

# THE COMING KING

STUDIES IN  
THE GOSPEL OF MARK

© IAN PENNICOOK

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## PREFACE

A short word of explanation concerning this book is due. This especially so since there is no shortage of very good commentaries on most books of the Bible, and the Gospel of Mark is certainly no exception.

This book is not an attempt to compete with those very competent works. But since they generally require either a fair degree of familiarity with the original languages and/or an interest in what often can become quite intricate and technical details, they are also beyond the field of usefulness of most Bible readers.

There are also a number of books which attempt, often with great success, to 'introduce' the reader to the various Biblical books. These can be in the form of simple commentaries or of 'manuals' which leave it up to the reader to glean the required information from the book being studied. Again, this book is not attempting to compete with these.

The **aim** of this book is to meet the need of the middle group of readers, namely, those who have already some idea of what is in the Scriptures and who are not afraid to push on into the riches of the word of God, but whose interests do not yet lie in the world of the academic. But there is more. The aim is not simply to meet a need; rather it is humbly to reflect the goal of the author of Mark's Gospel and to present 'the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. To that end, there is, unashamedly, the occasional bit of 'preaching'.

With this in mind, may I urge the readers to use this book with their Bibles open before them. Actually, the material which is contained in this work was originally designed for group use, although that may not be the circumstance in which most will find themselves. But the final authority is the Bible, the written word of God. It is to that authority which I must urge you to submit yourselves as you work through the Scriptures, and to that authority which I am happy to have anyone submit this book.

The **title** of this book is *The Coming King*. It has that title because, to the people who came under the ministry of Jesus before the cross and resurrection, the kingdom of God was not yet established. It was still 'breaking in' but required the victory of the cross and resurrection to completely render sin, the forces of darkness, and all that attach themselves to them, utterly powerless to hold men and women in bondage. But now, through his death and his rising out of the grave, Jesus is Lord. We read the stories in the Gospels as those who know the result of all that Jesus was about. To us, then, the King has come. If there is submission to the written word of God it is because we have been captured by the living Word. May the King himself direct us as we live in the great liberty and delight of his kingdom.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF MARK

## MEETING CHRIST

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This book is not a simple biography of Jesus. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Nor is it 'a' gospel. It is 'the' gospel.

The word 'gospel' is from the Anglo-Saxon word *godspell* which means 'good tidings'. *Godspell* was the way which John Wycliffe translated the Greek word *euaggelion*. Though *euaggelion* does carry the implication of 'good tidings', the word literally means 'an announcement made well', that is, in a manner appropriate to the situation.

In Mark 1:14 we read that 'Jesus came . . . preaching the gospel of God'. In the next verse the gospel demands a response from the hearers. Comparison with Mark 8:34-35 reveals the degree of response which the gospel demands; see also Mark 10:29. In Mark 13:10; 14:9 and 16:15 it is expected that the gospel will be preached by the disciples of Christ. In all these cases, the gospel is the same, that is, there are not various gospels.

A brief comparison with Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14 (the only other uses of the word *euaggelion* in the four Gospels) shows that the gospel relates to the kingdom ('of God'—or 'of the heavens', the phrase usually used by Matthew' and equivalent to God'). We must stress the great dynamic of the kingdom; there was therefore nothing static or dull or commonplace about the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God is the gospel of the kingdom (cf. Ps. 2:6-9).

A comparison with such statements as Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 1:5 will indicate the dynamic of this gospel. On the one hand it calls for a serious response from the hearers and on the other the proclamation itself initiates the response and the transformation which accompanies it. We may call the gospel 'a life changing proclamation'.

We cannot overlook the fact that the gospel is also a word of judgement in that it also effectively reveals the depths of human rebellion and so calls down judgement upon the impenitent (Mark 1:15 'repent'; cf. also 1 Pet. 4:17).

We may conclude that in writing this account of Christ, Mark is writing the gospel. and in doing so he is giving a life changing proclamation. In other words it is not possible to read this work in moral neutral. Therefore as the life changing proclamation. Christ himself is the speaker, revealing himself in all his royal glory (cf. Rom. 10:14, 17, etc.).

## THE GOSPEL IN ITS CONTEXT

We must refer briefly to what is called 'the Synoptic Problem'.<sup>1</sup> This is simply, that it

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'synoptic' is derived from a Greek word meaning 'seeing together'.

is hard to determine finally how it is that the three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have so much in common. This is not simply common subjects but often identical wording. They are conspicuously different from the Gospel according to John in this. Many solutions have been offered and they need not concern us here.<sup>2</sup> What does come to our attention is the stress which all three Synoptic Gospels place upon the Old Testament and its institutions (cf. Mark 1:1-3, 6; 2:18-28; 7:1-13, 19, etc.).

What we see is that the gospel is related to the Old Testament. It is the fulfilment of the Old Testament expectations yet at the same time it stands over against the institutions which grew out of the Old Testament. We could say that each of the Synoptic Gospels, in its own way, presents Jesus as the fulfilment of all that God was about in the history of Israel. That is, the writers, although writing after the events of the Cross, Resurrection and Pentecost, nevertheless had as their aim the presentation of Jesus as the one who closes off the old covenant (cf. Mark 14:24, with some versions having 'new covenant'). The Synoptic Gospels are, in that sense anyway, the closing documents of the Old Testament. That is not to imply that the Gospel of John does not have a similar aim; it is that John does seem to be more oriented towards the language and experiences which characterise the New Testament letters.

### THE AUTHOR

All the Gospels are anonymous. The titles in our Bibles have been added later. However, the traditions concerning authorship are still very ancient.

The earliest evidence is that recorded in the 4th century by Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical history, written by Papias of Hierapolis about the mid-second century. It is 'Mark, since he was the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, but not in order, the things said or done by the Lord as much as he remembered. For he had neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards as I have said (heard and followed) Peter, who fitted his discourse to the needs (of his hearers) but not as if making a narrative of the Lord's sayings; consequently, Mark, writing some things just as he remembered, erred in nothing; for he was careful of one thing—not to omit anything of the things he had heard or to falsify anything in them.'<sup>3</sup>

Vincent Taylor says of the Papias tradition that it 'is so sound that, if we did not possess it, we should be compelled to postulate something very much like it.'<sup>4</sup>

It seems more than reasonable to conclude that the author of this Gospel and the Mark of whom Papias wrote was the Mark we come across elsewhere in the New Testament. We know of him from Acts 12:12, 25; 13:2-5; 15:36-40. It seems that Mark was at first a youthful failure, while 2 Tim. 4:11 would indicate that the failure was by no means final and that his relationship with Paul was fully restored. However, 1 Pet. 5:13 seems to show that later his closest relationship was with Peter. This would agree with Papias. Further, an examination of Acts 10:36-43 will show it to be a virtual summary of Mark's Gospel. Possibly the little comment of Mark 14:51-52 is a mention that, although not an eyewitness the way Peter was, Mark was nonetheless present on one tragic, and for him embarrassing, occasion.

### OUTLINE

The Gospel of Mark can be divided into two main sections, 1:1—8:26 and 8:27—

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<sup>2</sup> simple summary of the issues is found in Hunter. pp. 34-39.

<sup>3</sup> Bingham. The Gospel according to Mark. p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor. p. vii.

16:20. The dividing point is the event at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus was recognised as being ‘the Christ’. Section one concentrates on the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and among the Gentiles and the second concentrates mainly on his ministry in Jerusalem and, in particular, during the week preceding his death. It is conspicuous that, out of sixteen chapters, five are devoted to the events of the last week.

### I. THE EARLIER MINISTRY, 1:1—8:26

#### A. The beginning of the Gospel, 1:1-13

1. Keynote, 1:1
2. Biblical prophecies, 1:2-3
3. John the Baptist and Jesus, 1:4-13

#### B. The Galilean ministry, 1:14—7:23

1. First manifestations of power, 1: 14—2:12
  - (a) Announcement of the kingdom of God, 1:14-15
  - (b) Call of the first four disciples, 1:16-20
  - (c) Teaching with power, 1:21-22
  - (d) Healings with power, 1:23-45
  - (e) Transition section: The power to forgive, 2:1-12
2. The heightening of controversy, 2:13—3:6
  - (a) The call of Levi, 2:13-17
  - (b) Argument about fasting, 2:18-22
  - (c) Controversy about the sabbath, 2:23-28
  - (d) A healing on the sabbath, 3:1-6
3. Power and instruction given to the Twelve, 3:7—5:43
  - (a) Summary of healings and exorcisms, 3:7-12
  - (b) Appointment of the Twelve, 3:13-19a
  - (c) The charge of madness, 3:19b-21
  - (d) The charge of possessing Beelzebul, 3:22-30
  - (e) Jesus’ true family, 3:31-35
  - (f) The secret of the kingdom of God, 4:1-34
  - (g) The storm at sea, 4:35-41
  - (h) The demoniac of Gerasa, 5:1-20
  - (i) Two miracles, 5:21-43
4. The rejection of Jesus and John the Baptist, 6:1—7:23
  - (a) Rejection in the home village, 6:1-6a
  - (b) The sending of the Twelve, 6:6b-13
  - (c) Herod hears of Jesus; the death of John, 6:14-29
  - (d) The return of the Twelve, 6:30
  - (e) Two epiphanies, 6:31-52
  - (f) Summary: healings, 6:53-56
  - (g) Controversy over the clean and unclean, 7:1-23

#### C. Jesus among the Gentiles, 7:24—8:26

1. The unclean spirit and the deaf mute, 7:24-37
  - (a) The Syro-Phoenecian woman, 7:24-30
  - (b) To the Decapolis territory, 7:31
  - (c) The deaf mute, 7:32-37
2. The blind, 8:1-26
  - (a) Feeding the four thousand, 8:1-10
  - (b) Rejection of the demand for a sign; dullness of minds, 8:11-21

(c) Transition section—The blind man of Bethsaida, 8:22-26

## II. THE CROSS AND ITS FORESHADOWING, 8:27—16:8

A. The turning point, 8:27—9:29

1. Caesarea Philippi and the first passion prediction, 8:27—9:1
2. The Transfiguration, 9:2-8
3. Discourse at the foot of the mountain, 9:9-13
4. Healing of the epileptic boy, 9:14-29

B. The return to Galilee, 9:30-50

1. The second passion prediction, 9:30-32
2. Teaching on 'little ones', 9:33-48
  - (a) Receiving a child, 9:33-37
  - (b) The man who cast out demons, 9:38-41
  - (c) The danger of causing a little one to sin, 9:42-48
3. Fire and salt, 9:49-50

C. On the way to Jerusalem, 10:1-52

1. Geographical introduction, 10:1
2. Divorce, 10:2-12
3. Children, 10:13-16
4. Rich Men, 10:17-31
5. The third passion prediction, 10:32-34
6. Leaders among the disciples, 10:35-45
7. Transition section: Blind Bartimaeus, 10:46-52

The Jerusalem ministry, 11:1—12:44

1. Jesus enters, 11:1-14
2. Jesus acts, 11: 15 -21
3. Jesus teaches, 11:22—12:44
  - (a) Prayer and faith, 11:22-25
  - (b) Authority, 11:27-33
  - (c) The parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants, 12:1-12
  - (d) The question of tribute, 12:13-17
  - (e) The question of the resurrection, 12:18-27
  - (f) The greatest commandment, 12:28-34
  - (g) The question concerning David's Son, 12:35-37
  - (h) The denunciation of the scribes, 12:38-40
  - (i) The widow's true offering, 12:41-44

E. The apocalyptic discourse, 13:1-37

F. The passion narrative, 14:1—15:47

1. The decision to kill Jesus, 14:1-2
2. The anointing at Bethany, 14:3-9
3. Judas and the conspiracy, 14:10-11
4. Preparation for the Passover, 14:12-16
5. The betrayal is forecast, 14:17-21
6. 'The Lord's Supper', 14:22-25
7. On the way to Gethsemane, 14:26-31
8. In the garden, 14:32-42
9. The arrest, 14:43-50
10. The anonymous young man, 14:51-52
11. The trial before the Sanhedrin, 14:53-65



12. Peter's denial, 14:66-72
13. The trial before Pilate, 15:1-5
14. Releasing a prisoner, 15:6-15
15. The crucifixion, 15:16-47
  - (a) The mockery, 15:16-20
  - (b) The crucifixion, 15:21-32
  - (c) The death, 15:33-41
  - (d) The burial, 15:42-47

G. The empty tomb, 16:1-8

H. The ending of Mark, 16:9-20

**Note on the Markan ending:**

Special mention must be made of the difficulties which attend the ending of Mark's Gospel. The following summarises the issues well.

The ending of Mark 16 is in doubt. In fact there are two endings—one which is the section vs. 9-20 (as in the AV [and also the NIV and the second edition of the RSV]) and another ending [as RSV footnote 'm'] . . . An overruling majority of manuscripts contain the full twenty verses and the earliest Christian writings show an acquaintance with them, assuming their genuineness.

For all this it seems that many important manuscripts show that the original Gospel ended at v.8 . . . Certain internal elements of vs. 9-20 raise doubts as to whether this was the author's creation eg. the fuller description of Mary Magdalene after her first mention in v.1. Verses 9-20 seem to be gathered elements from the other three Gospels. Stylistic differences are also present.

On the other hand such an abrupt ending at v.8 is also inconsistent with the nature of the Gospel, and the intention of its writing. This has led to the [surmise] that the end (a scroll end?) has been lost and another substituted. A further idea was that Mark had intended to „go on into an account such as is the Acts of the Apostles. The matter is indeterminate, but it is sufficient to say that the early Church accepted its substance, and to a great degree it must reflect their mind, and therefore have value.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bingham. The Gospel according to Mark. pp. 12f.

## MARK: CHAPTER ONE

### I. THE EARLIER MINISTRY, 1: 1 8:26

#### A. THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL, 1:1-13

##### 1. Keynote, 1: 1

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God

**1:1** The beginning of the gospel Mark's concern is not just biography. This is the commencement of his 'life changing proclamation'.

*of Jesus Christ* 'Jesus' is the Greek form of the Hebrew Yehoshua, Aramaic Yeshua, and means 'God is Salvation'. Until the beginning of the second century, it was a very common name among Jews. Josephus lists twenty by that name of whom ten are contemporary with Jesus.

*Christ* 'Christ' (Gr. Christos) is the translation of the Hebrew 'Messiah', meaning 'the anointed one'. This word was a common title for Jesus later, and carries a very full meaning. Cf. Mark 8:29 where Jesus began to teach concerning the Cross only when the truth of his Messiahship was recognised (see also Matt. 16:16-17). All the other uses of 'Christ' follow the events of Caesarea Philippi. As Christ, Jesus stands as the fulfilment of the promises of God to Israel.

*the Son of God* See Ps. 2:2, 6-7 for the conjunction of Christ ('anointed'), Son and King. Hence Jesus commences his ministry with the declaration of 'the kingdom of God' (Mark 1:15).

##### 2. Biblical prophecies, 1:2-3

2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight—'

**1:2** *As it is written* This gospel accords with that which was written in the past, (cf. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). The point is that God, having entered into a covenant with Israel, is keeping his promise.

*in Isaiah the prophet* The first quotation is not from Isaiah<sup>1</sup>; it is from Mal. 3:1, which refers to the Lord coming in judgement. When we observe the messenger in Mark and the way he appears (Mark 1:6) then the whole context of Malachi comes to life; see Mal. 4:5-6 (cf. Matt. 11:13). The messenger is coming because the Lord is coming in judgement. It is therefore imperative that Israel should repent, and do so quickly (cf. Matt. 3:7-10).

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<sup>1</sup> Some Greek manuscripts have the (evidently amended) form 'in the prophets': see Metzger. p. 73. for a discussion.

1:3 *the voice of one crying* . . The second quotation does come from Isaiah 40:3, a message of redemption to captive Israel. There is thus a twofold thrust to the message which came to Israel.

*Prepare the way of the Lord* Both quotations insist that preparation must take place before the coming of the Lord. Malachi says that ‘my messenger’ (the literal meaning of ‘Malachi’) will prepare the way, and Isaiah records the ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’ as making the appeal to his hearers.

### 3. John the Baptist and Jesus, 1:4-13

4 John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. and there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan and when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.’

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.

1:4 *John the baptiser*. Elsewhere he is called ‘the Baptist’ (Mark 6:25, cf. 6:24).

*appeared in the wilderness* ‘Wilderness’ does not refer specifically to deserts as such; the Greek word used, *ερώμιος*, means ‘any lonely uncultivated region’.<sup>2</sup> There was great significance attaching to ‘the wilderness’. It was the place of Israel’s salvation from Egypt and the place where so many of God’s mighty acts were done. In the prophets the hope of Israel is also strongly linked to ‘the wilderness’ (cf. Isa. 32: 16; 40:3-5; Hosea 2:14; etc.). It is possible to say that the wilderness was both a place of retreat (often from the Romans) as well as an eschatological focal point.

This would help explain the incredible popularity of John. Although he was not authorised in contemporary Judaism, even the leaders of Israel attended<sup>3</sup> and he stood with great authority. John is the one who is calling on men and women to prepare for the coming of the Lord both in judgement and redemption. How are they to prepare? They are to repent! Cf. Isa. 40:4 for the dimensions of the preparation.

*preaching a baptism of repentance*<sup>4</sup> This is the thrust of John’s preparatory ministry. He was calling Israel back to its covenant relationship to God because God was coming in judgement (cf. Matt. 3:7-12). ‘Repentance’ literally means ‘a change of mind’, although in practice it means the repudiation of all that opposed to the truth of God. As such it is a radical turning, the complete re-orientation of the human spirit.

*for the forgiveness of sins* Baptism did not bring forgiveness but was ‘with a view to (Gr. *eis*) the forgiveness of sins’. By baptism (which expressed submission to the demands of the covenant), associated with the necessary repentance, the people could anticipate forgiveness at the coming of the kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Harper, pp. 1f.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 3:7.

<sup>4</sup> See Pennicook. The Baptism of John, for an examination of the significance of the baptism administered by John.

**1:5** *all the country of Judea John was ministering in the southern end of the Jordan Valley*, away from the settled areas (see ‘wilderness’ above). The effect of John’s preaching was powerful: vast crowds came to him and were baptised by him confessing their sin. Although the full details of John’s preaching are not given in this Gospel, the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi contain the essence of it. Judgement and redemption are expected and the crowds responded by acknowledging their failure.

**1:6** *clothed with camel’s hair* John’s appearance and lifestyle were deliberately intended (by whom?) to remind people of Elijah, see 2 Kings 1:7-8; Mal. 4:5; see also John 1:21, where there was a clear expectation of the coming of Elijah (Mark 9:11-13).

**1:7** This returns to the content of John’s message.  
*he who is mightier than I* It is the Lord who is to come (Mark 1:3).

**1:8** ‘John was strong in proclamation inducing water baptism, but the One coming will baptise with the Holy Spirit. This statement, although not enlarged upon means the coming One has power to do what no man has authority or power to do—cf. Joel 2:28, Acts 1:4-8, 11:16.’<sup>5</sup> The anticipation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit related to the anticipation of the forgiveness of sins.

**1:9-11** The baptism of Jesus is not explained here. Matt. 3:15 adds that Jesus was baptised because it was necessary ‘to fulfil all righteousness’. The significance of the event here is that he who will baptise with the Spirit was himself baptised in the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:38). my beloved Son The reference to Ps. 2:7 has already been noted above. Isa. 42:1 is also quoted in the Father’s declaration,

*with thee I am well pleased* Why is the Father well pleased with Christ?. It is not because of his baptism but because of its significance, namely, that by his baptism he is assuming the role of ‘Christ’—‘the anointed one’ whose anointing is with a view to him subduing the nations and his being king over against the rebellion of the kings of the earth. In doing so, ‘he will bring forth justice to the nations’ (Isa. 42:1). In Isaiah, ‘justice’ is the Hebrew word *mishpat*, which carries the meaning of justice as judgement. Cf. also John 12:31; 16:8-11.<sup>66</sup> The addition of the quotation from Isa. 42 also links Jesus with the ministry of the ‘the Servant of the Lord’ which Isaiah develops.

**1:12** *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* His reception of the Spirit was with a view to his ministry (so Isa. 42:1). Having received the Spirit, therefore, Jesus was immediately thrust into the action of the kingdom. The Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. The wilderness was not just a place of solitude but was associated with demons (Luke 8:29; 11:24 etc.).

**1:13** *forty days.* Even if the forty days are a literal period, the number forty carries with it the reminder of many of the great events in Israel’s past, for example, the period of rain (judgement) in Gen. 7:4, and in particular the period spent by Moses on Sinai (Exod. 24:18) and by Elijah in the wilderness on the way to Mount Horeb (another

<sup>5</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*. p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Westermann, p. 95. who says that the judgement anticipated is ‘the Gentiles’ gods’ claim to divinity being declared to be nothing’. Hence the reason for judgement in John 16:11.

name for Sinai, 1 Kings 19:8).

**tempted by Satan** ‘Satan’ is the Hebrew word for ‘adversary’, though here it refers specifically to the personal adversary of God, elsewhere described as the Serpent, the Devil etc. (cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:2). It is true that Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are (Heb. 4:15) but, although Mark does not give us the details, here the temptation was directly related to the clear word of God which Jesus had just received. As such it was an attempt to repeat the event of Eden (‘Has God said?’). Satan must bring him under bondage lest in his submission to God he accomplish the work of ‘healing all that were oppressed by the devil’ (Acts 10:38).

**wild animals** This demonstrates how deserted the place was.

**the angels ministered to him** We must understand that the conflict drained Jesus, because the Son of God was also fully man. As man who is totally dependent upon God he knows the sustaining power of God. It must not be assumed that the kingdom was established apart from conflict, nor, equally, that it can ever be known apart from conflict (cf., for example, Eph. 6:10-17).

## **B. THE GALILEAN MINISTRY, 1:14—7:23**

### **1. First manifestations of power, 1:14—2:12**

#### ***(a) Announcement of the kingdom of God, 1:14-15***

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.’

**1:14 after John was arrested** There was a time lapse between verses 13 and 14. Jesus’ public ministry did not commence until after John was removed. It may be that this refers to Jesus’ Galilean ministry, since John 3:22-27 indicates that their ministries were contemporaneous, at least in Judea. Hence Jesus came into Galilee.

**preaching the gospel of God** The content of this gospel is contained in verse 15 which is a general summary of what was said. However, it must be stressed that the gospel is never reducible to mere words. Always it is the action of the word of God. Hence the action which ‘immediately’ follows is as much part of the proclamation (cf. 1:27 where his exorcism is equated with teaching).

**the gospel of God** This is not a humanly devised message. Cf. Rev. 14:6 where the reference is to ‘an eternal gospel’. Its origin and therefore its power is divine.

**1:15 The time is fulfilled.** Whereas John had looked forward to the coming one, the time for waiting is over.

**the kingdom of God is at hand.** We must recall the dynamic nature of the kingdom. The kingdom, or active reign, of God is now beginning to break in. This was initiated by his anointing Jesus with the Spirit as that related to the kingdom functions of Ps. 2, that is, the complete subjugation of all the enemies of God, and so of all man’s enemies.

**repent and believe in the gospel.** The proclamation presents an urgency to life. An immediate response is required. There can be no neutral hearing of this proclamation. Those who hear must change their whole attitude and believe the proclamation which is being given concerning the coming kingdom.

**(b) Call of the first four disciples, 1:16-20**

16 And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.' 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.

What follows is a description of the action of the gospel, as God in Christ establishes the kingdom. The urgency of this is expressed often by the repeated use of the word 'immediately'.

**1:16 casting their net** .A circular drag-net was used weighted down with small stones.

**1:17-18 Follow me** The blunt command 'Come!' came with authority, since immediately they left their nets and followed him. John 1:35ff. shows that they had already had contact with Jesus and knew him and his message. They may already have expected his call, although their immediate response may indicate that they were divinely moved.

**fishers of men** This may have the sense of judgement, as in Jer. 16:16, and would then mean that there is a judgement as men and women are captured for God (cf. Matt. 13:47-50).

**1:19-20** James and John were evidently from a (relatively) prosperous family, since they had hired servants. They too responded immediately. Clearly these four men were more than simply curious; they all followed Jesus as 'disciples' that is, as learners committed to their teacher (cf. John 4: 1-2). A 'disciple' has been called an undistracted learner.

**(c) Teaching with power, 1:21-22**

21 And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

**1:21 Capernaum** This town was situated on the north western shore of the Sea of Galilee and was a major trading town.

he entered the synagogue and taught Jesus exercised the right, open to any Jewish adult male, of teaching in the synagogue.

**1:22 astonished** . . . authority Unlike those who usually taught in the synagogues, Jesus' teaching was with authority. This means more than that he spoke with confidence but that in his speaking the truth communicated itself. The scribes, on the other hand, indulged in exposition which 'was often pettifogging, legalistic and cribbed'.<sup>7</sup> They certainly did not move their hearers as Jesus did. The power of his word struck the hearers with great effect. His teaching was a communication of the dynamic of the kingdom.

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<sup>7</sup> Bingham. The Gospel according to Mark. p. 22.



**(d) Healings with power, 1:23-45**

23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; 24 and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' 25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' 26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27 And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' 28 And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

29 And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her. 31 And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered together about the door. 34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, 37 and they found him and said to him, 'Every one is searching for you.' 38 And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out.' 39 And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

40 And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.' 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be clean.' 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 And he sternly charged him, and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people.' 45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

**1:23-26** These verses illustrate the power and authority of Jesus' teaching, the action of the word. Jesus was proclaiming the reality of the kingdom and, therefore, it was not surprising that the powers of darkness should rise up to resist him. 'Capernaum had the climate of unbelief in which such powers flourished (Matt. 11:23-24).'<sup>8</sup>

**1:24** What have you to do with us What authority do you have over us? This is in reality a denial of any authority to Jesus.

**I know who you are** The demon in the man was forced by Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom to give unwilling testimony to the truth of who Jesus was. However, the demon no doubt was attempting the same thing as Satan in the temptation, namely, 'If you are the Son of God.'

**1:25 Be silent, and come out of him** This command was sharp. The demons have no true rights over the lives of men and women and may not, then, resist the purpose of God for them. The kingdom is God's. Certainly Jesus neither needs nor wants attestation by demons.

**1:26** 'The kingdom of God is not in word but in power' (1 Cor. 4:20) and so the

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<sup>8</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 23.

demon was cast out, though convulsing the man and screaming out as it was expelled.

**came out of him** Before the kingdom demons must obey.

**1:27 they questioned among themselves.** Having seen what happened the people engaged in a debate amongst themselves. The miraculous had not brought them to faith, although they were certainly deeply impressed.

**a new teaching.** They call Jesus' exorcism 'teaching'. His action is as much a communication of the truth of the kingdom as his words. The point is that the kingdom is in action; even demons must obey his command.

**1:28** The news of Jesus' 'abilities' spread throughout all Galilee.

**1:29-31 she served them** The healing was so complete that she immediately began to minister to them.

**1:32-33** These events have been taking place on the sabbath (v. 21) although there has thus far been no reaction on that account.

**at sundown.** The sabbath was finished. No doubt the people had waited until they could legitimately carry their burdens any distance.

**the whole city.** All were present, as the action of the kingdom proceeded and dominated people were liberated.

**1:34 he would not permit the demons to speak because they knew him.** Jesus kept his Messianic identity a secret; he would certainly not allow it to be revealed by the forces of evil. It can only be revealed to faith, which the crowds and disciples, and most certainly the demons, did not have. The demons' knowledge of Christ was not faith and so could not truly communicate who he was.

**1:35** Prayer was significant to Jesus, cf. Luke 3:21; 5:15-16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 1:1; etc. He prayed at night and in times of tension, and, as far as possible, away from interruption.

**1:36 Simon . . . pursued him.** They searched strenuously for him. It seems that Simon and the others were more anxious for action than prayer. But without prayer there could be no effective action, even for Jesus.

**1:37-38** The crowds wanted Jesus, no doubt because of the spectacle and the healings. But he left Capernaum, not just to heal elsewhere, but to preach.

**that is why I came out.** From Capernaum and/or from God. If the meaning is from Capernaum, we should note that his prayer was with a view to his ministry.

**1:39** This was the full ministry of the kingdom.

**1:40 a leper.** Today leprosy is also known as Hansen's disease, although it seems that in the New Testament period it referred to any deep skin disease. It led to exclusion from the community, with the cry of 'unclean', and doubtless consequent tragic effects on the whole person.

**beseeking him.** He knows the agony of his situation and begs for release. He has surely heard of Jesus' actions elsewhere.



If you will He knows that Jesus can heal.

**1:41** Moved with pity, he surely have had profound effects.  
**touched him** The act of touching itself would

**1:42** immediately the leprosy left him Jesus spoke and it happened.

**1:43** Jesus sternly charged him to remain silent. This was lest the healing become more important to the people than the teaching for which he has come.

**1:44** **go, show yourself to the priest.** Jesus was not against the Jewish system; indeed, he scrupulously kept the Law himself, and in commanding the man to go to the priest he was fulfilling its demands. The Law, after all, came from God.

**1:45** **began to talk freely.** Previously the man would have been socially restricted in any conversation. Now he cannot but announce his healing. However, the man's inability to remain silent led to pressures on Jesus which were only relieved by his not (openly) entering the towns.

## MARK: CHAPTER TWO

### *(e) The power to forgive, 2:1-12*

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

**2:1** when he returned to Capernaum This was at the conclusion of his first missionary circuit. Capernaum was evidently Jesus' home base, for Mark records that it was reported that [Jesus] was at home.

**2:2** The impression given is that the vast crowd and the events which attended their presence took place in Jesus' own home.

**preaching the word** The emphasis was on preaching rather than only healing.

**2:3-4** **The story is well known.** The crowds which came included a paralytic carried by four men. The roof of the house was of dried mud interlaced with sticks and rocks etc. Removing part of the roof was reasonably simple, as would also have been the later repair.

**2:5** **their faith.** We may assume that the faith is that of the four friends, although there is no reason to exclude the paralytic.

your sins are forgiven. In saying this, Jesus was going to the heart of the issue. Whether or not this man's paralysis was the direct result of sin, it was forgiveness which lay at the heart of the word which Jesus was preaching, since it was the word of the kingdom. If the kingdom is present, it must result in forgiveness (see Mark 1:4, 14-

**2:6-7** The response to Jesus' declaration was immediate and strong. The Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy, a capital crime (cf. Mark 14:64). They knew that only

God can forgive sins (cf. Isa. 43:25; 44:22) and they recognised that Jesus was not simply speaking on God's behalf but was actually administering forgiveness. As such he was claiming equality with God (see John 5:17-18).

**2:8-9 The scribes.** Scribes were the professional lawyers, and were present to be critical. They had been sitting in silence, but Jesus had discerned their thoughts (cf. John 2:24f.).

Which is easier To say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' would no doubt appear the easier course, since presumably it could not be seen, so, for example, in verse 10 where it needed to be demonstrated. However, from a fuller perspective, we may say that to say 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk' would be easier. To say 'Your sins are forgiven' must mean that sins are forgiven. That, of course, requires the action of the Cross.

**2:10-11 that you may know.** It is Jesus' authority to forgive which is about to be validated. The healing is a demonstration of the forgiveness.

the Son of man This phrase means more than just 'man' or 'human', which is the way the phrase is used in Ezekiel. It refers to the 'son of man' of Dan. 7:13f. to whom the kingdom, the totality of rule, is given.

**2:12** Since the crowd, and in particular the scribes, would have assumed that the healing was the more difficult, Jesus did the more difficult thus proving the easier.

**amazed and glorified God** They continued to glorify God. However, the healing with its associated truth also caused the opposition to appear and increasingly to express itself.

## 2. The heightening of controversy, 2:13—3:6

### (a) *The call of Levi, 2:13-17*

13 He went out again beside the sea; and all the crowd gathered about him, and he taught them. 14 And as he passed on, he saw Levi the Son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him.

15 And as he sat at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were sitting with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him. 16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; [ came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'

**2:13** The crowds kept coming to Jesus, 'the flowing response to the Messianic action'.<sup>1</sup>

**2:14 Levi.** He calls himself 'Matthew' in Matt. 9:9ff. He was a tax collector, an occupation which made him hated, since it involved working for the government of the hated Edomite, Herod<sup>2</sup>, in the collection of tribute.

Follow me Levi's response is identical to that of the four men in Mark 1:16-20. Again we may presume that Levi had had some previous contact with and knowledge of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> Bingham. *The Gospel according to Mark*. p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luke 3:1. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. and was the tetrarch of Galilee from 4 BC to AD 39.

**2:15 sat at table.** According to Luke 5:29, Levi ‘made a great feast in his house’, inviting a large number of his fellow tax collectors and associates as well as Jesus and his disciples.

**sinners.** This term was applied to those who were not meticulous in living according to the strictly Pharisaic interpretation of the Law.

**there were many who followed him.** The reference is probably to the number of tax collectors and sinners who had been attracted to Jesus through the call and response of Levi.

**2:16 scribes of the Pharisees** (Some readings have ‘scribes and the Pharisees’.) These scribes belonged to the Pharisaic Party. In their traditions, sitting with the ‘tax collectors and sinners’ would render them unclean.

**2:17** Jesus’ reply showed that the scribes’ attitude towards purity was wrong. True purity flowed from repentance which brought forgiveness. In this, he was consistent with the thrust of the Law with its sacrificial provisions (cf. Matt. 9:13).

**Those who are well...** ‘For Jesus to refuse to have dealings with the disreputable would be as absurd as for a doctor to refuse to have to do with the sick; he has come on purpose to call sinners, and the disreputable people he is associating with are obviously members of that class.<sup>33</sup> The response of the scribes showed that they did not regard themselves as needing forgiveness. Cf. the reaction of John the Baptist to them in Matt. 3:7-10.

***(b) Argument about fasting, 2:18-22***

18 Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ 19 And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. 21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins.’

**2:18** While the Pharisees were hostile to the disciples of John, they were one with them in their observance of Jewish traditional fasting. What was significant was the contrast with the disciples of Jesus. Jesus’ disciples were not displaying the same earnestness and so their relationship to orthodoxy was called into question.

**2:19** Jesus’ reply was that fasting required a clear reason. There was no reason at the moment. Indeed the opposite was true; it was a time for rejoicing, since they were with the bridegroom. This was a picture of the Jewish wedding practice of the bridegroom spending a time in celebration with his friends before going to collect his bride for the marriage. It was not until he left that the feasting would cease.

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<sup>3</sup> Moule, p. 107.

**2:20 the bridegroom is taken away from them** This is the first ‘shadow of the Cross’ in this Gospel. That day ‘That day’ has a sense of the ominous to it. However, Jesus’ emphasis is upon the sheer joy of the gospel which he both proclaims and embodies.

**2:21-22** These verses ‘must refer primarily to the old Judaism into which frame the Gospel cannot fit. Its dynamism needs a new container. The [wineskins] were leather sustaining only one ferment. The Law of course is not rejected (cf. Matt. 5:23-24) but the Gospel is clearly "new"’,<sup>4</sup> In Luke 5:39, the deeply entrenched resistance of the old against the new is seen.

**(c) Controversy about the sabbath, 2:23-28**

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

**2:23-24** ‘The actions of the Pharisees cannot be understood unless we see that Jesus and his followers represented (in the Pharisees’ minds) a rival and growing group.’<sup>5</sup> They evidently followed Jesus in order to detect any failures which they could use against him. To them, he and his followers were representative of the despised common people who were ignorant of, and uncaring about, the niceties of the rabbinic schools. But more, he had an authority which contrasted with their lack and brought a freedom and joy conspicuously absent from their lives.

The pharisees could not criticise Jesus at all. Even the charge of ‘sabbath breaking’ could not be sustained (it was not brought up at his trial). The charge was levelled at his disciples. The act of eating was not unlawful (cf. Deut. 23:25); what was at issue was the disciples unconscious carelessness about the subtle points of rabbinic traditions concerning the sabbath.

**2:25-26** Jesus’ reply was that David’s behaviour showed that hunger took precedence over even the rules concerning the tabernacle; how much more then does it take precedence over petty traditions. It was a simple fact that the Scriptures never reproved David’s action.

**2:27 The sabbath was made for man...** This is evidently a reflection on the rabbinic saying ‘The sabbath is delivered unto you, and ye are not delivered to the sabbath’. Jesus is observing the gracious purpose of the law of sabbath. Man was not created just to exemplify unchanging theological principles; rather, the law was given to minister to man under God.

**2:28** ‘If the sabbath was made for man’s spiritual and physical good, and not vice versa, then the Son of man is Master of the sabbath and can interpret its regulations

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<sup>4</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark, p. 27.

with reference to need. This, in fact, was what the rabbis had been trying to do themselves, though in a wrong-headed way'.<sup>6</sup>

Son of man For the significance of this phrase, see on Mark 2:11.

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<sup>6</sup> Cole, p. 74.

## MARK: CHAPTER THREE

### *(d) A healing on the sabbath, 3:1—6*

1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come here.' 4 And he said to them, 'Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

The issues here are similar to those of the preceding paragraph.

**3:1 synagogue** Probably this is still in Capernaum.

**3:2 they watched him** Alan Cole calls them a 'theological delegation from Jerusalem'<sup>1</sup> they are there to catch Jesus out and not to see his Messianic ministry. Certainly they had no compassion for the man with the disability.

**3:3-4 Come here** Jesus, sensing the attitude of the opposition, deliberately calls the man to come forward. Doubtless he was also doing it for the man's sake (cf. Mark 5:30ff.) but clearly he was exposing the nature of the bondage of the Jewish traditions which were in contrast to the true nature of the kingdom of God.

**Is it lawful** This question is unanswerable. Jesus was not asking 'is it right in itself?' but 'is it legal?' Even if it was not absolutely lawful, it became so in the light of the alternative. Obviously, the Pharisees were faced with the impossibility of doing nothing. Either they would help, and do good, or hinder, and so do evil. Cf. Matt. 12:11 where the parable about the animal falling into a pit makes the point even more clear.

**they were silent** Their silence was proof of his righteousness and of their pettiness. Jesus had not given them a legal option but a moral option, and they would rather have allowed someone to suffer than to break their law.

**3:5 hardness of heart** Their unreasonableness rightly angers Jesus.

**Stretch out your hand** The command carries with it the thrust to faith obedience.

**3:6 Pharisees... Herodians** Evidently the Herodians, who were the political antithesis to the Pharisees, were equally hostile to Jesus, though the reason is unknown. Possibly they sensed a political movement beginning which may threaten

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<sup>1</sup> Cole, p. 75.

them. Again, possibly the hatred of Herodias for John was already being transferred to Jesus (cf. Mark 6:17-19). Either way, Jesus' ministry caused mutual enemies to unite against him.

### 3. Power and instruction given to the twelve, 3:7—5:43

#### (a) *Summary of healings and exorcisms, 3:7-12*

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed; also from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from about Tyre and Sidon a great multitude, hearing all that he did, came to him. 9 And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they should crush him; 10 for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. 11 And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' 12 And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

**3:7 a great multitude...** followed The withdrawal of Jesus indicated his distaste for 'brawling' or conflict. The crowd which followed him did so because of his popularity and contrasted strongly with the opposition of the Pharisees and the Herodians. Doubtless the adulation of the crowd also provoked increased opposition.

**3:8-12 a great multitude, hearing all that he did, came to him** 'The ship saves the pressure of the crowd (cf. Luke 5:10 which must have presented a terrifying "mob" spectacle in its desire for healing and release. The cries of the demonic powers must have added to the confusion—all this [Jesus] handles quietly and exercises his authority in keeping the demonic testimony unspoken. Matt. 12:24 shows how the opposition derided the significant ministry attributing it to an evil source.'<sup>2</sup>

#### (b) *Appointment of the Twelve, 3: 13-19a*

13 And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach 15 and have authority to cast out demons: 16 Simon whom he surnamed Peter; 17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, whom he surnamed Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder; 18 Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

**3:13 he went up on the mountain** This was probably to escape the crowds.

**and called to him those whom he desired** Luke tells us that he spent the night in prayer before this (Luke 6:12).

**3:14 he appointed twelve** 'Appointed' is in Greek 'made'. Possibly the thought is that he made, or created, the twelve, as a deliberate reflection of the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Matt. 16:18). As such, Jesus is seen to be gathering together an obedient people of God, the people of the kingdom. Indeed their calling is the action of Jesus' kingdom ministry.

**to be sent out to preach** They were to engage in the same ministry as Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*. p. 29.



**3:15** and have authority to cast out demons This authority was the seal of their commission to preach. Their authority was likewise the action of the kingdom, since their master had come in order ‘that he might destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8). He is at work through them.

**3:17-19 Boanerges** Possibly based on such outbursts as Mark 9:38.

**Bartholomew** This is a patronymic, meaning ‘son of Talmai... He probably had another name as well. Sometimes he is identified with Nathanael, who is also associated with Philip (John 1:45).’<sup>33</sup>

**Matthew** This was a common name, and this Matthew is probably the same person as the Levi described in Mark 2:14, but Mark does not indicate this. Indeed, apart from Peter, James and John, and Judas Iscariot, none of these names recurs in this Gospel.<sup>44</sup>

**Simon the Cananaean** Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13 call Simon ‘the Zealot’. Although the Zealots as a formal group did not appear until much later (AD 66), there were already many who exhibited the extreme nationalism at this early date.

**Iscariot** This name is usually explained as meaning ‘man of Kerieth’, with Kerieth being either the village Kerieth-hezron (Josh. 15:25) twelve miles south of Hebron, or Kerieth in Moab (Jet. 48:24).

### **(c) *The charge of madness, 3:19b-21***

Then he went home; <sup>20</sup>and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. <sup>21</sup>And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, ‘He is beside himself.’

**3:19b-20** Evidently Jesus returned to his home in Capernaum. As usual the crowds came in such numbers, demanding his attention, that there was no time for, and presumably no interest in, eating.

**3:21 they went out** Jesus family went out, from their home in Capernaum (was this the home where Jesus stayed?) or possibly even in Nazareth, in order to seize him, to restrain him, since people were saying that Jesus was out of his mind. His devotion to preaching was seen as pathological fanaticism. Comparison with Mark 3:31 shows that Mary, Jesus’ mother, was part of this attempt to restrain Jesus.

The point is that Jesus was not understood by those who were closest to him, far less by the leaders of the Jews. ‘We must also remember the incredible nature of all that was happening—something of the nature of a "revival" with its attendant passions etc.’<sup>55</sup>

### **(d) *The charge of possessing Beelzebul, 3:22-30***

<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out demons’. <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him, and said to them in parables, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.

<sup>3</sup> Cranfield, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> Lane, p. 135, says that these men ‘remain shadowy figures’.

<sup>5</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup>But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house.

<sup>28</sup>Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever

blasphemies they utter; <sup>29</sup>but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'— <sup>30</sup>for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

**3:22 He is possessed by Beelzebul** The theological delegation from Jerusalem was making charges, but not directly to Jesus. Being from Jerusalem, this group would have had far more authority and prestige than the provincial scribes, from whom Mark is clearly distinguishing them. The implication may be that the authorities in Jerusalem were now concerned enough to send their own special delegation to investigate. The name 'Beelzebul', although its precise meaning is uncertain<sup>66</sup>, the meaning is clearly 'Lord of all that is unclean', hence, by the prince of demons he casts out demons.

**3:23 he called them to him** The charge made was extremely serious, so Jesus took the initiative and summoned the scribes.

**parables** Jesus makes use of comparisons and analogies to respond. See 4:2ff.

**How can Satan cast out Satan?** Exorcisms were not uncommon (cf. Matt. 12:27), although there may have been misunderstanding concerning their source. Jesus leaves no doubt here; Satan himself is suffering a frontal attack and this is nothing less than the action of the kingdom (cf. Matt. 12:28). By means of three parables (w . 24, 25, 26), Jesus makes it clear that their charge against him is nonsense. Neither man nor devil could be thus divided against himself, so as to make war upon himself to the degree in which Jesus was now doing it. Even if others should be Satanic deceptions, these exorcisms are not. These are clearly the action of the Spirit (Matt. 12:28), by whom Jesus was anointed and empowered for the action of the kingdom.

**3:27 no one can enter a strong man's house...** It is plain that Jesus is far stronger than Satan, the strong man. If he is plundering Satan's goods (men and women) then he must be stronger than the strong man.

**3:28-30** 'To say the source of this authority and power is Satanic is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. This is holy work—not evil. Misjudging is not forgivable—it is associated with deliberate rejection of the Spirit and His illumination. To such, forgiveness is unable to be given...,<sup>77</sup> Knowing the Scriptures as they apparently did (cf. Matt. 11:2-6) and seeing Jesus in action and hearing him, they deliberately chose to ascribe his activities to an unclean spirit.

**(e) Jesus' true family, 3:31-35**

<sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you.' <sup>33</sup> And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' <sup>34</sup> And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.'

<sup>66</sup> Various suggestions have been made: Lord of the flies; Lord of the dung heap; Lord of the dwelling. Lord of the earth.

<sup>77</sup> Bingham. The Gospel according to Mark, p. 31.

**3:31-32 his mother and his brothers came** Possibly this is still related to verse 21. They could not get to Jesus because of the crowd in and around the house. Therefore, the crowd passed on the message to him.

**3:33-35** Jesus' reply is that to do the will of God is the true nature of the Son of God, therefore other sons and daughters will—as he—wish to do God's will. His concern for his mother is not diminished (see John 19:26-27), but it and other family relationships must be seen as incapable of making a claim upon Jesus in the work of the kingdom. Those who are bound to him are those who are one with him in obedience to the kingdom.

## MARK: CHAPTER FOUR

### *(f) The secret of the kingdom of God, 4:1-34*

#### **(i) The parable of the soils, 4:1-9**

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it, on the sea; and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he taught them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them, 3 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it had not much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil; 6 and when the sun rose it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.' 9 And he said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'

**4:1 a very large crowd** The presence of great crowds continued. We may assume that the practice of Jesus sitting in the boat in order to teach was regular, at least around Capernaum.

**4:2 parables** A parable is 'truth in pictorial form'. To those who have ears to hear the truth is plain, while to those who are not people of faith, the truth is hidden within the parable. Indeed, the change in method by Jesus to the use of parables will actually effect a sifting in the audience. Reference to Mark 1:14-15 will show that the thrust of Jesus teaching was always the dynamic of the kingdom (see Mark 4:11, 26, 30).

**4:3-8** The principle of farming was that seed was first sown by hand and then ploughed in.

**4:9 He who has ears to hear, let him hear** Beware of superficial hearing. In the explanation which follows the parable, the issue of hearing is prominent (vv. 12, 15, 16, 18, 20). But it is hearing of a special kind. The teaching is not directed towards the intellect but towards the spirit.

#### **(ii) The explanation, 4:10-20**

10 And when he was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. 11 And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; 12 so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven.' 13 And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is

sown in them. 16 And these in like manner are the ones sown upon rocky ground, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns; they are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 20 But those that were sown upon the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.'

**4:10 asked him concerning the parables** This verse shows that the disciples discerned the change in method, hence their enquiry. Evidently they found his parabolic teaching most difficult.

**4:11 To you has been given** 'The use of parable at once makes clear and yet conceals. Only he who has the key may open the meaning.'<sup>1</sup> At the same time we observe that this perception must be a gift. Such is the sovereign action of the kingdom.

**the secret of the kingdom** The truth of the kingdom is not determined by a person's response, but the recognition of the truth of the kingdom requires revelation, hence it is a 'mystery'.

**4:12 see but not perceive** The parables are designed to lock men and women into their unbelief. This quotation from Isa. 6 concerns God's judgement upon Israel's unbelief. The people of Israel would hear the prophet's word but would not believe him and so be saved from impending judgement. The prophetic word would actually flush out the unbelief and re-enforce it.

**4:13-14 Do you not understand this parable?** This question indicates that they ought to have understood this simple parable without explanation. Also this parable may be seen as foundational. It sums up the teaching of Jesus and the various responses to him. He is the sower; the word is his proclamation.

**4:15-20** These verses give Jesus' exposition of the parable. The issue is in verse 20. To accept the word is the reverse of the offence taken at the word by the Pharisees etc. The command of verse 9 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear' shows that the responsibility to accept the word rests upon men and women.

**(iii) The theme developed, 4:21-25**

21 And he said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand? 22 For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. 23 If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.' 24 And he said to them, 'Take heed what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. 25 For to him who has will more be given; and from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'

**4:21-22** It must not be assumed that the parables which Jesus told are designed to confuse the hearers. Quite the contrary, their purpose is to convey the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark, p. 32.

## 4:23 Therefore, Hear!

4:24-25 **Take heed what you hear** Literally this is ‘See (Gr. **blepete**) what you hear’. Perceive what you are hearing. The alternative reading in Luke 8:18, ‘take heed [see] then how you hear’, does not materially effect the meaning.

**the measure you give...** The measure of obedience and faith in hearing will be the measure by which you receive the blessings of the kingdom.

**to him who has will more be given** The response of faith opens it all up further. The reverse is also true. Again Luke adds ‘even what he thinks that he has’. The implication is that without faith the insight into the truth of the kingdom which people have is only apparent. It is a false insight, and even that will be lost.

**(iv) The kingdom is growth, 4:26-29**

26 And he said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, 27 and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’

4:26-28 The point of this parable is that the kingdom is not a human creation. The sower sows (initially Jesus, but later, of course, any preacher of the word) but the dynamic for growth is in the seed (cf. Rom. 1:16). The action of the kingdom is in the word and not in any human instrumentality. Man simply sees the result.

4:29 at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come It is not clear what the nature of the harvest is. Is it a harvest of joy (Ps. 126:5-6; Hosea 2:21-23) or a harvest of wrath (Joel 3:13; Rev. 14: 15)? What can be concluded is that there will be a point when the action of the kingdom in history will be concluded, as will all of history. Doubtless both wrath and joy will be involved on that day.

**(v) The strange growth—the mustard seed, 4:30-32**

30 And he said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’

This parable could be approached in one of two ways, although in both the conclusion will be the same. The first urges the disciples not to be deceived by small beginnings (cf. v. 28). Although it seemed that very few were true disciples of Jesus at that point (12 or perhaps 11!), there would be great growth. At Pentecost the church grew from 120 to 3000 and then very soon to over 5000. Within 40 years the gospel had spread throughout the whole of the empire and beyond. (It was estimated that in 1982 there were 63,000 new believers each day(!), with 1600 new church groups being formed each week. Such statistics may be very misleading.)

The second approach recognises that the description of the tree indicates unnatural growth. When compared with Matt.13:24-30, 47-50, the implication may be that the growth of the kingdom may initially include much that is undesirable and which will be later discarded. The ‘birds of the air’ (Mark 4:4; cf. Dan. 4:12f.; Gen. 40:19) have been

likened to Satan and his minions. 'If the tree is unnaturally large (as it seems here to be—the mustard plant attaining 4 ft.—or at the most 15 ft.) then there is a bloated aspect of the Kingdom which may not only call for judgment but actually lay the basis of it, i.e. evil is inclined to be related dynamically to judgment.'<sup>2</sup> The common conclusion is that rapid growth is a principle of the kingdom.

**(vi) Summary concerning parables, 4:33-34**

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

4:33 as they were able to hear it 'Calvin commenting speaks of Christ "accommodating Himself to their capacity" and adopting "a method of teaching which was proper and suitable to hearers, whom He knew to be not yet sufficiently prepared to receive instruction", and then goes on to suggest that his purpose in employing parables was "to keep the attention of His hearers awake till a more convenient time", in the meantime allowing them "to remain in a state of suspense". Had he spoken to the crowds in a direct way, he would have forced them to make a final decision at once, and that decision could only have been a decision of unbelief and rejection. Instead he spoke to them in an indirect way, thus engaging and maintaining their interest, and summoning them to decision without compelling them to make a final decision immediately. The parabolic teaching was at once a judgement pronounced upon their unpreparedness for the kingdom of God and also the expression of divine mercy that desires to spare and save. ,<sup>3</sup>

4:34 without a parable This 'does not mean that Jesus never spoke to the crowds except in parables like that of the mustard seed or the good Samaritan; but that what he addressed to them was consistently indirect and veiled. ,<sup>4</sup>

privately... he explained everything A disciple is a 'disciplined learner'. To those, then, who were willing to learn, that is, with a view to obedience, he explained everything. 'The crowds would understand that Jesus was talking about the kingdom of God: what they would not grasp would be the relation of the kingdom of God to his person. ,<sup>5</sup>

**(g) The storm at sea, 4:35-41**

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

<sup>2</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark, p. 34

<sup>3</sup> Cranfield, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Cranfield, pp. 171f.

<sup>5</sup> Cranfield, p. 172



**4:35-36** Following the day spent in teaching the truth of the kingdom, Jesus and his disciples launched out towards the eastern side of the lake. The Sea of Galilee, or Lake of Gennesaret, is approximately, at its maximum 21 km by 11 km and is 212 km below sea level. Its fishing industry was famous throughout the Roman empire.

**4:37 a great storm of wind** The position of the lake in the Rift Valley, surrounded as it is by hills, 'renders it liable to atmospheric down draughts and sudden storms' .<sup>6</sup>

**4:38 asleep on the cushion** Jesus was tired but also calm in the face of real danger. His tranquillity was in stark contrast to the panic of the disciples. The disciples' 'rudeness ... is an eloquent pointer to the messianic veiledness—the Son of God subject to the rudeness of men.'<sup>7</sup>

**4:39 rebuked** The storm is clearly no mere natural event, but is the result of demonic activity. The forces of evil combined to destroy him. That does not mean that there is any 'wind demon' but that the storm was the result of the demonic corruption of creation being used in an attempt to kill him. Cf. the similar attempts under king Herod, Satan's attempt to provoke Jesus to commit suicide in the temptation and the attempt to kill him in Luke 4:29. Hence Jesus 'rebuked' the wind.<sup>8</sup> The result of this rebuke is no different from the previous rebuke of the demonic.

**4:40** Jesus does not respond to the disciple's charge with a counter attack. His statement implies 'that faith ought to be active in his presence'.<sup>9</sup>

**4:41 filled with awe** This is literally, 'they feared a great fear'. The disciples had seen a revelation of Christ's lordship over creation. The great creative word which brought the wind and sea into being was operative in Jesus. Furthermore, the calming of the storm was a demonstration of his moral authority, and doubtless it was this which had the most profound effect. See the similar effect in Luke 5:8.

**Who then is this?** Cf. Mark 6:49-52; 8:17-21; 9:32; 14:37-42.

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<sup>6</sup> Paterson.

<sup>7</sup> Cranfield, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> With the possible exception of this reference. the word 'rebuke' is always used of persons. There is no reason. then, why this instance should not be personal also.

<sup>9</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark. p. 35.



# MARK

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *(h) The demoniac of Gerasa, 5:1-20*

1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. 2 And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, 3 who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; 4 for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. 6 And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him; 7 and crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' 8 For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' 9 And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. 10 Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; 12 and they begged him, 'Send us to the swine, let us enter them.' 13 So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

14 The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. 16 And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. 17 And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighbourhood. 18 And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 But he refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marvelled.

Note that the vividness of this account, and of other accounts in this Gospel, highlights the eyewitness touch.

**5:1 the other side of the sea** This was the Decapolis, a Gentile area. The word 'Decapolis' means 'ten cities', and the area was on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. In such an area, the keeping of pigs would not have been unacceptable.

**Gerasenes** There are two variants, 'Gergasenes' and 'Gadarenes'. With reference to this, Cranfield writes, 'The most likely explanation seems to be that Mark wrote "Gerasenes" with reference to a town by the lake (whose name may be preserved in the modern Kersa or Koursi on the eastern shore), but that early readers mistook this for a reference to the well-known Gerasa. Since this Gerasa was some thirty miles from the lake, it was natural that improvements should be attempted: hence the variants... At Kersa the shore is level, but about a mile further south there is a fairly steep slope

within about forty yards of the shore.’<sup>1</sup>

**5:2 tombs** These were caverns, either hewn out or natural, in the cliffs.

**unclean spirit** This was not just a ‘demon’, but it was ‘unclean’. There is nothing clean or pure about the demonic!

**5:3-4 no one could bind him** The man threatened those who passed by. so that they tried, without success, to bind him.

**5:5** This verse shows the tragedy of demon possession, as seen in particular in the vicious and destructive nature of the demonic. (Cf. the mutilations in other cultures, where there the religions involving trances etc. are often followed either by physical mutilation and/or, more subtly, psychological damage. There is also pronounced sexual immorality associated with much demonic activity.)

**5:6-7 he ran and worshipped him** We may assume that the ‘worship’ was an act of prostration and not adoration. It was the demons who were forced to prostrate themselves before Jesus whom they must acknowledge as the Son of the Most High God, which was a pagan epithet (cf. Dan. 4:2,17). James 2:19 shows that the demons ‘believe’ in God.

**What have you to do with me** This is literally, ‘What to you and to me?’ This is actually the ‘same question put by Jesus to his mother in John 2:4. The demon(s) admits that there is nothing which demons have to do with God; indeed, the very contact with him is torture and torment.

**5:8 Come out of the man, you unclean spirit** Jesus had not used the usual formulae of the professional exorcists.

**5:9 What is your name?** This is the only occasion where Jesus is recorded as having any conversation with a demon. Usually there is no opportunity for the demon to speak at all after the first unwilling recognition of Jesus.

**Legion** This name indicates the full degree of the possession. Their reply indicates that the demonic forces controlled his will and personality, that is, ‘my name... for we are many’.  
**5:10** he begged him eagerly not to send them ‘He’ is the man, and ‘them’ refers to the demons.

**out of the country** This may mean that they do not want to be sent out of the tombs with their death and decay, or the man may be begging not to be sent with them to a more desolate spot, since the townspeople had already rejected him.

**5:11-13** If the demons may not destroy the man, they must, by their very nature, destroy something else. If they cannot destroy the image of God, they must destroy God’s creation. By allowing it to happen, Jesus exposed their true nature.

**5:14-17** These verses demonstrate the reaction of the townspeople to what had happened. They were afraid, no doubt for the same reason that the disciples were also afraid in Mark 4:41. They had also lost a large amount of money through the loss of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, p. 176.

pigs. It could be asked why, when they saw the transformation of the man, they too did not worship Jesus. Possibly, their own guilty acquiescence with the man's situation had been exposed; they had nothing with which to help him, cf. 1 John 4: 18.

**they began to beg Jesus to depart** This is the most terrible judgement of all; Jesus agreed to their request!

5:18-20 'The contrast [with the fear of the townspeople] is the affection (firstly) of the healed man and secondly his complete obedience in what must have been a difficult task. The completeness of his evangelism and its results is seen in V. 20.'<sup>2</sup>

how much the Lord has done for you Jesus' instruction was for the man to tell what the Lord had done for him. His response was to tell what Jesus had done for him. Mark's equation is inescapable.

how he has had mercy on you 'Mercy' is the compassion of God expressed for the man's misery. No doubt the man was aware of the dimensions of this 'mercy' (cf. Eph. 2:1-5).

### **(i) Two miracles, 5:21-43**

There are two interwoven stories in this passage, the first concerning the daughter of Jairus and the second, contained in the first, concerning the woman with a haemorrhage.

#### **(i) The woman with the haemorrhage, 5:24b-34**

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. 25 And there was a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years, 26 and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. 27 She had heard the reports about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. 28 For she said, 'If [ touch even his garments, I shall be made well.' 29 And immediately the haemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. 30 And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Who touched my garments?' 31 And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say "Who touched me?"' 32 And he looked around to see who had done it. 33 But the woman, knowing what had been done to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. 34 And he said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

5:24-26 The woman's condition was both debilitating and embarrassing. It also rendered her ceremonially unclean. Medically, she was beyond assistance.

5:27-29 The woman's faith was evident in her behaviour. Having heard of Jesus, she knew that she need only touch his garment for his power to be operative within her. Immediately she did so, her condition was healed.

5:30 **power had gone forth from him** 'There is no indication that this was painful, weakening or distressing, but simply a fact. Matt. 8:17... is probably connected with this.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*. p. 37.

**Who touched my garments?** The question seemed strange in the midst of the crowd (v. 31) but it was necessary. ‘The woman must have the most and the best of her healing. It is not to be done furtively. Her faith is commended and the grace of God put on a clear footing. Through this she will get the most from the incident. For her part there must be confession—something that probably Jesus saw was needed, as her disease (at least ceremonially) was an unclean thing (Lev. 15:25-27).’<sup>4</sup> Her healing must not be limited to the body; such would be less than the purpose of grace in the kingdom. Further, there must be no disguising of grace, it must be seen for what it is.<sup>5</sup>

**5:32-34 told him the whole truth** The woman’s confession liberated her whole being (cf. Rom. 10:9-10). Jesus’ declaration demonstrated the issues of her healing, and so the issues of the kingdom—‘Go in peace and be healed of your disease.’

### (ii) Jairus’ Daughter, 5:21-24a, 35-43

21 And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him; and he was beside the sea. 22 Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet, 23 and besought him, saying, ‘My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.’ 24 And he went with him.

. . . 35 While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler’s house some who said, ‘Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?’ 36 But ignoring what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, ‘Do not fear, only believe.’ 37 And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. 39 And when he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ 40 And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 Taking her by the hand he said to her, ‘Talitha cumi’; which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you arise.’ 42 And immediately the girl got up and walked {she was twelve years of age}, and they were immediately overcome with amazement. 43 And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

**5:21 the other side** This indicates a return to Capernaum.

**5:22 one of the rulers of the synagogue** He ‘was the lay official responsible for the supervision of the synagogue building and the arrangements for the services, but the designation was sometimes used as an honorary title for distinguished members of the synagogue.’<sup>6</sup>

**fell at his feet** In spite of his esteemed position, his need has priority and he takes the place of a supplicant.

**5:23** His request is an act of faith; compared to that of the woman, it was already open and public. No doubt, however, the interruption which followed would have acted on his faith by both testing it (the delay) and encouraging it (the healing).

<sup>4</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> The comment of Cranfield is worth noting: Jesus ‘sought the information. not because he wished to make the miracle conspicuous—which would be inconsistent with his injunctions to secrecy but because he desired to drawn away from his clothes to himself an imperfect faith which was seeking his help apart from a personal relationship with himself’ (p. 185).

<sup>6</sup> Cranfield. p. 183.

**5:35** Jesus' ability to heal was not in question, but there was no comprehension that he could have any authority over death itself. There is still a failure to see Jesus' actions as relating to the kingdom of God! To them he is 'the Teacher'.

**5:36 Do not fear** Fear is the opposite of faith. The command is not simply to stop being afraid now and to believe now, but both commands are in the present tense, 'Do not go on fearing, only go on believing'.

**5:37-38 people weeping and wailing loudly** These people may be professional mourners, although the short time since the child's death may make this unlikely. Whether they are or not, loud public weeping and wailing was a culturally recognised part of the process when a death took place. It need not imply callousness on behalf of the mourners.

**5:39 Why do you make a tumult and weep?** Jesus dislikes this giving of recognition and obeisance to death by 'man' who was not created to die. Cf. John 11:11, 33f. Their mourning is in stark contrast to the dynamic of the kingdom (John 11:25-26).

**5:40 he put them all outside** Jesus will not make the raising of the dead, in this case, a public spectacle. He has said only that she is not dead. To those outside, that is the way it should remain (see.v. 43, where he strictly charged them that no one should know this).

**5:41 Talitha cumi** Evidently the actual Aramaic words used by Jesus were remembered (by Peter) so clearly that they had to be included, although the Gospel was written in Greek. The original Aramaic words are included on numerous occasions in this Gospel (3:17; 7:11, 34; 11:9f.; 14:36; 15:22, 34).

**5:42** The parents and those in the small group were speechless with amazement.

**5:43** give her something to eat The instruction is possibly because, in their amazement and joy, the parents may forget. The action of the kingdom leaves no aspect of life untouched, even to the supply of food (cf. Matt. 25-33).

# MARK

## CHAPTER SIX

### 4. The rejection of Jesus and John the Baptist, 6:1—7:23

#### *(a) Rejection in the home village, 6: 1-6a*

1 He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. 2-And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. 4 And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.' and he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. 6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief.

**6:1 came to his own country**      Although Jesus had been living in Capernaum, he was still 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

**6:2** By this time Jesus' fame had spread throughout Galilee. Those in Nazareth accorded him the usual privilege of speaking in the synagogue, but instead of responding in faith they were bewildered by his teaching. 'They acknowledge the evident facts of his wisdom and his acts but they cannot understand it and therefore do not really accept what is evident to them.'<sup>1</sup>

**6:3 they took offence at him**      Rather than accept him, they rationalised his ministry by attempting to see him in the light of his family instead of on the basis of what was evidently the work of the Holy Spirit. Because he was 'a local' they would not accept that he could have anything more than human authority. (To a certain extent, they were no different from the scribes in Mark 3:22ff.)

**6:4 A prophet is not without honour**      This statement was possibly an aphorism well known to the hearers. By means of it, Jesus may have been calling himself a prophet, especially since his ministry was to bring 'the gospel of God' (Mark 1:14). However, the point was that people will avoid hearing the word of God wherever they can and will especially attempt to do so when the messenger is one of their own.

**6:5-6** 'And so it was that, in the very place where He had been brought up as a boy, the only exhibition of divine power that He was able to give was to heal a few sick folk who were humbled enough by pain and sense of need to believe in Him (5). He who

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<sup>1</sup> Bingham. The Gospel according to Mark, p. 39.

marvelled at the faith of the Roman centurion (Mt. viii. 10) marvelled at the lengths to which unbelief could go in His own people (6). They might be staggered at Him: but not more than He was staggered at them. <sup>2</sup>

The unbelief of the people was a cause of wonder to him (Gr. *thaumazo*); further, it limited him, for God has bound himself to honour faith (cf. Mark 5:28-30 with 6:5).

**(b) *The sending of the twelve, 6:6b-13***

And he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup> And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; <sup>9</sup> but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. <sup>10</sup> And he said to them, 'Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. <sup>11</sup> And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them.' <sup>12</sup> So they went out and preached that men should repent. <sup>13</sup> And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.

**6:6b** Jesus left Nazareth.

**6:7** The authority which Jesus gave to the twelve had already been given in general (3:14-15), while here it took specific form in that they were now to go out, invested with his authority. 'It was a simple multiplication of his own ministry, especially in the actual liberation of people bound by sin, disease and demons. <sup>3</sup>

**6:8-9** The prohibition was to demonstrate to them and to others their total dependence on God and not man. Also it meant that they were not to accumulate these things on the way either.

**staff** This was only an aid to walking; it was not for defence etc. In Matt. 10:9-10 and Luke 9:3 Jesus excludes the staff and also sandals. Possibly the meaning is that in Matthew the prohibition is against taking an extra pair of sandals and an extra staff.<sup>4</sup>

**bag** Extra food would generally be carried in the bag, although it has been suggested that what was in mind was a 'begging wallet'.

**sandals** These were simply a flat piece of leather, wood or even matted grass tied on by thronging.

**two tunics** The tunic was a 'poncho-like' affair, sometimes reaching down to the feet. The second tunic would be intended to keep out the cold at night were they forced to spend the night outside. They were, instead, to trust God for their needs in this matter, that is, he would provide their accommodation. Hence verse 10.

**6:10 Where you enter a house** If accommodation was provided, and it was eastern practice to provide it for strangers, they were not to be choosy and move to a more 'comfortable' house etc.

**6:11** This action indicates to both preachers and hearers the seriousness of rejecting the message of the kingdom.

**shake off the dust** This was a symbolic action of dissociating them from the people and the coming judgement. The rejection of the disciples was, of course, no

<sup>2</sup> Cole, pp. 107f.

<sup>3</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> See Hendriksen. pp. 228f.



different from the rejection of Jesus.

**6:12-13** These verses show that their preaching of repentance, that is, of the coming kingdom, was accompanied by the action of healing.

**anointed with oil** This is the only mention of this in the Gospels. The disciples used ‘conventional’ healing methods, but the healing was obvious to all. Repentance and faith were necessary for the healing, but they did not stop there: they were the ongoing condition for the action of the kingdom.

**(c) Herod hears of Jesus: the death of John, 6:14-29**

14 King Herod heard of it; for Jesus’ name had become known. Some said, ‘John the baptiser has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him.’ Is But others said, ‘It is Elijah.’ And others said, ‘It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.’ 16 But when Herod heard of it he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded has been raised.’ 17 For Herod had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; because he had married her. 18 For John said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and the leading men of Galilee. 22 For when Herodias’ daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it.’ 23 And he vowed to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.’ 24 And she went out, and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask?’ And she said, ‘The head of John the baptiser.’ 25 And she came in immediately with haste to the king, and asked, saying, ‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’ 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. 27 And immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard and gave orders to bring his head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

**6:14-16** The fame of Jesus had spread widely. Possibly many had promised to perform ‘signs and wonders’ but had to this point failed to deliver. (It is known that in later years, AD 40-70, there were many ‘prophets’ offering signs, but it is not certain whether Jesus was the beginning of the line with this emphasis.<sup>5</sup>) Explanations of Jesus’ success were many and varied. Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, opted for the popular explanation that Jesus was, in fact, John the Baptist redevivus. This at least explained why such powers should be at work. It is noteworthy that John is specifically said to have done ‘no sign’ during his lifetime (John 10:41), but it would not be surprising that he should have done so if he had been raised from the dead. We may, no doubt, see Herod’s response as reflecting his troubled conscience.

Others suggested that Jesus was **Elijah** or a **prophet, like one of the prophets of old**. These suggestions were based on the popular expectation that these figures would appear (see John 1:19-21; cf. Deut. 18:18; Mal. 4:5-6). However, it is conspicuous that Jesus was not understood at all to be the Messiah. That would need to be known by revelation (see Mark 8:27-30 cf. Matt. 16:16-17). We should see that the

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<sup>5</sup> See Pennicook, *The Expectation of Signs in Israel AD 27-70*. for an examination of this subject.



faith which was placed in Jesus very often had a fragile base. The comment in verse 6, ‘He marvelled because of their unbelief’, may then be taken to mean that Jesus marvelled because the evidence was clear, that he was Messiah, but the people could not, because they would not, see with the clarity of faith. The suggestions they made concerning him were rationalisations of their unbelief more than genuine enquiry.

**6:17-29** These verses provide the reason why Herod should have felt as he did about Jesus.

**6:17-18** Josephus tells us that these events took place at Machaerus, to the east of the Dead Sea at the southernmost part of Peraea. He also says that the execution of John took place for political reasons.<sup>6</sup> There is, of course, no contradiction between Josephus’ description of Herod’s fear that John would encourage sedition, and Mark’s description of the religious reasons for Herod’s fear and Herodias’ hatred.

**Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife** ‘John had denounced the unlawful marriage of Antipas to Herodias. Not even the royal house was exempt from the call to radical repentance.’<sup>7</sup>

It is sometimes difficult to follow the relationships within the Herodian family. Philip the ‘tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis’ (Luke 3: 1) actually married Salome, the daughter of Herodias and his brother Herod Philip. Herod Philip was a private citizen and not to be confused with the tetrarch.

Antipas, the tetrarch, the protagonist of this incident, had previously been married to the daughter of the Nabataean king Aretas IV. ‘He divorced her, however, in order to marry Herodias, who was not only the daughter of his late half-brother Aristobulus but also the wife of another half-brother, Herod (sometimes referred to as Herod Philip). He fell in love with Herodias on one occasion when he was lodging with her and her husband, and arranged to marry her as soon as he could make the necessary arrangements for putting away Aretas’s daughter. The Evangelists tell how John the Baptist denounced the marriage of Antipas and Herodias as unlawful.<sup>8</sup> But John was not the only person to disapprove of these doings; King Aretas, very naturally, took offence at the insult offered to his daughter, and some years later he seized an opportunity to declare war on Antipas, and inflicted a heavy defeat on him (AD 36). Josephus says that many of the subjects of Antipas believed that this disaster befell him as a divine retribution for his behaviour towards John the Baptist.’<sup>9</sup>

Herodias ‘was near her fortieth year at the time of her second marriage. Her union with Antipas was adulterous and shocking because the Mosaic Law clearly prohibited marriage to a brother’s wife while the brother was yet alive (Lev. 18:16; 20:21).’<sup>10</sup>

**6:19-20** Evidently Herod had a superstitious fear of John which overrode the vindictive spite of his wife. He enjoyed hearing John yet was in awe of him.

**6:21** an opportunity Herodias, hitherto prevented from killing John, found that an occasion arose to achieve her goal when Herod gave a party to celebrate his own birthday. Although he was tetrarch of Galilee, evidently his guests did not mind accompanying him to Machaerus.

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<sup>6</sup> Josephus, XVIII. v. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, p. 219.

<sup>8</sup> Possibly Jesus’ ruling in Mark 10:12 is a reference to Herodias.

<sup>9</sup> E E Bruce. p. 203.

<sup>10</sup> Lane, p. 219.

**6:22-23 Herodias' daughter** She is not named here; it is Josephus who tells us that her name was Salome. She was evidently in her mid teens at this time. It seems that her dancing was at the instigation of her mother. However, the morality prevalent in the Herodian families may mean that immorality and, in particular, sensuous dancing was not uncommon at gatherings such as these. What probably was unusual was that it was the princess who danced in this way.

**Ask me for whatever you wish** Possibly the boisterous offer meant that Herod, along with his guests, was drunk. To take the offer, even half of my kingdom, strictly literally would be 'to take his words too prosaically'.<sup>11</sup> Herod was in no position to dispose of his kingdom, since he held his position per favour of Rome. The whole event recalls the book of Esther, especially 1:10-11 and 5:3.

**6:24-25** If Salome had danced at the instigation of her mother, it seems that she had not been informed of the real purpose of the exercise.

**6:26-28** Herod no doubt recognised that he had been tricked, but was incapable of backing down in front of his guests. John was immediately executed and his head carried on a platter (a gruesome touch, possibly to add to Herod's discomfort) to the girl who then gave it to her mother.

**6:29** There is no indication of how long it took for John's disciples to hear of his death. Possibly they were not far from the fortress in order to serve him while he was imprisoned. It is not difficult to understand why Herod should have reacted as he did to the activities of Jesus. One so righteous and holy (v. 20) and who had been so unjustly killed, no doubt could evidence great power, even to rising from the dead.

*(d) The return of the twelve, 6:30*

<sup>30</sup> The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.

**6:30 apostles** The disciples who were sent out in Mark 6:7-13, are now given the title of 'apostles' or 'sent ones'.

*(e) Two epiphanies, 6:31-52*

**(1) The feeding of the five thousand, 6:31-44**

<sup>31</sup> And he said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going, and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. <sup>35</sup> And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the hour is now late; <sup>36</sup> send them away, to go into the country and villages round about and buy themselves something to eat.' <sup>37</sup> But he answered them, 'You give them something to eat.' And they said to him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them

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<sup>11</sup> Cranfield, p. 212.

to eat?' 38 And he said to them, 'How many loaves have you? Go and see.' And when they had found out, they said, 'Five, and two fish.' 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down by companies upon the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

**6:31-33 a lonely place** The events which took place in 'a lonely place' (literally 'wilderness', see on Mark 1:4) were occasioned by Jesus concern for the well-being of those who had been engaged in ministry. Cf. 5:30 where Jesus recognised 'that power had gone forth from him'.

The Sea of Galilee is not large and Jesus probably did not rush across to the other side of the Lake. But when he arrived, a crowd from the towns was ready and waiting for him.

**6:34** like sheep without a shepherd Cf. Num. 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17. In these Old Testament references the meaning is that the people had no king, the word shepherd being a common eastern designation for the monarch (cf. Ps. 23:1; etc). Jesus saw them as people not living under the kingdom of God. John 6:15 shows that the people took Jesus' compassion in a more political way. It has been suggested that the phrase in Mark 6:44, five thousand men, may highlight the political, indeed revolutionary intention of the crowd. Far from doubling the number and adding a fraction to cover women and children, the suggestion is that the five thousand men were just that; men who were there in order to engage in military activity against the Romans, and who saw Jesus as a potential leader. Whether or not this is an accurate evaluation in this instance, there was certainly much general hostility towards Rome and towards others who did not share the revolutionary fervour. Bandit groups were common (cf. Luke 10:30).

**6:35-36** The disciples knew that the great crowd had rushed together and so had no food with them. Perhaps they had some sense of responsibility towards them.

**6:37** You give them something to eat The disciples were asking Jesus to take the initiative in dealing with the needs of the crowd. His response was to say, 'You do it.'<sup>12</sup> Keeping in mind the authority given to them before they were sent out, and which they had already exercised (v. 30) Jesus response was not at all unreasonable. They ought to be men of faith now as then (see the later issue in Mark 9:18-19, 23, 29).

**two hundred denarii** The denarius was the wage for a labourer for one day (cf. Matt. 20:2).

**6:38-43** The miracle of feeding the crowd was significant. John's Gospel shows that the parallel between this and the feeding of Israel in the wilderness under Moses was not lost on the people. It was this observation which gave the crowd hope that Jesus may fulfil their military designs and lead them to victory as Moses had Israel of old. (See the commentary on v. 34 above).

**twelve baskets full of broken pieces** . . . We are left in no doubt as to the scope of the miracle. However, '... various attempts have been made to explain the

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<sup>12</sup> It is noted that there is no pronoun in the Greek text.

incident behind the narrative as non-miraculous. Thus it has been suggested that the numbers have been exaggerated in the oral tradition and that if this is allowed for the miracle disappears; that Jesus and his disciples shared their provisions with the crowd and thereupon others who had provisions with them followed their example ( "miracle of the awakening of fellowship in men's souls", as W. Barclay seems inclined to call the miracle of John 6. 1-14); that it was simply a sacramental meal, each person receiving a tiny fragment as a pledge of his share in the coming eschatological feast (Schweitzer); ...<sup>13</sup>

## (2) Jesus walking on the water, 6:45-52

45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw him, and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear.' 51 And he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, for their hearts were hardened.

Jesus' authority over the sea has already been demonstrated in Mark 4:35-41. We have also seen Jesus concern to pray (Mark 1:35).

6:45 No doubt the disciples expected Jesus to make his own way back to Bethsaida.

6:46-47 Jesus spent the time from nightfall to about 3 am ('the fourth watch', v. 48) in prayer.

6:48 Mention has already been made of the unpredictability and severity of storms on the Lake. On this occasion the disciples had to row hard to make any headway at all.

**the fourth watch** This follows the Roman measurement; the Jews only counted three watches during the night. The fourth watch was between 3 am. and 6 am.

6:48-50 He meant to pass by them The first impression may be that Jesus did not want to get into the boat with them, intending rather to reach the other side before them. But such is unlikely. More likely is that Jesus deliberately willed to pass by them in order to provoke them to appeal to him. However, the record gives no explanation.

**but when they saw him** Their reaction does not agree with the suggestion given above. They thought he was a ghost. The Talmud preserves a tradition which indicates that there was a popular belief in water spirits which, appearing in the night, brought disaster.

**it is I** Although the Greek words, **ego eimi**, are the words usually used for 'It is I', it is not impossible that the intention is to remind the disciples and the reader of the Old Testament expression, 'I am' (Exod. 3:14; etc.).

6:51-52 Matt. 14 inserts the story of Peter also walking on the water at this point

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<sup>13</sup> Cranfield, p. 220.

(vv. 28-30). Since tradition tells us that Peter was the source of Mark's information<sup>14</sup> we must guess as to the reason why Mark omits it. However, when Jesus (and Peter) had boarded the boat the sea was immediately calmed. The comment of R. C. H. Lenski is instructive (though somewhat imaginative);

The boat lay in the calm water that surrounded Jesus. We cannot conceive of the boat as still pitching and tossing and as still being distressed by the waves; nor of Jesus frantically clutching at its sides and being hauled in by the disciples. Without any effort at all Jesus stepped into the quiet boat, and Peter with him. The wind stopped at once, greek, to grow tired, to abate. This sudden stopping just at that moment is evidently not presented as a singular coincidence. The wind stopped at the will of Jesus. More than that, John 6:21, supplementing Matthew and Mark, adds that immediately the boat was at its destination—there in the dawning light lay the docks of Capernaum. We now see why John mentioned the distance the boat had gone, and why we were told so particularly that it was still in the midst of the sea. He who walked on the sea and enabled Peter to do so caused the storm to cease in an instant and caused the boat to be transferred to its destination. The fact that Matthew and Mark omit the latter is the plainest evidence that they are not intent on magnifying the miracles or their miraculous features. They never overstate but, as in this instance, often understate the facts.<sup>15</sup>

they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves The disciples did not respond as men of faith. Mark explains that their bewilderment was due to their failure to see the significance of the miracle of the feeding of the crowd. Evidently they, too, saw Jesus as simply one who could perform Mosaic miracles and not as the source of Moses' power. their hearts were hardened Their failure to understand was not an innocent mistake but related to the hardness of their heart. They should have understood (cf. Mark 4:13). That is why they were not particularly happy at Jesus' appearance.

Lane comments:

Mark's concluding explanation is important in three respects: (1) it indicates that some events in Jesus' ministry are 'parabolic' in that they provide the key to other events. If the disciples had understood the miracle of the loaves they would have recognised Jesus' identity as the sovereign Lord who walks upon the waves of the sea. (2) The problem of understanding is not intellectual, but existential; it is a matter of faith. The disciples did understand Jesus' incidental instructions and they understood that the multitude had been fed. But their confused reaction to Jesus indicates that they failed to recognise that God was acting in history through him. Their misunderstanding reflects unbelief. (3) The disciples' reaction to Jesus' actions (as well as his teachings) throughout Mark's Gospel is characterised by non-understanding. In tracing this lack of understanding to 'hardness of heart' Mark indicates that at this stage in Jesus' ministry the disciples are not essentially different from his opponents, who also fail to recognise his unique character and exhibit hardness of heart (cf. Chs. 3:5; 10:5).<sup>16</sup>

**(f) Summary: healings, 6:53-56**

53 And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. 54 And when they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognised him, 5 and ran about the whole neighbourhood and began to bring sick people on their pallets to any place where they heard he was. 56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well.

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<sup>14</sup> See p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Lenski, pp. 275f.

<sup>16</sup> Lane, p. 238.

6:56 the fringe of his garment Cf. Num. 15:37; Deut. 22:12. Jesus was obedient to the Law in even the smallest details.

## MARK

### CHAPTER SEVEN

**(g) Controversy over the clean and the unclean, 7:1-23**

1 Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, 2 they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed, 3(for the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze). and the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?' 6 And he said to them, 'Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

"This people honours me with their lips,  
but their heart is far from me;  
7 in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."

8 You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.'

This passage demonstrates the hostility of the Pharisees to Jesus and his followers. What is at issue is not a rejection of the Law of Moses but a conflict between Jesus and those who have added to the Law the complex of 'the tradition of the elders', the Pharisaic body of oral tradition which was intended to protect the Law from accidental transgression.

7:1-2 The scribes who accompanied the Pharisees were already hostile to Jesus (see Mark 2: 16; 3:22). What is at issue for them is not just the details of ritual cleansing; it is the whole action of the kingdom which is present in Jesus. They are attempting to bring in the kingdom by their legal observances, while Jesus simply does it. His evident authority confronts their empty claims (Mark 1:22).

**hands defiled, that is unwashed** It was this failure to fit in with Pharisaic practice which so infuriated them.

7:3-4 **the Pharisees, and all the Jews** Not all Jews followed these traditions. '... the common people, the so-called "sinners", certainly were not careful about ritual washings. In generalising his explanation Mark was following accepted Jewish practice in describing Jewish customs to a Gentile audience.'<sup>1</sup>

**they wash their hands**

The biblical mandate that the priests had to wash their hands and feet prior to entering the Tabernacle (Ex. 30:19; 40:13) provided the foundation for the wide-spread practice of ritual washings in Palestinian and diaspora Judaism. At least as early as the second century BC many Jews voluntarily assumed the purity laws of the priests and regularly washed their hands before morning prayer. The accompanying benediction was designed not for the priests, but for laymen:

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<sup>1</sup> Lane, p. 245.



‘Blessed be Thou O Lord, King of the universe, who sanctified us by thy laws and commanded us to wash the hands.’ The custom of washing the hands before eating bread was also grounded in priestly practice, in the conviction that daily food should be eaten as if it were priestly food. By the third century AD the eating of bread without washing was strongly condemned, and this seems to have been a tendency already evident in Jesus’ day. The Pharisees surpassed the priests in their zeal to safeguard themselves from ritual defilement and were strong proponents of ‘the priesthood of all believers’ in the sense that they considered the priestly regulations to be obligatory for all men.<sup>2</sup>

7:5 Lane comments:

The deeper intention behind the question of eating with defiled hands is suggested by a passage in the Mishnah: ‘But whom did they place under the ban? Eleazar ben Enoch, because he cast doubt on (the tradition of the Elders concerning) the cleansing of hands.’<sup>3</sup>

7:6-8 Jesus’ reply to the question is in two parts: the first, verses 6-13, is addressed to the Pharisees, and the second, verses 14-23, is addressed to the crowd first, then expanded to the disciples.

The quotation, from Isa. 29:13, exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. While the oral law was, in theory, a safeguard against breaking the Law, in reality it proved an alternative to keeping the Law. It actually replaced the Law by changing the Law as far its purpose was concerned (cf. Mark 12:28-34).

9 And he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! 10 For Moses said, "Honour your father and your mother"; and, "He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die"; 11 but you say, "If a man tells his father or mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban" (that is, given to God)—12 then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, 13 thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do.’

7:9-13 These verses expand upon Jesus’ charge that the Pharisees had abandoned the Law for the sake of their man-made traditions.

7:11 **Corban** This word is a transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning ‘an offering’, ‘a gift devoted to God’.

A fine contemporary parallel to the use of qorban in Mark has been provided by a recently recovered Jewish ossuary<sup>4</sup> inscription: ‘All that a man may find-to-his-profit in this ossuary (is) an offering to God from him who is within it.’ The importance of this inscription is that it preserves the formula in its completeness and furnishes a concrete example of how the formula was used. It indicates that Jesus was referring to a dedicatory-formula which was commonly used by Jews in the last centuries BC and well into the Christian era. The basic purpose of the formula was to place a ban on something, reserving it for sacred use and withdrawing it from profane use by another person. The vow creates a prohibition with regard to an object and fixes upon it the character of an offering dedicated to God. This did not necessarily mean that the object declared qorban had actually to be offered to God; it signified rather that it was withdrawn from its intended use and was no longer available for a particular individual ‘as if it were an offering.’ In the hypothetical situation proposed by Jesus, if the son declared his property qorban to his parents, he neither promised it to the Temple nor prohibited its use to himself, but he legally excluded his parents from the right of benefit. Should the son regret his action and seek to alleviate the harsh vow which would deprive his parents of all of the help they might normally expect from him, he would be told by the scribes to whose arbitration the case was submitted that his vow was valid

<sup>2</sup> Lane, pp. 245f.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, p. 247.

<sup>4</sup> A receptacle for the bones of the dead.



and must be honoured. Jesus' statement that the scribes do not allow him to do 'anything' for his parents is not extreme. The renunciation of all profitability extended beyond financial support to such practical kindness as assistance in the performance of religious duties or the provision of care in sickness?<sup>5</sup>

**7:13 And many such things you do** This example was only one of many which could be offered. The obscuring of the Law in its intention is a significant feature of self righteousness.

14 And he called the people to him again, and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him.' 17 And when he had entered the house, and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 And he said to them, 'Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on?' (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, 'What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these things come from within, and they defile a man.'

**7:14-23** Addressed to the crowd and, later, the disciples, these verses are to be seen in the context of the Pharisaic insistence on keeping the rules concerning clean and unclean food. In their fanatical insistence (cf. Peter's dream in Acts 10:10-16) they had completely failed to see the true nature of sin. Sin, and so unrighteousness, does not result from things such as food, whether proscribed by the Old Testament Law or not, but rather issues from a heart already corrupt (so Jet. 17:9).

**7:14 Hear me, all of you, and understand** The Pharisees had laid great stress on defilement, as evidenced by their question in verse 5. Jesus now confronts their hypocrisy, but does so by publicly rejecting their position. But Alan Cole makes the point that while the Pharisees may have been silenced, 'the major principle of the validity of the ritual law was still at stake. The disciples of Christ had, in point of fact, eaten with unwashed hands, and thus stood condemned, if the ritual law was valid. The discomfiture of the Pharisees in the last argument did not necessarily mean the acquittal of the Lord's disciples, unless the whole principle of oral tradition was to be attacked: and so it was, in this parable. It must have seemed to many Pharisees in early days that the Lord came near to espousing the Sadducean cause, with His firm rejection of the "tradition of the Fathers"'.<sup>6</sup>

**7:15 There is nothing outside a man which...** can defile him The point behind this statement was that the Pharisees' starting point was not that of the Scriptures. They assumed that they were essentially pure and wished to use the law to prove their own righteousness. To do this they, therefore, had to substitute legal-ism for divine law. Over against this, the second part of Jesus' declaration declared that the human heart was already desperately corrupt.

It must be stressed that in no way was Jesus abrogating the Mosaic laws on purification. Quite the opposite, he was upholding the Law by demonstrating a correct use of it. The Law was never intended to be used for self justification, otherwise the whole, divinely instituted, sacrificial system would have been pointless.

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<sup>5</sup> Lane, pp. 250f.

<sup>6</sup> Cole, p. 120.

7:16 This verse is omitted by RV, RSV, NEB and NIV, etc. following the best manuscripts.

7:17 **parable** Parable does not mean story; it ‘has here its vaguest sense of something enigmatical, not obvious in meaning. One interpreter supposes the disciples to have been led, by their habit of inquiring about parables, to use the word for any thing requiring explanation.’<sup>7</sup>

7:18-19 **Then are you also without understanding?** The disciples actually shared the prevailing attitude towards purity. They did not see that the heart was the source of defilement. In Semitic expression, the heart (the word is used in the quotation in v. 6) ‘is the center of human personality which determines man’s entire action and inaction’.<sup>8</sup> Food, on the other hand, had no relationship at all with that. So fulfilling the dictates of the oral law leaves the heart entirely untouched.

**Thus he declared all foods clean** This statement is not without some difficulty. To begin with, this translation, while conveying the sense, is not literal. The Greek has ‘and so passes on’<sup>9</sup>, making all meats clean’. The words, ‘Thus he declared’, have been added by the translators.

The phrase ‘making all meats clean’ may refer to the bodily processes. That is the way in which J. A. Alexander<sup>10</sup> takes it, as does Lenski.<sup>11</sup> They prefer to see the phrase as the words of Jesus and not as an interpolation by Mark. ‘The evangelist’, says Lenski, ‘would be telling us what Jesus really means, namely that Jesus makes all foods clean – a remark that is so exceptional for him and at the same time so superfluous (after all that Jesus himself says) that we cannot accept it.’<sup>12</sup>

The majority today, however, assume that this phrase ought to be regarded as an interpolation by Mark, who was writing in the light of the revelation which came at Pentecost. As Peter’s amanuensis, he was recording Peter’s understanding which came after his vision in Acts 10. But the question remains, how could Jesus declare all foods clean without abrogating the Levitical Law?<sup>13</sup> The answer is that he did nothing of the sort. When Jesus declared all foods clean, he was not referring to those foods which the Law proscribed but to those which the ‘tradition of the Elders’ proscribed. This statement, the implications of which Mark conspicuously does not elaborate, must be seen in the context of the Pharisaic distortions of the Law. The change in attitude to the Jewish food laws was dependent on the work of the Cross and could only come about following the clear intervention of the Spirit as the kingdom was opened up to Gentile believers (see Acts 10:9-16; 15:6-29; Rom. 14:1-23).

7:20-23 These verses take up the major theme, that corruption is not a matter of breaches of tradition but of the evil of the heart. Again, like the detail in the Sermon on the Mount, there is no distinction between thought and action.

**wickedness** Possibly implying ‘acts of deliberate malice’.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander. p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Lane, p. 255.

<sup>9</sup> The precise translation of this phrase does not concern us at this point.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander, pp. 193f.

<sup>11</sup> Lenski, pp. 296f.

<sup>12</sup> Lenski, p. 297.

<sup>13</sup> A. B. Bruce. p. 389. says Jesus was ‘abolishing the ceremonial distinctions of the Levitical law’. He quotes other authorities who also held that position.

<sup>14</sup> Lane, p. 257.

**licentiousness** This carries the idea of open immorality.  
**envy** This is literally, ‘an evil eye’. For a parallel see Matt. 20:15, which literally reads ‘or is your eye evil?’ Cf. Eccles. 35:8, where a good eye denotes generosity.

## C. JESUS AMONG THE GENTILES, 7:24—8:26

### I. The Unclean Spirit and the deaf mute, 7:24-37

#### (a) *The Syrophenician Woman, 7:24-30*

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid. 25 But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. 26 Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 And he said to her, ‘Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ 28 But she answered him, ‘Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ 29 And he said to her, ‘For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.’ 30 And she went home, and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.

**7:24** Wanting to escape notice for a time, Jesus went north into the region of Tyre and Sidon, a designation which is vague as to the precise location. However, it was not possible to keep his presence a secret.

**7:25-26 a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth** The woman who approached Jesus was not a Jew. As a Greek, she was evidently one of the Hellenised citizen class in the Phoenician republic of Tyre, a Gentile by birth and culture. She is designated a Syrophenician because Phoenicia belonged administratively to the province of Syria.

Her daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, and, no doubt having heard of all that Jesus had done south in Galilee, she came and appealed to him to free the little girl.

**7:27-28 Let the children first be fed** The conversation between Jesus and the woman is generally analysed in terms of Jesus’ primary ministry ‘to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt. 15:24, in the parallel and fuller version of this story). In these terms, Jesus was saying that the time had not yet come to extend the blessings of the kingdom to Gentiles. It is true, though, that the Scriptures had made it clear that the coming of Messiah would also herald blessing to ‘all the families of the earth’. Was the woman aware of this?  
 and throw it to the dogs Gentiles were sometimes described as dogs in Jewish tradition<sup>15</sup>, however the words here are different. The word for ‘dogs’ is a diminutive form of the usual word, and means ‘a little dog’, implying the pet dogs which could be admitted to the house and which may then be found under the table at meal times.

**Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table...** At first reading, Jesus seems to be harsh and insensitive. Mark makes frequent use of diminutives, so that some have questioned whether he was actually referring to pet dogs and not, in fact,

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Eg. The Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 13a, "As the sacred food was intended for men, but not for the dogs, the Torah was intended to be given to the Chosen People, but not to the Gentiles": and Pirque Rabbi Eliezer 29, "Whoever eats with an idolater is like a man who eats with a dog" (Lane, p. 262, note 63).

using the usual pejorative language. But the woman's response shows that she did not regard him as being insulting. Indeed, her reply, far from being defensive betrays a certain witty quality. Matthew's version shows that the woman certainly knew of Jesus' Jewish role and priority, 'O Lord, Son of David' (Matt. 15:22). She would, then, have been in no doubt as to the nature of her request. Yet her reply reveals her confidence. While there is no explicit reference to it, it does seem reasonable that Jesus was not cold and unpleasant to her, as a superficial reading may suggest, but that instead there was a measure of warmth and sympathy which, possibly accompanied by Jesus' tone of voice and smile etc., actually encouraged the woman to press her case.<sup>16</sup> It would certainly be unreasonable to assume that he who could 'love' the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21), would be callous and ungracious to this woman whose need was so obvious.

**7:29-30 For this saying** The saying was not rewarded for its wit but for the faith which lay behind it, cf. Matt. 15:28.

The placing of this story immediately after the controversy with the Pharisees may be intended to demonstrate Jesus' disregard for the fierce separateness adopted by the Pharisees.

**(b) To the Decapolis territory, 7:31**

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis.

**7:31** Jesus' route to Galilee was indirect; he went southeast from Tyre and Sidon, past Caesarea Philippi, through Philip's territory to a point on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee in the largely gentile area of Decapolis.

**(c) The deaf mute, 7:32-37**

32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. 33 And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and spat and touched his tongue; 34 and looking up to heaven he sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is 'Be opened.' 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

**7:32** they These need not have been Gentiles. Many Jews lived in the Decapolis. Cf. Matt. 4:25. This would concur with Jesus' speaking to the man in Aramaic (v. 34).

**7:33-34** Although the initial exercise of faith was by the friends of the man, evidently Jesus expected some sort of faith in the man himself. He took him to one side and dealt with him in relative privacy. No doubt the man was given dignity by being treated as an individual and not as one who was unable to communicate. Compare the modern ignorance which tends to treat such people as also mentally deficient simply because their speech is defective.

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<sup>16</sup> Alan Cole provides the following corrective: 'It is true that in most parables there is a certain amount of back-cloth which is incapable of exegesis, but this ignores the express evidence of Matthew xv. 23, that the Lord at first refused to hear her . . .' (p. 124).

**fingers... spat...** Touching and the use of spittle were common features of many types of healing rituals. Spittle was especially used in some ancient magic. However, there was no use of magic here nor was there any healing ritual used. Alan Cole has suggested that 'All the actions of verses 33 and 34 were miming [the man 's] present need, the course of healing, and the manner in which such healing alone could come, in a way which even a deaf mute could understand (i.e. the blocked ears opened, spitting an impediment away from the tongue, the upward glance and sigh of prayer).'<sup>17</sup>

**Ephphatha** The healing was not effected by the actions of Jesus, but by the word of command.

**7:35** The effect was instantaneous.

**7:36 tell no one** This instruction to conceal the healing was possibly to retain the holiness and dignity of the act, rather than have it and the man made objects of public curiosity. Again the crowds were incapable of penetrating the issue and persisted in excited gossip.

**7:37 He has done all things well** We should not assume that the crowds necessarily meant by this statement what we, with hindsight, might mean.

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<sup>17</sup> Cole, pp, 124f.

## MARK

### CHAPTER EIGHT

#### 2. The blind, 8:1-26

##### *(a) The feeding of the four thousand, 8:1-10*

1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him, and said to them, 2 'I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; 3 and if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come a long way.' 4 And his disciples answered him, 'How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?' and he asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said, 'Seven.' 6 And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. 7 And they had a few small fish; and having blessed them, he commanded that these also should be set before them. and they ate, and were satisfied; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 And there were about four thousand people. 10 And he sent them away; and immediately he got into the boat with his disciples, and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

At first sight this section may seem to be a repetition of the story of the feeding of the 5000. Geoffrey Bingham's comment on this passage is helpful.

It cannot be that [this] account is the erroneous repetition of the [first account in chapter 6] as the details are varied, and the early church has accepted both. To say that Jesus never repeated his sayings or acts in varying situations is to make a strange claim. The significance of the feeding of the 5,000 is easily seen in John 6. There is not so much significance in the second, necessarily, as the clear act of compassion, and doubtless the same significance is implicit, if not expressed. Certainly the word 'compassion' in V. 2 is the key. Some explanations of the amounts are interesting but not really significant. In feeding the 4,000 there are more loaves and fishes than in feeding the 5,000 but it is doubtful whether this is of any great point. For the rest many of the comments on 6:32-44 will obtain here. Note 'green grass' in 6:39 and 'ground' in 8:6. Some have tried to say that the happening with the 5,000 is with the Jews and here with Gentiles, but that is almost certainly not so. The account simply shows the practical compassion of Christ and helps us to see how large a crowd remains at the end of three days.<sup>1</sup>

##### *(b) Rejection of the demand for a sign: dullness of minds, 8:11-21*

11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. 12 And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.' 13 And he left them, and getting into the boat again he departed to the other side.

14 Now they had forgotten to bring bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 And he cautioned them saying, 'Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.' 16 And they discussed it with one another,

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<sup>1</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, pp. 45f.

saying, 'We have no bread.' 17 And being aware of it, Jesus said to them, 'Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 20 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' And they said to him, 'Seven'. 21 And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'

**8:11 seeking from him a sign from heaven** Although the miracle above was not explicitly significant, it was nonetheless a clear demonstration, in Mosaic terms, of Jesus' commission from God in the establishment of the kingdom. No doubt the Pharisees would have heard of the incident just completed. Their request is, then, quite perverse, and indicative of their refusal to believe him. They were there to argue and were only doing it to test him. Why should a King be put upon to prove his kingship?

**8:12 he sighed deeply in his spirit** As the man who was led by the Spirit, Jesus' 'spirit' was moved with righteous indignation. He knew that their request for a sign was not really with a view to belief but in order to maintain their unbelief. Hence his response that no sign shall be given to this generation. It should be noted that the use of 'sign' (Gr. semeion) in John's Gospel indicates that which God gives with a view to faith; in the Synoptics, a 'sign' is that demanded by unbelieving man, or offered by false Christs (cf. Mark 13:22). (Matthew and Luke add the comment by Jesus that the only sign which God would give would be 'the sign of Jonah', which is the sign which most specifically condemns their unbelief.)

**8:14-21** shows that the disciples also had not understood the miracle of the feeding of the 4000. Against their concern for lack of provisions(!) Jesus warned them against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. Although on opposite sides of the political spectrum, both Pharisees and Herodians were 'so infected with an "anti" spirit that they [could not] respond.<sup>2</sup> Luke (12: 1) identifies the Pharisees' leaven with hypocrisy, while that of the Herodians (Matt. 16:1 has Sadducees) is left unclear.

**(c) *The blind man of Bethsaida, 8:22-26***

22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' 24 And he looked up and said, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking.' 25 Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'

This incident highlights the preceding events by contrasting the coming to sight of the blind man with the unwillingness of the Pharisees and the inability of the disciples to see the truth of the kingdom. This theme will re-occur in the next section, where Peter's 'sight' of Jesus' identity is in contrast with his inability to see that Jesus must suffer.

**8:23** The means Jesus used to heal the man is similar to that used in 7:33. The reason

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<sup>2</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 48.



why Jesus did not heal the man instantaneously is not given. The process of the man coming to full sight has often been used to illustrate the experience of growing faith, and may have been used for that purpose here by Mark.

**8:24 I see men, but they look like trees, walking** The description by the man of men as trees walking need only demonstrate that the man could faintly distinguish things. His sense of touch and general knowledge would have provided him with sufficient information for the description. However, we need not assume that the man had been blind from birth.

**8:25 again he laid his hands upon his eyes** Does the question by Jesus in verse 23 and the repeated action here indicate some perceived lack of faith in the man? Certainly there was no need to ask a similar question of others.

**8:26 Do not even enter the village** Jesus does not wish either himself or the man to be the centre of a public spectacle. That is not the nature of his actions; they are the action of the kingdom of God and ought not to be separated from the proclamation of the kingdom.

## II. THE CROSS AND ITS FORESHADOWING, 8:27—16:8

### A. THE TURNING POINT, 8:27—9:29

#### 1. Caesarea Philippi and the first passion prediction, 8:27—9:1

27 And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do men say that I am?' 28 And they told him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets.' 29 And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.' 30 And he charged them to tell no one about him.

Note that from this point the direction of the action of the kingdom is clearly seen. All that Jesus has done to this point relates to this but has been seen more generally as some sort of triumph. However, now the great moral dimension of the kingdom becomes prominent and Mark's account is less concerned with the miraculous aspects of Jesus' ministry.

**8:27 Caesarea Philippi** This is an area, some 32 km. north of Bethsaida, in the foothills of Mount Hermon in the Anti-Lebanon Range. These events take place on the way.

Jesus' question to the disciples is provocative and intended to expose the attitudes of men and women. Indeed, in spite of Peter's reply, he will be seen to be really one with those whose opinions are first described. 'Natural man never objects to the concept of a Messiah, provided it be a Messiah who commends himself to natural man.'<sup>3</sup>

**8:28** The answers given to the question are illuminating. At no point have the people seen him as the Messiah/Christ. This may be because their concept of Messiah excluded someone who only did what Jesus did and who avoided any political or nationalistic activities. This was seen in the account of the feeding of the 5000 and in particular in

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<sup>3</sup> Cole, p. 134.



the account in John 6:15, (25-)60.

**John the Baptist** Especially since they were near the territory of Herod, this opinion may have been prominent, cf. Mark 6: 14.

**Elijah** Cf. Mal. 4:5-6.

one of the prophets That is, one of the other Old Testament prophets come back to life. It is clear that Jesus' ministry has been so powerful that only a doctrine of resurrection could possibly explain it.

**8:29 But who do you say that I am?** '... now, as it continually comes to us, comes the rapier-thrust that transfers theology from an armchair discussion to an uncomfortable dialogue between God and us.'<sup>4</sup> In Matthew, Jesus claims that Peter's reply, 'You are the Christ' (Matt. '... the Son of the living God'; Luke '... of God') could only come from God.

**8:30 to tell no one about him** This prohibition may reflect the political danger that could arise from the announcement, but more likely it reflects the whole 'hiddenness' of Jesus' nature and role from those to whom he does not wish to make it known. The reason lies in the nature of his Messiahship, which is raised in the next sentence.

31 And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men.'

**8:31 the Son of man** Using the title 'Son of man' for himself, Jesus explains that the real victory of Messiah can only come through suffering. By using the title 'Son of man', Jesus opens up the great hope of Israel as shown in Daniel 7, where through the reign of 'one like a son of man', that is, a man, the saints will receive the kingdom. It was this hope which lay beneath the various Messianic expectations which were current. The title exposes the hope, and Jesus' statement that the Son of man must suffer many things... declares the way this hope will be realised.

We should note that this prediction of suffering is repeated in Mark 9:31 and 10:33. It must not be missed.

**8:32 he said this plainly** This was no parable but a statement in the most direct and clear way possibly. It could not be missed; nor was it. Peter began to rebuke him. Peter, while announcing that he was the Christ, would not and could not see that it was 'necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory' (Luke 24:26; cf. Luke 24:44-46). More than that, Peter was actually attempting to force Jesus to change his mind.

**8:33** The disciples were clearly one with Peter in this. But as their spokesman, Peter received the rebuke.

**Get behind me, Satan!** 'Satan' is 'the adversary', the one who calls the word of God into question. This is seen particularly in his accusations of guilt against the people of God (Rev. 12:10; Zech. 3:1-2; Job 1-2). Here, Peter is speaking as Satan himself. In doing so, he represents not God but men, who stand defiant in their hostility and

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<sup>4</sup> Cole, p. 135.

determination to suppress the truth. No sterner rebuke was ever given than this, not even to the most perverse Pharisee. Do not call the word of God into question! Ever!

34 And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? 37 For what can a man give in return for his life? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' <sup>9:1</sup>And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

**8:34-35** Not only is the Christ to suffer; his disciples must follow him. This is not some penalty to be endured as Christ's disciple; it is the reality of the kingdom. To take up one's cross is to lose one's life for the sake of Christ and of the gospel (v. 35). And the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom which Christ is establishing in the face of human and demonic rebellion (cf. Acts 14:22).

It is to be understood that as the Christ must suffer, so the person who would save his life will find that he is protecting himself from the liberating and life-giving kingdom of God. Such is the perverse deception of the flesh. It was this 'flesh' which was evident in Peter's rebuke of Jesus (vv. 32-33).

**8:36 What does it profit...** To gain the whole world is to make one's own a world which stands under the judgement of God. Cf. Mark 9:43-48 for the radical response to the world which is appropriate to the coming judgement.

**8:37** '... if a man think deeply there is nothing so precious as having one's soul eternally. In hard-headed terms it is better to suffer now and to live forever.'<sup>5</sup>

**8:38 whoever is ashamed of me and of my words** Here Jesus takes up the issue raised by the rebuke by Peter. The issue for the disciple is not simply that of ascetic self denial; it is rather how do we stand in relationship to the crucified Christ? To reject Christ and his suffering will mean being cut off from the saving work of the Christ when his kingdom is revealed in its glory. The glory of his Father is not mere beauty, but the glory of holiness which must mean both redemption and judgement. Note that the entourage includes his holy angels. The picture is from Dan. 7:13.

This is no polite discussion about theology; Jesus has left the disciples at the point where the issues are totally unavoidable. Will they, or will they not, be one with him in his suffering?

**9:1 Truly, I say to you...** This verse is at first sight not easy, since the coming of the kingdom seems related to the consummation of history. How then could some still be alive at that time, since will not taste death is only a Semitism for 'die'? Suggestions include (i) the transfiguration (9:2-8), (ii) the kingdom going on with power as in Luke 10:19, (iii) the triumph of the Cross and/or the resurrection which certainly was with power (Rom. 1:4), or (iv) the judgement of AD 70 when

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<sup>5</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 51.

Jerusalem was judged (clearly the book of the Revelation makes it clear that this was an action of the risen reigning Christ).

While all these suggestions have merit, the context points to the fact of the Cross and resurrection as being the place where the kingdom comes in power. The disciples have been faced with what must have seemed like the greatest tragedy, namely the suffering and death of the one they have now seen to be the Christ. It has also been revealed that this suffering Christ will involve them in the possible loss of their own lives. But that kingdom which demands such suffering will be seen to come in power before the disciples face the suffering. It will not be suffering in the midst of defeat but suffering in the midst of great victory. While the disciples would not have understood the implications of this at the time, they undoubtedly knew its meaning on the day of Pentecost when the victory was powerfully proclaimed (see Acts 2:36, 'God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. ').

# MARK

## CHAPTER NINE

### 2. The Transfiguration, 9:2-8

2-And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, 3 and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, 'This is my beloved Son; listen to him.' 8 And suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

**9:2 after six days** The fact that Mark is so precise in relating this episode with what has just been described has been taken by some to mean that this in some way explains what has just taken place. It undoubtedly does, but not in the sense of fulfilling the prediction of verse 1. Rather it is a demonstration of the true nature of Jesus as the Son of man and thus of the truth of the kingdom.

**Peter James and John** These three seemed to have formed some sort of inner cabinet, though no details are given as to why they were given this privilege.<sup>1</sup> transfigured This means that the actual form (Gr. *morphe*, hence 'transfigured' is Gr. metarnorph. othe) was changed. He was still Jesus, but his form appeared in a startlingly different way. And it did so before their eyes. They saw it happen.

**9:3 glistening, intensely white** How can one describe the intensity of his glory, which even transfigures the clothing he wore? Cf. Luke 9:32 which states that the disciples 'saw his glory'. The question is not inappropriate: was it the glory of the Son of God or the glory of the Son of man which they saw?—is there any real difference?

**as no fuller on earth could bleach them** Certainly what they saw was beyond the capacity of any man on earth to reproduce.

For other instances of the word 'transfiguration' and its implications see Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18.

**9:4 Elijah and Moses** Without doubt Moses and Elijah were significant figures in Jewish thought. A prophet like Moses was expected (Deut. 18:18) as was Elijah (Mal. 4:5—6; cf. John 1:21, 25). These two are the paradigms for true prophetic ministry in Rev. 11. It has been often suggested that they are representative of the Law and the prophets, but other than the fact that they were the ones who appeared with Jesus no reason is given as to why they should have this privilege. Luke tells us that they spoke

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<sup>1</sup> Other than in John 13:23 where it is probable that John is the one described as the one whom Jesus loved. James was his brother and Peter is perhaps the most prominent of the disciples. cf. esp. Matt. 16:16ff. Other than these things, we are left to speculate.

to Jesus concerning his ‘exodus, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem’ (9:31) which, while fitting well with the discussion just recounted in Mark 8, is nonetheless not recorded by Mark.

**9:5-6** Peter’s response was to be garrulous with excitement and fear. Luke tells us that he and the others had been asleep, no doubt being wakened by the glory and the nature of the discussion. Possibly Peter was suggesting in an irrational way that this great event could be immortalised by the erection of three shrines, one for each of the three glorified men. Whatever he meant, he was speaking nonsense.

**9:7 a voice came out of the cloud** Into the confused babbling came the voice from glory. The words were a repeat of those uttered at Jesus’ baptism with the addition of the instruction to listen to him. Of course, the point is that this one is the king whose coronation was declared at his baptism and whose word is sovereign.

### 3. Discourse at the foot of the mountain, 9:9-13

9 And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of man should have risen from the dead. 10 So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant. And they asked him, ‘Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?’ 12 And he said to them, ‘Elijah does come first to restore all things; and how is it written of the Son of man, that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.’

**9:9-10** The incident was over. The full significance of what it meant must wait until his death and resurrection, when they would again see him in his full glory. However, at this point they were as bewildered as ever, not knowing what resurrection from the dead might mean. Contemporary Jewish thought, while having a doctrine of the resurrection, probably leaned more towards resuscitation than anything resembling the rich picture of the resurrection described in 1 Cor. 15.

**9:11** While it is not difficult to see how the subject of Elijah’s coming (Mal. 3:1; 4:56) would occur to the three disciples, it is not easy to follow their train of thought at this point. They were evidently looking for a subject which did not expose their weaknesses. Possibly they were attempting to show that they now believed in his Messiahship, although later events would again demonstrate that this was at best a very tenuous faith.

**9:12 Elijah does come first** Jesus agreed with their expectation that Elijah would return to restore all things (Mal. 4:6 cf. Matt. 3:1-2, 7-8). But if Elijah does come to restore all things, why do the Scriptures say that the Son of man must suffer? As it stands, this would be a parenthetical reference to the earlier reaction of the disciples to Jesus’ prediction of his suffering. If the disciples believe the prophecies concerning Elijah, why do they not believe those concerning the coming suffering?

Another possible construction regards this not as a question but as a statement: ‘How it is written of the Son of man...’ (A V). This form would then mean that ‘the scriptures do say that Elijah will come—and it also says that the Son of man...’

This is not substantially different from the meaning implied by the question form.

**9:13 Elijah has come** According to Matt. 17:12-13, Jesus made it plain that he was speaking of John the Baptist. But Mark stresses the point that Elijah has come and he has also suffered. Malachi's prediction was fulfilled, not in the glorious appearance of Elijah which they had just witnessed but in the appearance and suffering of John the Baptist. He was the fulfilment of prophecy but was not only not recognised, he too had to suffer for the sake of the kingdom, just as the Son of man must suffer.

#### 4. Healing the epileptic boy, 9:14-29

14 And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them. 15 And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. 16 And he asked them, 'What are you discussing with them?' 17 And one of the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; 18 and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.' 19 And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am [ to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.' 20 And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has he had this?' And he said, 'From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 23 And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.' 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' 25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again.' 26 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. 28 and when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' 29 And he said to them, 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.'

The diagnosis usually given of this boy's condition, as reflected in the title of this section, is inaccurate. His symptoms certainly resemble epilepsy, but quite specifically, his condition was caused by demonic activity. There is no doubt that the authors of the New Testament documents could distinguish between illness and demonic activity.

**9:14-18** The scribes, the interpreters of the law, were disputing with the nine disciples of Jesus and a large crowd were gathered observing the debate. The issue was the inability of the disciples to heal the boy with a dumb spirit, in spite of their previous experiences. It has been suggested that 'Spirits were exorcised by giving their name—did this make it difficult to exorcise him—or was the child simply dumb because of it?'<sup>2</sup> Whatever the immediate problem, the reason for their inability was made plain in the next statement of Jesus (see also v. 29).

**9:19 O faithless generation** This was directed at the disciples, but also at the scribes and the crowd. All ought to have been people of faith. The presence of the

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<sup>2</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*. p. 55.

demon ought to have stirred them all to great faith and so to action, particularly since the disciples had been involved with Jesus for so long. Instead the scribes saw the problem only as an occasion for calling the ministry of the disciples, and so the ministry of Jesus, into question, while the crowd saw it as an occasion for more spectacle.

**how long am I to bear with you?** It has been pointed out that ‘O faithless generation’ is a half quote from Ps. 95:10, which refers to God’s endurance of the faithlessness of the generation which wandered in the wilderness.<sup>3</sup> This comment then, makes it plain that the judgement which such unbelief calls down cannot be long in coming. The whole generation, and not simply the crowd present at the time were culpable.

**Bring him to me** The stress is on the me.

**9:20** In the presence of Jesus, the man of faith, the demon immediately responded by doing its most vicious and destructive work.

**9:21 How long has he had this?** Jesus’ question concerning the boy and the period of this possession seems more to be aimed at exposing the desperate nature of the case than merely compiling a case history. The healing would not depend on how long this had been going on, since only a word of command is required.

**9:22 From childhood** The father responds to Jesus question with a desperate plea for help. All others are helpless in the face of this condition and have been since the boy was a child (his age at this time is unknown). The plea, however, shows singular failure to understand the person of Jesus: if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us. As far as he knows, Jesus may be as helpless as the others.

**9:23 If you can** This is usually treated as Jesus repeating the father’s words. What follows, All things are possible to him who believes would then be regarded as an appeal to the father to have faith. Some MSS. have ‘If you can believe, all things are possible...’ (see A V).

We may possibly see this statement are directed to the father and to all those gathered round. The ‘If you can’ would then be Jesus’ statement to them. There is no pronoun (you) in the expression in Greek, but in the context of verse 19, we could regard Jesus as saying, in response to the man’s ‘if you can do anything’, ‘No, if you were men of faith you would have done it.’

**9:24** Jesus’ statement brought an immediate response: the father of the child cried out and said, I believe; help my unbelief! The man recognises the truth of Jesus’ rebuke and directs his acknowledged weak faith to Jesus. As with the SyroPhoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30), he accepted Jesus’ estimation of his condition and continued his plea for help.

**9:25-27** The events of the healing were not prolonged since a crowd was quickly gathering, to see the spectacle. So severe was the final attack that many thought the boy was dead, but the demon was totally defeated by the command of Jesus.

**9:28-29** Away from the crowd, the disciples now privately admitted their inability, and asked Jesus why they could not cast the demon out. Jesus’ reply was that This

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<sup>3</sup> Cole, p. 146.



kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. This was not an appeal for lengthy prayer before the action, as if the amount of power was related to the length of prayer. It was instead a recognition that prayer was evidence of genuine faith. If they had been men of faith they would have been men of prayer who constantly waited on God for all their strength.

## **B. THE RETURN TO GALILEE, 9:30-50**

### **1. The second passion prediction, 9:30-32**

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have anyone know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise.' 32 But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him.

In Mark 8:31 Jesus began to teach the disciples concerning his coming suffering. Now he spends time in relative seclusion with them, in order to re-enforce what he previously said. However, they remain without understanding. This is not because the information is cryptic, but because of their unwillingness to be committed to Jesus, the suffering Son of man. Their fear of asking him about his predictions is probably fear of the implications of the answer.

### **2. Teaching on little ones, 9:33—48**

#### **(a) Receiving a child, 9:33-37**

33 And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' 34 But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, 'If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.' 36 And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.'

9:33-34 On the way to Capernaum the disciples had kept apart from Jesus, carrying on a conversation which they preferred he did not hear. It had nothing to do with his sufferings, a subject they doubtless wanted to avoid. The subject was who was the greatest among them, a topic diametrically opposed to that of Jesus' suffering.

9:35 If anyone would be first Without them identifying their topic, Jesus proceeded to deal with the subject of greatness. True greatness consists in service and the willingness to take the last place. This, of course, is not seen naturally but only by revelation. His Lordship will appear as weakness when the Son of man suffers, but when the Spirit reveals the truth of Christ, his suffering will be seen as his true greatness (cf. 2 Cor. 13:4).

9:36-37 he took a child The picture is a warm one; Jesus took the child in his arms. He cuddled him.

Whoever receives one such child Receiving the child implies putting aside one's sense of grandeur and importance and simply giving that child the attention and



care it requires. To receive the child thus, in Christ's name, is to receive Christ and, by implication, to receive the one who sent him.

This does not mean that devoting one's time to children is to be equated with receiving Christ. The point is that the disciples wanted to receive Christ as if they were grand officials in the service of the glorious kingdom. But they cannot receive Christ that way; they can only receive him if they do so in the same way they receive such a child, as servants as he is servant.

**in my name** This would mean that the child is to be received because this is the way Christ wants it.

**not me but him who sent me** This reflects 'the Jewish legal principle that a man's representative or agent is as himself'.<sup>44</sup>

**(b) *The man who cast out demons, 9:38-41***

38 John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him, because he was not following us.' 39 But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. 40 For he that is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward.'

Verses 38-41 highlight the superior attitude which the disciples had. This paragraph stands in stark contrast with all that Jesus had just said about greatness and service. Note that the subject must be dealt with again in 10:35-45.

**9:38 we forbade him** Previously the disciples had been totally incapable of defeating the powers of the evil one (Mark 9:18); now, when faced with someone who could and did cast out demons, they forbade him because he was not following us. We know nothing about this man, but it may be that, following the criticism of Jesus by the Pharisees in Mark 3:22, they assumed that the man was actually casting out demons by demonic power. However, it is more likely that the man was casting out demons in Jesus' name but was castigated by the disciples because he was not a close follower of Jesus (cf. Luke 9:49, 'he does not follow with us').

**9:39-40** Jesus' response was to rescind the prohibition. His reason was that the man who was casting out the demons was doing so in Jesus name and so clearly recognising Jesus' authority and functioning within it. We might contrast this with the later astonishment of the disciples when they too found demons subject to them in Jesus' name (Luke 10:17). It is important that we recognise that this does not imply that the mere use of Jesus' name by any person qualifies them for Jesus' approval. This case was obviously different from that. The man is described in terms of the general principle that **no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he who is not against us is for us.** Lenski's comment is helpful:

Jesus states the reason in a negative form which is somewhat like a litotes<sup>5</sup>, for he implies that such a man will speak well of him, if not now then at least very soon. In other words, he will

<sup>4</sup> Cranfield. p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> 'Ironical understatement. esp. expressing of an affirmative by the negative of its contrary' (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

confess Jesus and his name or revelation apart even from the great deeds which he does on the basis of that name, confess him for his own soul's sake. Jesus thus asks for patience on the part of his zealous disciples and for time for the faith of the man to develop. This is better than to say that Jesus demands 'tolerance,' a term that is liable to mislead. Jesus is not dealing with a man who is settled in his determination not to join the band of his disciples but with a man whose knowledge is still limited, whose faith is yet young, and of whom our expectation must be that he will grow in both.<sup>6</sup>

he that is not against us... This must not be taken as a general truth as if it could apply to anyone who does not actively oppose Christ and the kingdom. It only applies to someone in the situation of the man described above.

9:41 This says the same thing in another way. The person who gives you a cup of water because you belong to Christ is giving evidence of a relationship to him. Possibly Jesus is saying that there is no need for such works of power as casting out of demons to demonstrate this. The inclination of the heart is revealed by the action. will by no means lose his reward Again, a litotes for 'he shall receive it'.

**(c) *The danger of causing a little one to sin, 9:42-48***

42 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And 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 to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'<sup>7</sup>

9:42 *these little ones who believe in me* It does not matter much whether it is the man casting out demons in his simple faith or the child on Jesus' lap who is being described. The point is that such faith is precious to God and to cause such a one to be scandalised (Gr. *skandalizo*—to cause someone to stumble in their faith, to destroy someone's faith, to cause to fall away from God) is a fearful thing. This is directed towards the attitude of the disciples who possibly caused the man to question the validity of his simple relationship with Jesus.

The seriousness of the offence is seen in the reaction to it. *it would be better . . .* Better that this happen than that such offence be given.

What follows is to be seen as a warning in graphic terms. Certainly it would not be expected to be taken literally. Serious action must be taken rather than cause someone who trusts in Christ to question or actually lose their faith. Better that you suffer even serious deprivation now and enter the kingdom bearing that deprivation than that you should enter hell whole.

*hell* Gr. *Gehenna*, from *ge Hintsore*, 'the Valley of Hinnom, [speaks] of a disintegration by endless fire and of maggots (V. 48) (symbols) such as were found in the endless burning of the refuse fires. See Isaiah 66:24. '<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Lenski, p. 398.

<sup>7</sup> Verses 44 and 46, which are identical with verse 48, are omitted by the best manuscripts: cf. RSV, footnote *n*: also Metzger, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 58.

### 3. Fire and Salt, 9:49-50

49 'For every one will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

**9:49 every one will be salted with fire** To be salted with fire means probably that the disciples must ensure that they are preserved from such scandalising of others. Salt is a preservative. But the great preservative is fire, the fire of judgement, which deals with the propensity to offend now (cf. 1 Cot. 11:31). Naturally, the idea of being salted with fire implies that there must be suffering now, so that we may not suffer in the final judgement.

**9:50 Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltness...** If we are to be seasoned and preserved and matured, only unadulterated salt will do. If the judgement against remaining sin be watered down then the whole purpose of it will have been defeated.

**Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another** Were the disciples, by quarrelling over greatness, failing to discipline themselves for the work of the kingdom? Instead they should be taking great care lest their witness be rendered useless by an insipid judgement of their own actions and attitudes.

# MARK

## CHAPTER TEN

### C. ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM, 10:1-52

#### I. Geographical Introduction, 10:1

1 And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them.

10:1 In Mark's Gospel, this is the only journey to Jerusalem. The other Gospels give more detail about other journeys. Mark says that they travelled down to the south, to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. These were two clearly defined areas, Judea to the west and 'beyond the Jordan' that is, Perea, to the east of the Jordan river. The area of Perea was under the rule of Herod Antipas who was also tetrarch of Galilee.

#### 2. Divorce, 10:2-12

2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' 3 He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' 4 They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away.' 5 But Jesus said to them, 'For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." 7 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.'

10 And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 And he said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'

10:2 Pharisees came... in order to test him These Pharisees were not really interested in Jesus' teaching as such; no doubt they had been hurt by his actional ministry, which had exposed the paucity of their supposed intellectual superiority, so they were more concerned to find some point of weakness by which they could discredit him. Hence their question, *Is it lawful... ?* As men who studied the law they already knew the answer(s) to the question. Moreover, their question, as far as they were concerned, had no single answer. They were expecting that Jesus would assume one of the contemporary positions on this issue and so alienate himself from a significant part of the people who held to a contrary position.

The discussions in Judaism had been prompted by Deut. 24:1, in particular the meaning of the words 'some indecency in her'. Two schools of thought developed on this matter. The school of Shammai took the strict view that Moses was only referring to something morally shameful, for example, adultery. The school of Hillel said that, in addition to adultery, anything which caused annoyance or embarrassment to the

husband was grounds for divorce. The result was that divorce was both common and easy in that society.

There may have been an added element to their question. John the Baptist had been executed because of this issue, and Jesus was presently in Herod's territory and the Pharisees would have been well aware of it.

**10:3 What did Moses command you?** This question cut through all the levels of legal tradition. His concern was not with contemporary questions but of the nature of the law of God.

**10:4 Moses allowed...** Their reply is that Moses did not actually legislate divorce, he only permitted it in certain regulated circumstances. Moses recognised the fact of divorce and actually limited the reason why someone should regard the marriage as finished. The **certificate of divorce** was aimed, to some extent, at protecting the rights of the wife. It authenticated her right to remarry and stated that she was not an adulteress. Both parties to adultery were to be put to death (Lev. 20:10<sup>1</sup>) so that whatever Moses intended by 'some indecency' it was almost certainly not adultery.

Concerning the passage in Deut. 24:1ff., P. C. Craigie writes,

If the man decided to divorce the woman, he was to write out a bill of divorce and formally serve it on the woman. She was then sent away from the man's house, but possession of the bill of divorce gave her a certain protection under law from any further action by the man. In the situation envisaged by this particular piece of legislation, the divorced woman then remarries another man. The second marriage is terminated, either by a second divorce or by the death of the second husband. Now comes the specific legislation: under all these circumstances, the first man may not remarry his former wife. After she has been defiled—the language (defiled) suggests adultery (see Lev. 18:20). The sense is that the woman's remarriage after the first divorce is similar to adultery in that the woman cohabits with another man. However, if the woman were then to remarry her first husband, after divorcing the second, the analogy with adultery would become even more complete; the woman lives first with one man, then another, and finally returns to the first. Thus the intent of the legislation seems to be to apply certain restrictions on the already existing practice of divorce. If divorce became too easy, then it could be abused and it would become a 'legal' form of committing adultery.<sup>2</sup>

It becomes clear that the situation being regulated by Moses was apparently exactly the same as that faced by Jesus. Divorce for the purpose of remarriage was adultery. This is precisely what Jesus taught the disciples in the house afterwards (vv. 10-12).

**10:5** Jesus now focuses on the real issue. Moses' command, which incidentally, was a command not to do something rather than a command to carry out a divorce, was a concession due to human sin. Were there no sin there would be no divorce. Moses, therefore, was only making a protective regulation, lest human sin should do even more damage.

**10:6-9 But from the beginning** Moses' concession must not be illegitimately taken as God's command for marriage. Quite the contrary, God's command concerning marriage was not something introduced into an already functioning community (for example, at Sinai). The marriage relationship is rooted in creation. It is fundamental to the nature of men and women—God made them male and female. The concession, then, is a restriction upon men and women who refuse to be obedient to the creational

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. John 8:4-5 where the Scribes and Pharisees were obviously more intent on testing Jesus than on carrying out the law, since they did not bring both parties before him.

<sup>2</sup> Craigie. p 305

law.

The following quotation, from Gen. 2:24, shows that when God made them male and female, his intention was that the man should leave the protection of his parents and the woman from the care of hers, and they should become ‘one flesh’, an united whole. So they are no longer two but one flesh. If this is What therefore God has joined together, that is, joined by a creational and therefore inviolable law, then man may not put them asunder. If this is how things are ‘from the beginning’, then later ‘laws’ cannot supersede it.

We may conclude from this that to divorce is to deny what God has done and to deny one’s own essential being. Hence Mal. 2:15-16, ‘Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel..."’

**10:10-12** These verses show that here, as elsewhere, the disciples do not understand. Jesus explains that divorce (except for *porneia*—‘unchastity’ see Matt. 19:9) for the purpose of remarriage is only another name for adultery. If a divorce takes place, it cannot alter what God has done. The couple may not live together as husband and wife, but they are! Even the separation in I Cor. 7:15 does not countenance remarriage. There it simply states that the partner ‘is not bound’, that is, is not bound to remain with the one who does not wish to maintain the marriage unit.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Children, 10:13-16

**13** And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. **15** Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’ **16** And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

**10:13 they were bringing children to him** This is literally, ‘they kept on bringing children to him’. The disciples resented the intrusion by the children into Jesus’ time, which he obviously ought to have devoted to the adults.

**the disciples rebuked them** The Greek word for ‘them’ (*autois*) is masculine, possibly implying that it was fathers who were bringing their children to Jesus and not the ‘mothers of Salem’.

**10:14-15 But when Jesus saw it he was indignant** Just as the Jewish legal system regarded women as items to be divorced at will, and so as inferior, so the disciples treated the children as inferior.

**to such belongs the kingdom of God** As it stands, this is not totally clear. Jesus was not saying that children, by being children, inherit the kingdom of God. His explanation in verse 15 gives the meaning. Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as (not, per RSV ‘like’) a child shall not enter it. One does not need to become like a child, one simply has to come as a child comes, viz. in helpless trust. These children, who have been

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<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that many who argue for remarriage after divorce want 1 Cor. 7:15 to mean ‘is not bound’ to remain unmarried. But this would be to go against the thrust of what we have said concerning this passage in Mark. For a detailed examination of this topic, see Bingham, *God’s Glory Man’s Sexuality*, chs 30-33.

brought to Jesus stand as the pattern for all who would receive the

kingdom. Of course the children, too, must actually receive the kingdom. It is not theirs by right.

**10:16 he took them in his arms** Jesus was not so caught up with theology that he lost the warmth of genuine affection. ‘He took them in his arms’ means that he cuddled them, as well as calling God’s blessing on them. This was in contrast to the attitude of the disciples who regarded them as a nuisance. It was also in contrast to the calloused attitude of much of contemporary Hellenistic society.

#### 4. Rich Men, 10: 17-31

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ 18 And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother."’ 20 And he said to him, ‘Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth.’ 21 And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ 22 At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

**10:17 As he was setting out on his journey** Mark continues the account of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, begun in Mark 10:1. As Jesus commences the next section of the trip, a young man (Matt. 19:20) who was also a ruler (Luke 18:18) came up to him and knelt before him.

**Good teacher** The form of address is unusual, but no doubt relates to the significance of the question which follows. Probably the young man is sincere in his enquiry as in his addressing Jesus this way, as seen in Jesus’ response in verse 21.

**what must I do to inherit eternal life?** Verse 23 shows that eternal life is the -issue of the kingdom. The previous discussion concerning children and the sections which follow all revolve around the action of the kingdom (so vv. 14-15, 37, 47; 11:10; etc.). Matthew records the question as ‘What good [thing] must I do . . .’ (Matt. 19:16).

**10:18 Why do you call me good** Jesus does not reject the epithet, nor does he, question deny being God. He simply exposes the young man to the crucial Only God is good<sup>4</sup>, so it is to him alone that one must go for eternal life.

**10:19 You know the commandments** Jesus lists the commandments which relate to the duty of a person to his or her neighbour. Possibly it is because the attitude towards these would demonstrate the attitude towards God.

**Do not defraud** This is usually taken as referring to the tenth commandment, although there is no real evidence to support this. More likely is the suggestion that Mark has in mind the substance of such commands as Deut. 24:14-15 which warn against oppressing or withholding wages from a hired servant.<sup>5</sup> This would concur with the alternative in Matthew, which has ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (19:19).

<sup>4</sup> Reference should be made to the article ‘The Fruit of Goodness’ by Pennicook for a discussion of the issue of the goodness of God as it relates to men and women.

<sup>5</sup> A. B. Bruce. p. 410.



**10:20 all these I have observed from my youth** ‘The man’s naive reply makes it clear that he has not understood the Commandments nor ever really taken them seriously. But he was no more mistaken about the Law’s real seriousness than were his Jewish contemporaries generally. (Cf. S.-B. 1, p. 814: "That man possesses the ability to fulfil the Commandments of God perfectly was so firmly believed by the Rabbis, that they spoke in all seriousness of people who had kept the whole Law from A to Z.")’<sup>6</sup>

**10:21 Jesus looking upon him, loved him** We should not take this simply to mean that Jesus was pleased with the man’s answer and so loved him. That he was not satisfied with the answer is demonstrated in his own instruction to the young man.

**go, sell what you have** Jesus perceived a deep idolatry in the man. It had been possible for the man to regard himself as blameless in regards the commandments listed by Jesus, even though as a ruler, probably of the synagogue, he would have been familiar with the many commandments which the Pharisees had built as a fence around the law. But the issue of his relationship with God had remained untouched by the traditions of the elders which he had evidently taken so seriously.

Further to this, Jesus’ instruction highlighted the total inadequacy of the traditions of the elders. Jesus asked him to sell all that he had. ‘Rabbinism had never asked this; if it demanded almsgiving, it was in odious boastfulness; while it was declared even unlawful to give away all one’s possessions—at most, only a fifth of them might be dedicated’.<sup>7</sup>

**10:22 he went away sorrowful** Nothing more is known of this man than this. His sorrow is not explained other than that it was because he was wealthy. But we are left to speculate as to whether he was sorrowful about losing his riches or about his failure to receive a satisfactory answer to his question. Whatever the answer, he had been exposed as a man who could not enter the kingdom of God.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!’ 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ 27 Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.’ 28 Peter began to say to him, ‘Lo, we have left everything and followed you.’ 29 Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel. 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many that are first will be last, and the last first.’

**10:23-25 And Jesus looked around** He was clearly intent on ensuring that the disciples heard and understood. It is very hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. It is so hard that Jesus resorts to using an illustration which, by its humour, implies that it is impossible. The young man has demonstrated that riches exert a hold over a person which renders them quite helpless in the face of the demands of the kingdom.

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<sup>6</sup> Cranfield, p. 329.

<sup>7</sup> Edersheim, vol. 2, p. 342.

**10:26 they were exceedingly astonished** It may be that up to this point the disciples were still bent on acquiring riches for themselves, and Jesus statement has shocked them intensely. Verses 35ff. of this chapter would indicate that there is at least something of this in their astonishment.

**said to him** This should probably be 'said to one another'.

**Then who can be saved?** There seems to be almost an element of petulance in their question. It could appear that Jesus has virtually excluded everyone by his absolute standards.

**10:27** Jesus agreed with their evaluation. With men it is impossible. Salvation cannot be earned by human effort. Man's only hope lies in the action of God.

**10:28** Peter, acting as the spokesman for the rest, defends the behaviour of the band of followers. **we have left every thing** is an aorist tense, indicating a single action, while and followed you is a perfect tense, indicating a continuing action. He is saying that surely their behaviour qualifies them, as Matthew's qualification, 'What then shall we have?' bears out.

**10:29-30** Peter has given the impression that he and the others feel deprived by their great sacrifice. Jesus' response is to show them the immeasurable generosity of God towards those who respond to Christ and the demands of the gospel of the kingdom. At the same time, there will be persecution, but the great goal is the eternal life which the rich young man claimed to be seeking.

**10:31** This warning is necessary because of the deceitfulness of the human heart, both of those who are inside as well as of those who are outside the kingdom. Possibly, Jesus is warning the disciples that 'The exhilarating promise of abundant recompense to those who had forsaken all for Christ, was in danger of being misapplied to some 'whose self-denial and devotion were apparent only.'<sup>8</sup> Such a one was, for example, Judas Iscariot. But it could well apply even to Peter, if he was using Jesus to accomplish some personal goal for prominence or success. God is certainly not deceived by merely outward professions of faith and devotion.

### 5. The third passion prediction, 10:32-34

32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 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; 31 and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise.'

The repetition of the passion prediction was entirely appropriate at this point. The twelve needed again to hear that the way of the kingdom was the way of suffering. There can be no kingdom apart from the Cross.

10:32 Jesus quite clearly was determined to go to Jerusalem where suffering awaited

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander, p. 288.

him. Those who accompanied him were amazed and afraid (cf. John 9:16).

### 6. Leaders among the disciples, 10:35-45

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him, and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' 36 And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 37 And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' 38 But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that [ drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?' 39 And they said to him, 'We are able.' And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but is for those for whom it has been prepared.' 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

This is more than an account of the approach of James and John to Jesus for special privilege. It is evidence of the deep seated resistance to Jesus' instruction concerning suffering. The failure of the disciples to understand (see Mark 9:32 etc.) was the failure of refusal to face the implications. They were locked into their own fears for their own future.

**10:35** In Matt. 20:20 we are told it was the mother of the two men who made the approach. Their initial request is somewhat humorous in its naivety.

**10:37** The two recognise that there is a coming glory. Furthermore, they recognise that they have been offered unlimited blessings in the coming kingdom. But they are obviously trying to get an assurance of their position and an improvement upon it. Evidently, the fear of suffering is still prominent, so that they fear that the suffering, far from guaranteeing their blessing, may actually deprive them of it.

**10:38-39** **You do not know what you are asking** This is in spite of the repeated instruction which Jesus has given them.

Are you able to drink the cup To share my glory, you must drink the cup that I drink.

**the baptism** Cf. Luke 12:50. The cup and the baptism are no light thing, but demand all the resources of Christ himself. This makes their response (v. 39) so pathetic. At best, having recognised that Jesus was speaking again of his coming suffering, they have assumed it to be the glorious suffering 'in the cause of the messianic kingdom, something which could be faced in the mood of the martyrs of Maccabean days'.<sup>9</sup> They will not see it as the suffering that is a scandal to the Jew and foolishness to the Greek.

**you will drink** Jesus reply to his own question is significant. His question implied that there was something totally unique about his suffering, which is true. However, what is also true is that the disciples will enter in to that suffering. Of course,

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<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, p. 338.

this has already been stated, in a different form, in Mark 8:34.

**10:40 not mine to grant** This is one of those statements which emphasises that the accounts of Jesus were not made up to enhance his reputation after his departure. The point of Jesus' comment is that he too is a man under authority. If there is a kingdom, it is not for his glory per se, but for the glory of the one whom he serves (so, 1 Cor. 15:24-28). Note also the electing purpose of God; **it is for those for whom it has been prepared.** They may, in fact, receive the desired privilege, but it will be a gift and not the result of any bargaining.

**10:41** It seems likely that the indignation of the ten other disciples was caused by the attempt of James and John to get in ahead of them. The instruction which follows treats the twelve as equally in need.

**10:42-44** 'To wish to have the place of authority may be all right<sup>[10]</sup>, if it is for exercising it for the purpose for which authority is ordained, i.e. to serve others. If it is only to lord it over men, then it is a Gentile way, if to serve, then the Kingdom way.'<sup>11</sup>

**10:45 not to be served but to serve** The lordship of Christ is with a view to serving. It is not that the Lord also serves, but that the suffering he has been repeatedly predicting is his lordship which is his service.

**a ransom for many** His service has a clear goal, viz. the salvation of many who are presently in bondage. 'Ransom' (Gr. lutron) is used only here and in the Matthean parallel in the New Testament. Outside the Bible it refers to the ransom of a prisoner of war or a slave. In the Old Testament (LXX) lutron is used to translate Hebrew words which relate to (i) the half shekel poll-tax (Exod. 30:12), (ii) the money to be paid by the person whose ox had killed someone (Exod. 21:30), (iii) the price paid for the redemption of the first born (Num. 18:15), (iv) the money paid by the next of kin to ransom an enslaved relative (Lev. 25:51f.), or (v) the payment for the redemption of a mortgaged property (Lev. 25:26).

However, the full implication of the use of lutron may lie not in these uses, although they may add to the idea, but in the whole picture of the suffering servant of Isa. 53, who 'makes his soul an offering for sin'. The words a ransom for many may be a direct reference to the work of the servant in Isa. 53:11-12, 'make many to be accounted righteous... he bore the sin of many'.<sup>12</sup>

## 7. Blind Bartimaeus, 10:46-52

46 And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' 49 And Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; rise he is calling you.' 50 And throwing off his mantle, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And the blind man said to him, 'Master, let me receive my sight.' 52 And Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your faith has made you well.' And

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 3:1.

<sup>11</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> See Cranfield, p. 342.

immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

This is the last miracle recorded in this Gospel. It ought to be observed that Mark has included it, not only for its isolated interest, but because it carries the thrust of the gospel further. Jesus is here addressed as ‘the Son of David’ which seems to have clear Messianic and kingdom significance. Certainly Jesus did not reject the title or try to silence Bartimaeus. The servant of Mark 10:45 is the king. This is born out more strongly in Mark 11:1ff. (esp. v. 10).

**10:46** The three synoptic Gospels have three differing accounts of this event. Matthew describes two blind men, while Luke places the event on the way into Jericho. It is only Mark who gives the man’s name. Surprisingly, in the Greek, Mark gives the meaning of his name before the name: the Son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus. Possibly the giving of his name may suggest that he was later known in the church (cf. Mark 15:21).

**10:47-48** Bartimaeus was certainly not about to be silenced when there was so much at stake. See above for the title given to Jesus.

**10:49-50 Take heart** Cf. Mark 6:50. This is a word of great encouragement, although here on the lips of the crowd. The fickleness of the crowd may be evident in it, since only moments before they were attempting to silence the man. The speed with which Bartimaeus responded demonstrated that he needed little encouragement.

**10:51 Master** Literally, this is ‘Rabboni’, a word which occurs only here and in John 20:16 in the New Testament. It is stronger than ‘Rabbi’ and means ‘my lord’, ‘my master’.

**What do you want me to do for you?** Obviously Jesus was in no doubt as to the man’s need; nor was anyone else. The question was probably intended to make Bartimaeus define his need and so place his precise request before Jesus. ‘I am publicly asking for the restoration of my sight.’

**10:52** The healing took place simply at the word of Jesus. (Matthew adds that Jesus touched their eyes, although this would not alter the power of Jesus’ word.)

**and followed him on the way** Bartimaeus joined the crowd which accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem. Presumably a deeper meaning of ‘followed’ may be in mind also.

# MARK

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### D. THE JERUSALEM MINISTRY, 11:1—12:44

#### 1. Jesus enters, 11: 1-14

1 And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, 2 and said to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. 3 If any one says to you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" 4 And they went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. and those who stood there said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' 6 And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. 7 And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. and many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. 9 And those who went before and those who followed cried out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!'

11 And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

12 On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. 13 And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on 'it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And he said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard it.

**11:1 Bethphage** This was a village near Bethany, although it is uncertain whether it was closer to Jerusalem than Bethany<sup>1</sup> or that it was mentioned first because, as Jesus came to Jerusalem from the east, Bethphage was the first village he encountered.<sup>2</sup> Both villages were only a mile or two from the city.

the Mount of Olives 'The Mount of Olives is over 2600 feet high and lies on the east of Jerusalem, stretching from north to south.'<sup>3</sup>

**11:2-3 into the village opposite** It is not clear which of the two villages is intended.

**you will find a colt tied** Though this is often cited as an example of Jesus' miraculous knowledge<sup>4</sup>, the language used does not preclude the possibility of Jesus having made some prior arrangements with the owner of the colt. The words which the disciples were to use may have been intended to identify them as genuinely entitled to take the animal.

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> Clark.

<sup>3</sup> Cranfield. p. 348.

<sup>4</sup> Eg., Cole, p. 174.



The Lord has need of it Are we to assume that Jesus meant ‘Lord’ as a reference to himself?. If so, it is an unusual occurrence. When used as a term of address, ‘Lord’ meant no more than ‘Sir’ (for example, John 4:11; Mark 7:28), but the use of ‘Lord’ in the third person for Jesus (that is, ‘the Lord’) seems not to have been normal until after the resurrection. Perhaps Jesus was referring to God or, possibly, even to the owner of the animal who may actually have been with him. This latter suggestion may be supported by the fact that the message of the disciples was sent not for the owner but for anyone who may intervene.<sup>5</sup>

**11:4-5 those who stood there** This may support the view that the owner was not there.

**11:7-8** When the disciples returned with the colt, the disciples made a makeshift saddle with their cloaks. The crowd which was present joined in to make the ride of Jesus a ‘triumphant entry’. The crowd was comprised of pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. As such, they were already in a festive mood, but Jesus’ actions caused even greater jubilation. Matt. 21:5 highlights the fulfilment of prophecy which was inherent in Jesus actions, quoting Zech. 9:9 which in its context looks towards the total salvation of Israel. Doubtless the crowd was not unaware of the prophecy.

**11:9-10 Hosanna! Blessed is he...** ‘Hosanna’ is literally ‘Save now’. The words used are from Ps. 118:25-26. The use of Ps. 118 was not altogether unexpected, since Ps. 113-118 were used liturgically during the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover.<sup>6</sup> In their context in the Psalm, the words ‘Blessed is he who comes...’ refer to those who come to the temple (cf. Ps. 118:27). Here, however, within the context of Mark’s Gospel and its theme of the proclamation of the kingdom, the quotation takes on a fuller significance. Luke’s account adds that the Pharisees demanded that Jesus rebuke his disciples (Luke 19:39), doubtless implying that they had seen some of the fuller significance and disapproved.

**11:11** After quickly surveying the temple and its precincts (the temple was the closest building when someone approached from the east), Jesus returned to Bethany as he was to do on each successive night during the following dramatic week.

**11:12-14** The account of the cursing of the fig tree has caused much difficulty, first as to the precise details concerning the tree and the required fruit (v. 13b) and then by the attitude which Jesus seemed to display. None of the difficulties or their many solutions are at all necessary if we allow that Jesus was fully aware that it was not the season when one would find fruit, and so the tree with its leaves but no fruit would provide a perfect illustration of the principle he wished to establish.

In Jer. 8, the prophet accuses Israel of not knowing the ordinance of the Lord (v. 7). They claim to know the law, but the boasting is false (vv. 10b-11). When God comes

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<sup>5</sup> Cranfield. p. 349f. Cranfield suggests that Luke (in 19:33) has altered the Markan statement of verse 5, ‘those who stood there’, to read ‘its lords’ (RSV ‘owners’).

<sup>6</sup> Lane, p. 397, suggests further that the form of the quotation and the words of verse 10, which are not a quotation but a commentary on verse 9, ‘suggests the antiphonal character of the singing:

(a) Hosanna!

(b) Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

(b’) Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!

(a’) Hosanna in the highest!’



to his people, expecting to find the fruit of righteousness among the people whose boast is that they are wise and have the law of the Lord (v. 8) he finds nothing but 'abomination' (v. 12). Such fruitlessness demands judgement (v. 12b). The way Jeremiah describes the sense of fruitlessness is in verse 13: 'When I would gather them, says the Lord, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them' (cf. also Micah 7:1f; Mark 7:6). This event, far from being the story of Jesus' uncharacteristic bad temper, or of his failure to discern the season, was an enacted parable of the coming judgement upon Israel, clearly based on the prophetic scriptures.

'The best commentary on vv. 12-14 and 20f. is to be found in the narrative which these verses enframe. "That which happened in the Temple and Jesus' action against the tree explained each other" (Schlatter).'<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Jesus acts, 11:15-19

15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons; 16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he taught, and said to them, 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.' 18 And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and sought a way to destroy him; for they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching. 19 And when evening came they went out of the city.

20 As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. 21 And Peter remembered and said to him, 'Master, look! The fig tree which you cursed has withered.'

11:15 he entered the temple Again, it is the prophetic principle which is paramount. The warning of coming judgement in Mal. 3:1ff. is significant. The people, speak much of delighting in the coming of the Lord, but his coming will be for judgement and not to approve his people's behaviour. And in the light of their hypocrisy, 'who can endure the day of his coming...?' Salvation can come to Israel only through judgement (vv. 2b-5 etc.). Jesus' description of the desecrated temple is a quotation from Jer. 7:(8-11). That Jesus' action in cleansing the temple was Messianic was not lost on the Jewish leaders (see John 2: 18, where they demand of Jesus a sign to validate his implied claims).<sup>8</sup>

those who sold and those who bought The selling of suitable sacrificial animals within the temple precincts was an old and, in one sense, not inappropriate practice. It would have been easier for those travelling long distances to purchase their sacrifices there than to bring them with them, possibly only to find that the animal did not pass official inspection. Likewise, since the temple tax was to be paid in Jewish currency (the Hebrew shekel) and normal business was transacted in currency bearing Greek or Roman inscriptions, it was necessary that the money be changed nearby.

However, the area used for these business transactions was the section known as the court of the Gentiles. Thus Jesus' quotation from Isa. 56:7 (the words 'for all nations' are omitted by both Matthew and Luke) in verse. 17 indicates the seriousness of the travesty. The temple did not exist only for Israel. Rather, Israel was to be the focus of

<sup>7</sup> Cranfield, p. 357.

<sup>8</sup> For the question concerning whether this event belongs early (John) or late (Synoptics) in Jesus' ministry, see Cranfield, p. 360; and Morris, pp. 189ff.

the worship of all nations, and the temple had an area especially set aside so that the non-Jews could participate in worship. But the court of the gentiles was not able to be used for prayer since it had become a market place. In this way Israel had shown utmost contempt for its own calling as a priestly nation.

**he... began to drive out...** The scene must have been one of almost unbelievable chaos. John 2:15 tells that Jesus made a whip out of cords (animal leads) and drove the animals from the place. More than that, the action was a direct confrontation with the whole temple hierarchy and the system they controlled. Hence the reaction in verse 18.

**11:18 chief priests... sought a way to destroy him** The king had come and must clean out all that was a denial of the holiness of the kingdom. But in doing so he was provoking the leaders of the Jews to kill him. But, in this way, of course, he was actually moving towards the complete establishment of the kingdom (see Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

for they feared him The chief priests and the scribes could not, at that time, take direct action against Jesus because the crowd was clearly impressed with all that he said and did. Generally, the crowds of common people were unsympathetic with the chief priests, who were largely drawn from the moneyed aristocracy and Sadducees. Consequently the chief priests and scribes were obliged to work indirectly for the moment.

**11:19** when evening came Following the day's dramatic activities, Jesus and the disciples returned to Bethany.

**11:20-21 ... the fig tree withered away to its roots** The words of verse 14, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again', resulted in the complete destruction of the tree. As in earlier events, the power lay in Jesus' words, although here it was a word of judgement, whereas earlier it was a word of healing. (Cf. Ezek. 17:9; Hosea 9:16.)

### 3. Jesus teaches, 11:22—12:44

#### (a) *Prayer and faith, 11:22-25*

22 And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, "Be taken up and cast into the sea," and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.'

Any division between this section and the previous one is arbitrary. Clearly the teaching which Jesus now gives is dependent upon what has just taken place.

**11:22 Have faith in God** Much has been made in some circles of the fact that the Greek reads 'Have faith of God' (Gr. **theou**), as if it meant 'have the sort of faith which God has'. Cranfield observes that this 'is surely a monstrosity of exegesis'.<sup>9</sup> Jesus'

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<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, p. 361. He also cites examples where the genitive is used with *pistis*.

comment is that what has taken place is the result, not of miraculous powers but of faith. Jesus, the man of faith, has seen and understood the purpose of God and acted upon that. That is no more than any man or woman of faith would do. In saying this, Jesus is no doubt highlighting the unbelief of the disciples as expressed in their astonishment.

**11:23-24 this mountain** In this context it is probably a reference to the Mount of Olives.

**Be taken up and cast into the sea** It must be stressed that at no point here is Jesus suggesting that the decision to command, in this case, the mountain to be removed, is initiated by the person doing the commanding. This statement must be seen in the total context of Jesus' action and the Old Testament prophetic utterances which gave it direction, and the fact that Jesus' whole life was one of dependence upon and obedience to his Father. Hence the command which Jesus has said will be fulfilled must be seen in the whole life context of prayerful discernment of the will of God. This principle was established in Mark 9:29.

**whatever you ask in prayer** This makes it clear that the command to the mountain is inseparably related to prayer.

**does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass... believe that you have received it** The result of the command does not depend upon the strength of the conviction that it will happen; it depends on the strength of the belief that God has commanded it so that we must speak the word of command. To doubt that God has commanded it will render the human word ineffective, since the person speaking will not be certain that he or she is acting in the strength of obedience. Also, such doubting will indicate an uncertainty that God is as good as his word. See Jer. 1:9-10, 17-19; James 1:6.

**11:25 forgive** Some have suggested that the insertion of this saying about forgiveness is only legitimised by the common subject of prayer. But forgiveness must be seen as vital to effective prayer. The one who does not forgive cannot truly know what it is to be forgiven and so must, by nature of the case, function with what is, in effect, a barrier between himself and God. Further, lack of forgiveness is an affront to God.

### **(b) Authority, 11:27<sup>10</sup>-33**

27 And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, 28 and they said to him, 'By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?' 29 Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you a question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men? Answer me.' 31 And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven," he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?" 32 But shall we say, "From men"?'—they were afraid of the people, for all held that John was a real prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'

**11:28 By what authority** Jesus' authority was obvious; what he said, happened. Neither he nor his disciples were the products of formal training (cf. Acts 4:13) yet

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<sup>10</sup> Verse 26, 'But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses', is omitted by the best manuscripts.

when Jesus spoke, the truth of (not simply about) the kingdom was communicated. The Pharisees and scribes were not guilty of misinformation about the kingdom (Matt. 23:1-3), yet they lacked the authority (Matt. 7:29).

**these things** The question was asked within the temple, where he had expelled the traders, but that was not the sole action being questioned. They were enquiring about all that he did.

**11:29 I will ask you a question** Jesus was not evading their question: he was rather exposing their unwillingness to face the answer.

**11:30-33 the baptism of John** The authority of Jesus can only be known when the general issue of authority is faced. The leaders would not face the subject as it raised itself in the person of John and so Jesus would not give them the direct answer they appeared to want. Calvin commented: 'The priests show their impiety: no consideration of truth, no interrogation of their own conscience, but a disgraceful effort to shuffle off responsibility rather than admit it, in case their tyrannical power were lost to them. All wicked men pretend to be desirous to learn, but shut the door on the truth when they sense it is against their greedy interests.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, vol.III, p. 12.

# MARK

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### (c) The parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants, 12:1-12

1 And he began to speak to them in parables. 'A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the wine press, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. 2 When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty handed. 4 Again he sent to them another servant, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. and he sent another, and him they killed; and so with many others, some they beat and some they killed. 6 He had still one other, a beloved son; finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." 7 But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." and they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. 9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not read this scripture: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; 11 this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes"?' 12 And they tried to arrest him, but feared the multitude, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them; so they left him and went away.

The connection between the previous subject and this is obvious. Just as the leaders would not know Jesus' authority, so here, in language drawn from the well known passage in Isa. 5:1-7, Jesus describes them as men who are rejecting the authority of God and thus rejecting the one whose authority is so plain. In doing so, they are calling down judgement upon themselves and the vineyard.

**12:1 parables** Although Mark uses the plural, 'parables', only one parable is actually recorded.

**planted... set... dug** All that was needed had been done. All the tenants needed to do was faithfully care for the vineyard. The pit was the trough used to receive the juice when the grapes were crushed, and the tower was a taller building from which the vineyard could be supervised and where the tenants could shelter.

**12:2-5 servant** The parable was quite transparent (v. 12). The vineyard was Israel, the tenants her leaders and the servants who were sent were the prophets. It was known that the prophets had been mistreated and rejected by Israel; the present generation admitted it (Matt. 23:29-30). What was not admitted was that the present generation was continuing the rejection (Matt. 23:31-32).

**12:6-8 a beloved son** What would demonstrate the nature of the leaders, who denied any sympathy with earlier rejection of the prophets, would be their attitude to the

one whom the Father loved.

**This is the heir** Not simply the one who would at some future time inherit the property, but the one who, as the heir, already carried his Father's authority. The point of the comment is that, although they have asked Jesus concerning his authority, they already knew full well who he is.

come, let us kill him The same words are used by Joseph's brothers in the LXX of Gen. 37:20.

**12:9 and give the vineyard to others** Matt. 21:41 tells us that the judgement on the tenants was the spontaneous verdict of the crowd. Although the way the judgement was to come was not yet obvious, still the point was that Israel would come under the control of others. 'Without declaring his own transcendent sonship, Jesus clearly implies that the Sanhedrin has rejected God's final messenger and that disaster will ensue. The sacred trust of the chosen people will be transferred to the new Israel of God.'<sup>1</sup>

**12:10-11** The quotation is from Ps. 118:22f., the same psalm from which the cry of 'Hosanna' in Mark 11:9 is taken. In rejecting the Son, indeed in killing him, they could not remove him. He will be seen to be vital to the whole building. In spite of the rejection of Jesus by the leaders, there can finally be no people of God without him.

**12:12** Possibly the verse is saying that the leaders were unable to arrest Jesus because the crowd knew that Jesus had told the story against the leaders. Certainly the leaders knew it and were enraged.

#### ***(d) The question of tribute, 12:13-17***

13 And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to entrap him in his talk. 14 And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are true, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Should we pay them, or should we not?' But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a coin, and let me look at it.' 16 And they brought one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' 17 Jesus said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were amazed at him.

**12:13 Pharisees . . . Herodians** The rage of the leaders made the previous mutual hatred of Pharisees and Herodians irrelevant. The Pharisees were the party of religious purity, mainly centred in and around Jerusalem, and the Herodians were the partisans of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. The latter would, quite naturally be in Jerusalem for the feast.

**12:14 we know that you are true** The aim was no doubt to flatter Jesus and so put him off his guard.

care for no man This would surely, if accepted, put Jesus in the position where he would be willing to speak out against Caesar.

**Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?** The question was cunning in that it was aimed at putting Jesus in the wrong either with the general population which

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<sup>1</sup> Lane, p. 419.

smarted under the harsh taxation of the Romans, or with the Romans, who were alert to signs of subversion.

**12:15 hypocrisy** Jesus was not caught and made it clear by asking them to produce a coin.

**12:16 Whose likeness** ‘By the acceptance of Imperial coinage... the Jews had already shown acceptance of Imperial rule, albeit unwillingly.’<sup>2</sup>

**12:17 Render to Caesar** Jesus deftly avoided the trap set for him. To the Herodians any refusal to pay taxes to Rome was unthinkable, since they favoured Roman rule, while the Pharisees insisted on one’s duty to God. Jesus’ answer showed that he felt no need to take sides with any group, especially since neither took its total obligation seriously. If there is an obligation to Caesar, meet it. Likewise, obligations to God must not be set aside.

The usual legend on the coins declared Tiberius to be the Son of the Divine Augustus<sup>3</sup> (obverse) and Pontifex Maximus (supreme head of the chief Roman cult-reverse) and thus implied that Tiberius was worthy of some degree of worship. Cf. Rev. 13 where worship of the beast and its image is so significant. However, those later issues are not being raised here.

**they were amazed at him** They had come to trap him, but were amazed at his extraordinary capacity to maintain control of the discussion.

**(e) The question of the resurrection, 12:18-27**

18 And Sadducees came to him, who say there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying, 19 ‘Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the wife, and raise up children for his brother. 20 There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and -when he died left no children; 21 and the second took her, and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; 22 and the seven left no children. Last of all the woman also died. 23 In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.’

24 Jesus said to them, ‘Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.’

**12:18 Sadducees** The Pharisees and Herodians had attempted to trap Jesus but failed. Now the Sadducees have their turn. The Sadducees are generally taken to be ‘an aristocratic party consisting of the high priestly and other leading families of Jerusalem’.<sup>4</sup> This is the only reference to them in this Gospel.

**12:19 Moses wrote** Their reference was to Deut. 25:5-10, where Moses legislated to ensure that a man’s family name did not die out. The Sadducees recognised the

<sup>2</sup> Cole, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> The legend was in abbreviated form but reads in full, ‘Tibenus Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus’.

<sup>4</sup> Lane, p. 426. Although there are no written records of the Sadducees. we do know, from here and elsewhere. that they were more than just a political party. holding strong views concerning the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6ff.).



authority of Moses but refused to recognise the prophetic writings. Their aim was to mention a Mosaic provision and then present a parody of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead in order to make Jesus, and, in passing, the Pharisaic position, appear foolish.<sup>5</sup>

**12:20-23** The Sadducees were willing to allow a hypothetical resurrection only so far as it served to make the whole subject look ridiculous.

**12:24** The Sadducees were wrong in two areas. They did not know the scriptures and they did not know the power of God. These two failures were, of course, directly related. Had they known the power of God then they would have recognised that the resurrection was by no means impossible, and they would have seen that even the scriptures which they acknowledged as genuine (they have already quoted Moses in v. 19) bore testimony to it. They would have seen also that the whole action of God in history transcends the trivial situation they have described (so v. 25). As it was, they were a clear illustration of those who saw but did not see (cf. Mark 4:12).

**12:25 like the angels in heaven** Jesus' reply to the Sadducees' question is that they do not know that marriage and its relationships are not at all part of the resurrection life. Jesus' answer is not at all reasonable to the Sadducees; part of their problem was that, while rejecting the power of God, they were rejecting the whole truth of the supernatural. Jesus' answer in terms of likeness to angels and the resurrection was quite beyond anything they could accept (cf. Acts 23:8).

The phrase 'in heaven' should be construed with 'the angels'. The resurrected dead would be like the angels who are in heaven, not that the resurrected dead would be in heaven. Contrary to popular terminology, the resurrected dead will find their home in the new earth (Rev. 21:1f.).

**12:26-27** Jesus now answers the Sadducees in terms of their own scriptures. His use of Exod. 3:6 at first sight may seem strange. While superficially it seems to say no more than that the God who is addressing Moses is the same God who earlier addressed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in fact the verse carries far more weight.

The point is that God was saying to Moses that his revelation was to be understood in terms of the covenant which he made with the patriarchs. God is saying, 'As I guided and directed the patriarchs, so I am continuing to do so.' This guidance was not restricted only to the confines of their own individual lives but found its context within the whole direction of history in the plan of God for his own people.

Lane summarises the issue as follows:

If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob' is the symbol. It is in fidelity to his covenant that God will resurrect the dead. In citing Ex. 3:6 Jesus showed how resurrection faith is attached in a profound way to the central concept of biblical revelation, the covenant, and how the salvation promised by God to the patriarchs and their descendants in virtue of the covenant contains implicitly the assurance of the resurrection. It was the failure to appreciate the essential link between God's covenant faithfulness

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<sup>5</sup> The rejection of all parts of the scriptures apart from the Law of Moses was occasioned in part by their reaction against the Pharisaic 'Tradition of the elders' (see on Mark 7:1ff.) which comprised 'a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them...' (Josephus, XIII, x, 6).

and the resurrection which had led the Sadducees into their grievous error.<sup>6</sup>

*(f) The Greatest Commandment, 12:28-34*

28 And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' 29 Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." 31 The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' 32 And the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; 33 and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' 34 And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to ask him any question.

**12:28 Which commandment is the first of all** The question, according to Mark, comes from a scribe, according to Luke from a lawyer and Matthew ascribes it to a Pharisee. (Scribes were legal professionals, and while most apparently belonged to the party of the Pharisees, this need not always be the case.) According to Matt. 22:34, the scribe was a representative of the Pharisees and asked the question because they saw that Jesus had 'silenced the Sadducees'.

Among the Jews, debate had gone on concerning the relative importance of the commandments. This debate had resulted in the sort of structure of values evidenced in Mark 7:9-13. Some rabbis had placed the laws concerning sacrifices as pre-eminent, other the laws of sabbath or circumcision etc. The rejection of the Sadduccan position would therefore have given rise to the assumption that the Pharisaic understanding of the Law was correct.

**12:29-31** In reply to the question, Jesus quoted the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5). The point of his answer was that nothing less than total love for God would satisfy the divine holiness. Neither one aspect of Law or another was more important. Every item was caught up under this commandment and its associate.

There is no other commandment greater than these This deals with the scribal distinctions. Matt. 22:40 puts it that all the commandments are contained within these two. Unless the various commandments are treated as being aspects of these two their significance has been missed. Jesus' reply had lifted the discussion from one of relative academic distinctions to a penetrating examination of the human heart.

**12:32-33 You are right, Teacher** The questioner was possibly suddenly aware that all the petty distinctions of Jewish debate were pointless. He certainly saw that to love God and one's neighbour is **much more than all burnt offering and sacrifices**.

**12:34 that he answered wisely** 'Wisely' is literally 'sensibly', 'intelligently'. You are not far from the kingdom of God In Jesus' teaching and actions the kingdom of God has been breaking into human experience. In his perception of the true nature of Law (cf. Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; 1 Cor. 13:1-3) the scribe had come very

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<sup>6</sup> Lane, p. 430.

close to the reality. He was not, however, in the kingdom, since he had not yet recognised the kingdom in the person of the King.

after that no one dared to ask him any question.<sup>7</sup> We must not just see this as a response to someone who was intellectually superior or more skilled in debate. Without doubt Jesus was both of these, but the point was that Jesus continually exposed the shallowness of the questioners' religion and the perverse intentions behind their questions. Even more, they were experiencing, in the confrontation with his penetrating responses, the presence of the kingdom and they found it threatening.

**(g) *The question concerning David's Son, 12:35-37***

35 And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? 36 David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet." 37 David himself calls him Lord; so how is he his son?' And the great throng heard him gladly.

**12:35 as Jesus taught in the temple** The occasion of this incident is not described, nor is the audience, although Matthew tells us that the Pharisees were the ones being questioned. The implication is that, following the confrontations of Mark 11:27—12:34, Jesus continued to teach the crowds who were in the temple for the Passover celebrations. No doubt the Pharisees were never far from him in order to pick up any failure on his part.

**How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?** By means of this question and the quotation from Ps. 110:1 which attends it, Jesus proceeded to expose the limitations of the scribes' understanding of the person of the Messiah. They knew and taught that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (cf. Mark 10:47f.; 11:10); but in that they had only partially understood the person and work of the Messiah.

**12:36 The Lord said to my Lord** Messiah is David's Lord as well as his descendant. In this he stands as sovereign over all. He sits at the right hand of Yahweh (see Ps. 110:1 where 'LORD' is the translation of 'Yahweh', and 'my lord' of 'adonai').

**12:37 David himself calls him Lord; so how is he his son?** Jesus was not calling into question the fact of the Davidic ancestry of the Messiah; he was displaying the dimensions of Messiah's reign. Again it is the reality of the kingdom which is prominent.

**And the great throng heard him gladly** The RSV (with RV, NASB) includes this statement with what precedes it; the NIV leaves it as an isolated sentence; the NEB includes it with the paragraph which follows. 'Heard' is literally 'was hearing'. The great throng was generally unaligned with any particular group and no doubt took pleasure both in Jesus' treatment of the self-righteous Pharisees as well as of the aristocratic Sadducees, and more generally in the powerful teaching which he gave.

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew includes this information at the conclusion of the next paragraph concerning David's Son and Luke places it at the end of Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees.

**(h) The denunciation of the scribes, 12:38-40**

38 And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to go about in long robes, and to have salutations in the market places 39 and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts, 40 who devour widow's houses and for a pretence make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

Having exposed the superficial attitudes of the scribes to the Law, Jesus now turned to their real motives, namely their desire for personal recognition and gain.

**12:38 Beware of the scribes** Again Matthew adds 'the Pharisees' to the denunciation.

**who like to go about in long robes** These long robes were the flowing cloaks which were the insignia of the learned.

**salutations in the market places** These salutations were not mere greetings but, as Matt. 23:8—10 shows, included titles indicating superiority, such as 'Rabbi', 'Father' and 'Master'.

**12:39 the best seats in the synagogues** Again the scribes loved prominence. Bingham observes that 'Seeking to be No.1 because of one's formal (academic) training is really against what one has been trained for (cf. Luke 14:7-10 for modesty in such situations).'<sup>8</sup>

**12:40 who devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers** We are not told how they 'devoured' widows' houses. It would have certainly been by legal means. Although their hearts were set on gain, they made sure that they gave a more pious impression (to themselves as well as to others!) by their rigorous praying. They will receive the greater condemnation As those who prided themselves on their knowledge of the scriptures, their responsibility was correspondingly greater (cf. Luke 12:43; James 3:1; Amos 3:2).

**(i) The widow's true offering, 12:41-44**

41 And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living.'

In contrast cf. v. 40) to the hypocrisy of the Pharisee, true giving is illustrated by the events taking place in the temple.

**12:41 And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude**

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<sup>8</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*. pp. 72f. (emphasis his). Edersheim, vol. 2, p. 409. adds, 'But, indeed. Rabbinic writings lay down elaborate directions. what place is to be assigned to the Rabbis, according to their rank, and to their disciples, and how in the College the most learned, but at the feasts the most aged, among the Rabbis, are to occupy the "upper seats." So weighty was the duty of respectful salutation by the title Rabbi. that to neglect it would involve the heaviest punishment. Two great Rabbis are described as literally complaining. that they must have lost the very appearance of learning, since in the market-place they had only been greeted with "May your peace be great," without the addition "My masters."' "

We must keep in mind the crowds which were present in Jerusalem for the feast. At some stage during their visit, the people would come into the temple to deposit their vows and offerings into the receptacle(s) provided for the purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Many rich people put in large sums This could only have been known if those making the offerings wanted it to be known. How they made it known is not mentioned.

**12:42 a poor widow came** It is remarkable that she was even noticed. Probably it was only Jesus who could notice her, since others were more impressed with the wealthy.

**put in two copper coins, which make a penny** These two coins were the minimum offering permitted. Her gift was one ninety-sixth part of a denarius.<sup>10</sup> The denarius was the usual payment for a labourer for one day's work.

**12:43-44** It was necessary that Jesus should call the disciples' attention to what was happening. This woman was putting in more than all the others combined. That, of course, had nothing to do with the amount of money but with the relationship to God that the gift revealed.

**she... put in everything she had, her whole living** Her offering was a powerful indication of her faith. Her gift, though minute by contrast with the others, was immense, for it was all that she possessed. This story was not told in order to cause the disciples to give a greater proportion of the living. The point was that this woman clearly knew that God would supply her needs and so lived that way. She, unlike the Pharisees, loved the Lord her God with all her heart, soul, mind and strength.

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<sup>9</sup> The precise meaning of 'the treasury' is not certain. One possibility is that described in the Mishnah which mentions thirteen trumpet shaped receptacles which were placed against the wall of the Court of the Women.

<sup>10</sup> Edersheim, vol. 2. p. 388.

# MARK

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### E. THE APOCALYPTIC DISCOURSE, 13:1-37

This is not an easy section to analyse. The reason for the difficulty does not lie so much in what is said, for taken separately, each part is reasonably clear. The problem for the ordinary reader is that of how to distinguish between statements which refer to the destruction of the temple and the events associated with that, and those which refer to the return of Christ at the close of the age.

Possibly we could assist in the solution by observing that with the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost the 'last days' began. All events coming between Pentecost and the close of this age, then, take place 'in the last days'. They all, therefore, have the same 'eschatological' character, and so Jesus does not bother to unravel the details. This can be seen in Matt. 24:3, where, following Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (v.2), the disciples ask him, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?' It is not that the actual events take place simultaneously, they obviously do not, but that they are all of a one since they are all part of the 'last days'.

Another point to be observed is that there is a significant element of paradox within this chapter. Cranfield observes:

There is a tension between, on the one hand, the absolutely clear warning against trying to know the date of the End in v. 32, and, on the other hand, vv. 28f. and all that is said about the signs of the End in vv. 5-23. But both elements must be taken seriously. To ignore the warning of v. 32 is to make shipwreck of faith. But it is an equally false way to take account only of the fact that we cannot know the 'when' and pay no heed to the signs of the End... For the signs are reminders in the midst of history of the coming Lord.<sup>1</sup>

He goes on to stress the practical issues which arise from this passage:

. . . the recognition that the events of history are signs of the End and pointers to the coming Lord rescues eschatology from the realm of merely academic discussion and makes it relevant for faith and obedience. As our faith recognises the signs as they occur, we are again and again put in remembrance of our Hope, and our gaze, that is so easily distracted from the Lord who is coming to us, is again and again directed back to him. The events of the present become for us reasons for lifting up our heads (Lk. 21:28) and so many summonses to renewed penitence, obedience and joy. There is a sober recognition of the signs which is something altogether different from the stupid 'illusion that they enable us to predict the date of the End.'<sup>2</sup>

The practical aspects of this chapter are, of course, part of the whole thrust of the chapter. In this regard, Cole notes that the whole of this chapter

... seems designed to warn the disciples against four great spiritual dangers. The first danger is that of reliance upon the outward adjuncts of religion, venerable and loved though they be. The second danger (verses 5, 6) is that of deception by false Messiahs; the third (verses 7, 8) is that of distraction by world turmoil about us; the fourth (verses 9ff.) is that of being 'tripped' because of

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, pp. 388f.

<sup>2</sup> Cranfield, pp. 390f.



the unexpected bitterness of the persecution for our faith. To be forewarned, in each case, is to be forearmed.<sup>3</sup>

One final observation must be made concerning the whole substance of this chapter. It is that the issues of wars, persecution, tribulation, false prophets etc. and cosmic disturbances, have all been described in the book of the Revelation as being features of the present reign of Christ. The disciple must not, therefore, be fearful or deceived, neither must he react as the world reacts. In the Revelation these things are, to the disciple, a reminder that his Lord is reigning and working out his purposes in history; here they are a powerful reminder that the end of the age, the consummation of the kingdom, has not been forgotten or deflected but is indeed coming.

1 And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' 2 And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.'

**13:1 what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!** Herod the Great, who died in 4 BC, had commenced the rebuilding of the temple in 19 BC. The programme was still not completed (cf. John 2:20). In fact the rebuilding was not finished until just before its destruction by the Romans in AD 70. Herod's intention was to make the temple a building of great magnificence. The stones referred to were some 11 metres by 3.5 metres by 5.5 metres, and polished.

**13:2 not be left here one stone upon another** Jesus' response to the awe of the disciples was to announce the complete destruction of the temple. The 'throwing down' of the building meant that victors would leave the glorious temple nothing but a pile of rubble. This is precisely what happened in AD 70. It must not be forgotten that this was not just a 'prophecy' but related to all that Jesus was about in the action of the kingdom. Luke 19:41-44 makes it clear that Jerusalem would be a city which experienced not only the action of enemies but the judgement of God.

3 And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 'Tell us when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?' 5 And Jesus began to say to them, 'Take heed that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name, saying, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. 7 And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.'

**13:3-4 when will this be, and what will be the sign...** The fall of the temple would in turn signify the fall of the whole nation. Furthermore, the destruction of the temple 'would be part of a whole complex of events leading to the End... The disciples, excited and disturbed by Jesus' prediction, want to know when the Temple is to be destroyed and what is the sign by which they may know that the final consummation is approaching.'<sup>4</sup>

**what will be the sign** It can be shown that there was a general expectation that

<sup>3</sup> Cole, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> Cranfield, pp. 393f.



‘signs’ would accompany the coming of the Messiah.<sup>5</sup> Cranfield makes the point that in wanting a sign, they were wanting an infallible indication of when the end would come, so that they would be relieved of the obligation, we might say the moral obligation, to watch. ‘But instead of a single sign Jesus gives them a baffling multiplicity of signs. The purpose of his reply is not to impart esoteric information but to strengthen and sustain faith.’<sup>6</sup>

**13:5** What follows is Jesus’ answer to their question. He does indeed tell them ‘when’ these things will take place, but the signs which he gives are conspicuous by being always visible. In other words, there is never a moment when believers cannot see that their Lord ‘is near, at the very gates’. The first ‘sign’ he offers is the presence of deceivers. At this period, or soon after, there were a number of ‘deceivers’ or ‘impostors’ who did in fact arise, and their activities led to the death of many in Israel. However, the ‘impostors’ appealed to Israel’s desire for freedom from Roman bondage. Jesus’ warning is here directed to the disciples.

**13:6 Many will come in my name** The disciples are to be on the watch, not for those who may deceive the nation, but for those who actually claim to be one with the followers of Christ. They will speak and act as if they had Christ’s authority. Cf. 2 Cor. 11:12-15; Acts 20:29f.; 1 Tim. 4:1ff.; etc.

**I am he** This phrase (Gr. ego eimi) can also be translated as ‘I am’, which elsewhere represents the divine name (see Exod. 3:14 and the many uses of ‘I am’ in John’s Gospel). Luke also has ‘I am he’ although Matthew avoids the ambiguity a little by having ‘I am the Christ’ (Matt. 24:5). It is still not clear whether they will mean simply ‘I am the Messiah’, or ‘I am Jesus having returned’, that is, the return of Christ has taken place. Either way, the danger will be serious, for these ‘impostors’ **will lead many astray.**

**13:7 wars and rumours of wars** Warfare is a constant feature of human existence (cf. Rev. 6:2-4). This is not to be a cause of distress to the believers, for they are to recall that this must take place<sup>7</sup>; these things do not herald the immediate close of the age but are all part of Christ working out his purposes within history. He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet’ (1 Cor. 15:25). ‘When the disciples hear news of war or of the threat of war, they are not to be inwardly disturbed; for these things fall within the eschatological purpose of God, a purpose which includes judgement as well as salvation.’<sup>8</sup>

**13:8 earthquakes in various places, there will be famines** Again the picture is filled out by the book of the Revelation, especially Rev. 6:5-8, 12.

**the beginning of the birth-pangs**

[beginning] implies that there is plenty more to follow and that the sufferings will get worse— these things are only the beginning. But [birth pangs] points forward. Though these things do not mean that the End is come, they do point to it and are a pledge of it. To the eye of faith they are

<sup>5</sup> See Pennicook, *The Expectation of Signs in Israel AD 27-70*.

<sup>6</sup> Cranfield, p. 394.

<sup>7</sup> Without at all deprecating the efforts of men and women to abolish or avoid war, we must note that God has given men and women up to their sinful natures. It is only when God causes men to ‘beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks’ that they shall not ‘learn war any more’ (Isa. 2:4). In the final analysis, men cannot accomplish by negotiation what only God can accomplish by regeneration. Only the complete transformation of creation will see the removal of death and its threat (Rev. 21:4).

<sup>8</sup> Cranfield, p. 396.

full of promise. 'To understand aright the significance of the metaphor, one must remember what motherhood meant for the Jewish woman. Without it her life was robbed of its goal and substance. The beginning of travail marked the end of the disgrace that rested on the childless woman, the approaching fulfilment of her strongest desire. It begins with grievous pains, but these pains are to her the promise of that for which she has waited with longing. Even so do the sufferings that come upon the disciples point to the end of the disgrace, which at present rests on them, through the fulfilment of the hope which gives their life its meaning.'<sup>9</sup>

9 'But take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 13 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.'

**13:9 take heed to yourselves** Part of the disruption of the last days is the hostility of the world against the disciples of Christ. However, the hostility will not be for their destruction but for the sake of their witness. This was the way the gospel was spread, for example, in Acts 8:4. Because they know that their suffering will be an opportunity for witness, the disciples must take heed to themselves. They must be on the alert, not only for occasions to speak, but also against those things which would render their witness ineffective (cf. I Pet.5:8).

**13:10 the gospel must... be preached** The disciples must not doubt that the suffering is necessary. Christ will cause the hostility of the world to be the means by which the nations are brought to discipleship (Matt. 28:19). Therefore they should not fear the hostility since it comes under the direction of the Lord. It can achieve nothing but his purpose.

**13:11 Do not be anxious** The disciples 'are to be of the same "stuff" as their Lord. Not tutored in the schools of rhetoric, logic or scholastic reasoning, they will be like him, with ready answers.'<sup>10</sup> This will not be as a result of their skill, but as a result of the Holy Spirit speaking through them. There can be no room for anxiety, and therefore, no excuse, when this sovereign action of Christ<sup>11</sup> through the Spirit is seen.

**13:12 brother will deliver up brother** The effect of the gospel will be experienced even within those relationships which would otherwise be expected to be warm and supportive. This is because the action of the kingdom and the relationships which the kingdom establishes transcends those relationships which are only on the human level (cf. Mark 3:31-35).

**13:13 hated by all for my name's sake** The hostility is directed against your Lord. It is his name, that is, his character which is so despised. Therefore, it is 'the death of Jesus' which we bear (2 Cor. 4:10).

**he who endures to the end will be saved** It is the disciple who does not give

<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, p. 396.

<sup>10</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> That it would be Christ at work would not have been obvious at this point. But from Pentecost onwards, the church was in no doubt that Christ was, and is, at work (cf. the Book of the Revelation. 1 Cor. 15:25; Acts 2:33; 3:16; Rom. 10:14, 17, 2 Cor. 13:3; etc.).

up his testimony but rather perseveres through the hostility who will be saved. Cf. Rev. 12:11, where the victory over the Dragon is by (i) the blood of the Lamb, and (ii) the word of testimony borne to that blood, even though it may require the death of the witness.

Grace is sovereign, but it both motivates and requires a response. The believer is under an obligation 'not to receive the grace of God in vain' (2 Cor. 6:1, cf. Acts 13:43; 14:22). The King requires kingdom living.

14 'But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; Is let him who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything away; 16 and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. 17 And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! 18 Pray that it may not happen in winter. 19 For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. 21 And then if any one says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "Look, there he is!" do not believe it. 22 False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23 But take heed; [ have told you all these things beforehand.'

**13:14 the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be** Matthew has 'standing in the holy place' (24:15). The reference to a 'desolating sacrilege' is to that unholy thing which fouls the holy. The words come from the prophecy in Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11, which looked forward to the occasion when the Greek king Antiochus IV set up an altar of Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem and sacrificed swine upon it (1 Macc. 1:54). 'Jesus' use of the phrase implies that for him the meaning of the prophecy was not exhausted by the events of the Maccabean times; it still had a future reference. The Temple of God must yet suffer a fearful profanation ...'<sup>12</sup>

Later, the emperor Gaius (Caligula) made an attempt to set up a statue of himself, but this did not eventuate. In AD 135, when Jerusalem was finally destroyed following the Bar Cochba revolt, a temple to Zeus was set up on the site, and later again the present Moslem mosques were established. However, we should see Jesus' prophecy as having a deeper significance still, as in Rev. 11:1-3. In other words, the significance is not limited to the major events in Jerusalem, but applies to the temple of God throughout history.

**let the reader understand** This is possibly intended to cover the cryptic language in which the warning is phrased, as if to cover a reference to the Roman authorities. Certainly Luke omits the reference, and instead of warning against 'the desolating sacrilege' openly mentions 'Jerusalem surrounded by armies' (Luke 21:20).

It is also possible that Mark intends the reader to perceive the implications of Jesus' statement \s we observed above, the warning is not to be seen only in its physical effects but in the overall context of the church as the temple of God.

**then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains** This and the following clauses spell out the urgent need of the disciples to read the signs and take immediate action. They are not to be distracted by anything. 'Eusebius 3,5 reports that the Christian congregation in Jerusalem received reliable news before the war in Jerusalem (AD 70) and retired to Pella in Perea and were all saved.'<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cranfield, p. 402.

<sup>13</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark. p. 76.

**13:15-16 let him who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house** The eastern roof was flat with the stairs down the outside of the building. The meaning must be that, although a person must descend in order to flee, he must not go down in order to go into the house, to gather his possessions together. There is no time. The urgency of the times demands immediate and undistracted action. If there are needs, the Lord will meet them.

**13:17-18** The presence of the desolating sacrilege ought not to be regarded lightly. Although it seems that the holy place is being desecrated, which it is, under the sovereign hand of its Lord it is also being judged and purified (see 1 Pet. 4:17). In all this, then, the experience of Roman armies laying siege to Jerusalem, and the consequent misery for the Jewish population, stands as the paradigm for the extraordinary tribulation that is about to be let loose on the people of God. Such difficulties as childbirth and winter rains occurred during the siege of Jerusalem, making the experience for many so much more fearful. Could 1 Cor. 7:25-31 be Paul's parallel injunction to remain single minded in the face of the hostility of the age and the severity of the coming tribulation?

**13:19-20 such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of creation... until now** The tribulation at the end of time will be more severe than any up to this point, and indeed nothing in the future will compare with the final tribulation. It seems as if all the pent up hostility of men and women against God will be unleashed against his people and were God not to shorten the days, that is, limit them, then no one would survive.

**but for the sake of the elect** God's concern is always for the salvation of his people. Therefore he will never allow them to be tempted/tested beyond their capacity to withstand (1 Cor. 10:13). He will shorten the days of tribulation, which means that the times of suffering and judgement are all under his control. The disciple, then must persevere as knowing that his Lord will cause him to stand.

**13:21 Look here is the Christ!** Knowing that Christ will not allow him to fall, the disciple must be on the look out for the deceptions of the evil one.

**13:22 False Christs and false prophets will arise** Believers must be alert. There will be these deceivers and they will have great persuasive powers. Many will follow them (cf. Rev. 13:11-15). Their aim, of course, is not only to deceive the world but, if possible, the elect. That would be for the powers of evil to accomplish by means of their signs and wonders what Christ does by means of the word of the Cross, namely to capture men and women, in this case front God.

**13:23 But take heed** The desire of the powers of evil will be frustrated because Jesus has exposed them. By simple, persevering (though not necessarily easy) faith, believers can and must resist the seductions.

24 'But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.'

**13:24-27** In these verses Jesus turns to the picture, not of the tribulation but of the coming of the Son of man which the tribulation anticipates.

**13:24-25** With the coming of Christ, all creation will be shaken. This is not to be feared since it will usher in the new heavens and the new earth (Heb. 12:26-29; Rev. 21:1). But it is not to be underestimated either, since all that belongs to this present creation will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-12).

**13:26** *And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory* Up until this point, the disciples will have only known Christ as Lord with power and glory by faith, and up to this point, to the world, Christ will seem to be clothed with weakness. But with the dissolution of the old creation Christ will be seen as he is, and not only by his disciples either (1 Cor. 15:5-8; cf. Rev. 1:7).

*clouds* Cf. Acts 1:11. These clouds ought not be understood as simply those clouds with which we are familiar, since the conditions for those will have gone (vv. 24-25). They should, instead, be understood as the clouds of God's presence.

*great power and glory* Those who regarded him as weak and morally impotent will now be confronted with him in his great power and moral excellence, since he comes to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31).

**13:27** *he will send out the angels, and gather his elect* The angels are the ministers of God to his elect (Heb. 1:14). Calvin's comment deserves our notice:

We too, when we see the church tom apart by Satan's craft, tom by the savagery of the wicked, upset by unholy doctrines, tossed by storms, let us turn our eyes to this [gathering of the elect]. If the thing seems hard to believe, let the angelic force remind us: Christ expressly points it out to lift our minds above human means. Though the church be now vexed by human malice, tossed between exiles and escapes of all kinds, smashed and broken even on the waves, wretchedly tom in pieces and losing all firm support on earth, we must persist in hope, for it is not by human means but by heavenly power (which will far surpass every obstacle) that the Lord will gather it in<sup>14</sup>

*from the four winds* These represent the four points of the compass, meaning 'from everywhere'.

*the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven* 'Ends' (Gr. akron) means 'the extreme', the highest, furthest point, cf. Acropolis, which is the highest, and often the fortified, part of an ancient Greek city, for example, that of Athens with its Parthenon. The meaning is that no one will be overlooked when the elect are gathered.<sup>15</sup>

28 'From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32 'But of that day or of that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35 Watch therefore—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the emphases on the marking of the elect and the numbering of the 144,000 in Rev. 7.

morning— 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Watch!

**13:28-29 From the fig tree learn its lesson** If you can tell the coming of summer by observing the trees, so, by observing the signs you will know that he is near, at the very gates.

**13:30 this generation will not pass away before all these things take place** This has puzzled many because it raises the question of how the present generation, that is the first disciples of Jesus, could be present for all these things. But if ‘these things’ are the signs of the end and they are present from the commencement of ‘the last times’, then there is no difficulty. Those who heard Jesus also saw the signs of the end, as do believers throughout subsequent history.

**13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away** What Jesus has said will take place is absolutely certain.

**13:32, not the Son, but only the Father** ‘Jesus obviously knows both the how and the why of the events leading up to the last event. His "self-limitation" at least puts the whole matter out of the realm of precise prediction and this may be part of the why of the self-limitation. It is not that the Son cannot know, but will not know. <sup>16</sup> Cf. Acts 1:7, which explains that Jesus’ lack of knowledge relates to his refusal to transgress the area of the Father’s authority.

**13:33 Take heed, watch** If not even the Son knows when the time will come, how much more should the disciples be alert against the seductions of the evil one, which will attempt to draw them away from the truth of the kingdom. To watch means to be morally alert, ‘not sitting with hands folded on the lap but being morally obedient and in the action of doing God’s will’.<sup>17</sup>

**13:34-36** These verses illustrate the need to be alert. The master will return at the time he chooses. The doorkeeper, having the responsibility to be ready, cannot afford to be asleep when the time comes. Neither, then, can those who are servants in the kingdom of God.

**13:36 And what I say to you I say to all: Watch** Matthew has added the parables of the wise and foolish maidens, the talents and the separation of the sheep from the goats as illustrations of what it means to be alert for the coming of the Lord and engaged in the action of the kingdom. But the simple conclusion of it all is ‘Watch!’

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<sup>16</sup> Bingham The Gospel according to Mark, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Bingham, The Gospel according to Mark, p. 79.



# MARK

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### F. THE PASSION NARRATIVE, 14:1-15:47

#### 1. The decision to kill Jesus, 14:1-2

1 It was now two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him; 2 for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people.'

**14:1 Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread** Much discussion has taken place concerning the precise time of Jesus' death. All four Gospels agree that the day of Jesus' death was a Friday. What remains unresolved is whether or not Jesus and his disciples actually celebrated a passover meal in 'the last supper', or whether the crucifixion of Jesus coincided with the sacrifice of the passover lambs. In this, John's Gospel and the Synoptics appear to diverge.<sup>1</sup>

**Passover** The institution of this meal is well known. It was an annual reminder of the events of the Exodus from Egypt and was:

celebrated on the 14th of the month Nisan (April/May<sup>2</sup>) and continuing into the early hours of the 15th (between sunset and midnight; cf. Exod. 12:6-20. 48; Num. 9:2-14; Deut. 16:1). This was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15th-21st days of the month (Exod. 12:15-20; 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:1—8). In popular usage the two festivals were merged and treated for practical purposes as the seven-day 'feast of the Passover.'<sup>3</sup>

**14:2 Not during the feast** They did, in fact, arrest Jesus during the feast. The offer of betrayal by Judas may have made them forget their fears. It may be possible, however, to translate this as 'not in the presence of the festival crowd'.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. The anointing in Bethany, 14:3-9

3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. 4 But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, 'Why was the ointment thus wasted? s For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor.' And they reproached her. 6 But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 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. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. 9 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.'

<sup>1</sup> For a full and helpful examination of the issues, see Jeremias, pp. 15-26.

<sup>2</sup> Or, March-April, see Wiseman, p. 177,

<sup>3</sup> Lane, pp. 489f. 'Nisan' is the post-exilic name for the month. Prior to the exile it was called 'Abib'.

<sup>4</sup> So, Cranfield, p. 414; Jeremias, pp. 71ff.



**14:3 at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper** Although there are differences, this is the same incident as that described in John 12:1-8. The story in Luke 7:36-50 is plainly of a totally different occasion. John 12:2 says that ‘They made him a supper; Martha served...’. At first sight it may appear that the meal was served in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. However, John does not actually say that this was the case. We may assume that, in the small village of Bethany, there was more than one home open to Jesus, and that Martha was able to assist by preparing the food.

**an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard** Lane says,

The costly perfume is identified as nard, the aromatic oil extracted from a root native to India. To retain the fragrance of nard, enough ointment for one application was scaled in small alabaster flasks. The long neck of the flask had to be broken to release the aroma.<sup>5</sup>

However, John 12:3 says that the amount of ointment was one pound. Such a large amount would be far in excess of that required for the customary courtesy anointing of guests. Possibly, the ointment was sufficient for the anointing of a body prior to burial, and Mary, having kept it against the day when it could be used for her own burial, now gave it all to Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Possibly, the events of John 11:38-44, and especially Jesus’ words in John 11:25-26 may have changed Mary’s attitude towards her own death and so the need for the ointment for herself.

**she... poured it over his head** Whether or not Mary recognised it, she was indeed anointing the Messiah, in anticipation of what was the fulfilment of his coronation (cf. v. 8; Isa. 52:13; John 12:32-33; 17:1).

**14:4-5 Why was the ointment thus wasted?** Whether the concern of those who criticised the woman was genuine or not, clearly they had not recognised the majesty of Jesus.

**three hundred denarii** This represented about a year’s wages. John 12:4 indicates that it was Judas Iscariot, the treasurer of the group, who led the criticism of the ‘waste’.

**14:6 a beautiful thing** Only Jesus could see the ‘beauty’ of her action, in the same way that only he could perceive the generosity of the widow in Mark 12:43-44.

**14:7 you always have the poor with you** This does not mean that the poor ought not to be assisted. If anything, it reflects on the failure of the critics to notice them other than on such an occasion as this, when it is someone else who ought to be doing something.

**14:8 She has done what she could** Unlike the critics, she has seized the opportunity (possibly recognising the closeness of the coming crisis?).

**she has anointed my body beforehand** We do not know whether Mary had this in her mind. It was still the supreme significance of her action. Cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, where Jesus has been repeatedly telling the disciples that he would die violently. Isa. 53:12 says of the Servant that he ‘was numbered with the transgressors’, that is, that he would be executed as a criminal. ‘... only in that circumstance would

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<sup>5</sup> Lane. p. 492.

<sup>6</sup> We may only speculate concerning these things, but if this was the case. we may observe that Lazarus had already been buried once, so that, doubtless, any ointment which he may have possessed had already been used.

there be no anointing of the body.’<sup>7</sup>

**14:9 wherever the gospel is preached** The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached, Mark 1:14-15, which the disciples also preached, Mark 3:14; 6:7, 12-13; and which must be preached before ‘the end’, Mark 13:10; 16:15. The woman’s role in the great action of the kingdom will never be forgotten.

### 3. Judas and the conspiracy, 14:10-11

**10** Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. **11** And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

**14:10 Then Judas Iscariot... went** We may assume that Judas was deeply angered by the whole incident, and the exposure of his own false motives (v. 7, cf. John 12:6), and so was driven by his own corruption to approach the chief priests.

**14:11 promised to give him money** Judas had asked for money and they were delighted to make use of his venality.

### 4. Preparation for the Passover, 14:12-16

**12** And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, ‘Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?’ **13** And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, **14** and wherever he enters, say to the householder, “The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?” **15** And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.’ **16** And the disciples set out and went into the city, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the passover.

**14:12 the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb** Although the feast of Unleavened Bread technically commenced on 15th Nisan and the lambs were slaughtered on 14th, the identification mentioned above on verse 1 is seen here. The lambs were killed on the afternoon of the 14th, and the meal took place in the evening, that is, on the 15th.

**14:13-15 he sent two of his disciples** The disciples had looked to Jesus for direction concerning the passover celebrations. ‘He gives it, but only to two disciples... so that Judas will not know where. Thus the Passover will be eaten in security and safety.’<sup>8</sup> The account of the discourse in the upper room, in John 13-16, shows that such a significant time of instruction must not be interrupted.

**a man carrying a jar of water** The implications of Jesus’ instructions are surely that he had already made the arrangements. The appearance of a man carrying a jar of water was sufficiently unusual to serve as a pre-arranged sign. However, he would only lead them to the householder, who would in turn show them the room he had made ready.

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<sup>7</sup> Lane. p. 494.

<sup>8</sup> Bingham. The Gospel according to Mark. p. 82.

there prepare for us The preparations would include preparing and roasting the lamb, providing the bread, bitter herbs, sauce, consisting of dried fruit, spices and wine, and at least four cups of wine.

### 5. The betrayal is forecast, 14:17-21

17 And when it was evening he came with the twelve. 18 And as they were at table eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' 19 They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, 'Is it I?' 20 He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. 21 For the Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.'

**14:17** Passover meals began after sunset and could last until midnight, and had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem.

Lane's detailed comment on the nature of the meal is helpful:

The celebration of the Passover was always marked by excitement and the high hope that it would be fulfilled by God's intervention once more. It was observed as 'a night of watching unto the Lord' (Exod. 12:42) in the conviction that 'in that night they were redeemed and in that night they will be redeemed in the future.' Jesus came to the city fully aware that he was to accomplish the Passover in his own person.

The meal was framed within a liturgy whose core was the Passover prayer of the family head and the recitation of the Hallel psalms (Ps. 113-118). When those participating had taken their places, the head of the house began the celebration by pronouncing a blessing, first of the festival and then of the wine. Then the paschal company drank the first cup of wine. After this the food was brought in, consisting of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, greens, stewed fruit and roast lamb. The son then asked why this night, with its special customs and food, was distinguished from all other nights. The family head responded by recalling the biblical account of the redemption from Egypt. This instruction led naturally into the praise of God for the salvation he had provided and the anticipation of future redemption: 'So may the Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, cause us to enjoy the feasts that come in peace, glad of heart at the upbuilding of your city and rejoicing in your service... and we shall thank you with a new song for our redemption'. The new song was the first part of the ancient Hallel (Ps. 113-115), after which a second cup of wine was drunk. Then the head of the house took bread and pronounced over it the blessing of 'the Lord our God, Sovereign of the world, who has caused bread to come forth out of the earth'. He then broke the bread in pieces and handed it to those who were at the table, who ate it with the bitter herbs and stewed fruit. Only then did the meal really begin with the eating of the roasted lamb, and this was not to extend beyond midnight. When the meal had been completed, the head of the family blessed the third cup with a prayer of thanksgiving. There followed the singing of the second part of the Hallel (Ps. 116-118) and the drinking of the fourth cup, which concluded the Passover.<sup>9</sup>

**14:18 one of you will betray me** Any festivity in the occasion would have been shattered by Jesus' solemn pronouncement.

one who is eating with me To emphasise the serious nature of the betrayal, Jesus then quoted Ps. 41:9, where the poor man laments that 'my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me'.

**14:19 Is it I?** The disciples were shocked by Jesus' announcement. They could not conceive that one of them could do such a thing as betray Jesus. They are, however, insecure and uncertain of their own hearts, and so ask who it is to whom Jesus refers.

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<sup>9</sup> Lane, pp. 501f, Lane has included the relevant references to the rabbinic literature.

This is no abstract enquiry, but a desperate attempt by each one to ensure that he could not stoop to such evil. Matt. 26:20—25 indicates that Judas asks last of all, as if his non-asking would have been conspicuous.

**14:20 one who is dipping bread into the dish with me** Jesus did not reply directly to their question, but simply repeats the deep horror of the action.

**14:21 the Son of man goes as it is written of him** Whether this refers to the prophecy of Ps. 41:9 or to the general thrust of the scriptures, the point is clear that the coming betrayal and suffering of the Son of man is all under the sovereign control of God (cf. Acts 2:23). However, this does not mean that the betrayer is not responsible for his actions. On the contrary, that man (and so all men) is responsible for his actions (Gen. 4:7) and will be judged accordingly.

### 6. 'The Lord's Supper', 14:22-25

22-And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' 23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24 And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly, [ say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

**14:22 this is my body** Just as the bread, the flat matzoth, was broken into pieces, so Jesus simply states that it represents his body 'broken' for them (Luke 22:19<sup>10</sup>).

**14:23-24 This is my blood of the<sup>11</sup> covenant** All the disciples drank the cup, which within the context of passover declared the covenant which God had made to redeem Israel from Egypt and not to judge them along with the first-born of Egypt (Exod. 12:7, 13). Later in Israel's history, the covenant which God established at Sinai was both initially sealed and repeatedly ratified by the shedding of sacrificial blood. Cf. Exod. 24:8.<sup>12</sup>

One of the strong themes of the Old Testament was that of the expectation of a 'new covenant which would bring in blessing which the first (old) covenant could not secure, by reason of the inability of Israel to fulfil its obligations under it. This new covenant will have as its strength the complete forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus, then, is declaring that all that God has promised will now be established, but that the new covenant requires his blood before its blessings may flow (cf. Rev. 1:5b 'has washed/freed us from our sins by his blood'; 1 John 1:7 'the blood of Jesus his Son goes on cleansing us from all sin ').

**for many** Cf. Isa. 53:12; Mark 10:45; etc.

**14:25 new in the kingdom of God** When will Jesus 'drink again of the fruit of the vine... new in the kingdom of God'? Does this refer to that great marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9)? Certainly Paul mentions the aspect of the Lord's Supper

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John 6:53ff. The reference to eating his body and drinking his blood is to a participation in his death. and not to the institution of the Lord's Supper. which John's Gospel does not mention. The common feature of John 6 and the Lord's Supper is the death of Jesus.

<sup>11</sup> some manuscripts have 'my blood of the new covenant'

<sup>12</sup> The wording in the LXX is almost identical, with the omission of 'my'.

which anticipates Christ's coming.

However, we may refer to the comment on Mark 9:1, where 'the kingdom of God... come with power', it was suggested, referred to the Cross and Resurrection. If this is what is in view here, then Jesus means that there will be a fellowship with the disciples following the great action of the Cross and Resurrection, brought to them by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which will not be limited to mere material elements (Rom. 14:17). Then, the new wine will flow as the old wine skins are burst and the great action of the kingdom moves out into the world in power (cf. Mark 2:22).

### 7. On the way to Gethsemane, 14:26-31

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered". 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.' 29 Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not.' 30 And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' 31 But he said vehemently, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same.

**14:26 when they had sung a hymn** This was, of course, the final hymn of the passover.

**14:27 You will all fall away** his is, literally, 'You will all be scandalised'. Matthew adds (26:31) 'because of me this night'. Jesus was under no illusions about what was to follow. It was not merely insight into the nature of the disciples but a consciousness of the purposes of God as declared beforehand in the scriptures. Hence the quotation from Zech. 13:7.

The scandalising, was more than simple fear. It would relate to the whole action of the Cross, which 'is a stumbling block [scandal] to Jews' (1 Cor. 1:23). To the disciples the Cross would seem a total disaster, the collapse of all their hopes and aspirations (cf. Luke 24:21). This sense of failure and so of deep fear, was in spite of Jesus' repeated and plain statements to them that these things must take place. Verse 47, later, will indicate the way that 'one of those who stood by' regarded the problem of Jesus' arrest and its solution.

**14:28 But after I am raised up** If the Cross was certain, so was the resurrection. It had likewise been declared in prophecy. The implication of 'I will go before you to Galilee' was that Jesus did not regard the fall away of the disciples as in any way final. But they must first know the scandal of the Cross if they are ever to declare the word of the Cross.

**14:29 Even though they all fall away, I will not** Peter, who in Mark 8:32 would not allow the Cross, will now not acknowledge the possibility of his own failure because of it.

**14:30 before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times** Not only will Peter and the others be scandalised by Jesus, but Jesus also defines with precision the time of Peter's failure. Given the length of Jesus' discussion with the disciples during the meal (cf. John 13-16) this prediction would have been made in the

early hours of the morning. Peter's denial of Jesus will take place 'before the cock crows twice', that is, within, at most, a few hours.

**14:31 they all said the same** Peter was the spokesman for the whole group, no one member of which could envision the absolute failure which Jesus had predicted. Who, unaided, can understand the depravity of the human heart? Or will (Jer. 17:9)?

### 8. In the Garden, 14:32-42

32 And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here, while I pray.' 33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34 And he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch.' 35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.' 37 And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him. 41 And he came the third time, and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.'

**14:32 Gethsemane** The 'Oil Press' Garden was somewhere on the side of the Mount of Olives. It is the place where the most profound event in human history began to be accomplished. We might say that unless the story of the 'Passion' of Jesus is approached with deep sensitivity and reverence (not trite emotionalism) we stand in danger of missing the wonder and depth of redemption. However much we may use our minds to understand the details, there can be no place for so-called academic objectivity. Only faith can penetrate the suffering of Christ (cf. Rom. 6:3, 5—6, etc.).  
Sit here, while I pray Alan Cole suggests that

•.. the Lord, as it were, surrounds Himself with two rings of prayer-supporters, as a king in battle might be surrounded by his body-guard. At the periphery, near the garden entrance, were the eight; further in, the chosen three were closest to Him.<sup>13</sup>

This needs to be qualified with the observation that as a bodyguard, or even a prayer guard, they were singular failures.

**14:33 he... began to be greatly distressed and troubled** Something of the horror and intense agony of the coming hours begins to touch Jesus.

**14:34 My soul is very sorrowful, even to death** The sorrow which Jesus was now experiencing was sufficient to kill him. For the context of this 'sorrow' cf. Isa. 53:4ff.

**14:35-36 If it were possible the hour might pass from him... remove this cup from me** It has been common to suggest that, as his human nature recoiled at the pain of the coming Cross, Jesus looked humbly to the

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<sup>13</sup> Cole. p. 218.



Father to provide an alternative means of redemption, if such could be possible. But surely such a suggestion is as much a concession to our own reaction to the scandal of the Cross. In other words, we would prefer that Jesus should react in the same way that we would to the suffering of the Cross.

Two points need to be made concerning this interpretation.

(i) It suggests that Jesus, who up to this point has been resolute in his determination to go to the Cross, and totally fearless in the face, not only of human opposition but also of the demonic opposition which has caused all others to tremble, should now begin to demonstrate the same fear which afflicts unregenerate men and women.

(ii) It overlooks the statement in Heb. 5:7, that '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'. Jesus' prayer in the garden was answered.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus had said that his soul was sorrowful, even unto death, and Hebrews says that he prayed to him who could save him from death and he was heard. It is more likely that, in the garden, Jesus began to feel the weight of human sin with its deep and destroying sorrow, and felt that unless the Father directly intervened, he would die in the garden and so not be able to die on the Cross. It was indeed 'this hour', that is, 'this cup' of present suffering which needed to be removed, so that the real work, prophesied for so long, might take place.

**Abba, Father** There is something quite staggering in this cry, for in it we are face to face with the reality of all that was taking place. Just as at his baptism, when he was commissioned for this very work, Jesus was declared to be 'my beloved Son', so here Jesus, as Son, cries out to the Father for the resources needed to bring the work to its climax. At the same time, 'Abba' is the Aramaic word for 'Dear Father', and as such is a term of warm affection, demonstrating intimate closeness with, and yet full respect for the Father, which is implied in the submission expressed in yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.

It is conspicuous that apart from this occasion, the phrase 'Abba, Father' is used on two other occasions in scripture only, both of them describing the intimacy which believers are privileged to have with the Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

**14:37 Simon, are you asleep?** There is no attempt to cover up the weaknesses of the disciples. They are not keeping awake and watching; in other words, their professions of strength do not even extend to the self discipline required for this service to their Lord.

**14:38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation** The real issue is not that Jesus may fail through their lack of prayerful watching, but that they will (cf. Mark 9:29). the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak We may question whether 'spirit' refers to the human spirits of the disciples<sup>15</sup> or to the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup>. There is no doubt that 'the flesh' is distinguished by 'weakness' (Rom. 8:3), whereas David prayed that God would 'uphold [him] with a willing spirit' (Ps. 51:12<sup>17</sup>), which

<sup>14</sup> Luke's account of the struggle in the garden (Luke 22:42) has in some manuscripts the additional verse 43. 'And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.' While this verse and verse 44 are very ancient, it is unlikely that they were part of the original penned by Luke.

<sup>15</sup> So Hendriksen, p. 590.

<sup>16</sup> So Lane. p. 520.

<sup>17</sup> RSV, NIV, NEB, JB, NASB.



is either the Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11) or flows from him. However, until the Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost, it is unlikely that this could mean that their human spirits were in fact willing. Probably, at this point only the Holy Spirit was willing. Their flesh was dragging them in quite an opposite direction (cf. Gal. 5:17).

**14:39-42** *And he came the third time* so weak was their flesh that not even the clearest warning had any effect.

*the hour has come* The time for prayer was now past. The events for which Jesus' prayer had prepared him were now happening.

*Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand* Jesus is not taken by surprise. Even in this moment he is still master of the situation. Again, it is only Jesus who could see the soldiers approaching; the disciples were dulled even in their physical senses.

### 9. The arrest, 14:43-50

*43* And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. *44* Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away under guard.' *45* And when he came, he went up to him at once, and said, 'Master!' And he kissed him. *46* And they laid hands on him and seized him. *47* But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. *48* And Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? *49* Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.' *50* And they all forsook him, and fled.

**14:43** *Judas came* In John 13:30 Judas was described as leaving after he had received the bread from Jesus. We may assume that he had waited until he had discovered where Jesus would be in the next few hours.

*a crowd with swords and clubs* This was a group probably of temple police and servants of the court, who had responsibility for keeping order within the temple and its precincts. They had come from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. <sup>18</sup>

**14:44** *The one I shall kiss is the man* The kiss was the customary greeting between a rabbi and his disciple.

*lead him away under guard* Did Judas know that Peter and at least one other disciple was armed (cf. Luke 22:38)? This would account for this being his instruction to the arresting officers.

**14:45** *Master!* 'Ironically, both the title, "Rabbi" ("my master") and the kiss declared Judas' respect for Jesus, while his act exposed his master to gross

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<sup>18</sup> There is some question concerning whether or not the Romans supplied the troops who then accompanied the servants of the high priest. Edersheim, vol. 2, p. 541, suggests that this is the case, since the Romans would not 'have tolerated a regular armed force [of Jews] in Jerusalem', whereas Lane, p. 524, argues that they were indeed Jewish. and cites arguments to the effect that if there had been Roman troops involved in the arrest then Jesus almost certainly would have been taken to the Roman prison and not to the high priest. Commenting on v. 49. 'Day after day I was with you in the temple', Lane also observes that those arresting Jesus must have been Jews (p. 526). Actually, it only demonstrates that there were Jews prominent in the party. Likewise his argument about Jesus being taken to the high priest and not the Roman prison does not necessarily follow. The question cannot be conclusively resolved without further evidence.

contempt. <sup>19</sup>

**14:47 one of those who stood by drew his sword** John 18:10 tells us that it was Peter who did this and also that the name of the servant was Malchus. This would, of course, concur with the comment in John 18:16 that the author of the fourth Gospel ‘was known to the high priest’.

**and cut off his ear** Possibly the darkness and the scuffle taking place effected Peter’s aim. Since the purpose was to arrest Jesus, the incident was ignored by the crowd. Only Luke (22:51) adds that Jesus healed the slave.

**14:48 Have you come out as against a robber** There was a significant degree of foolishness in the actions of the armed force. Jesus had never demonstrated any interest in the use of physical violence and had been readily available to them for some time. Their fear of Jesus and of a public reaction to an open arrest lay behind their method now. Luke directs Jesus’ statements ‘to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come out against him’ (22:52). Possibly they had followed behind the armed force and had now joined them.

**But let the scriptures be fulfilled** What takes place really is not in the hands of the Jewish leaders or the Romans. ‘The son of Man goes as it is written of him...’ (Mark 14:21). Jesus willingly submits to their authority because they are under God’s authority (cf. Acts 2:23).<sup>20</sup>

**14:50** Cf. Mark 14:27.

### 10. The anonymous young man, 15:51-52

**51** And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, **52** but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

These two verses are unique to Mark’s Gospel, and are usually treated as the author’s small indication that he was actually present on this one occasion.

a linen cloth The usual outer garment was made of wool. This one was linen, possibly indicating that the young man came from a wealthy family. The apparent<sup>21</sup> absence of undergarments may indicate that he had come in some haste.

### 11. The trial before the Sanhedrin, 14:53-65

**53** And they led Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled. **54** And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, and warming himself at the fire. **55** Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. **56** For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree. **57** And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, **58** ‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not

<sup>19</sup> Lane, p. 525.

<sup>20</sup> Note also Luke’s wording (22:53), ‘this is your hour. and the power [Or. exousia ‘authority’] of darkness’.

<sup>21</sup> Cranfield, p. 438, argues that the wording in the Greek, epi gumnou, does not conclusively demonstrate that the young man was not wearing the usual undergarment, since the more natural words for ‘over his naked body’ would be epi chrotos or en chro, and these are not used.

made with hands." 59 Yet not even so did their testimony agree. 60 And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' 61 But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' 62 And Jesus said, 'I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' 63 And the high priest tore his garments, and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? 64 You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death. 65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophesy!' And the guards received him with blows.

**14:53 the high priest** The high priest at this time was Caiaphas, who held office from AD 18-36/37. Jesus was taken to his official residence.

all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled These three groups constituted the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish court of law. If they were literally 'all' present, then there would have been seventy members plus the presiding high priest.<sup>22</sup>

**14:54 Peter had followed him** Although they had all left him and fled (v. 50), Peter had not gone far. He now entered the courtyard of the high priest's residence and took a place among the servants and soldiers who were gathered. In the semi-darkness (the word used by Mark for 'fire', Gr. phos, is elsewhere translated as 'light') and in the confusion of the occasion he would not expect to be noticed.

**14:55-56** It was the intention of the Sanhedrin to have Jesus executed, but to do so they required the unanimous evidence of at least two witnesses (cf. Deut. 17:6; etc.). Many were willing to give false evidence against Jesus, but no two gave similar testimony. The picture is of the Sanhedrin sticking strictly to the rule of law regarding witnesses, but of it having reached a verdict before the proceedings began. Evidently the witnesses had been earlier gathered together in readiness for the appearance of Jesus.

**14:57-59 I will destroy this temple** The words alleged to have been used are very close to those actually said by Jesus (see John 2:19). Jesus was reported to have claimed that he would do it. If this charge could be proved, then nothing else would have been required. '... throughout the Graeco-Roman world the destruction or desecration of places of worship was regarded as a capital offence. When the prophet Jeremiah had simply announced the catastrophe that would overtake the temple in Jerusalem he was seized and brought before the royal court as a criminal who deserved to die.'<sup>23</sup>

Yet not even so did their testimony agree We are not told how they failed to prove this charge.

**14:60-61 Have you no answer to make** Jesus was required by law to answer his accusers; since there was no real accusation, Jesus maintained silence. This infuriated the high priest who decided to ask Jesus directly whether he claimed to be the Messiah

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<sup>22</sup> The issues of the nature of this assembly and its legality and its powers has been the subject of endless debate. Besides the commentaries referred to in this book, reference may also be made to Sherwin-White, pp. 24-47. Opinion is especially divided over whether or not the Sanhedrin had the power to carry out, rather than simply pass, the death sentence.

<sup>23</sup> Lane, p. 534.

**the Son of the Blessed** ‘The Blessed’ was another way of saying ‘God’. Messiah would be the Son of God (so Ps. 2; 2 Sam. 7:14) although the Jews did not take this to mean that he would be divine (cf. John 1:14; 5:17-18). ‘A Messiah imprisoned, abandoned by his followers, and delivered helpless into the hands of his foes represented an impossible conception. Anyone who, in such circumstances, proclaimed himself to be the Messiah could not fail to be a blasphemer who dared to make a mockery of the promises given by God to his people.’<sup>24</sup>

**14:62 I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven** Jesus’ reply joins together Ps. 110:1 and Dan. 7:13, and so points out that in spite of his seeming defeat, he is in fact the one who will occupy the place of supreme honour and that he will be the one whose kingdom will never be destroyed. Furthermore, the high priest and those with him will see it (cf. Rom. 1:4).

**14:63 tore his garments** This was a symbolic gesture upon him hearing what he regarded as Jesus’ blasphemy.

Why do we still need witnesses? Such a confession by Jesus makes the testimony of others unnecessary.

**14:64 they all condemned him as deserving death** Mark does not explicitly say that the Jews could administer the death penalty, only that they said that Jesus ought to die. This is why they then led him to Pilate (Mark 15:1).

**14:65 to spit on him** To spit in someone’s face was a conventional sign of contempt, as was the striking (Deut. 25:9; Isa. 50:6; etc.).

**to cover his face... Prophecy** Lane tells us that

The detail that Jesus was blindfolded and cuffed, with the demand to ‘prophecy’, i.e. to say who it was that struck him, accurately preserves an old interpretation of Isa. 11:2-4, according to which the Messiah could judge by smell without the need of sight. What is described in the text [here] is a traditional test of messianic status, to which Jesus declined to submit.<sup>25</sup>

What became clear was that the previous fear of Jesus now turned into vicious contempt. In this context, even the cowards could act with confidence.

## 12. Peter’s denial, 14:66-72

66 And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the maids of the high priest came; 67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him, and said, ‘You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.’ 68 But he denied it, saying, ‘I neither know nor understand what you mean.’ And he went out into the gateway. 69 And the maid saw him, and began again to say to the bystanders, ‘This man is one of them.’ 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while again the bystanders said to Peter, ‘Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.’ 71 But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know this man of whom you speak.’ 72 And immediately the cock crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.

<sup>24</sup> Lane, p. 536.

<sup>25</sup> Lane, pp. 539f.

**14:66-67 Peter was below in the courtyard** This verse takes up from verse 54, and provides a sad contrast to the events taking place before the high priest. Just as Jesus has confessed to his own role and is suffering scorn because of it, Peter is engaged in the action of denying him.

Alan Cole has wisely observed,

The whole story of Peter's fall leaves the reader helpless, powerless to intervene, as the tragedy unfolds inexorably, scene after scene, until Peter has passed the point of no return, and finally crashes. Rash self-confidence and scorn of others (xiv. 29); failure to discipline the flesh in the Garden (xiv. 37); the cowardice of the flight (xiv. 50); the following at a distance (xiv. 54); the close association with the enemies of Christ (xiv. 54)—all these in their turn made the actual denial logical and indeed well-nigh inevitable... But the battle against temptation in the high priest's palace had been lost long before; for the time for the Christian to fight temptation is before it is encountered.<sup>26</sup>

**one of the maids** Evidently she had seen Peter with Jesus on one of their many previous visits to Jerusalem.

**the Nazarene** There may have been contempt in the title given to Jesus, cf. John 1:46.

**14:68 he denied it** Peter was unable to confess the truth of the charge.

**went out into the gateway** We may imagine the fear which gripped him at this time. This is evident in the way he immediately 'went out into the gateway', that is, as far away from the accusations as he could without actually leaving the scene.

**14:70 you are a Galilean** There would have been many Galileans in Jerusalem for the Passover, but not many, if any, among the servants of the high priest. It was Peter's Galilean speech which betrayed him.<sup>27</sup>

**14:71 he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear** This implies that he began to call upon God as witness to the truth of his denials.

I do not know this man of whom you speak Peter refused even to use the name of Jesus, cf. Mark 8:38.

**14:72 the cock crowed a second time** Dawn was almost upon them, but the significance of the cock crowing was far more than that to Peter. Immediately he heard it, he recalled the words of Jesus, spoken only hours earlier about Peter denying Jesus, and, no doubt, his refusal to even countenance the possibility.

**he broke down and wept** Peter was confronted by his own utter weakness and depravity. He did not go and retract his denials, because he could not. At this point he could only weep bitterly. It would require a powerful action by God before Peter would ever stand up and boldly proclaim that he knew Jesus (cf. Acts 2:1-4, 14ff.)

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<sup>26</sup> Cole, pp. 230f.

<sup>27</sup> Evidently Galileans were unable to distinguish between the several guttural sounds which are part of Semitic languages (Lane. p. 542).

## MARK CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### 13. The trial before Pilate, 15:1-5

1 And as soon as it was morning the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, and the whole council held a consultation; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. 2 And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

And he answered him, 'You have said so.' 3 And the chief priests accused him of many things. 4 And Pilate again asked him, 'Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.' 5 But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered.

**15:1 delivered him to Pilate** It was necessary to have Pilate's approval before Jesus could be put to death.

**15:2 Are you the King of the Jews?** It is Luke who tells us that 'they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king."' The question was not meant lightly. The anti-Roman feelings in Judea ran high and had done so for some time. Pilate himself was involved in a number of serious skirmishes with the Jewish mob (cf. Luke 13:1<sup>1</sup>). The charge was an attempt to force Pilate's hand.

**You have said so** While not a denial, Jesus' reply was not an affirmation either. John 18:33-38 describes why Jesus does not give a direct answer to Pilate's question. What Pilate and the Jewish leaders meant by 'king' was not what Jesus meant by it.

**15:3 the chief priests accused him of many things** The Jewish leaders, no doubt sensing Pilate's suspicions concerning their motives (cf. v. 10), took the opportunity to substantiate their charges against Jesus.

**15:4-5** Even when he was given the opportunity to deny the accusations made against him, Jesus remained silent. This refusal to defend himself puzzled Pilate, since without a defence, Pilate was virtually obliged to find Jesus guilty of the charges. Jesus silence can be explained on two related bases. The first was that of the prophecy of Isa. 53:7 and the second that of the real nature of the occasion. Jesus real opposition was not the Jewish leaders or Pilate, however culpable they may have been,

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<sup>1</sup> There are also many references in the writings of Josephus which demonstrate the volatility of the crowds. For example. XVII. x. 8. referring to the problems which arose at the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, 'And now Judea was full of robberies: and. as the several companies of the seditious lighted upon any one to head them. he was created a king immediately, in order to do mischief to the public. They were in some small measure. indeed. and in small matters. hurtful to the Romans. but the murders they committed upon their own people lasted a long while. '. Speaking of another rebel. Athronges who arose at the same time, Josephus says, 'And this man retained his power a great while: he was also called king. and had nothing to hinder him from doing what he pleased. He also, as 'veil as his brethren. slew a great many both of the Romans and of the king's forces. and managed matters with the like hatred to each of them. The king's forces they fell upon, because of the licentious conduct they had been allowed under Herod's government; and they fell upon the Romans. because of the injuries they had so lately received from them. But in process of time they grew more cruel to all sons of men.' (XVII, x, 7)



but the fierce accusations of the Adversary (Satan). Jesus was bowing under the authority of darkness (Luke 22:53) in order to destroy it—that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death are subject to lifelong bondage’ (Heb. 2: 14—15).

#### 14. Releasing a prisoner, 15:6-15

6 Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. 7 And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. and the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he was wont to do for them, 9 And he answered them, ‘Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?’ 10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. 12 And Pilate again said to them, ‘Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?’ 13 And they cried out again, ‘Crucify him.’ 14 And Pilate said to them, ‘Why, what evil has he done?’ But they shouted all the more, ‘Crucify him.’ 15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

**15:6 he used to release for them one prisoner** Mark has omitted the account of Jesus being sent to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12). He immediately describes the choice faced by Pilate concerning the annual release of a prisoner.<sup>2</sup>

**15:7 among the rebels ... the insurrection** We do not know which particular insurrection Mark is referring to, although it was obviously well known at the time.

**Barabbas** The name means ‘Son of Abba’ or ‘Son of the father’, and was not uncommon among the rabbis.<sup>3</sup> It was, if nothing else, ironic that one with such a name should be the alternative to the one who was indeed the Son of the Father.

**15:8 the crowd came up** It was still relatively early, but already the crowds were gathering, no doubt by this time having been made aware of the events taking place. It is probable that the crowd was comprised of those upon whom the chief priests could rely.

**15:9 Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?** Pilate evidently expected that the crowd would choose Jesus, if for no other reason than the general mistrust of the priestly hierarchy by the common people.

**15:10** The motives of the chief priests’ motives were transparent. They were envious of Jesus’ popularity and power. But Pilate was also opposed to the Jewish people as a whole, and no doubt took this as an opportunity to attempt to thwart their leaders’ plans.

**15:11-14 the chief priests stirred up the crowd** Pilate did not count on the

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<sup>2</sup> The historicity of this annual release has been vigorously debated, although there does seem to be evidence that the practice was not altogether unknown, although the evidence cited by Lane (p. 553) does refer to Egypt in AD 85 and not to an annual event. But there is no reason why Mark was not simply recording a practice that Pilate had instituted. It is certainly not inconsistent with Pilate’s known weakness as a governor.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, p. 554.



priests having thoroughly prepared for this eventuality. Nor, evidently did he see that, even given the dislike of the hierarchy by the common people, they would never side with a Roman against the Sanhedrin. So, instead of responding to Pilate's questions, the crowd worked itself into a frenzy, demanding that Jesus be crucified, even though that was the ultimate humiliation to a Jew (Deut. 21:23).

**15:15 So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd** Pilate's record with Jewish crowds was not good. Josephus tells of the occasion near the beginning of his time as prefect when he introduced busts of the emperor that were attached to the Roman military standards into Jerusalem. This produced such a disturbance that for some days the crowds persisted in demanding their removal, and even when threatened with death, they did not give up their demands, saying that they preferred death to transgression of the law.<sup>4</sup> Pilate was forced to have the images removed. He also stirred up fierce opposition when he used money from the temple treasury to construct an aqueduct to bring water into Jerusalem. On this occasion Pilate did not relent but sent his troops into the crowd. The troops over-reacted and many Jews were killed or disabled.

Pilate's strength on that latter occasion and his back down on this occasion with Jesus, had behind it another issue. It was that for many years the Emperor Tiberius had not lived in Rome and virtual control of the Empire has fallen into the hands of Aelius Sejanus, who evidently had a profound dislike of the Jews. Pilate could, at first, then, act with little regard to Jewish sensitivities. But when Sejanus was removed by Tiberius and the emperor 'reaffirmed his commitment to Jewish rights guaranteed by Augustus'<sup>5</sup>, Pilate was caught between a hostile Jewish mob and a pro-Jewish emperor. It was this dilemma which lay behind the comment in John 19:12, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.' The implied threat was sufficient to make Pilate's resistance crumble.

having scourged Jesus Lane says that

A Roman scourging was a terrifying punishment. The delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or a pillar, or sometimes simply thrown to ground, and was beaten by a number of guards until his flesh hung in bleeding shreds. The instrument indicated by the Markan text, the dreaded flagellum was a scourge consisting of leather thongs plaited with several pieces of bone or lead so as to form a chain. No maximum number of strokes was prescribed by Roman law, and men condemned to flagellation frequently collapsed and died from the flogging. Josephus records that he himself had some of his opponents in Galilee scourged until their entrails were visible. while the procurator Albinus had the prophet Jesus bar Hanan scourged until his bones lay visible... scourging was a customary preliminary to execution after a capital sentence...<sup>6</sup>

## 16. The crucifixion, 15:16-47

### (a) *The mockery, 15:16-20*

16 And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praetorium); and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' 19 And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him,

<sup>4</sup> Philo mentions another occasion when Pilate brought shields bearing the emperor's name. not his image. into Jerusalem. and was forced to remove them when the Jews directly appealed to the emperor.

<sup>5</sup> Rhoads, p. 66, note 46.

<sup>6</sup> Lane, p. 557.

they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

**15:16 the soldiers led him away** Rome made use of mercenary troops whenever possible, and two legions were stationed in Judea, one from Syria and the other comprising Samaritans. It was the latter who manned the Jerusalem garrison. Their hatred for the Jews was well known and they took this opportunity to vent that hatred on the now pathetic figure of Jesus.

**the praetorium** The 'praetorium' was the Latin name for the official residence of the governor. The events described here would have taken place in the courtyard near where the troops were quartered.

**the whole battalion** It is not certain how many men were meant by this; either 200 or 600, but it does seem as if the presence of a condemned man was an opportunity for some 'fun' for the soldiers, who probably felt in need of relief from the tension occasioned by the crowds assembled in the city for the Passover.

**15:17 a purple cloak** This was probably a scarlet military cloak, the closest the soldiers could get to the purple robe of royalty. Their purpose was to make Jesus an object of ridicule.

**a crown of thorns** The likely intention was to use whatever was available to make a mock crown for the 'King' rather than necessarily to use the thorns as a means of torture. However it may well have achieved both ends.

**15:18-19 they struck his head with a reed** Whether this was part of some mock coronation or not, it was an act of gross brutality. and spat upon him Again, this may have been a parody of the customary kiss of homage; it was certainly a sign of open contempt.

**15:20** After removing the mock regalia, the naked Jesus was given his own clothes.

**And they led him out to crucify him** This usually involved the condemned man being forced to carry the cross beam of the gallows to the place of execution.

**(b) The crucifixion, 15:21-32**

21 And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. 22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. 25 And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. 26 And the inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' 27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. 29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!' 31 So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

15:21 Simon of Cyrene Cyrene was in North Africa, although this Simon, called 'Simon of Cyrene' no doubt because of his background and to distinguish him from

others with the same name, **was coming in from the country**. We may assume that he was a diaspora Jew living in or near Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

**the father of Alexander and Rufus** No doubt these two men were expected to be well known to the first readers.

**compelled... to carry his cross** Jesus was doubtless so weakened by the savage scourging that he found it impossible to bear the load of the cross beam. Since the route taken by the execution party led them through the busy streets of the city, in order to intimidate the population, it would not have been difficult for the soldiers to compel Simon to bear the load.

**15:22 Golgotha** The site, wherever it was, was outside the walls of the city. This was both Jewish and Roman practice.

**15:23 myrrh** Lane says of this,

According to an old tradition, respected women of Jerusalem provided a narcotic drink to those condemned to death in order to decrease their sensitivity to the excruciating pain... This humane practice was begun in response to the biblical injunction of Prov. 31:6-7: 'Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more.'<sup>8</sup>

**but he did not take it** Whatever agony Jesus' refusal may involve, the hours on the cross required that Jesus be fully conscious and able deliberately to engage in the moral battle of the kingdom.

**15:24 And they crucified him** It is conspicuous that the Gospel writers do not dwell on the physical details of crucifixion. Certainly the first readers may be expected to have had more than a passing knowledge of the practice, since it was the common way in which slaves were executed.<sup>9</sup> But also, the physical details of the suffering of Jesus were not of major significance. Nor were they even the major element in the suffering. We have already observed that in the garden of Gethsemane he had been in deep agony<sup>10</sup> as he began to experience the weight of sin coming upon him. However, without wishing to move the stress away from the real issue, Lane's comment is not without value:

Normally, the delinquent was stripped, and after having been scourged, his outstretched arms were nailed or tied with cords to the cross-beam, which he himself had been forced to carry to the place of execution (cf. Artemidorus, *Oneirokritika* II. 56: 'He who is nailed to the cross first carries it out'). The cross-piece was then lifted up with the body on it and fastened to an upright stake already sunk into the earth to which the feet were now nailed. The cross thus formed by the upright and the transverse beam was probably in the shape of a T. A block of wood fixed about midway up the post supported the body.<sup>11</sup>

Lane then quotes an article in the *Israel Exploration Journal* 20, 1970, p. 58, based on the finding, in June 1968 in north-eastern Jerusalem, of the remains of someone who

<sup>7</sup> Some have suggested that Simon was not a Jew. since 'No Roman would demean himself by carrying a cross and to a Jew it was accursed' ('Bingham, *The Gospel according to Marie* p. 92). There are two questions which lead away from such a conclusion: (i) If Simon was not a Jew. why was he in Jerusalem on such an occasion of Passover? and (ii) What Jew would be able to argue that a cross was accursed when he was being compelled to carry it?

<sup>8</sup> Lane, p. 564.

<sup>9</sup> Cranfield, p. 455.

<sup>10</sup> Some manuscripts of Luke's Gospel add to chapter 22, verse 44, 'and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground'.

<sup>11</sup> Lane, p. 564.

had been crucified, as follows:

‘the feet were joined almost parallel, both transfixed by the same nail at the heels, with the legs adjacent; the knees were doubled, the right one overlapping the left; the trunk was contorted; the upper limbs were stretched out, each stabbed by a nail in the forearm.’<sup>12</sup>

He continues,

The height of the cross varied. Normally it was not much higher than the stature of a man, so that the feet of the crucified nearly touched the ground. A high cross seems to have been used when there was the desire to make the victim visible for as wide a radius as possible. That the cross on which Jesus was crucified was higher than normal may be deduced from the fact that the soldier who offered him a drink with a sponge soaked in vinegar could not reach his mouth by hand, but had to extend it with a reed (verse 36). A higher cross also gives point to the scornful challenge for Jesus to ‘come down’ (verse 32).

Crucifixion was essentially death by exhaustion. The time required for death naturally depended on the physical condition of the victim as well as on the manner by which the body was affixed to the cross. When nails were used physical torment was heightened, but ordinarily it was less protracted because death was hastened by the loss of blood. When men had been tied to the gibbet they sometimes remained alive for several days. Yet the weight of the body hanging on the cross frequently caused such a state of exhaustion that death occurred in a matter of several hours. When it was desired to hasten the death of one who was crucified, his limbs were beaten with an iron club (cf. Jn. 19:31-33).<sup>13</sup>

they... divided his garments among them In Roman practice the victim was usually crucified naked<sup>14</sup>, with the soldiers having the right to the man’s minor possessions. In this case it was limited to Jesus’ clothing. John draws attention to the fulfilment of Ps. 22:18 in this regard. See below, on verse 34, for the significance of Ps. 22.

15:25 the third hour In Jewish reckoning this was nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>15</sup>Jesus’ suffering on the cross was to last for six hours (v. 34).

15:26 The King of the Jews It was the usual practice to make the condemned man carry a placard bearing the charge for which he was to be executed, and then, when he was crucified, for the placard to be attached to the cross. Jesus was being executed because he was ‘the King of the Jews’. John 19:19-22 tells us that the particular wording was intended not only to convey the charge but to offend the Jewish leaders, who would have much preferred an alternate wording.

We must not forget the great emphasis in the rest of the New Testament upon the real reason for Jesus’ death. Paul, writing to the Colossians, puts it this way: ‘And you who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside nailing it to the cross’ (2:13-14). Paul’s point is that what really stood above Jesus by way of the charge for which he was condemned was the accusation which stood against us! ‘He was

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<sup>12</sup> Lane, p. 565.

<sup>13</sup> Lane, pp. 565f.

<sup>14</sup> Jewish law required that at least a loin cloth be provided for men condemned to stoning. but it is not known whether the Romans took Jewish sensitivities in consideration at all.

<sup>15</sup> One suggestion to explain the apparent difference between this and John 19:14, which says that Pilate pronounced judgement ‘about the sixth hour’, is that John used Roman reckoning. making Pilate’s statement take place at about six o’clock in the morning. We would need, then, to posit a gap between John 19:16 and 19:17 to account for the time difference. In this three hour gap we may well imagine the soldiers carrying out the scourging and mocking of Jesus as well as making non-hurried preparations for the execution. We ought to keep in mind that there were two others also being crucified with Jesus.

wounded for our transgressions... and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 53:5-6); 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24); 'Christ died for our sins' (1 Cor. 15:3). This death was, then, the Son dealing with the great offence against the holiness of God, and in doing so establishing that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of righteousness (cf. Heb. 1:8; Rom. 3:21-26).

**15:27<sup>16</sup> two robbers** Robbery was not usually a capital offence. That these two 'robbers' were being executed with Jesus may indicate that they were actually bandits who had been engaged in activities against Rome.

**15:29-30** The crucifixion of Jesus took place in a public place where large crowds could attend. Whilst some were sympathetic (cf. Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:27-31; John 19:25-27), many took the opportunity to pour scorn on Jesus. Their language may have been based on passages such as Jer. 18:16 and Ps. 22:7-8, but it was nonetheless a further indication of the fierce hatred being let loose upon him by those who claimed to be the people of God.

**come down from the cross** The words indicate the utter helplessness of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 13:4a).

**15:31-32 The chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes** It is not hard to imagine the Jewish leaders standing smugly by and watching his suffering with some sense of satisfaction.

**He saved others; he cannot save himself** Had they but known what they were saying! In order to save others he must not save himself. Matt. 27:40 records the people saying, 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' The point was, of course, that as Son he had come precisely in order to die on the cross (cf. Matt. 1:21). The prophets had said that this must be so (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 1:10-11; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47) and Jesus himself had repeatedly taught the disciples on this very subject (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

**that we may see and believe** Of course they would not have believed, however much they may have been amazed. They had, after all, seen him perform all sorts of miracles, including the raising of the dead; it was their fundamental hostility to God, albeit covered with a pious exterior, which needed to be changed (cf. Col. 1:21; Luke 16:30-31). Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. Not even the prospect of the immediate and painful death of the robbers could produce sympathy for Jesus in them. Luke 23:39-43 records the change in one of the criminals, but we are left to observe that he had just heard Jesus cry, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (23:34).

### (c) *The death, 15:33-41*

33 And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Elo-i, Elo-i, lama sabach-thani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' 35 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, 'Behold, he is calling Elijah.' 36 And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him

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<sup>16</sup> Verse 28, 'And the scripture was fulfilled which says, "He was reckoned with the transgressors"', although ancient, ought probably to be omitted, since it is not found in the major manuscripts of Mark.

down.’ 37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God.’

40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, 41 who, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered to him; and also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

**15:33 the sixth hour** A strange darkness descended upon the land from noon until three o’clock in the afternoon. Whether this can be traced to an eclipse or not, or to some other phenomenon, is finally not the issue. The reality was that there was the physical effect of the great moral darkness which was attempting to assert itself (cf. Luke 22:53; John 1:5).

**15:34 Elo-i, Elo-i, lama sabach-thani** Usually there were loud screams of pain and rage plus cursing from those who were crucified. The four Gospels record seven utterances of Jesus during the six hours before he died. Mark includes only one, and this is a quotation from Ps. 22:1.

Ps. 22 may be divided into two sections, verses 1-21, which are a cry of despair as the psalmist senses both God’s distance from him and the fierce hostility of his enemies, and verses 22-31 which are a cry of praise because God has answered his prayer for deliverance. The latter section is introduced by ‘I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee:’ which is quoted in Heb. 2:12.<sup>17</sup>

This cry on the lips of Jesus reflects David’s desperate sense of desolation. But we must go further and say that Jesus’ cry was a reflection of the fearful abandonment and alienation experienced by man in his guilt. This was no mere quotation on Jesus’ part. It was him expressing all that was true of the human spirit in its guilt and loss of relationship with God. In this cry, he was expressing what it truly means for men and women to be cut off from the Father. They are ‘without God in the world’ (Eph. 2:12), and he had entered into that experience in all its horror.

**15:35 he is calling Elijah** Whether the bystanders deliberately chose to misunderstand Jesus’ cry, or they actually thought he was crying for Elijah (see on Mark 1:6; 9:11-13) cannot be decided. They did, however, recognise his distress.

**a sponge full of vinegar** ‘Vinegar’ was the sour wine of the common people. It was cheap and refreshed the thirst (cf. Num. 6:3; Ruth 2:14). John 19:28 tells us that the vinegar was offered because Jesus cried, ‘I thirst.’

**15:37 a loud cry** Again, it is John (19:30) who tells us that he cried ‘It is finished’ (in the Greek, *tetelestai*), and Luke (23:46) that he then with great confidence that it was indeed finished, and that nothing more remained to be done to secure full and complete forgiveness and the defeat of sin and Satan, cried, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!’

**Jesus... breathed his last** Jesus’ life was not taken from him; he gave his life as a ransom for many. He willingly and deliberately yielded up his spirit (John 19:30; cf. 10:14-18).

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<sup>17</sup> See Pennicook, *The Shadow and the Substance*, p. 26.



**15:38 the curtain of the temple** The veil of the temple was torn in two, Matthew (27:51) saying that it was torn from top to bottom. Whether this was the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, or that separating the Holy Place from the outside is not specified; probably it was the latter.<sup>18</sup> But the significance lay in the fact that no longer did the people have to remain separated from the great priestly activities. Indeed, there no was longer any need for a priestly service, since all that they had done was in anticipation of Christ's sacrifice. Now that he had died, the Jewish rites were effectively finished.

**15:39 Truly this man was the Son of God** The translation may be 'a son of God', but our versions are probably closer to the intention. Precisely what the centurion meant cannot be finally decided, but it is clear that he knew that Jesus was not like any criminal. He did not deserve to die for any crime. Luke 23:47 has, 'Certainly this man was righteous!'<sup>19</sup>

**15:40-41 There were also women looking on from afar** Mark describes these women as being among those who had ministered to Jesus while he was in Galilee. The reference is to the supply of material needs.

**Mary Magdalene** This Mary is distinguished from others of the same name by the addition of the surname which is derived from her place of origin, Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of the sea of Galilee.<sup>20</sup> She was not the 'Mary of Bethany, nor the woman of Luke 7 who was a sinner, but one out of whom had been cast 7 devils, see Luke 8:2 (cf. Mark 16:9).'<sup>21</sup>

**Mary the mother of James the younger** This James was also known as the son of Alphaeus in Mark 3:18. In John 19:25 Mary is also called the wife of Clopas (see also Luke 24:18).

**Salome** Salome is called 'the mother of the sons of Zebedee' in Matt. 27:56.

**(d) The burial, 15:42-47**

42 And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. 45 And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 And he bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

**15:42-43 the day before the sabbath** The Law in Deut. 21:23 required that the body of an executed person be buried before sundown. The stress in the law was, conspicuously, that the person executed by hanging on a tree is accursed by God and does not, therefore, need any further humiliation by being left exposed.

Roman practice was quite different. Depending on the generosity of the particular magistrate, the family of the deceased may or may not be given permission to remove

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Heb. 6:19-20; 9:6-12, and the relevant comments in Pennicook. *The Shadow and the Substance*.

<sup>19</sup> RSV 'innocent' translates the Greek *dikaioi*: cf. NIV.

<sup>20</sup> Lane, pp. 576f.

<sup>21</sup> Bingham, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 94.



the body for burial. On occasions the body may be left to rot or to be eaten by the scavenging birds and animals.

**Joseph of Arimathea** Arimathea was probably a town some 32 km north-west of Jerusalem. We know nothing of this man apart from the Gospel accounts. He was rich (Matt. 27:57), 'He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God' (Luke 23:50-51) and in his approach to Pilate he was aided by Nicodemus (John 19:39).

**a respected member of the council** We may assume from this and from Luke's comment, that certain members of the council may well have not been informed of the hasty trial of Jesus until it was over and their objections would carry no weight.

looking for the kingdom of God This phrase must not be overlooked, since it reflects the whole theme of this Gospel. Possibly Joseph had heard both John the Baptist and Jesus (cf. Mark 1:14-15) and was eagerly awaiting the fulfilment of all that Jesus' ministry was bringing in (cf. Matt. 12:28).

**asked for the body of Jesus** Usually it was the relatives who would make such a request, but we may assume that Mary was in no emotional condition to approach Pilate.

**15:44-45 if he were already dead** Pilate was surprised that death could come so quickly, since crucified men could often last some two or three days before dying. Although some people have suggested that Jesus did not really die on the cross but rather that he 'swooned' and later revived in the tomb, Mark stresses that Pilate made absolutely certain that Jesus was in fact dead, by asking the officer in charge of the execution squad. Since Jesus had been charged with what was virtually rebellion against Rome, it would not do to have him removed from the cross before he had died, only to be cared for until he recovered and then resume his activities. Jesus was dead.

**15:46** Joseph was wealthy and able to afford the purchase of the linen and to supply the tomb. This, in contrast to the way Jesus was numbered with the transgressors in his death (Isa. 53:12), fulfilled the prophecy of Isa. 53:9, 'And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death'.

**a tomb...** hewn out of the rock Lane has commented on the details of the tomb:

The site traditionally identified as the tomb of Jesus and its immediate vicinity is now known to have been a cemetery in the first century. As was frequently the case in Palestine, this cemetery utilised an abandoned quarry, where several centuries before stone-cutters had worked their way back into a hillside, leaving a rugged scarp into which tombs were cut in the early Roman period. The facade cut into the hillside opened into an antechamber, at the back of which a rectangular doorway about two feet high led inside (cf. Jn. 20:5, 11, they 'stooped to look inside'). Burial itself took place within an inner chamber. Ordinarily in this period such a tomb was sealed with a flat stone slab wedged into place to shut out animals or intruders. The Markan account speaks of some sort of stone which could be rolled into place. This may have been only a boulder, but if the tomb was an exceptionally fine one, it may have had an elaborate disc-shaped stone, about a yard in diameter, like a millstone, which was placed in a wide slot cut into the rock. Since the groove into which the stone fitted sloped toward the doorway, it could be easily rolled into place; but to roll the stone aside would require the strength of several men. Only a few tombs with such rolling stones are known in Palestine, but all of them date from the period of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lane. pp. 580f.

15:47 saw where he was laid      Open mourning was prohibited in the case of a criminal executed for treason. Possibly this extended to Jesus' case also. But since the burial took place late on Friday afternoon, we may assume that the women did not go to the tomb to mourn on this occasion, but to discover where he was laid in order that they may return when the sabbath was over to complete the burial rites.

# MARK:

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### G. THE EMPTY TOMB, 16:1—8

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 2 And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 And they were saying to one another, ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?’ 4 And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed; 6 And he said to them, ‘Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.’ And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

The accounts in the four Gospels concerning Jesus' resurrection are difficult to reconcile. Cranfield's comment is helpful:

The existence of discrepancies (eg. as to the number and names of the women concerned and their reaction to the angel's (or angels') words) between the several accounts of the first Easter morning is well known; and, while the various differences taken one by one can be more or less satisfactorily reconciled (and there is no need to be either unduly cavalier with such explanations or unduly pedantic in discovering discrepancies!), the difficulties are nevertheless too numerous for this patient ironing away of them one by one to 'be altogether satisfying. But it should be remembered that differences between eye-witness accounts of the same events are by no means an unusual phenomenon. In the gospels themselves there are often discrepancies elsewhere. It would in fact be suspicious, if just here everything agreed exactly. The discrepancies are at least evidence that we have not to do here with a piece of carefully concerted deceit. Moreover, allowance should be made for the uniqueness of the event the immediate sequel of which is being recorded. It is not surprising that here the human testimony should show signs of disturbance and strain. Here, anywhere, we should expect it to be a broken and trembling testimony.

One feature of all four gospel accounts which goes a long way towards authenticating the story as a whole is the prominence of women; for this is a feature which the early Church would not be likely to invent.<sup>1</sup>

**16:1 when the sabbath was past** Sabbath concluded at sunset on Saturday. As soon as it was possible, the women purchased the various aromatic oils needed to anoint the body of Jesus. Whatever emotions may have gripped them as they made these preparations, clearly they had absolutely no idea that he would indeed rise from the dead. This would agree with verse 14 which says that the eleven disciples were gripped by ‘unbelief and hardness of heart’.

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<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, pp. 462f

**16:2** No sooner had the sun risen than the women made their way to the tomb.

**16:3 Who will roll away the stone** Matthew tells us that the great stone was not only difficult to remove because of its size, but also because the authorities had sealed it and set a guard over it (Matt. 27:62-66). Just when the thought struck the women that they would require assistance in moving the stone is not mentioned. It is not difficult to understand that the emotional strain of the past two days would have made clear thinking difficult.

**16:4 they saw that the stone was rolled back** Mark does not say how this took place (see Matt. 28:2), but considering its size, ‘it was very large’, we are meant to share the women’s amazement.

**16:5 they saw a young man** The word for ‘young man’ (Gr. *neaniskos*) is the same word used to describe the anonymous youth in Mark 14:51. Yet here we are intended to see that the young man was one who brings the word of the risen Christ to the first witnesses of his resurrection (vv. 6-7). He is Christ’s messenger.<sup>2</sup> sitting on the right side This detail highlights the fact Mark is recording exactly what the women saw.

*dressed in a white robe* Matthew tells us that ‘His appearance was like lightening, and his raiment white as snow’ (Matt. 28:3). The ‘white’ robes are meant to indicate their dazzling quality more than simply their colour.

*and they were amazed* The women were absolutely staggered by the open tomb and the presence of the young man. It was not only that they expected neither, but that they were being confronted by the most powerful work in human history, the raising of a man from the dead. Whether they understood this or not is of no consequence at this point; that they were nonetheless a part of the great event was!

**16:6-7 He is risen, he is not here** They had come to anoint a dead body, but it was not just that the body had gone; the body was no longer dead! Familiarity with the words, ‘I believe in the resurrection of the dead’, must not be allowed to blind us to the incredible<sup>3</sup> nature of this event. Compare the preaching of the early church, for example in Acts 2:31-32; 3:15; 4:10, 33; 17:17, 31 and Rom. 10:9; etc.

*tell his disciples and Peter* No doubt this instruction struck deeply into Peter, who had so recently and so vehemently denied even knowing Jesus. If Papias’ detail is correct that Mark was recording Peter’s preaching, then we can understand why this is the only Gospel to mention Peter being singled out in this way.

*he is going before you to Galilee* Cf. Mark 14:28.

**16:8 And they went out and fled from the tomb** The women were, for the moment at least, filled with ‘trembling and astonishment’ and reduced to silence. They were afraid, probably because they had been confronted with the glory of God, although Mark does not tell us their thoughts. What is plain, is that the message of the resurrection of Jesus was no glib recitation but was born out of a personal encounter with the reality of the empty tomb.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word for messenger, although not used here, is *aggelos* —angel.

<sup>3</sup> Technically, ‘incredible’ means that which cannot be believed. But that is precisely what we do: we believe not because it is humanly believable, but because the truth of it comes unmistakably to us by revelation.

If this Gospel seeks to present the truth of the kingdom of God, then this paragraph

is a fitting, even if somewhat abrupt, conclusion. For if Jesus has risen from the dead, then he is Lord over death, and if he is Lord over death then he must be Lord over sin. The great power of sin, namely its guilt and so its condemning power, has been broken. Just as John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sin, so now that forgiveness is an established fact. Jesus is Lord and the kingdom of God is unchallengeable.

### H. THE ENDING OF MARK, 16:9-20

Reference has been made in the Introduction to the problems attached to the ending of this Gospel. It seems almost certain that these verses do not belong to the original Gospel<sup>4</sup>, although, as noted above, verse 8 does seem to be rather an abrupt ending<sup>5</sup>. What is certain, however, is that many in the early church accepted this long ending of Mark at an early stage.<sup>6</sup> As was said earlier, if nothing else, then, it reflects to some degree, the thinking of the early church. Perhaps we could say that where this ending is consistent with other parts of scripture it may be used with confidence, but that no doctrine ought to be based on any part of this passage. Indeed we ought to be careful of any doctrine which is built upon only one statement in scripture.

9 Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast seven demons. 10 She went out and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

16:9-11 when he rose early... Mary Magdalene Strangely, the name of Jesus does not occur in this section until verse 19, while Mary Magdalene is introduced as if she was, to this point, unknown to the readers.

he appeared first to Mary This seems to have been based on John 20:11-18, although in that account there is no mention of the refusal of the disciples to believe her (see Mark 16:13, 14).

12 After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. 13 And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

16:12-13 Again this paragraph seems to be based on another passage, in this case the full account in Luke 24:13-35 of the two on the road to Emmaus. As in verses 9-11 above, 'Mark's' stress is on the persistent unbelief of the disciples, whereas in Luke's account the two to whom he appeared were met with the declaration, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon' (Luke 24:34).

14 Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. 15 And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. 16 He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out

<sup>4</sup> Hendriksen, pp. 682-587, presents a good discussion of the reasons behind such a conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> Lane, pp. 591f., argues reasonably that the ending in verse 8 is thoroughly appropriate to the form in which the Gospel is written, being 'consistent with the motifs of astonishment and fear developed throughout the Gospel'.

<sup>6</sup> Not all did so. however. Eusebius omitted it from his canons and Jerome also rejected it. For a list of the evidence. see Cranfield. pp. 471f.; Taylor, p. 610.

demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.

**16:14 Afterward** The details of the time and place are quite imprecise.

**he appeared to the eleven** In spite of the statements in Mark 14:28 and 16:7, it is Matthew who records that the eleven disciples went to Galilee where they saw Jesus (Matt. 28:16). But the stress on the unbelief of the disciples is continued. This gives point to the command of verse 16, which would, then, refer first of all to the eleven.

**16:15 Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation** As with Matthew's account (28:19), the Greek is literally, 'having gone...',<sup>7</sup> It is assumed that the disciples will go; having gone, then, they are to 'preach the gospel'. In this they will be continuing the work begun by Jesus (Mark. 1:14-15).

The gospel is to be preached to 'the whole creation', meaning, obviously, to every person.<sup>8</sup> The result, however, will involve the transformation of the whole creation (Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:10, 13; Rev. 21:1; etc.).

**16:16 He who believes and is baptised will be saved** A comparison of the two halves of this verse will show that the stress is on belief and not baptism for salvation. Baptism is shown to be associated with faith; both verbs are aorists indicating single unrepeatable actions, which in the book of Acts we see to be virtually simultaneous.

**16:17-18 these signs will accompany those who believe** The list of 'signs' which follow seems largely based on the accounts in Acts of the experiences and ministry of the early church.

**cast out demons** This was a feature of Jesus' own ministry and there is some evidence of it in Acts 8:7; 16:18.

**speak in new tongues** The mention of this 'sign' (in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 it is a 'gift') seems strange in this context, when compared with the startlingly new experience in Acts 2:1-11).

**pick up serpents** See Acts 28:3-6.

**drink any deadly thing** There is no New Testament evidence of the drinking of poison without harm.

19 So when the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.

These verses describe the exaltation of Jesus and the subsequent preaching by the disciples (actually, by the eleven, see v. 14). It is given in such general terms as to convey very little. A full picture of Jesus' exaltation is to be gathered from Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 1:3-4, although the actual event was, by nature of the case, unseen by human eyes.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek word used is *poreuthentes*, which is the masculine nominative plural of the aorist passive participle of *poreuomai*.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek word *ktisis* may well be better translated 'creature' rather than 'creation' in this context, although we may have expected *ktisma* if that was 'Mark's' intention.



16:20 the Lord worked with them Cf. Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1.  
confirmed the message Cf. Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:4.