptist, portrayed as the new Elijah and the prophet of God anticipated in Scripture (1:2-6; Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; 2 Kings 1:7-8), announces Jesus as the "one more powerful than I" (1:7) "who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (1:8; cf. Joel 2:28-29). Mark has Scripture speak of this "more powerful one" as "the Lord" (1:3). After John has baptized Jesus, the heavenly voice of God proclaims him to be "my Son, whom I love" (1:11). Mark's final description of Jesus is probably intended to identify him as the Messiah who does battle with Satan to bring peace to a fallen world (1:12-13; cf. Isaiah 11:6-9; Hosea 2:18; Ezekiel 34:5, 8, 25; Psalm 22:11-21). With great skill, Mark has succinctly identified for the reader of his Gospel its main character in a few short verses.

Mark uses Jesus' bold actions as his second thread in the secrecy motif. These actions powerfully demonstrate Jesus' authority and Messianic status. In the first section of the Gospel (1:1—8:21), Jesus calls and commissions disciples (1:16-20, 2:13-17, 3:13-19), casts out demons (1:21-28, 35; 3:11-12, 5:1-20), heals many with all sorts of maladies and diseases (1:29-34, 20-45, 2:1-12, 3:10, 5:25-29), forgives sins and associates with sinful outcasts (2:5, 17), redefines the meaning of and pronounces himself Lord of the Sabbath (2:23—3:6), teaches about the kingdom of God (4:1-34; cf. 1:14-15), exerts power over nature by speaking (4:35-41), raises the dead (5:21-24, 35-43), feeds the hungry masses (6:30-44, 8:1-13), walks on water (6:45-52), challenges established religious traditions (7:1-23), and receives faithful Gentiles (7:24-30). Mark uses this compressed sequence of "rapid fire" events to portray Jesus as a bold, powerful, Messianic figure.

The third thread in Mark's secrecy motif is Jesus' reluctance at being identified publicly as the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus will not allow the demons to proclaim his identity because they "know him" to be "the Holy One of God," the "Son of the Most High God" (1:23-25, 34; 3:11-12; cf. 5:6-7). This practice could be dismissed as Jesus' reluctance to accept the acclamation of demons since his opponents attribute his power to demons (cf. 3:20-30). Mark, however, incorporates this reluctance into a more general theme of Jesus' unwillingness to be identified in public as Messiah. He does not want those whom he has healed to proclaim his great deeds and sternly warns them to be silent (1:43-45, 5:37-43, 7:36-37). He gives special revelation about himself and God's kingdom, but only in private to his disciples whom he warns to secrecy (4:2, 10-12, 33-34, 7:17-23, 8:27-33, 9:2-10, 30-32, 9:28-29, 33-37, 10:10-12).

In these ways, Mark brings the reader's knowledge of Jesus' identity from his mighty acts, the acclamation of demons, and the introductory description of Jesus in the prologue into contact with Jesus' reticence to have his identity exposed. To this matrix of ideas, Mark adds a fourth thread in his secrecy motif. In his first section (1:1-8:21), even though Jesus is pictured as the powerful and authoritative "Christ, Son of God," Mark "whispers" of Jesus' ultimate gruesome destiny.

The first whisper comes from John the Baptist, the one who prepares the "way" for Jesus the Lord (1:1-3). He literally goes before Jesus, anticipating Jesus' death by his own death (6:14-29, 9:12-13, 11:27-33) and prepares Jesus' "way" (cf. 10:17, 32, 52) to the cross. The second "whisper of destiny" is Jesus' identification of himself as the bridegroom, followed by his warning that there will come "a time when the bridegroom will be taken from them" (2:20). Mark's third "whisper of destiny" occurs in the middle of Jesus' great popularity when he tells the readers "the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus" (3:6; cf. 8:15, 11:18, 12:12-13, 14:1, 10-11).

Mark's readers know Jesus' identity from his prologue. Mark displays Jesus' authoritative acts and power. The demons submit in fear to him as the Son of God. Yet Jesus guards his Messianic identity and divine Sonship from public recog-

nition while underneath the story line, there is a troubling destiny whispered for the Messiah, Jesus. Mark weaves each of these four threads together in a compelling way. Jesus' identity is known, yet guarded. Jesus' power is displayed, but protected. Jesus' destiny appears bold and popular, yet is filled with whispered danger. What is Mark's purpose in setting up this "secrecy schizophrenia"?

### *A Call to Sight*

Mark reveals the reasons for the Messiah's reluctance primarily in the middle and closing sections of his Gospel (8:22-16:8). He does this first by a series of mission statements. Second, he uses the healing of two blind men to help draw attention to the disciples' need for sight. Third, he carefully places and blends Jesus' Messianic titles to consolidate his identity as the rejected, risen, and returning Son of Man. Fourth, Mark closely links Jesus' teaching on discipleship to the proper understanding of his role as Messiah.

### *Mission Statements*

Mark begins to reveal the purpose of his Messiah's reluctance through three crucial mission statements. In the early part of Mark's Gospel, Jesus refuses to be identified as the Messiah. He does, however, declare the purpose of his ministry. He escapes the press of the crowd and declares, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come" (1:38). In this way, Jesus defines the purpose of his ministry without that purpose being linked to an easily misunderstood Messianic title.

The healing of the leper, which follows immediately after this statement of mission (1:40-45), helps the reader understand why Jesus would guard his identity and define his life in terms of mission. The leper's rebellion against the secrecy warning prevents Jesus from entering the cities and preaching—his stated mission (cf. 1:38, 45). His disobedience to Jesus' secrecy command sets up the "tug of war" between Jesus and the crowds. Jesus wants to preach the Good News of God, the nearness of God's kingdom, and the need to repent and believe (1:14-15, 3:34-35, 6:31-34, also 4:10-12, 33-35, 9:1-10, 28-32,

10:1-2, 10-12). The crowds want a miracle-worker and are constantly pressing themselves upon him (1:27, 2:1-2, 3:7-12, 20; 5:21-24, 6:31-34, 53-56). Jesus must guard his identity to protect his mission!

Jesus' second statement of mission focuses on "outsiders" to the current religious power base who receive his message (2:13-17, 3:34-35, 5:1-20, 7:24-30, 9:33-40, 10:13-31) and the "insiders" who refuse it, either by opposing or misunderstanding him (3:6, 20-35, 6:1-6). When criticized for associating with "sinners," Jesus responds, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (2:17). In this way, Mark alerts his readers to the rejection and misunderstanding of Jesus' mission by those at the center of Jewish religion. This statement of mission follows Jesus' forgiving of the paralytic (2:1-12) and the call of Levi the tax collector (2:13-16). Both of these actions provoke controversy and set the stage for two more controversy episodes focusing on Jesus and important components of Jewish religion, the Sabbath and fasting (2:18-3:5). In this way, Mark reveals that Jesus will be rejected and misunderstood as "Christ, Son of God" by the insiders in Jewish religion who reject him and ultimately will kill him (3:6) because they do not understand his mission.

Jesus' final mission statement comes at the end of Mark's central section on discipleship (8:22-10:52). The disciples are utterly confused about the nature of discipleship (10:13-16, 35-41). Jesus holds himself up as an example for them to follow and says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). This statement both expands his concept of mission ("for many") and his concept of Messiahship ("to serve . . . give his life") and ties together his preaching of repentance and the kingdom (1:14-15, 38-39), his call to outsiders (2:17), and his role as Suffering Servant (10:45).

When connected, Mark uses these mission statements to underscore the mission of the "Son of Man" to preach the kingdom, call sinners to righteousness, and to serve many by giving his life as a ransom. Jesus will not accept a Messianic designation for himself, for none of the titles carries this proper understanding of his identity. By couching his identity

in mission statements, Mark helps define Jesus' identity by what he does to fulfill his mission, then ties this mission identity to the title "Son of Man," the key focus of his important central section (8:22-10:52).

### *The Blind Receive Their Sight*

Mark's outline, especially the central section, is essential to the proper understanding of his Gospel and his theme of the Reluctant Messiah. Two passages frame this central section and act as "hinges," holding this section to what precedes and follows. Each of these "hinge passages" (8:22-26, 10:46-52) are about blind men receiving their sight. They function as "living metaphors" for the disciples who are in need of understanding and sight (cf. 6:30-8:21).

The first healing of a blind man is a uniquely Markan and somewhat bizarre miracle involving a double healing (8:22-26). It follows immediately after Jesus' stated frustration with his disciples' lack of understanding and insight (6:30-8:21). It precedes Peter's confession, yet inadequate understanding of Jesus' identity (8:27-32). Mark utilized this healing, especially by its placement in the narrative, to warn his readers that knowing titles for Jesus and appreciating his great power is not an adequate insight into the true identity of the "Son of Man," "Jesus Christ, Son of God." It is only partial insight.

In the second healing of a blind man (10:46-52), the newly "sighted" believer joins the disciples "in the way" on the way to Jerusalem where Jesus will live out what he has revealed as the divine will for the "Son of Man" ("way" or *hodos* is especially emphasized by Mark, especially his unique use of "in the way" in 8:27, 9:33-34, 10:32, 52). This blind man does not need a second miracle to see, for he has embraced the "way" of rejection, resurrection, and return of the "Son of Man." He receives his sight in order to follow Jesus on his "way" to the cross, not simply to receive a miracle. He prefigures Jesus' disciples, who will have their blindness lifted after his rejection, resurrection, and appearance to them in Galilee where they will truly "see" him as he promised (16:6-7).

### *Messianic Titles*

Mark reveals the purpose of his Reluctant Messiah in a third

way by his use of titles for Jesus. In Mark, Jesus uses the title "Son of Man" as his means of self-designation. There is no secrecy in his use of this title. Jesus fully accepts it as his own understanding of himself. For Mark, this becomes the key title for understanding all other titles for Jesus. This is shown not only in its frequent use, but also in the way it is used to modify all the other major titles for Jesus and by the very clear way Jesus defines it in the central section of this Gospel.

In the early part of Mark's Gospel (1:1—8:21), "Son of Man" is an elusive, but powerful self-designation of Jesus (2:10, 28). This self-designation remains undefined until after Peter's confession (8:29). In the key central section of Mark's Gospel (8:22—10:45), when Jesus is alone with his disciples (8:27-34, 9:2, 9-10, 30-31, 10:32, 35, 41-45), he defines himself as the "Son of Man" who must be rejected and suffer (8:31, 9:12, 31; 10:33-34, 10:45), rise from the dead (8:31, 9:9, 31; 10:34), and return (8:38; cf. 9:41, 10:37). This understanding of Jesus runs through the rest of the Gospel. Jesus meets his divinely appointed ministry of rejection, resurrection, and return (14:21, 41, 13:26, 14:62). His identity is tied inextricably to these three concepts which define Mark's essential title for Jesus, the "Son of Man."

In Mark, other Messianic titles are found on the lips of Jesus' disciples, opponents, admirers, and mockers. "Son of Man," however, is never confessed by the crowds or disciples. It is never used as a title of address by friends or foe. Yet Mark makes clear it is Jesus' title of choice. Mark apparently was concerned about the Messianic understanding among his contemporary Christians. "Christ," "Son of God," "Lord," "King of the Jews" and "Son of David" could be easily confessed, but just as easily misunderstood. Such titles of glory could leave the disciple with a wrong concept of his Messiah, as well as a distorted view of discipleship (e.g., 10:35-52). Mark very carefully orchestrates Jesus' acceptance of other titles by modifying them to match this "Son of Man" self-understanding.

Mark utilizes two other key titles for Jesus—"Christ" and "Son of God." Mark indicates their importance by using them in the prologue of his Gospel (1:1). Yet he defines each of these important titles by associating them with his definition of

"Son of Man."

After stimulating interest in Jesus' identity through a series of identity intensive episodes (4:35—6:29), Mark highlights Jesus' frustration at the blindness and hard hearts of both his opponents and his disciples (6:30—8:21). Mark then prepares his readers for the confession of Jesus as the Christ through his "living parable" of the blind man who required a double healing to see (8:22-26). Jesus asks the disciples who the people think he is (8:27-28), alerting his readers to the basic identity issue surrounding Jesus. Jesus then asks his disciples who they understand him to be. Peter confesses, "You are the Christ" (8:29-30).

Jesus then modifies any understanding of himself as "the Christ," by associating it with the title "Son of Man" which he defines as the one who must suffer rejection and rise from the dead (8:29-32) and ultimately return in the glory of God and the holy angels (8:38). From the very beginning of Jesus' acceptance of the title "Christ," he associates it with the rejected, risen, and returning "Son of Man" (8:31-32a).

Peter will not accept this understanding of "the Christ" (8:32). Jesus attributes his refusal to his satanic and human point of view (8:33). Peter's confession is of no more value than the earlier testimony of the demons and those Jesus had healed. Peter does not see the true nature of the Messiah. His mistake is a threat to the other disciples, and he is rebuked. At issue is the proper understanding of Jesus' Messiahship, and thus the proper understanding of discipleship (cf. 8:34-38). Mark wants his brothers and sisters, caught as disciples in "an evil and sinful generation" (8:38), to know that Jesus demands his disciples' faithfulness to the crucified Son of Man if the coming "Christ" and the glorious conquering end-time "Son of Man" is to be a blessing for them (cf. 13:5-13, 27-36).

Mark uses Jesus' definition of the rejected and risen "Son of Man," who is "the Christ," to take precedence over all other references to "Christ." This is important because the other references to "Christ" reveal it was associated with an eschatological understanding of Messianism. Mark seems to be guarding against popular ideas of a Messianic "Christ" detached from suffering service. In later chapters, "Christ" is

linked with other titles like "Son of David" (12:35), the reigning "Lord" (12:35-37), the false christs of end-time speculation (13:21), and the "King of Israel" or "King of the Jews" (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32, 39). These titles only provoke confusion and speculation (cf. 12:35-37, 13:21) or are used in derision (12:9, 12, 18, 26, 32, 39). They must be redefined by coming to Jesus as the teacher and then following him "in the way" to the cross (10:46-52).

Mark also uses the title "Son of God" with powerful emphasis in these closing chapters. Twice Jesus uses it to refer to his relationship with God as Father. The first time occurs in the parable of the wicked tenants—a parable aimed at his Jewish opponents who will put him to death to have the inheritance for themselves (12:1-12). Referring back to his transfiguration and his baptism, Jesus adopts the image of the "beloved son" and uses it as a description of himself and his coming death (12:6). Yet he indicates that the process of his opponent killing him and throwing him out of the vineyard is part of God's plan to give him the place of ultimate importance (12:9-11).

Jesus also uses the title "Son" for himself to emphasize his relationship to God, while not knowing the day of his return as the coming "Son of Man" (13:26, 32). Mark has Jesus fully take over the title "Son" for himself and ties it to the rejected, resurrected, and returning Son of Man scenario by the first and third elements, the rejection and the return. This is further emphasized by Jesus' use of "Father" to refer to God in Mark's Gospel. In comparison to the other Gospel evangelists, Mark uses the term "Father" to refer to God very sparingly. When he does use "Father" in this way, it is tied to Jesus' submission to the divine will regarding his suffering death (14:36) and his glorious return (8:38, 13:32).

The final two appearances of the "Son of God" title are especially important. Jesus is hauled before the Sanhedrin and is asked if he is "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Mark is the only evangelist who has Jesus emphatically reply with a clear, bold, "Yes, I am" (14:62; cf. Matthew 26:64; Luke 22:67). Before the hostile Sanhedrin, whose members have been plotting to have him killed, all three central titles for Jesus converge (14:61-62). In the face of his passion, Mark's

Jesus is the "Christ, Son of God," and the "Son of Man." Jesus boldly accepts this designation. Mark's readers know the outcome of his confession—it has been whispered, it has been clearly spoken in the "Son of Man" sayings, it has been embraced by an authoritative Jesus, and it has been foreshadowed in parable. Jesus is the "Christ," the "Son of God," and the "Son of Man." Mark uses the events which follow to further define what he means when using these titles.

The Sanhedrin rejects Jesus. Jesus has been abandoned by his disciples (14:50), betrayed by Judas (14:10-11, 42-45), and denied by Peter (14:66-72). He stands alone to confess himself as "the Christ," knowing he will be mocked, despised, beaten, and crucified by his opponents. This is what God's Messiah must do. He boldly affirms, "Yes, I am the Christ, the Son of God." The only voice to echo his confession is the voice of the centurion at the foot of the cross who sees Jesus die in humiliation and says, "Surely this man was the Son of God" (15:39). Just as surely as the "Son of Man" is rejected, the centurion's confession is the believer's assurance of resurrection, return, and the ultimate rejection of those who rejected Jesus (12:9-11). This is Mark's signal that Jesus' mission has been accomplished. "Jesus the Nazarene" will always be known as more than a miracle-working Messianic "Son of God": He will be understood as the one who is now the risen, crucified one (16:6, 1:9, 24; 10:47, 14:67) who will return for his disciples in his heavenly glory (13:26-27, 14:62).

The convergence of all these titles at the end of Mark's Gospel, as Jesus stands under the shadow of the cross, is extremely significant. Rather than permitting these titles, rich in expectation, to dominate Jesus and the reader's understanding of Jesus, Mark does the opposite. Each of these titles finds its meaning in the shadow of the cross. The central section of the Gospel of Mark defines Jesus' role as the rejected, resurrected, and returning "Son of Man." "The Christ," "the Son of God," "the Lord," "the King of the Jews," "the Son of David," "Jesus of Nazareth" now is fully revealed. He is not only the miracle-working "Jesus Christ, Son of God," but also the cross-killed servant "Son of Man." Any true conception of Jesus' ministry and mission must now be interpreted in light

of the cross event.

Mark's Jesus was reluctant to claim Messiahship only because Messiahship must be defined in terms of the cross first! Having done that, Jesus, the raised crucified one (16:6), can now be present to bless his church through his resurrection (cf. 4:35-41, 6:30-51) and ultimately redeem her through his promised return as the conquering "Son of Man" (13:26-27).

### *Discipleship*

Finally, Mark reveals the reasons for his Messiah's reluctance by linking Jesus' teaching on discipleship with his identity as the rejected, resurrected, and returning Christ. Jesus' clearest and most concentrated statements on discipleship come in the central section of Mark's Gospel where his role as "Christ" and rejected, risen, and returning "Son of Man" are most clearly defined (8:27-10:45, 13:1-37). For the disciple to know his Messiah's "way," he must first know the nature of his Christ's Messiahship.

Mark uses his central section to weld together Jesus' true identity and the responsibility of the true disciple. This begins with Peter's confession of "the Christ" (8:29-30), followed by Jesus' modification of his understanding of the rejected and risen "Son of Man" (8:31), resulting in the twin rebukes associated with satanic and human understanding (8:32-33). Jesus then calls his disciples and the crowd to deny their basic selves and follow his way to the cross (8:34-37), so they can share in the glorious return of the powerful "Son of Man" (8:38). Some disciples are even allowed to foretaste this majestic power of the "Son of Man" who is also God's beloved "Son" (9:1-7). This "Son" alone must be heard and obeyed if they are to be true disciples (9:7-8). Once again, Jesus emphasizes his divinely appointed role as "Son of Man" which they must not reveal until after his rejection and resurrection (9:9-13).

In this dramatic unit of material, Mark clearly emphasized Jesus' role as "Christ," "Son of Man," and "Son of God" and ties this identity to his sole authority over the disciples. Then comes a series of pericopae, which provides Jesus the opportunity to teach his disciples (9:14-10:31), followed by a reminder of his role as "Son of Man" (10:32-34), leading to a

pericope which shows the disciples still do not understand who Jesus is or what he is saying about their discipleship (10:35-41). Mark culminates this section with Jesus connecting the ministry of the disciple to the ministry style of the "Son of Man" (10:42-45). In this way, Mark fuses the Messiah's identity and the life of the disciple.

Mark connects Jesus' identity and the believer's discipleship once again in chapter 13. This chapter revolves around the expectations of the return of the Messianic "Son of Man" (13:21-27) and deals with the basic issues of persecution (vs. 9-13), vigilance (vs. 5, 9, 23, 33, 35-37), and Messianic identity (vs. 5-6, 21-22). In this way, Mark reminds his readers that their Messiah is to always be identified with his death and rejection (cf. 14:1-9), so their responsibility as his disciples is to be faithful to the end (13:9-13).

Mark's Messiah is reluctant because the disciples must define their discipleship in terms of the Messiah's rejection, resurrection, and return. Each element is vital, although Mark emphatically stresses the rejection. He seems to be saying, "There is no Christ without the cross. The Son of Man will return, but he will return as the conquering crucified one." Without the understanding of the cross, Mark believes Jesus' disciples remain blind to his identity and to the nature of their discipleship.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

In a Western World so caught up in achievement, notoriety, power, position, and self-gratification, Mark's message of a reluctant Messiah speaks as incisively today, as it did in his day. In churches which emphasize the "gospel" of health and wealth, the fervor of end-time expectations, and the powerful helper Jesus, there is a desperate need to hear Mark's corrective message of cross-dominated discipleship. Whether the Christ-followers of today face persecution or complacency, initial enthusiasm and then spiritual burnout and disillusionment, Mark's Gospel speaks powerfully. He presents a mighty Messianic figure. Yet this Messianic figure, the church's "Jesus Christ, Son of God," cannot be understood

apart from the cross of the servant "Son of Man." The disciple must come to know this "Christ" to have his blindness taken away, so he can embrace that same "way" of the cross in his own life. For Mark, there is no Messiah, no hope, no glory, no discipleship without the cross. He would speak to the present generation of believers and remind them that the true Messiah, "Jesus Christ, Son of God," will always be reluctant to be identified with any group that will not meet him at the cross and any discipleship which will not define itself "in the way" of the servant "Son of Man."

## OUTLINE OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

### "The Servant Messiah and the Cross: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man"

Prologue: The Beginning of the Good News  
(The Key Word Is "Wilderness.")

1:1-13

#### I. The Reluctant Messiah: Blindness Condemned

(The Key Word Is "Galilee.")

1:14-8:21

Hinge Passage A: Transition

1:14-15

A. The One With Authority and the "Authorities"

1:14-3:6

B. Jesus and His Disciples

3:7-4:34

C. "Who Is This Jesus?"

4:35-6:29

D. Hard Hearts and Blind Eyes

6:30-8:21

#### II. The Radical Messiah: Blindness Confronted

(The Key Word Is "The Way.")

8:27-10:52

Hinge Passage B: The Necessity of Clearer Sight

8:22-26

A. The Suffering Christ and His  
Servant Disciples

8:27-10:45

Hinge Passage B': The Blind Receive Their Sight

10:46-52

#### III. The Revealed Messiah: Blindness Removed

(The Key Word Is "Jerusalem.")

11:1-15:39

A. The One With Authority and the "Authorities"

11:1-12:44

B. Jesus and His Disciples

13:1-14:52

C. "Who Is This Jesus?"

14:53-15:5

D. Hard Hearts and Opened Eyes

15:6-39

Hinge Passage A': Transition

15:40-41

Epilogue: Seeing Him in Galilee

15:42-16:8

This outline is my own. Hinge passages B and B', I identified along with others. The A and A' hinge passages come from Stock and van Iersel as well as the key words. Eduard Schweizer uses a similar outline to this in his writings in the bibliography. Many commentators divide Mark's outline into two parts based upon Peter's confession. I believe this misreads Mark's intention and de-emphasizes the importance of his central section.

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## THE ENDING OF MARK

JACK P. LEWIS

For more than a hundred years, from the time that codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus became available for study, beginning with Griesbach, all significant editions of the Greek text have indicated by one device or another the question over the genuineness of Mark 16:9-20. The only exceptions are the editions of the Catholics Merk and Bover and that of Hodges and Farstadt in their reconstruction of the Majority Text.<sup>1</sup> Since the Majority Text supports verses 9 through 20 there was no reason to indicate the question.

Since at least the time of Wescott and Hort, all English handbooks discussing the text of the New Testament have surveyed the evidence, and the authors have voiced their opinions on the authenticity of these verses, with the majority giving an adverse judgment.

Since the issuing of the RV/ASV (1881/1901), all significant new translations of the English Bible have indicated, usually by skipping a space accompanied by an explanatory note, that early manuscript evidence, some versional evidence, and some church father evidence do not support verses 9 through 20. The KJV translators did not have access to the manuscripts which raise the problem; hence, they did not indicate it.

As J. W. McGarvey pointed out a hundred years ago,<sup>2</sup> the question is not whether what is contained in verses 9 through 20 is true. In fact, there is very little of them which does not have its parallel in either the other Gospels or the book of Acts. The overlap is such that Hort<sup>3</sup> argued that the section was compiled from these sources. That the disciples were mourning and weeping (v. 10) may be logically deduced if not specifically mentioned elsewhere. Jesus was not called *kurios* (Lord) in the sense used here before the resurrection; but beyond these

items, it is the drinking of deadly poison without harm which is unique.

The question of the ending of Mark is solely "How did the Gospel of Mark end when it came from its author?" It is a question of how one decides in the presence of variants what the authentic text of the book is as contrasted to what a scribe or scribes added.

The available relevant external evidence has, though modified in minor details, not significantly changed since the case was first stated by Hort<sup>4</sup> and then was later restated strongly by Streeter.<sup>5</sup> As can be seen from the summaries of Metzger<sup>6</sup> and Thomas,<sup>7</sup> the manuscripts of Mark end in six ways: (1) Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and some versional and church father evidence end at verse 8 with *ephobunto gar* ("for they were afraid"). (2) Four uncial manuscripts and some versions skip a space, have an addition which is called the shorter ending after verse 8, skip a space, and then continue with verses 9 through 20. Manuscript 274 has verses 9 through 20 first followed by the shorter ending. (3) Old Latin k ends with the shorter ending following verse 8. (4) The mass of manuscripts, including Alexandrinus, Ephraemi, Bezae, some versions, and some church fathers include verses 9 through 20. The types of text known as *Textus Receptus* and the Majority Text reflect this category. (5) Several minuscule manuscripts, though containing the longer ending, make it with asterisks, obeli, or a critical note to show that it was under suspicion. (6) An addition within the long ending known to Jerome and now extant as the *Freer Logion* came to light in 1906 and is to be seen in the fifth-century Washington Gospels.

The support for the shorter ending is so inferior that no scholar would champion that Mark wrote this ending. Manuscript evidence is sparse, there is no known patristic text which quotes it, and its vocabulary is different from that of canonical Mark. It is, however, thought to be an evidence that in the circles from which it first came the long ending of Mark was not known. The *Freer Logion* can also be dismissed as a serious candidate for how Mark originally ended. This leaves three options to consider. Mark originally ended with *ephobunto gar*; the Gospel has suffered an accident in which the original

ending has been lost without a trace; or the long ending (vv. 9-20) is an authentic ending.

Much discussion has been devoted to the last possibility. In addition to the somewhat negative manuscript evidence already mentioned, there is the style question. First stated in detail by Hort,<sup>8</sup> the style question has been restated in recent times by Elliott<sup>9</sup> and Farmer<sup>10</sup> with opposing conclusions drawn about its weight. Verse 9 begins abruptly with a masculine singular which requires a masculine antecedent for which one must go back to verse 6, not to the feminines of verse 8. There are 163 Greek words in verses 9 through 20 of which nineteen words and two phrases do not occur elsewhere in Mark. The attempt made a hundred years ago by Broadus and then summarized by McGarvey<sup>11</sup> to answer the stylistic argument gets no attention in late twentieth-century discussion.

Because the content of the long ending of Mark was known to Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3. 10. 5), perhaps to Justin (*Apol.* 1. 45), and to Tatian in his *Diatessaron* (as attested by the Arabic text), it is recognized that the ending is quite old, going back to the second century. However, that still leaves the question of whether Mark wrote it in the first century. What weight is to be given to the early knowledge of the text as opposed to the weight of those sources which end at verse 8? What weight is to be given to the silence of those church fathers: Tertullian, Cyprian, Athenasius, Basil, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria? Their arguments would have benefitted by the content of Mark 16:9-20, yet they do not mention it.

An entirely different line of discussion has concerned itself with whether it is conceivable that Mark could have ended his Gospel with *ephobunto gar*. That such a possibility was inconceivable was championed by many who furnished hypotheses about Mark's leaving the Gospel incomplete because of interruption by business, persecution, or even death. Others postulated a completed Gospel which suffered an accident in which the original ending was lost without a trace. Kenyon<sup>12</sup> conjectured an accident with a scroll and Roberts<sup>13</sup> with a codex. Conjectures about the nature of early Christian books have

since their time favored the use of the codex.

All such discussion seems futile with the discovery some forty years ago that there are sentences in the Septuagint, classical authors, and the papyri which do end in *gar*. The evidence is best surveyed by R. H. Lightfoot.<sup>14</sup> The debate then shifted to whether a book could so end, and that question seems now settled by Horst with his example from Plotinus.<sup>15</sup>

For those who are convinced that Mark could have ended in *ephobunto gar*, the center of discussion shifted to trying to establish a possible motive of Mark in so ending. Lightfoot suggested that rather than "fear," *ephobunto* should be understood as "reverential awe,"<sup>16</sup> and he attempted to point out precedents elsewhere in Mark. Out of reverential awe at what had happened, the women did not tell anyone.

Stonehouse insisted that, when considered in the light of the entire sixteenth chapter and the whole of Mark, Mark 16:8 is not an abrupt ending.<sup>17</sup> The predicted resurrection had taken place as the young man declared to the women.

Continuing to insist, however, that verse 8 could not be the original ending of Mark, Boomershine, after examining Mark's narrative technique, points out that the prediction and fulfillment technique used in Mark leaves the reader frustrated here. While many items around the passion do find fulfillment, showing that Jesus accomplished his intent without regard to what men do, even if one interprets "fear" as "religious awe," the reader is frustrated with the ending.<sup>18</sup>

Thus far we have looked at the way the dominant trend in the discussion of the ending of Mark has gone. Periodically, dissenters have arisen and have championed the authenticity of the long ending (vv. 9-16). Included are J. W. Burgon,<sup>19</sup> F. A. H. Scrivener,<sup>20</sup> George Salmon,<sup>21</sup> J. Morison,<sup>22</sup> S. Zwemer,<sup>23</sup> R. C. H. Lenski,<sup>24</sup> and E. F. Hills.<sup>25</sup> William Farmer insisted that neither the external nor the internal evidence is strong enough to justify deletion of verses 9 through 20.<sup>26</sup> Farmer's book drew many reviews, mostly negative.

One gets lost in the "may be" and "possibly" of the discussion. Burgon defends the long ending with an impressive collection of church father evidence, and is a determining influence on all defenders who came after him. He attempted to explain

away Eusebius's statements that manuscripts did not have the long ending of Mark on the basis that a church liturgical reading began with *arche* inserted in the manuscript and ended with *telos*. A scribe confused *telos* at Mark 16:8 with the end of the manuscript when a page was missing from the manuscript. Burgon had to assume that scribes were ignorant of the practices of their own times. Burgon also attempted to attribute Eusebius's statement to a treatise of Origen which Eusebius was copying, and in this way to connect the statement with Alexandria and Caesarea where Origen was operative. The statement could then be attributed to an error of judgment on Origen's part.

Catholic scholars accept the canonicity of Mark 16:9-20 because the Council of Trent declared the Vulgate which has these verses to be sacred and canonical. The Biblical Commission at the beginning of this century upheld Markan authorship; however, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* finds this position no longer sustainable. Tradition allows Catholics to make a distinction between "authentic" and "canonical," and some non-Catholics lean in this direction. However, such a position, if consistently applied, would also support all those items in the *Textus Receptus* for which adequate Greek manuscript support is lacking like the confession of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37) and the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 4:7-8). Such a position seems indefensible.

If Mark contained the long ending from the beginning, it is difficult to see why a scribe omitted these verses as the manuscripts show that some did. On the other hand, if the copy ended abruptly at verse 8, it is easy to see that there was a felt need for supplementation. Thereby lies part of the unsolved puzzle which D. E. Nineham called "the greatest of all literary mysteries."<sup>27</sup>

It must be acknowledged that the longer ending of Mark is very early, was widely known, and that, despite notable differences, does reflect some similarities to Markan style and vocabulary. Its actual origin is still only a matter of speculation.<sup>28</sup> When the RSV in its second edition moved verses 9 through 20 from the footnote back into the text with an intervening white space and the explanatory note, Kenneth Clark,

whose qualifications for a judgment would not be in dispute in any textual circles, said that it was a wholesome challenge to a dominant view, and that the question was still an open one, "insoluble at present."<sup>29</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29-51.

<sup>5</sup>B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London, England: Macmillan & Co., 1924, 8th impression 1953), pp. 333-60.

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<sup>7</sup>John Christopher Thomas, "A Reconsideration of the Ending of Mark," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (December 1983):407-19.

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<sup>9</sup>J. K. Elliott, "The Text and Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 27 (July-August 1971):255-62.

<sup>10</sup>William R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1974).

<sup>11</sup>McGarvey, *Matthew and Mark*, pp. 379-82.

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<sup>17</sup>N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Guardian, 1944), pp. 86-118.

<sup>18</sup>Thomas E. Boomershine, "Mark 16:8 and the Apostolic Commission," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (June 1981):225-39.

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<sup>26</sup>Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*.

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## CHURCH GROWTH UPDATE

FLAVIL R. YEAKLEY, JR.

Last year, I reported that churches of Christ in the United States are growing once again. I really do not have much to report this year that adds significantly to the report I gave last year. Because of funding problems, we were not able to do as large a survey this year as we needed to do. Having a smaller sample size means that our margin of error is larger. Within that margin of error, however, the mean 1987 growth rate in the sample was approximately 1 per cent. If that is an accurate representation of congregations generally, it means that the turn-around in the growth rate that started in 1984 is continuing.

For the past two decades, I have been conducting nationwide random samples of congregations in a study of growth rates in churches of Christ. These surveys indicate that the growth rate in 1965 was around 5 per cent. The rate of growth declined by about 0.33 per cent per year from 1965 through 1980. Growth stopped in that year. For the next three years, the amount of change in the rate of growth (or decline) continued the trend that had started as early as 1965. There were net membership losses of around 0.33 per cent in 1981, 0.67 per cent in 1982, and 1 per cent in 1983. If this trend had continued, there would have been a net loss in membership in 1984. There was a loss in membership in 1984, but the surveys indicate that the loss was only 0.5 per cent. Later surveys indicated that the decline ended in 1985; there was a growth in membership of around 0.5 percent in 1986, and a growth of around 1 per cent in 1987. If this latest trend continues through 1990, earlier losses will be erased, and membership in 1990 will be around 2.5 per cent ahead of the 1980 figure.

A decadal growth rate of only 2.5 per cent is very low. That is

not even enough to keep pace with population growth. That small growth, however, is far better than the decline in membership of around 18 per cent that would have been experienced by 1990 if the 1965-1983 trend had not been reversed. Furthermore, if the 1984-1987 trend continues, the annual growth rate by the end of the century will be around 7.5 per cent, the decadal growth rate for the 1990s will be over 50 per cent, and we could anticipate doubling in membership in the first decade of the next century.

Since there is really very little that is new to report concerning growth rates among churches of Christ, most of my remarks will focus on a different kind of church growth update. This report will focus on trends in the religious world generally.

The latest reports indicate that the Church of God and the Assemblies of God are still the fastest growing demoninations in America. These and other Pentecostal churches, however, have evidently suffered the most from the recent scandals involving well known television evangelists. Conservative denominations are still growing faster than liberal denominations. However, Dean Kelly's 1972 study of *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* is no longer being interpreted as it once was. Kelly did not really say that conservative denominations are growing because they are conservative or that liberal denominations are declining because they are liberal. Those who have studied Kelly more carefully have found that what he really said is that conservative churches are growing because they are distinctive and evangelistic, and liberal denominations are declining because they are not distinctive or evangelistic. The statistics on patterns of growth and decline among the various denominations support this conclusion. Regardless of where various denominations are located on the liberal-conservative continuum, those that grow tend to be those that are evangelistic and so distinctive that everyone knows who they are, what they believe, and what they stand for. Those that decline tend to be those that are not evangelistic and that have become so ecumenical that no one knows for sure who they are, what they believe, or what they stand for.

One of the recent trends is that the liberal denominations

that declined so rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s have started emphasizing evangelism once more and have largely given up on the merger efforts of the Council on Church Unity. Instead of seeking oneness through denominational mergers, they are now seeking oneness through interdenominational cooperation.

Another important trend is indicated in the research that shows denominational loyalties to be far less significant to people today than they were in the past. People seem to be far more interested in the style of a church than in its theological position or organizational affiliation. There is even a growing awareness that denominational organizations may not be necessary. Elmer Towns recently published a book called *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* In it he claims that very large congregations can provide all the services that smaller churches once depended on denominations to provide. After I read his book, I told him that this is what leaders of the Restoration Movement have been saying all along. Unfortunately, he does not see it that way. That is not what he has heard us saying. All that he has heard us saying is, "We are not a denomination." Perhaps, instead of arguing about how the non-biblical word "denomination" should be defined and applied, we ought to focus more on how the biblical word "church" should be defined, how the church should be organized, and how independent local churches should cooperate with one another.

Ever since Vatican II, both Catholic and Protestant scholars have been involved in a careful re-thinking of liturgical issues. Out of this liturgical renewal have come several interesting developments. Several Protestant writers are now urging more frequent observance of the Lord's Supper—perhaps even as often as every Sunday. They are coming to see worship as participation rather than as performance. They are now questioning the wisdom of having professionally trained musicians, large choirs, and even instrumental music. Most are not ready to give up their instrumental music, but they are recognizing the importance of congregational singing.

Changes are even taking place in regard to baptism. Donald McGavran has many followers in many denominations who have been impressed with his insistence that in the New Tes-

tament, no one was regarded as being a Christian, a member of the Lord's church, until that person was baptized. Denominations that once looked only for decisions or professions of faith are now recognizing that the goal must be to help people become responsible members of the church. Denominations that practice infant baptism have come to recognize that baptism is only for believers. They still practice infant baptism, but they do not baptize the infant children of non-believers. They baptize only the infant children of those they regard as faithful Christians who pledge to bring these children up as Christians. Perhaps it would be wise for those of us in churches of Christ to realize that even in our own experience, there are significant differences between the radical conversion experienced by adults who obey the gospel and the gradual developmental process experienced by those who grow up in Christian families.

The growth of interest in the smaller church is one of the most significant developments of recent years. For many years, most denominations put most of their emphasis on building megachurches—large impressive congregations with thousands of members. Today there is a growing realization that the megachurch is the exception rather than the rule. More than half of all Protestant churches in America have less than fifty people in attendance at their largest assembly. Seminaries are beginning to realize that most of their graduates will serve throughout their lives in churches led by just one minister and not in megachurches with many specialists on the staff. For several years, many denominations tried to close their small, inefficient parishes. They forced a lot of congregational mergers. What they found, however, was that within five years, the merged congregation had typically declined to the size of the larger of the two congregations before the merger. They also observed that in the 1970s, every denomination that reduced the number of congregations declined in total membership, and every denomination that increased the number of congregations grew in membership. Furthermore, they noticed that in most cases, the change in the number of congregations came before a change in total membership.

For several years, the emphasis in most denominations was on bigness. There were a lot of church mergers and consolidations. Today, the emphasis is on planting more and more new congregations. There is a book called *The Smaller Church in a Super Church Era*, edited by Jon Johnston and Bill Sullivan. It tells the story of what happened in the Church of the Nazarene. After World War II, they planted a lot of new churches, and they grew rapidly in that period. Then they got into an era of mergers and consolidations in order to build really big churches that would have a lot of influence in the community. But when they did, their growth stopped, and they started to decline. Recently, however, they have put the emphasis back on church planting, and they have started to grow rapidly once more. The Baptists went through a similar experience, and at their most recent convention, they agreed to plant thousands of new congregations throughout the nation by 1990. Baptist churches in Texas plan to start two thousand new churches by September of 1990.

It might be interesting for churches of Christ to re-consider our own experience in this regard. Shortly after World War II, we started a large number of new congregations. Every time a congregation filled its building, a group would swarm like a hive of bees and start a new congregation. That trend continued up until about the mid-1960s. Since then, our emphasis has been on bigness, merging, and consolidating. But we were growing rapidly when we were planting all those new congregations, and our rate of growth declined past the zero point when we stopped planting new congregations. Perhaps the time has come for us to recognize what so many denominations are recognizing: Planting new churches is the best church growth strategy available to us today.

I believe that those of us who are interested in studying church growth in our fellowship need to be aware of the church growth research being done in the various denominations. Ever since I started preaching, in 1950, I have been trying to produce growth in churches of Christ. In 1970, I started doing research on patterns of growth and decline among churches of Christ in order to understand the factors associated with growth in churches of Christ. It was not until

1984 that I started studying the church growth literature generally. I went to Pasadena, California, to see what I could learn from the leaders of the Church Growth Movement: Donald McGavran, Peter Wagner, Carl George, Eddie Gibbs, and others at Fuller Seminar and the Fuller Institute. Working with these people and others such as Elmer Towns, John Vaughan, Charles Chaney, Chuck Hunter, Kent Hunter, and Win Arn, I helped organize the North American Society for Church Growth. I drafted the constitution for that society and presently serve on three of its editorial boards. Later I studied with Lyle Schaller, who has written more church growth books than anyone else alive today. I believe that I learned some valuable lessons from these people. In my opinion, however, churches of Christ should not accept everything that these people say without careful and critical examination.

I do not think of myself as being a Church Growth person (spelled with a capital "C" and a capital "G"). I do not fully identify with the Church Growth Movement or with those who are known as the "Fuller Group." I have several important reservations about their approach and even more important reservations about those who uncritically apply their conclusions to churches of Christ.

Donald McGavran, the father of the Church Growth Movement, spent many years collecting and analyzing data. A few of his followers have also worked diligently, gathering data. However, most of the writing in the Church Growth Movement is based on authority rather than data. They quote the authorities and quote one another with little empirical evidence to support what they say.

I believe that anything pertaining to church growth that is a matter of faith or doctrine must be investigated by thorough biblical scholarship. We must not do theology by conducting opinion polls. I also believe, however, that quotations from authorities do not provide the best way to study matters of method that relate to church growth. The only safe way to study these matters of method, in my opinion, is through careful empirical research—scientific, quantitative, statistical studies. Far too many of the conclusions accepted as Truth in the Church Growth Movement have very little empirical evi-

dence to back them up.

People in the Church Growth Movement have based most of their conclusions on cross-cultural, cross-denominational studies. Their effort has been to identify factors associated with church growth in any denomination anywhere in the world. I believe that it is too early in this investigation for such generalizations. The first step in any scientific inquiry is to collect as much descriptive data as possible. The next step is to generate hypotheses and test them empirically. Theory-building should come only after this kind of foundation has been developed. At this point in the development of this area of scholarly investigation, I believe that the focus ought to be on discovering what factors are associated with growth or decline within the context of each group. We should not even start the search for generalities until after the Baptists know what produces growth in Baptist churches, the Methodists know what produces growth in the Methodist churches, and others know what produces growth within their denominations. The cross-cultural, cross-denominational approach filters out the effects of both culture and the unique characteristics of each denomination. I believe that doctrine is important. I believe that how churches are organized is important. I do not want to filter out those important differences until growth is thoroughly understood within the context of each particular group. That is why I have focused all of my research on patterns of growth and decline among churches of Christ in the United States.

Leaders of the Church Growth Movement, in my opinion, are far too uncritical in their assumption that all growth in all denominations everywhere in the world is evidence of God's approval. The approach advocated by most Church Growth people is to look at only successes. I do not believe that we can know what produces success unless we compare successes with failures. I believe that the church growth research must always be based on comparisons of growing and declining churches and not just on studies of growing churches.

Some of the popularizers of the Church Growth literature, in my opinion, put far too much emphasis on a marketing approach. They claim that any church can grow—regardless of doctrine—if it has a good location, proper management, a

healthy cash flow, and good advertising. They seem to equate evangelism with salesmanship. They make unwarranted claims about Church Growth being "an exact science." All that I am willing to acknowledge is that some things about church growth can be studied scientifically.

Far too much of the literature in the Church Growth Movement uses the megachurch model. They focus on what works in churches with many full-time specialists on the staff and thousands of members. They take those principles and try to apply them to all churches, regardless of size. That is wrong. Fortunately, some writers in the Church Growth field are beginning to recognize this. In his book *Making the Small Church Effective*, Carl Dudley compares the small church to a single cell organism and the large church to a multicell organism. The study of what makes individual cells function properly can be applied to a single cell or to the individual cells of a multicell organism. But there are many things about the functioning of a multicell organism that do not apply to the single cell. In the same way, I believe that much more research needs to be done on what makes the small single cell church function effectively. That knowledge then can be applied to the individual cells of the large multicell church. Too much of the literature in the Church Growth field starts at the wrong end of the scale.

Having said all this, I must confess that much of what I have learned about church growth in various denominations does seem to be applicable in churches of Christ, in spite of the many ways in which we differ from these denominations. I still believe, however, that most of our focus needs to be on identifying factors associated with growth or decline among churches of Christ.

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

JAMES A. JONES

## PEOPLE IN CONFLICT IS A BIBLICAL THEME

The title assigned me suggests that church growth and conflict resolution are interrelated. I think conflict prevention, resolution, and management are *major keys* to church growth.<sup>1</sup> In fact, church growth is proportional to its conflict prevention, resolution, and management. Conflict has been in the human family since Adam and Eve. Even Jesus' disciples, whom he personally selected, were in conflict with each other at times. They were indignant (Matthew 20:24); they argued (Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46) and disputed (Luke 22:24) with each other. Conflict was in the church at least as early as Acts 6. Paul and Barnabas "... had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company" (Acts 15:39).<sup>2</sup> Paul and Peter had conflict. Paul said, "... I opposed him to his face, because he was in the wrong" (Galatians 2:11).

Some Christians think conflict in and of itself is sinful and should be avoided at all costs. Since people conflict is *dynamic*, Christians should seek to prevent, resolve, and manage it. Realistic goals, precise, informed, and effective delegation, and immediate and constant accountability of every group member will prevent unnecessary conflict. A precisely stated, realistic, and adequate contract which each group member understands and to which each member is committed will assure that some conflicts will be resolved and that others will be managed more effectively.

## FROM WHERE DOES CONFLICT COME?

In order to prevent, resolve, and manage people conflict, one needs to understand it and know its origin. *People conflict is*

*simply the opposing mental and emotional forces within and between individuals.* It is difficult for the group members to express their individual thoughts about a specific conflictual issue. Most often group members do not share their specific feelings, and therefore, their feelings are not faced and worked through. Common emotional forces are disappointment, frustration, anger, fear, guilt, and shame. These and other emotions emerge when members are arrogant, think they are ignored, are in power struggles, are rebellious, feel left out and not needed, feel unimportant or neglected, or perceive themselves as being treated unfairly and without respect. Usually Christians mask or veneer their feelings through talking around them, justifying what they did, becoming defensive, or argumentative, and even using Scripture to prove their external point. But Scripture is supposed to be a lamp to one's feet and light for his path (Psalm 119:105), a mirror for his soul (James 1:22-25), and a discernor of his thoughts and attitudes (Hebrews 4:12). Christians may camouflage their feelings because they do not understand them and, therefore, are *afraid* of them, feel *guilty* about them, and/or are *ashamed* of them.

My experience has been that most people think that conflict comes from either not understanding and/or not being committed to *external* doctrines. It is true that some conflicts in the New Testament church were over external doctrines (Acts 15:1-2). However, most people conflict in the New Testament was over personal and interpersonal issues. Even when the conflict was over an external doctrine, there were usually personal and interpersonal issues, and often they, instead of the external doctrine, became the focus. I think the same is true today. Contrary to what is sometimes spoken and written, most congregational conflicts emerge out of personal and interpersonal issues which, for the most part, are never acknowledged, much less worked through (Acts 20:28-31; James 4:1-3; Titus 3:10-11).

Paul said that some conflict will come from outside the congregation (Acts 20:29). Most of the emphasis in churches of Christ historically has been on pointing out error and evil influences from the outside. While doing this is correct and

necessary, often leaders are unaware that conflict can come from within their congregation, and even within their eldership. In fact, most conflict which congregations experience does come from within the membership and especially the eldership (Acts 20:30). Conflict within the leadership may arise from conflicting *visions* between the leaders themselves and/or between the leaders and the congregation. The leaders' vision may be hazy and ambiguous and, therefore, may not be articulated effectively to each other or to the congregation. This type of environment breeds faction (1 Corinthians 1:10-12). Paul stated that from within the eldership "... men will arise and *distort the truth* in order to *draw away disciples* after them" (Acts 20:30; emphasis mine). (See also Titus 3:10-11; James 3:14, 16; 4:1-3.) It should be obvious that a person is not likely to say that he is distorting the truth to get the members to follow him, but my experience tells me that Paul is telling the truth. While this can also happen because of outside forces, most unhealthy conflict comes from leaders who are not differentiated, do not have a large repertoire of responses, are not effectively connected to the flock, and are not feeding them a balanced diet.

### THREE KEYS TO PERSONAL AND CHURCH GROWTH

Differentiation, response, and connection are three inter-related components which *each leader and member* of the congregation should seek to integrate continually, regardless of whether the individuals or group are in conflict or in concord. The individual members, the congregation, and the issues within and between the group members are constantly changing. Therefore, growing persons and groups are continually working on their self-differentiation, responses, and connections. These three interrelated components of personal and group growth will now be considered in the order given.

#### *Self-Differentiation*

Self-differentiation<sup>3</sup> is a key to personal and congregational growth. A leader's effectiveness, especially in conflict, is proportional to his differentiation of his own *self*. This is one reason why an elder is not to be a recent convert (1 Timothy

3:6). Differentiation is not just difference or separateness; it is not withdrawal, independence, or selfish individuality. It is a defining of self through processing one's thoughts and feelings, thus becoming integrated. Therefore, one is not compulsive, but has control over his will while being in relationship (connected) with others. Paul gave several examples of differentiation, one of which is "*but the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, and is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his own mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing*" (1 Corinthians 7:37; emphasis mine). One mistake Christians sometimes make is that of confusing the *application* of a principle with the principle; thus they try to make the *specific application* of a principle the *principle itself*. Here the application is to marriage, but the principle applies to any people issue. The principle is *differentiation—settling the matter in his own mind, thus not being compulsive or internally forced to do something*.

#### *A Large Repertoire of Responses*

Having a large *repertoire of responses* is a key to personal and congregational growth. Peter refers to this principle of leadership when he said, "*But in your hearts acknowledge Christ as the holy Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience. . . .*" (1 Peter 3:15-16; emphasis mine). Many Christians interpret this passage to mean that they should have ready answers to the religious errors of other people. While the application here is religious, and having answers to religious errors is important, the *principle* of this passage is on a person having his *own reasons* for his hope. Hope is both desire and expectation. It is rooted in faith, and faith must be based on reality or solid evidence (Hebrews 11:1). Otherwise one is only being gullible and daydreaming. According to Paul, hope is also developmental because it grows out of suffering, perseverance, and character (Romans 5:3-4). Hope is not disappointing (Romans 5:5) because of the evidence or reality upon which it is built or developed. It is easy to

complain about and find fault with others; it is also relatively easy to have ideas. However, it is very difficult and time-consuming to know explicitly what one believes, and to understand the *reasons* of his hope. Elders who have not thought through their faith do not know why they believe as they do or what their hope is. Consequently, out of their anxiety, shame, and arrogance, they may become closed, defensive, and ridiculing when asked questions instead of answering with gentleness and respect. Conversely, leaders who have hope, realistic desires, and expectations welcome questions and are joyful in their hope (Romans 12:12) because they have almost unlimited responses for their visions and clear *reasons* for believing they will one day become reality.

### *The Ability To Be With Another*

The ability to *be with* (connected to) another, especially in times of conflict, is a key to personal and congregational growth. One's ability to be with another is proportional to the degree of differentiation of his own self and the number of appropriate responses he has. Otherwise, he withdraws from or abandons, moves against<sup>4</sup> others, or becomes enmeshed with them. The more differentiated he is, the more freely he can choose connection or disconnection. The more differentiated one is, the less compulsion he is under. Emerging out of one's increased quality and quantity of responses and his differentiation of self is one's ability to *be connected* to another. Three New Testament words which imply connection are communion, fellowship, and, in terms of leadership, shepherding. The word "shepherd" (Acts 20:28) implies feeding. In fact, proper nutrition and adequate TLC (tender, loving care) will prevent and resolve much congregational conflict (Acts 6:1; 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; Romans 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). But another significant implication is that of *tending* or *being with* the sheep. The literal shepherd was with his sheep in all types of conditions. Therefore, he experienced personal vulnerability as they did. For example, if the sheep got caught in a rain storm, the shepherd would invariably get wet too. Men who want to be bishops, not shepherds, do not want to be vulnerable and get wet by the storms of life. To be with

another is *frightening* and sometimes *embarrassing* for leaders; their anxiety and shame may be manifested, though, in compulsion or passivity. Most leaders have little knowledge and perhaps less experience in *being with* others. The concept of being with (shepherding) is not a doctrine emphasized in churches of Christ. "Bishop" (board of directors) has been emphasized, but not "shepherd."<sup>5</sup> However, the idea of being with is clearly taught by Peter (1 Peter 5:1-3). "Being with" implies connection—mental, emotional, spiritual, behavioral. "Being with" is not just physical presence or intellectual thoughts; it is experiencing each other as selves, persons, souls, or beings (2 Corinthians 6:12-13; Proverbs 4:23; Romans 9:1-3).

Men who emphasize being bishops tend to think the most important learning is *from* the eldership. Men who emphasize being shepherds tend to think that learning *from* another person has value, but that the most powerful learning occurs when shepherds are *being with* their flock (Luke 2:8), connected in joy and sorrow, in sickness and health, in birth and death, in marriage and divorce, in adversity and prosperity. For over thirty years, bishops have asked me why the sheep will not talk with them, especially before quitting the church, getting divorces, etc. My experience shows that members will not talk to bishops about personal problems, but sheep will share with shepherds. Bishops (board of directors) make decisions and give orders and instructions. When sheep are frightened and hurting, they naturally turn to the *shepherds* for safety, comfort, and healing. It is easy to *tell* people what they *should do*; it is *painfully difficult* and *time-consuming* to *be with* the sheep while they are struggling through their growth process. In some elderships, even the elders themselves are disconnected from each other. Therefore, much congregational conflict grows out of malnutrition and disconnection.

One severe problem some congregations have is attempting to be connected without being differentiated (1 Corinthians 7:37) and having a large repertoire of responses (1 Peter 3:15-16). Differentiation and a great repertoire of responses allow genuine connection—congruency of thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Proverbs 14:13) and protects each from corruption

(2 Corinthians 7:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 2:3, 5, 10-12). Trying to have one without the other two inhibits the growth of the individual member as well as that of the group. A healthy person and congregation balance all three interrelated keys of church growth.

The more differentiated an individual is and the greater his quality and quantity of responses, the *less anxious* and *ashamed* he is. Therefore, he can be more connected to others in either joy or sadness, in peace or in conflict. The more one grows in these three areas, the more he can be *himself*. It should be understood that what most people call being themselves is wearing the *masks* they have accumulated through the years to protect their *real selves* from perceived or real harm. Being themselves, to many people, is manifesting their defenses, not a disclosure of their true selves. The mask or defense is usually designed to protect or camouflage what is truly in their hearts. Solomon said, "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief" (Proverbs 14:13). The more a leader can *be himself* and disclose his true spirit while in relation to others, the more others can be themselves while in relation to him. The more each individual can be himself while related to others, the less conflict there will be in the group. The more the group members can be themselves, the more spiritual they can become because to become one's *self* is to be like God (Genesis 1:26).

### RULES ARE INHERENT IN GROUPS

A group develops rules in order to govern and protect themselves. They are the guidelines by which bishops define issues, arrive at decisions, delegate responsibilities, hold people accountable, and become shepherds. Obviously, the group members should know the rules by which they are to relate to each other and by which they are to be governed, but often they are not clear even to the leaders. Tradition is one powerful way in which a group makes verbal and nonverbal rules. Most likely, these *traditions*, which become rules, are *vague, contradictory, unrealistic, and inadequate*. The prevention, resolution, and management of conflict depend, among other

things, upon *precise, realistic, and adequate* rules which are rooted in principles.

Any group has three sets of rules, which are as follows:

1. *Verbal*—The ones the members know about and can *articulate*.
2. *Nonverbal*—The ones they know about but are *unspoken*.
3. *Unconscious*—The ones they *do not know about*, but which control them anyway.

Usually there are *contradictory* rules in each of these three sets. Unspoken rules are often more powerful than spoken ones, and unconscious rules are the most powerful of any. Verbal rules are likely to be external ones like the time of meeting. However, a nonverbal rule of the group may be that the meeting will actually start ten minutes after the announced time. In many congregations, most of the rules are nonverbal; that is, they are not spoken, even if they are broken. For example, some churches have a rule that its members are not to cry, and especially the men. When someone violates their rule, the members give the person who is crying disapproving looks and may avoid him. Another unspoken rule in some congregations is that *no one* should disagree with his teacher or the elders. If one should verbalize disagreement, he is given disapproving looks, perhaps is *avoided*, is excluded from certain activities, and may be ignored *altogether*. An unconscious rule is a rule which a person and/or the group has, of which it is not aware (Romans 7:15; Proverbs 20:5). When a group says it does not have a particular rule, it may in fact have the same rule unconsciously. For example, a group may say it has a rule that it is not prejudiced, but unconsciously is very prejudiced in a given area.

Rules are the norms or parameters which enable the members to become more or less of themselves, although neither the members nor the leaders may be aware of this fact. The more clearly and precisely defined the group members are in terms of who they are as individuals, what their values and goals are, and the meaning and purpose of their lives for themselves personally (1 Corinthians 7:37), the more clearly and precisely defined are their rules. Rigid, contradictory,

vague, unrealistic, and inadequate rules are proportional to the group members', and particularly the leaders' *shame*. The *shameful* person struggles to keep from looking at himself and the rules. The more inner conflict the members personally have, the more contradictory their rules will be. Conversely, the less shameful the group members are, the more their rules will focus on self-disclosure, responsibility, and accountability of its members. The more respect the group members have for themselves and each other, the more respectful, open, and clear are their rules.

The rules which follow are effective for one-on-one relationships as well as groups of all types. They are interrelated but are not exhaustive. When they are committed to by each person and consistently and persistently practiced, they enable individuals to grow and become more of themselves while being connected to each other.

#### GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS AND GROWING RELATIONSHIPS

The best time to make rules is when the group begins. The group will make its own rules unconsciously if they are not deliberately made. The best way to make rules is to discuss each one specifically when the group is first assembled and get an agreement from each group member. Since it is easy to forget, especially over time and in conflict, it is wise to write the group rules down, date, and sign them. When the leaders and group members will not do this, it is because of their *shame* and *anxiety*. They want to be neither *defined* nor *accountable* to each other. The best time to enforce rules is when one is first broken. Rules that are not enforced will encourage confusion and conflict.

A leader should be mature enough to allow the group to decide whether or not *he will be their leader* and whether or not *they will follow him*. It is important for formal leaders (elders, teachers, etc.) to raise this issue in new group situations such as a new Bible class or retreat. Being a leader in title or position does not necessarily mean the people will follow. Even in outward compliance, the group members may sabotage the

leader's effectiveness by being late or by not following through on assigned responsibilities. Sometimes the question is asked, "What would happen if someone in the group objected to a particular leader at a given time?" In group dynamics, any response can be potentially educational and helpful. Therefore, the leader should simply inquire of the person raising the objection what his reasons are. Of course, the leader's own shame and anxiety may keep him from asking this self-disclosing question. The leader may not want to face the possibility of rejection; he may perceive *disagreement* as rejection. Dealing openly with these forces builds self-esteem and enables the members to become connected to the leader and each other. This rule helps develop differentiation, quality, and quantity of responses and connections.

The group should have a rule that *members can disagree with each other* (Amos 3:3; Acts 11:1-4, 15:39; 2 Timothy 4:11). Sometimes Christians confuse disagreeing with each other with rejection, and/or as disagreeing with God. They sometimes confuse questioning God (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46) with defying him. Obviously, Christians ought to agree with what God says, but raising questions or disagreeing with another member is neither rejection nor defiance. If the group agrees that each one has the right to disagree with the other(s), they will discover that they have less disagreement, and what they do have will be less severe. Furthermore, with this attitude, they will tend to be more willing to discuss their differences openly, honestly, caringly, respectfully, and responsibly. Thus, they will have less conflict.

*Each group member should speak for himself, and speak one at a time* (Acts 15:19; 1 Corinthians 14:27, 40). This rule, if followed, would prevent unnecessary conflict and maintain order in the group. It also forces an individual to grow and develop by the process of thinking for himself through speaking for himself. Each person needs to be responsible and accountable for his thoughts, feelings, and actions. Using the pronoun "I" when speaking forces one to be responsible for himself, but using plural pronouns like "us," "our," "they," and "them" allows a person to hide from himself and be unaccountable to the group. He remains anonymous as an individual with his

own thoughts and feelings.

Each group member should not only speak for himself, but should agree that *no one can speak for another, including God*. This and the previous rule forces self-differentiation and the development of personal responses while remaining connected to each other. Of course, God speaks for himself through his word, the Bible. He said through the prophet Isaiah, "‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways my ways.’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Much of the conflict in the church comes from members not minding *their own business* (1 Thessalonians 4:11) and meddling in the business of others (Proverbs 26:17). It should be understood, however, that just because each group member must speak for himself, one at a time, and that no one is allowed to speak for another, does not mean that each person will necessarily *get his way* (Acts 15:5, 10, 19, 24, 28-29). Of course, such is impossible. These rules, if enforced, will insure that each person can express his thoughts and feelings. The group leader should be able to *interrupt*, but the group members should not be allowed to do so (1 Samuel 15:16). The leader *should not prevent* each member from expressing his thoughts and feelings thoroughly, but he should interrupt to prevent *arguing about words* (2 Timothy 2:14), *ridiculing or ignoring* another, in order to stay *focused* on the question asked or the idea suggested.

Leaders or group members may think that discussing an issue is making a decision. Even administrative matters and factual information should be openly discussed in the group and *each member should speak his truth* (personal thoughts and feelings; Acts 15:19; Ephesians 4:15, 25; James 3:14; Psalm 15:2, 51:6; Proverbs 20:15) about these and other matters concerning the congregation. However, it is difficult for some leaders to distinguish between giving members permission to express their thoughts and feelings, and thinking that if the members express themselves they will be making the decision for the leaders. There is a vast difference between discussing and deciding, but this difference is not clear to individuals who are not differentiated themselves. Leaders may feel

threatened or intimidated when a different or opposing viewpoint is raised.

A group rule should be that *no one is laughed at*. It is acceptable to *laugh with* another, but not *at him*. Accordingly, there are no silly, ridiculous, and stupid questions or suggestions. Sometimes people get laughed at, and questions seem silly because they are misunderstood. Sometimes the group may laugh because they are misunderstood. Sometimes the group may laugh because the speaker raised the anxiety of the group with his questions. Group laughter may not be laughing at or with the speaker, but may be a way of releasing their anxiety. People do things which are logical and make sense to them. Thus, another group rule should be that *each member will listen* to the one speaking to try to *understand* him, not just to give him an answer nor to make fun of him. One powerful way to build self-esteem in each group member as well as build group cohesion is each person knowing that he will be *heard* and *responded to openly and honestly* instead of being *judged, ridiculed, or ignored*. Naturally, the group members should have a *right to respond* to the one speaking. *Mutual and immediate accountability* for one's words and actions should be a group rule. Holding the speaker accountable for his thoughts and feelings as well as behavior helps to clarify them to the speaker as well as to the group, thereby building his self-esteem (Proverbs 9:9, 19:8; Ecclesiastes 7:8). One is held accountable by simply asking questions such as what, when, where, who, why, how, how many, and how much, and then waiting for specific answers (Genesis 3:9:11, 13; 1 Samuel 15:14, 19; Matthew 16:13, 15). This sounds easy, but it is one of the most difficult things a person can do because of the querist's shame and fear of what the other may say or do. This is because of his own lack of differentiation, limited responses and fear of disconnection. When this is not the rule, shame and irresponsibility are encouraged, and the amount of unhealthy conflict rises proportionally.

Truth is powerful. It has the power to *build one up* (Acts 20:32), to *free* (John 8:31-32, 36), to *sanctify* or *set apart* (John 17:17), to *purify* (1 Peter 1:22) and to *make one wise to salvation* (2 Timothy 3:15). *Fear and intimidation* of truth is likewise

powerful and may lead to unnecessary conflict (Galatians 2:11-14). Truth can also be *painful* (Acts 2:37), *hard to accept* (John 6:60), and too much of it at once *can be overwhelming* (John 16:12). Nevertheless, each individual should be allowed to speak his truth in the group. There is a difference in speaking one's truth and blaming others, justifying self, or arguing about words (2 Timothy 2:14, 16, 23-24; Proverbs 19:13, 21:9, 19). Group members should be permitted to talk, as long as they are sharing their truth, *until they get through*. Jesus did this (Matthew 26:36-46) as did the early Christians (Acts 11:18, 15:1-2; Galatians 2:11-14).

Sometimes current matters are not settled, even though the individuals may think they are. Thus the group needs a rule that *old business can be brought up* and discussed again and again until the issues are settled. Personal and interpersonal issues are settled when the thoughts and feelings concerning the issues are processed. Hence, another group rule should be that each member *has a right to his thoughts and feelings*. In some congregations, members do not have the right to *think* for themselves. It is even more difficult for leaders to allow themselves their rights to their feelings. Historically, Christians have not studied the biblical doctrine of emotions and feelings, and they tend to be afraid of, feel guilty about and/or be ashamed of their feelings. The doctrine of emotions is more fully developed in other writings<sup>6</sup>; therefore, for purposes here, they are only treated briefly.

A group rule should be that *each member has at least five feeling rights*:

First, each member has a right to his feelings—both pleasant and unpleasant—ones which feel good and ones which hurt. Deeply rooted in American culture and the church is the false belief that painful feelings harm a person and the group with which they are involved. Therefore, good intentions of *helping* are sometimes thwarted because of this incorrect attitude.

Second, each member has a right to feel toward the other group members *not the way he should*, but the way he *does* feel. If one is to grow, he must begin where he is, and where he is, in part, is what he feels.

Each member has a right to express verbally and nonverbally the appropriate amount of his feelings to the *correct* person(s) or event at the proper *time* and *place* for the *correct reason*, *openly*, *caringly*, *respectfully*, and *responsibly*. Many Christians confuse expressing their feelings with blaming and attacking others. Also, what most Christians call their feelings are actually their thoughts—thoughts and feelings are not the same. One can feel without thinking and think without feeling, but the goal of each group member should be to think what he feels and feel what he thinks. Another group rule should be that the members can express their *painful* and *pleasant feelings* (Romans 9:1-2; 2 Corinthians 6:12-13; 7:2-7; 2 Timothy 1-4; Romans 12:15; Ecclesiastes 3:4, 7:2-4). Some groups have a rule that a few pleasant feelings can be shared, but *little, if any, pain can be expressed* verbally or nonverbally.

Third, each member has a right to listen to the *feelings* of the speaker and to respond to them when he has finished sharing. Most group members will not listen to the feelings being shared, much less respond openly and honestly to them. They usually try to *explain them away* and/or tell the person what he *should be thinking or doing*, like, "Have you thought about how blessed you are?" Certainly one should be thankful for his blessings, but this type of question is designed to keep the person from *experiencing* his feelings. The listener may not respond to the *feelings* of the speaker because he does not value them and/or thinks that expressing them would be unhealthy for the speaker. He may also be afraid of, be ashamed of, or feel guilty about them. However, sharing and responding to feelings is the connecting link between human beings. This right clearly demonstrates how differentiation, repertoire of responses, and connection complement each other.

Fourth, each person has a right to process or work through his feelings. This is what Jesus did (Matthew 26:36-46). In order to process one's feelings, an individual must become aware of and accept them, understand their origin, and analyze them, expressing the appropriate amount of feelings at a fitting time, in the proper place toward the correct person(s) or event and for the correct reason. Working through or processing feelings also means experiencing them—not just say-

ing feeling words. There is a difference in *experiencing* one's feelings and only *saying feeling words* or *whining* to keep from taking responsible action.

Another significant rule should be *confidentiality*. What is said in the group should stay in the group. It is very important for group members to work out whatever conflicts they have with each other in the group itself and to do so as quickly as possible (Matthew 5:23-26; 18:15-17). When this is done, the group members are learning to be responsible and accountable to each other, and they are modeling for each other how conflicts can be resolved. Obviously, working out conflicts is *frightening* and *embarrassing*. As previously stated, their *anxiety* and *shame* will be proportional to their differentiation, quality, and quantity of responses, and connection to each other and their leaders. When confidentiality is not the rule, the more likely the group will have the rule that conflictive thoughts and feelings *cannot be worked out in the group*. Conflicts that are not settled in the group do not *just go away*. The mental and emotional dynamics are so powerful that group members will be forced into releasing this energy with someone out of the group, either another group member or someone else. When this is the case, factions develop within the membership (1 Corinthians 1:10-12), gossip runs rampant, and the group begins to erode. The initial conflict escalates, often to unmanageable proportions. As *frightening* as it may be, *conflict can only* be prevented, resolved, and managed *by the group itself within the group itself*.

## CONCLUSION

The matters which have been set forth are basic to the prevention, resolution, and management of church conflict. However, these concepts will only be effective in a congregation to the degree that leaders and members alike assimilate them into their character. The concepts are not exhaustive, but being fundamental, can be enlarged and built upon by the reader. They have been given with the hope and prayer that they will be studied, understood, and integrated.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jerry and Becky Gross, eds., *Growing Through Conflict* (Abilene, Tex.: Quality Publications, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

<sup>3</sup>Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1966).

<sup>5</sup>Norman Hogan, *Leadership in the Local Church* (Henderson, Tenn.: Nakari Publications, 1988).

<sup>6</sup>Gross, pp. 84-98. James A. Jones, *I Never Thought It Would Be This Way* (Abilene, Tex.: Quality Publications, 1982); *Counseling Principles for Christian Leaders* (Abilene, Tex.: Quality Publications, 1982); *Managing Church Conflict: Group Theory Applied to the Church Family* (Abilene, Tex.: Quality Publications, 1985).

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## LEGAL ISSUES IN CHURCH DISCIPLINE

TRUMAN RUCKER

### THE BATTLE OF "MIGHT" VS. "RIGHT"

God's spiritual laws have often contradicted man's unspiritual and worldly laws. One of the clearest examples of this conflict is set forth in Acts 4 when Peter responded to the might and strength of the Jewish hierarchy by stating, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." With the progression (?) of the law in the United States, the issue of "Might" vs. "Right" has recently come into sharper focus with decisions in lawsuits such as *Guinn vs. Collinsville Church of Christ, et al.* The willingness of courts to exercise their "might by hearing and deciding church discipline cases has increased the brotherhood's interest in being "right" in the exercise of its disciplinary beliefs, and properly so. Unfortunately, the court's intrusion has also had the "chilling" effect of many brethren disputing the "rightness" of church discipline.

### IDENTIFYING CONDUCT WHICH MAY BE ACTIONABLE

Matthew 18:15-17 is the foundational cornerstone for every religious group which practices church discipline. In following the requirements of Matthew 18, three specific areas of conduct can be identified which most commonly give rise to lawsuits. A greater awareness of these problem areas may eventually result in finding a balance between the "might" of the courts and the "right" of the church.

### *Counseling*

Counseling can be defined both by quantity and quality of contacts. It may be as simple as one member contacting another member about a problem in his/her life. From this initial contact, counseling may increase in quantity, i.e., more contacts and by more members, or increase in quality, i.e., more sophisticated counseling and assistance by elders, preachers, or professional staff counselors. Any counseling which a person finds offensive may give rise to a lawsuit. Obviously, the greater the quantity and quality of counsel contacts, the greater the risk of a lawsuit.

### *Public Statements*

The second area of conduct which has become a problem source is in making public and semi-public statements. Certain statements made by members about other members, whether spoken or written, may be actionable. The fact that the maker of the statement may also be an official, i.e., preacher or elder, increases the likelihood of a prospective plaintiff seeing the church as a target defendant. The publication of such a statement to a large group or an entire congregation may also increase the possibility of a lawsuit, although statements which may seem private, i.e., made to one or a few individuals, may be semi-public and actionable.

### *Withdrawal of Fellowship*

The third and major problem area of conduct which has generated the most lawsuits is in the exercise of withdrawal of fellowship. Since this conduct is only used as a last resort in the most severe cases, it is also perceived by the erring member and prospective plaintiff as the most actionable conduct. The imposing of sanctions, withdrawal of social contact, and ostracism often are interpreted as antagonism towards the erring member. Withdrawal of fellowship is often a culmination of many unpleasant contacts by church officials (counseling) and is usually coupled with public statements.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW LAW FOR OLD INJURIES

Simply identifying the principal areas of alleged misconduct is not sufficient. Church leaders can guard their conduct only by more fully appreciating the theories of law plaintiffs have used to invite the court's intrusion into ecclesiastical matters.

Prior to the 1980s, courts generally decided church cases which only involved property disputes, i.e., which faction got the church building, and did so only when they could decide issues by applying "neutral principles of law" without deciding church doctrine. Courts abstained from deciding any case which necessarily required them to determine church doctrine on the grounds that such action was prohibited by The Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution. However, with recent developments in tort law, plaintiffs have ingeniously convinced trial courts to break down these longstanding barriers in the interest of protecting individual rights. These rights are often described as property rights or individual liberties guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution.

For those limited instances in the past where a court did exercise jurisdiction over a church discipline action, an erring member was limited to seeking redress for any wrongs under a theory of libel and slander. Although the constitutional privileges and defenses were, and still are, available for such actions, they were often difficult to present and difficult to understand. Since truth and qualified privilege are defenses to libel and slander actions, they were the most common means for churches to have these actions dismissed by the courts. Therefore, few cases in the past addressed the constitutional issues involved in church discipline cases. In addition, new tort law, which covers conduct similar to libel and slander, called dignitary torts, has only developed within the last ten to fifteen years. It is these recent developments in tort law, coupled with a more ingenious and litigious plaintiff, which has brought us to our present predicament. This new tort law, still in its developmental stage, has not balanced the interest it attempts to protect with the harms it is producing. This bal-

ance will not be achieved until well-reasoned appellate court opinions, perhaps by the U. S. Supreme Court, have set forth the parameters under which these actions may be maintained, particularly against religious associations.

Recent developments in tort law have generally produced three separate causes of action leading to the flurry of lawsuits nationwide.

### *Pastoral Counseling Malpractice*

This cause of action has its roots in the case of *Nally vs. Grace Community Church*, a California case which has yet to reach a final decision. In *Nally*, plaintiffs of a suicide victim sued a church for the negligent counseling of an emotionally distressed member, i.e., the plaintiffs' son. In response to the church's defense that their right to religious counseling is protected by U. S. Constitution, plaintiffs argued that the defendant church engaged in the secular pursuit of counseling, holding itself out to be professional and performing said function in an unprofessional manner.

Although it is difficult to predict how the court will treat a church's right to religiously counsel its members without being held to a secular standard of care, it is the conduct of counseling and the tort of pastoral counseling malpractice that should cause all church officials and employees to be exceptionally careful in this area. The most common, and perhaps most actionable, result of counseling by preachers and elders is family disharmony which may be evidenced by one spouse leaving another or a minor child disobeying his parents in the pursuit of religious beliefs promoted by the counseling.

### *Willful Infliction of Emotional Distress*

Recent tort development has resulted in formulation of a cause of action for Willful Infliction of Emotional Distress. Many states have adopted this cause of action to protect individuals for clearly outrageous conduct of defendants and to punish the same. Liability under this theory is found only when one intentionally or recklessly causes severe emotional distress to another by extreme outrageous conduct. This specific theory was first proposed in 1965. It has subsequently

been adopted by many states as part of their common law. It is not intended to protect an individual from rough and profane language, or unkind and inconsiderate acts where someone's feelings may be hurt. Liability has generally been found only where the conduct has been so outrageous in character, and so extreme in degree, as to go beyond all possible bounds of decency, and to be regarded as atrocious and utterly intolerable in a civilized community.

It is generally a question of fact for a jury's determination as to what conduct may be outrageous. Counseling and the making of statements to a member on a one time or occasional basis probably would not rise to outrageous conduct. However, the withdrawal of fellowship would probably be seen by the average juror, probably not a member of the church, as outrageous conduct intended to cause harm. The kidnapping and indoctrination of young people by religious sects would clearly be outrageous. We can only guess how public statements about the sinful life of an erring member would be viewed by a jury.

### *Invasion of Privacy*

The final dignitary tort to come in to recent use is for Invasion of Privacy. This tort is divided into four causes of action, two of which have primary application to church discipline: (1) Intrusion Upon Seclusion and (2) Publication of Private Facts.

One who intentionally intrudes, physically or otherwise, upon the solitude or seclusion of another or his private affairs or concerns is subject to liability to the other for invasion of his privacy if the intrusion would be highly offensive to a reasonable person. In the spiritual context, plaintiffs have applied the tort of Invasion of Privacy by Intrusion Upon Seclusion to apply to the actions and efforts of elders in inquiring as to the propriety of an erring member's conduct. This cause of action appears to directly contradict the command of Matthew 18:15 "to go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." It should be clear that the actions of elders and preachers in physically entering upon the property of an erring member to discuss a spiritual problem with them would not rise to Intrusion Upon Seclusion. However repeated attempts by church

officials in this regard and/or in-depth inquiries the erring member's private life might be punishable. The rationale underlying this tort is that each person has a right to keep his/her private life private.

One who gives publicity to a matter concerning the private life of another is subject to liability to the other for the invasion of his privacy if the matter publicized is of a kind that would be highly offensive to a reasonable person and is not of legitimate concern to the public. It makes no difference that the statements made by church officials are true. The tort is designed to protect an individual from publication of private matters about his/her life of which another, i.e., a church official, may legitimately have knowledge. Whereas Intrusion Upon Seclusion protects against the investigation and finding of such knowledge, Publication of Private Facts protects against the dissemination of such knowledge. This tort could find liability for publication to a congregation of an erring member's sin after the erring member voluntarily admitted the sin to church officials but refused to repent. However, liability should not be found in such a situation where the erring member's sin is common knowledge, i.e., public knowledge, since the church officials have not disclosed any private fact.

### COMMON LAW DEFENSES TO DIGNITARY TORTS

Without respect to constitutional arguments, certain common law defenses exist to modern tort law.

#### *Qualified Privilege*

A Qualified Privilege is a conditional right to make public statements when (1) there is information which affects a sufficiently important interest of the publisher, and (2) the recipients knowledge of the information will be of service in the lawful promotion of the interest. In other words, a substantial common interest between a speaker and recipients gives rise to the conditional right to make public statements about individuals. The common interest of members of religious associations has normally been sufficient to justify public statements about the immoral conduct of erring members. However, the public statements must be limited to the scope of the common

interest between the speaker and the recipients and must not be made in a malicious manner or for an improper purpose, which would be an abuse of the privilege. Although almost all states recognize Qualified Privilege as a defense for defamatory actions, many of them have not yet addressed its application to modern dignitary torts. It would appear that the trend and weight of authority is in favor of Qualified Privilege becoming a defense to these dignitary torts.

#### *Legitimate Group Concern*

One of the requirements of proof for the tort of Invasion of Privacy by Publication of Private Facts is that statements made are not the legitimate concern of the recipients of said statements. This common law defense, coupled with First Amendment Freedom of Association arguments, may legally cloak a church's actions towards an erring member, giving them the legal right to conduct which would normally violate a dignitary tort. This would allow church officials to inquire into an erring member's conduct, repeatedly encourage and admonish the member to correct his/her conduct and make public statements about the member's conduct, even though private, to members of the church who have the legitimate concern for the spiritual welfare of the erring member.

It is vitally important that the legitimate concern of the church or association be on an active and continuous basis. Although membership by the erring member is an important factor in determining the right to make statements and perform conduct normally actionable, it is not the sole factor. It is certainly possible for the immoral conduct of an erring member to have been neglected and ignored for such a long period of time that the church would no longer have a legitimate concern. This would be particularly clear where the immoral conduct of a member has been made public after the erring member has not attended services for several years. On the other hand, an erring member who received continuous contact with the church and withdrew their membership during disciplinary proceedings would not necessarily terminate the concern of the church. Legitimate group concern may be determined more by quality of relationships than by member-

ship. In fact, membership is not an essential factor to this defense.

### CONSTITUTIONAL DEFENSES TO MODERN TORT LAW

Although analysis and application of recent tort law to common practices and conduct of the church and its members appears to leave them defenseless to these actions, in fact, the great weight of authority should be in favor of religious freedom. State and Federal Constitutions have consistently been held to protect the most basic religious liberties, including the exercise of church discipline, except in the most extreme cases.

The U. S. Constitution provides four barriers to the government's entry into church cases.

#### *Free Speech*

The First Amendment allows free speech to everyone, including the right to use profane language, etc., except where substantial interests, public or private, are being invaded in an essentially intolerable manner or the speech is a clear and present menace to public peace and order. The free speech clause demands that assaults on sensitivity be protected to a substantial degree.

#### *Freedom of Association*

The First Amendment also guarantees the right to form and maintain an association for the advancement of beliefs and ideas, whether religious or not. This guarantees that private groups may decide internal affairs without unreasonable government interference. A church's right to determine internal affairs includes its right to determine internal policies of membership and have those policies respected and given substantial protection by the U. S. Constitution which only the strongest kind of state interest can outweigh. Freedom of association is a right of exclusion as well as inclusion and protects the rights of a church in its relationship with former members.

### *Free Exercise of Religion*

The First Amendment grants to every person the right to freely exercise their religious beliefs. This right is subject to only the most compelling state interests and those of the highest order which cannot otherwise be served. Generally, this barrier is breached by the courts only where the strongest public policy, i.e., protection of the social security system, or imminent danger to public health, safety, and welfare (e.g., snake-handling) is found. Everyone has the right to any and all religious *beliefs*. The right to *exercise* those religious beliefs is subject only to the above limitations.

### *The Establishment Clause*

The First Amendment prevents congress from making any law respecting the establishment of religion. Neither the State nor Federal government can make or enforce any law which establishes or inhibits a religious belief. It is the establishment clause which is the "wall" that separates church and state. The U. S. Supreme Court has developed a threefold test to determine impermissible establishment of religion: (1) The governmental action which affects religion must have a secular, non-religious purpose. (2) The primary effect of the governmental action must not be to aid or inhibit religion. (3) The governmental action must not lead to excessive entanglement between the secular and the religious. The establishment clause prevents courts from hearing church cases which require them to determine church beliefs and doctrine, such as membership status and church discipline.

## RECOMMENDED SAFEGUARDS

It is difficult to estimate with accuracy how these constitutional safeguards will counteract the new "dignitary" torts. However, based upon the constitutional and common-law defenses to these new torts, the following recommendations should be considered.

1. Be sure that each present and the new member of your congregation understands how you exercise your religious beliefs relating to counseling, correction, and church

discipline.

2. Be consistent in the exercise of your religious beliefs relating to counseling, correction, and church discipline.
3. Maintain a reasonable religious purpose and foundation for your activities related to counseling, correction, and church discipline. Do not allow members to "drift away" before contacting them. Do not ignore them when they need help.
4. Maintain the private nature of private communications whenever possible.
5. Make only truthful statements, and limit them to making public statements containing only the most necessary information.
6. When making public statements, maintain a common interest by limiting the audience to members of the congregation. Do not allow the membership to make statements to non-members.
7. Never do anything less than your conscience and religious beliefs absolutely require.

In addition to the above, the following suggestions are offered as additional deterrents to lawsuits and/or aids to defense of lawsuits:

1. Incorporate and properly maintain your corporate status, protecting the membership from lawsuits and judgments.
2. Purchase liability insurance to cover officers and employees of the congregation.
3. Anticipate problem people, and plan your actions accordingly.
4. Record all meetings and statements made in the course of counseling, correction, and church discipline when you anticipate problems. Do not be afraid of the truth.
5. Seek competent legal advice when you first perceive a problem and before any significant disciplinary action is taken.

## CONCLUSION

The development of dignitary torts has outdistanced constitutional barriers which protect the right of church discipline. This appears to be temporary and correctable with well reasoned appellate court opinions, which should be issued in the near future. In the meantime, churches should not be cowered into retreating from the biblical practice of church discipline. Instead, church discipline must be practiced with caution and an awareness of potential problems. Amidst this controversy and concern, the challenge to the church is twofold: (1) to exercise the right and obligation of church discipline in love, and (2) to do so in a correct manner, consistent with state and federal laws, where known and possible.

Although the law may eventually deteriorate to a level which does not tolerate the practice of church discipline, we have not yet reached that point. On the contrary, we are evolving through a process of balancing religious freedom against individual liberties. The development of law is a continuing effort to seek this balance in a changing society.

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College of Bible and Religion**



*"Heaven and earth will pass away,  
but My words will not pass away."  
(Mark 13:31)*