



As a  
**Ransom**  
for Many

Quiet Times and Reflections  
from the Gospel of Mark

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“As a Ransom for Many”

Quiet Times and Reflections from the Gospel of Mark

By Rolan Monje and John Philip Louis

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# **“As a Ransom for Many”**

## **Quiet Times and Reflections from the Gospel of Mark**

### Introduction

**ACTION FLICKS. ROLLER COASTERS. THRILLER NOVELS.** These things give us an idea of what to expect from the Gospel of Mark. Crisp and fast-paced, this Gospel takes readers on an energetic ride to offer his account, his portrayal of Jesus.

### Fast Facts about the Gospel of Mark

- Ancient title: Kata Markon, “According to Mark”
- Composed around A.D. 55–65, in Rome
- Written by Mark, probably an early convert associated with Peter (Acts 12:12; 1 Peter 5:13)
- Originally written in Greek; the shortest (and possibly earliest) Gospel
- Probably meant to encourage Christians in Rome
- Appeals to the practical Roman mindset

### Jesus the Servant

Each of the four Gospels shares certain characteristics and materials, and a perspective that is unique. In addition, each Gospel was “designed” to emphasise various aspects of Jesus’ life and work. Working together, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John paint a complete and compelling picture of our Lord.

In Mark, what stands out is Christ as a servant-king. His whole Gospel may be summed up in Jesus’ statement about himself:

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

As you work through the text of Mark, try to keep this theme in mind. And as you reflect on following our Lord’s footsteps, may you be deeply inspired to serve like Jesus, and to give your life for many.

## **“As a Ransom for Many”**

### **14-Session Outline**

<b>Session 1</b> Mark 1:1–13	<b>The Presentation of the Servant</b> His forerunner, baptism, temptation
<b>Session 2</b> Mark 1:14–45	<b>The Followers of the Servant</b> His work, first disciples, first miracles
<b>Session 3</b> Mark 2:1–3:6	<b>The Mission of the Servant</b> Healings, controversy over friendship with sinners, the calling of Matthew
<b>Session 4</b> Mark 3:7–35	<b>Initial Opposition to the Servant</b> Crowds gathering, choosing of the Twelve, charges of demon possession, teaching on spiritual family
<b>Session 5</b> Mark 4:1–34	<b>The Parables of the Servant</b> Instruction through parables, explanation to disciples
<b>Session 6</b> Mark 4:35–5:43	<b>The Power of the Servant</b> Calming the storm, healing the demoniac, Jairus’ plea, healing of bleeding woman
<b>Session 7</b> Mark 6:1–7:37	<b>The Ministry of the Servant</b> Rejection at Nazareth, sending the Twelve, death of John, feeding the five thousand, walking on water, teaching on tradition, the Syrophenician woman

- Session 8**  
Mark 8:1–30      **The Identity of the Servant**  
Feeding the four thousand, request for a sign, the yeast of the Pharisees, healing a blind man, recognising Jesus as Messiah
- Session 9**  
Mark 8:31–10:52      **The Destiny of the Servant**  
Three predictions of the Passion, requirements of discipleship, the Transfiguration, healings, teaching on divorce and authority
- Session 10**  
Mark 11:1–12:44      **The Testing of the Servant**  
The triumphal entry, cursing the fig tree; questions about Jesus' authority, taxes, marriage, the Great Commandment, and Solomon; the widow's offering
- Session 11**  
Mark 13:1–37      **The Warnings of the Servant**  
The Olivet discourse, the prophecy of the destruction of the temple, warnings against deceivers and of persecution, the need for watchfulness
- Session 12**  
Mark 14:1–72      **The Betrayal of the Servant**  
The plot to arrest Jesus, the anointing and betrayal, the Lord's supper, Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Peter's denial
- Session 13**  
Mark 15:1–47      **The Rejection of the Servant**  
Trial before Pilate, the mocking of Jesus, the Crucifixion and burial of Christ

**Session 14****The Resurrection of the Servant**

Mark 16:1–20

The empty tomb, the longer ending of Mark  
(appearances and ascension)

**Please note: Every session can be read over two days, so that the whole gospel of Mark can be covered in a month. As we delve and dig deeper into this account of Jesus' life, let us also share with each other in our discipling times our favourite and most helpful insights. Together, we can strive to imitate Jesus' love and servanthood.**

## Session 1: The Presentation of the Servant

Read Mark 1:1–13

Jesus began His ministry when He was 30 years old, and that year was around A.D. 27. The book of Mark is a like a quick tour of Jesus and His ministry. It is like touring a prominent museum — you can take a one-day tour, paying attention to some details and getting a good general feel of what was displayed at the museum, or you can take a slow tour that takes days, examining each item in greater detail. The book of Mark is the shortest of all the four Gospels and it takes us quickly through the life of Jesus.

### *Exploring the Surface*

- In 1:1 Jesus was introduced immediately as Son of God. Do you believe in Jesus as the Son of God? If so, or not so, what are your reasons for this?
- Look at the Old Testament prophecy about Jesus that appeared in 1:2 (see footnote references to Malachi and Isaiah). These were prophecies (predictions) made about Jesus about 400–600 years before He walked on the earth as a human. The fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies hundreds of years later is strong proof that Jesus is the Son of God. Please see this link for other fulfilled prophecies regarding Christ—  
<https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog-and-stories/old-testament-prophecies.html>
- The prophecy says, “Make *straight* paths for Him...” are your paths to Him straight (note: the shortest distance between two points is a straight path) or crooked with many self-imposed distractions, twists, bumps and delays?



- Mark says that what he has written is the gospel, meaning “good news”. In what ways is the story of Jesus “good news”?
- In Jesus’ life there were two forces—one was God encouraging Him (1:11), and the other was Satan trying to pull Him down (1:13). Do you also sense the two forces at work in your life? Which force is winning?
- Jesus had to go through temptations. What temptations are you currently struggling with?

### *Digging Deeper*

Mark begins his Gospel with a prophecy. Drawing from two Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Malachi, he opens the narrative by evoking the past. His story is a continuation of Israel’s story. The prophets had proclaimed it already. A herald of good news will come to usher in a new messianic era.

That herald is John the Baptist, and his message is clear: There is One arriving (Greek: *erchomai*) who is so powerful that He will baptise with the Spirit. John is simply a forerunner, paving the way, laying the red carpet for a more significant entrance.

The character of John is significant on a number of levels. Deeper study leads us to reflect on some vital aspects of Christian life. Note for instance how some important themes are broached in the passage: the Holy Spirit, temptation, baptism, repentance, forgiveness.

- This Gospel, as with the other three, is founded on solid continuity with the Old Testament. In the quoted prophecies of Malachi and Isaiah (v. 2), what stands out? What is common?

- Jesus was introduced in the part of the world that was a desert. In fact the word “desert” or similar words like “lonely places” were used six times (1:3, 4, 12, 13, 35, 45). What is the significance of Jesus coming to a desert? Do you feel that you are in a “desert” now?
- John the prophet prepared the way for Jesus’ first coming in Mark 1. We too are preparing the way for Jesus’ second coming. Are we as zealous as John the prophet was in preparing the way for others to know Jesus?
- Focus on verses 7–8. John’s message was not about himself but something far greater. How does he emphasise Jesus’ greatness?
- Jesus undergoes baptism before being sent out to be tempted. How do the events surrounding His baptism prepare Him for His bout of temptation in the wilderness?
- The text says that the angels attended to Jesus at His temptation (ESV, “angels were ministering to him”). What might we learn here about God’s providence in times of temptation?
- Mark 1:7–8 seems to say, “It’s not about me, but about Him!” John the prophet was consciously drawing attention to the Messiah. Modern-day discipleship is similar. While the world looks out for “number one”, disciples have a higher purpose of pointing people to the One. How can you be more like John the prophet in pointing people to Christ?

## **Session 2:       The Followers of the Servant**

Read Mark 1:14–45

### *Exploring the Surface*

- The episode on the first disciples (vv. 16–18) is interesting in that Jesus chose fishermen to be His earliest followers? Why was this the case?
- Observe how Simon and Andrew left their nets to follow Jesus (v. 18). The same goes for James and John (v. 20), who left their father and his employees. Can someone truly follow Jesus without “leaving behind” something?
- The evil spirits knew who Jesus was and called Him “the Holy one of God” (1:24). Even though they knew who He was, they were not true followers of Jesus. We can be in danger of just knowing who Jesus is but not truly following Him. Are you in danger of doing this?
- In 1:38, Jesus said, “Let us go to the nearby villages ... so I can preach there also”. If you were in one of those villages what would you have heard Him preach?

### *Digging Deeper*

This rapid-fire Gospel gets immediately into the action. After the announcement and introduction to the Coming One, Mark immediately proceeds to create a verbal portrait of that Person. He is intent on showing his readers what kind of Messiah Jesus is.

Coming back from a victory in the wilderness, Jesus preaches the gospel (“good news”) of the Kingdom. He sounds the alarm, announcing that the waiting time is over. The Kingdom is breaking in. And as with kings of old, Jesus begins to gather around Him a band of loyal followers.

- In both verse 17 and 18, Mark uses the Greek term *akolouthein* (= to follow). The word is loaded with meaning. To “follow” a teacher in ancient times meant more than to “go behind”. It implied attachment, imitation, and surrendering to the teacher’s inclinations. How is this definition crucial for discipleship today?
- Verses 35–38 show Jesus having a consistent time to be with God. Notice His efforts to wake up at dawn and walk to a quiet (lit., “lonely”, “desolate”) place for minimal distractions. In your own Quiet Times, how strong is your sense of priority and intentionality? Any personal measures that come to mind to have better times with God?
- Note how Jesus willingly touched the unclean leper (v. 41) in order to make him clean. Some authors point to this as a preview of what Jesus would do on the cross—taking on our filthiness in order to cleanse us. In a way, we all are lepers touched by Jesus’ healing hand. Take time today to remember your past sins and thank Jesus for removing your unrighteousness.
- We have already seen that discipleship involves surrender. What are you doing to remain surrendered to Jesus?

## Session 3: The Mission of the Servant

Read Mark 2:1–3:6

### *Exploring the Surface*

- Imagine that you are the person known in the text as “the paralytic”. Imagine you are being lowered before Jesus (2:1–12). How might you feel, especially when Jesus pronounces forgiveness? Do you see why He is the Son of God as He was able to forgive people of their sins?
- In 2:17 it says, it is not the healthy who needs a doctor, but the sick. Who is the healthy and who is the sick? Whom do you see yourself as?
- Was Jesus wrong in helping someone on the Sabbath, a day when others would not? (3:1–4). Will opposition arise even when you try to do good to others?

### *Digging Deeper*

Crowds swelled as Jesus’ ministry gained popularity. In Capernaum, a paralytic man had to be brought through an opening in the roof of a mobbed house. A typical first-century Palestinian house had small windows and a thatched roof that allowed access into the house. To make an opening, the man’s friends had to dig through thatch and compacted earth. Their endeavour showed faith and impressed Jesus.

The same chapter also has the calling of Levi. Following his writing style, Mark gives a version that is shorter and more to-the-point than the other Gospel accounts (cf. Matthew 9:9–13; Luke 5:27–32).

There is also a *pericope* (= literary extract/portion) on fasting and on Jesus being the Lord of the Sabbath. Both these sections explain Christ’s teachings and shed light on the kind of opposition

He faced. Questions were lodged with regard to His words, actions, motives, as well as His followers.

- Opposition against Jesus is first presented in Mark 2:6–7. Who brings it about? Are their accusations valid?
- Notice the word “immediately” in verse 8. This is a recurring word in Mark, which makes for the book’s rapid pace (1:12, 18, 20). In what ways does this affect the narrative? How does it reflect Jesus’ responsiveness to the Father’s will and His mission?
- Review Mark 2:23–28. How does Jesus’ attitude toward the Sabbath diverge from that of the Pharisees?
- This section of Scripture presents opposition as a matter of fact in Jesus’ ministry. What are some ways to respond to persecution in a godly way? How can these keep you focused on your mission?
- Consider Paul’s words to Timothy: “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” (2 Timothy 3:10–12). How does this passage prime our hearts for facing opposition?
- The paralytic here was fortunate to have friends who cared enough to make that remarkable effort. How can you be a faithful friend to someone who needs help?

## Session 4: Initial Opposition to the Servant

Read Mark 3:7–35

### *Exploring the Surface*

- In 3:20, His family said that “He is out of his mind”. Have you faced any opposition, and/or been called “crazy” by your family/friends since you began taking steps to follow Jesus? Do you still serve God despite the hardship and opposition?
- According to Jesus, what is the basis for a family relationship with Him (3:35)? How can you teach this to others?
- Jesus calls such people His mother, sister, and brother. Why did He leave out “father”?
- As the Son of God, who was His father?

### *Digging Deeper*

Word about the Galilean wonder worker got around quickly. Soon, there was a swarm of folks from all around Israel—from the North (Tyre and Sidon) to the South (Jerusalem, Idumea). A boat was readied for security reasons (in case things turned rowdy, 3:9). And with back-to-back healings and exorcisms, our Lord was so busy He missed His meals (3:20).

Twelve “apostles” are eventually appointed to be His special ambassadors (Greek: *Apostolos* = messenger, delegate, agent). They are commissioned to preach and drive out demons. The number twelve is significant, evoking the ancient tribes of Israel.

Interestingly, Mark mentions Jesus’ family in the light of controversy. They want to restrain Him, thinking He had lost His mind. Obviously the ministry had brought about considerable

stress, but also unwanted attention from people. In addition to insanity, demon possession was added to the list of criticisms. The chapter ends with a punchy declaration that true family is about one's spiritual circle (3:31–35).

- Jesus' popularity continued to rise despite flak from religious leaders; the crowds responded well to His words. Do you find it interesting that sometimes ordinary people can see what the theologians fail to perceive?
- Note Jesus' warning not to make Him known (3:12). What do you think is the reason for this caution?
- "Beelzebub" (3:22) literally means "lord of flies", lampooning the Philistine deity (cf. 2 Kings 1:2). How do you think this later became a reference to Satan (cf. Matthew 9:34; 12:24)?
- The teachers of the law saw Jesus' success as an exorcist, but charged Him with demon possession (3:23). Why do you think they thought that way? How did Jesus effectively answer their charge (3:23–27)?
- Jesus explained the secrets of the kingdom to a chosen group of obedient followers. Similarly, disciples today are especially called to follow obediently. Read Luke 6:49 and John 6:29. In what areas are you most consistently obeying? In what areas should you repent?



## Session 5: The Parables of the Servant

Read Mark 4:1–34

### *Exploring the Surface*

- In the parable of the sower, Jesus said there were four places with differing types of soil—the path, rocky places, thorny places, and a fertile one. Which one most accurately describes you?
- A rocky type of soil has a shallow foundation—how do you build a stronger foundation?
- A thorny type of soil is one full of worries and the deceitfulness of wealth—what do you worry about the most in life? Do you have a strong desire to be wealthy?
- What does the world say are your benefits when you are wealthy? How is wealth deceitful?

### *Digging Deeper*

Do you remember your teachers back in school? Each teacher had his or her own unique style of instruction. In Mark 4, Jesus' chosen method is teaching through *parables* (4:2). The English term is derived from the Greek verb *paraballo* (lit., “to cast alongside”). A parable makes comparisons. It “throws” one thing alongside another to make a point. Typically, a spiritual concept is taught through something that is physical. What is mundane opens the door to unfamiliar ground. That’s how parables carry their instructive power.

Five parables are presented here: the sower, the lamp, the measure, the growing seed, and the mustard seed. Each one illustrates the Kingdom of God and reveals its mystery (Grk: *mysterion* = a secret, something to be revealed or interpreted; 4:11). Jesus taught many things in parables, but gave explanations

only to His disciples in private settings (4:33–34).

- To interpret parables, some basic principles must be kept in mind:
  - a. Knowing the original setting. One must strive to know how the parable was originally heard. This would include identifying the audience and the familiar elements of the story. In particular, note the parts of the parable that would draw hearers into it.
  - b. Discovering the central issue. All parables have an intended response by the way they address specific problems or questions. Parables feature a “twist” or “punch” that “hits” hearers. Try reading the parable several times to get this, and try reading the immediate context or related passages as well.
  - c. Determining the timeless truth. Most parables focus on one central tenet that addresses the issue or problem. Once you “get the point” of the parable, its teaching can be translated or applied to your own context.
  
- In the parable of the sower, only one of the four types of soil proved fruitful. What does it mean to have a heart that has fertile soil?
  
- Why do you think Jesus taught in parables? It seems that parables reveal truth to the responsive (4:11) and conceal truth from the unresponsive (4:12). Could Christ have used a less indirect approach?

## **Session 6: The Power of the Servant**

Read Mark 4:35–5:43

### *Exploring the Surface*

- Here Jesus demonstrated His power as the Son of God. He calmed the storm, cast demons from a man, healed a woman who had been suffering from bleeding, and raised a dead girl. Do these give Jesus credibility that He is the Son of God?
- When the disciples faced a storm their first reaction was “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”. Have you ever questioned or blamed God for the storms in your life?
- Did Jesus not care about them? Was the statement that “Jesus did not care” true? Did Jesus care after all?
- What does Jesus want us to have when we face the storms of our lives?
- Jesus paid attention to those who tried to touch Him (5:30) but ignored those who had no faith (5:36). Was Jesus rude when He ignored them?
- Did Jesus “show off” after performing all these miracles (5:43). What did Jesus tell them to do after they witnessed these amazing miracles? What does this show about His character?

### *Digging Deeper*

Imagine seeing Jesus’ miracles first hand. There’s nothing like being there as an eyewitness—to experience and be amazed by His supernatural control of the elements. No tricks here. Just sheer power from on high.

But it’s not just about the “wow factor”. There is a deeper purpose for our Lord’s signs and wonders (4:41). Whereas humans would jump at any chance to brag or attract, Jesus has

more in mind. His manifestations of power are not meant to show off or scare or intimidate. They are not even to gain a following. Miracles establish that the Kingdom of God is about *meeting needs*.

- Vital to Mark's story is how Jesus showed power over nature. Creation obeyed the Servant-King. Apparently, the disciples had yet to be convinced. How did the question in 4:38 reflect human insecurity? How did the calming of the storm point to the subject of Jesus' identity (4:41)?
- As before, the powers of God's kingdom overcame the forces of evil. In Mark 5, Jesus effectively drove out demons. How did the narrative answer the question in 4:41? (See 5:7 specifically.)
- Once freed from Legion, the healed demoniac asked to join Jesus, an understandable reaction of gratitude and faith. Our Lord replied by commissioning him to bear testimony to God's mercy. What does this show about the *intended response* to miracles?
- Compare Jairus and the bleeding woman. One is named and influential, the other unnamed and lowly. How did each one show faith in Jesus? In what ways did Jesus impact people from opposite sides of the social spectrum?
- The storm surfaced the disciples' faithlessness. Jesus used it as a teaching opportunity. Recall the storms in your life. How did they refine *your faith*?
- A main lesson for modern-day believers is Jesus' rebuke (4:40). He was upset at their lack of trust in Him. How can our obedience to Jesus sometimes lead us into storms? How is God teaching you to trust completely?
- Consider Jesus' commissioning of the Gerasene demoniac: "Tell them how much the Lord has done for you..." should

have the same impact for us today. How are you doing with Jesus' commission to you?

## Session 7: The Ministry of the Servant

Read Mark 6:1–7:37

### *Exploring the Surface*

- Why did Jesus begin to teach on the Sabbath (6:2) in His hometown? What message was He trying to convey by doing this?
- At first the people who heard Him were amazed (6:2), and then when cynicism crept in (6:2b–3) it spread so fast, like a virus, and in no time they took offence at Jesus. Do you see how fast negativity can spread?
- Why did Jesus send out His disciples in pairs (two by two)?
- John the prophet demonstrated courage (6:18) and Jesus demonstrated compassion (6:34). Does courage and compassion come naturally to you?
- To God, 5 (loaves) + 2 (fish) = 5,000 (or unlimited loaves and fish). Does this encourage you about the power of God?
- Did Jesus use any miracles to meet His own need thus far? See 1:25, 33, 41; 2:11; 3:10; 4:39; 5:8,30, 34; 6:5, 39, 50-51, 56. What does this say about Jesus? Do you admire this? If anyone in the world had this much power what would he or she do with it?
- When Jesus displayed His power the disciples thought He was a ghost (6:49). Do you confuse the power of God with superstition and give credit to another “force” or “good luck” at work?
- Jesus told them to not be afraid (6:50b). Fear is the number-one killer of faith. What controls you—fear or faith?
- What does “take courage” (6:50b) mean?

## *Digging Deeper*

These two chapters feature a mixed bag. The work of ministry includes various aspects, from teaching to deputising to healing to feeding. There's a lot to do. Jesus, as has already been established, is a busy man, a tireless servant.

Crucial to understanding this section is the pericope at the beginning of Mark 6. Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth, a small town situated in the Galilean hills. He begins to teach in the synagogue. The responses, initially infused with amazement, turned sour; suspicion was mixed with derogatory remarks. Jesus was a “prophet without honor” at His homecoming. Sadly, even the Son of God could not perform miracles there as He would have wished. He was “amazed” (ESV “marveled”) at their unbelief.

So as you explore this text, be reminded that signs and miracles *in themselves* will never produce lasting belief. Jesus wants us to go beyond visual stimuli and shock value. Godly belief commits to truth; faith-response has everything to do with choice. Will He be amazed at your faith or the lack of it?

- Review Jesus' instructions to the Twelve (6:6–13). What does this passage tell us about the kind of ministry they were to have? What kind of servants was Jesus training them to be?
- As they preached about “repentance” they also healed others. Does preaching the gospel mean helping those that are in need? When was the last time you helped someone in need? Join our volunteers to visit the needy regularly (after the outbreak of the virus).
- The brutal death of John the prophet is recalled here (6:14ff.), interrupting the account of the sending of the Twelve. What is the purpose of this flashback, given that Mark devoted

several verses to John's death as compared to His ministry?

- Right after the account of the death of John the prophet, the account of the feeding of the 5,000 was introduced. Could it be that Mark wants us to make a comparison between the two banquets?

Contrast the two accounts or two banquets using the following questions:

- o Who was the host of each banquet?
- o Who was invited to Herod's banquet as opposed to Jesus'?
- o Which of the two was done with such pomp and significance?
- o What type of entertainment took place in both banquets?
- o What type of food was offered in each banquet? Did this make a difference to the atmosphere?
- o Why was King Herod distressed at his banquet?
- o How did the people in both banquets feel at the end? See 6:42 for the feeling of the people at Jesus' banquet, and 6:26 for how Herod felt.
- o Did the leaders serve the guests or vice versa in each banquet (see 6:39, 43).
- o Which type of banquet are you more drawn to?
- Jesus fed people and met needs, but that was not the end point of His ministry. Why is it important to seek Jesus for more than spiritual thrills? See John 6:26–27 for more insight.
- This miracle took place at the fourth watch of the night, at 3am, or more likely between 3am to 6am. How hard did the work given that they fed the 5,000 in the evening?
- In the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus was with the 12 disciples, but in the next miracle the 12 were left alone to go to the



lake without Jesus initially (6:45). Why did Jesus arrange things this way?

- In 6:52, it says that the 12 disciples were amazed when Jesus walked on the water. Mark links this amazement with the fact that their hearts were hardened, for they had not understood about the loaves in the previous miraculous feeding of the 5,000. Does the hardening of our hearts make us not see Jesus' power and we have to be reminded of His power over and over again?
- What aspects of God's helping hand are shown in the healing of the deaf and mute man (7:31–37)?
- You get a sense that Jesus *desired* this ministry. He had given Himself wholly to it (1:38–39; 6:34). What is your personal ministry? Do you desire to do less or more?
- For leaders in ministry at any level or capacity: What motivates you to do ministry?
- Recall your moments of spiritual tiredness. What measures can help you reduce ministry fatigue or burnout?

## **Session 8: The Identity of the Servant**

Read Mark 8:1–30

### *Exploring the Surface*

- Which is more important? Being clean on the inside or outside (7:18-23)?
- Do you judge people more on the outside or inside?
- Do you judge yourself more on the outside or inside?
- In 8:17, 21, Jesus asked them, “Do you still not understand?” After reading all the miracles do you still not understand? Do you still not see Jesus for who He is, the Son of God?
- Jesus asked Peter who gave the right answer (8:29), “You are the Messiah”. Can you give this same answer about who Jesus is with conviction? Why, or why not?

### *Digging Deeper*

Do you like suspense movies? Throughout Mark’s Gospel, suspense has been building about Jesus’ identity. In Mark 1, He was introduced by John the prophet as one infinitely greater. In Mark 3, the source of His power was questioned. In Mark 4, even His followers asked, “Who is this?” In Mark 6, His lowly occupation and over-familiar family were used against Him. All this begs resolution.

In order to prove Himself a godsend, Jesus is asked by the Pharisees to produce some compelling sign (vv. 11–12). With a sigh, He said, “Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to [this generation]”.

At the end of the chapter, however, there is an affirmation. In a more private setting, Jesus and the disciples discuss His identity (vv. 27–30). Peter declares Him to be “Messiah”. Jesus then explains what that means.

The Christ was uniquely chosen for suffering, rejection, and resurrection.

- The narratives on feeding have much more to say than how Jesus fed multitudes. What does the feeding of the four thousand (a second feeding) reveal
  - ... about Christ's character and power?
  - ... about the weakness in His disciples' thinking (6:37; 8:4)?
- While the disciples were concerned about forgetting to bring bread (possibly even blaming each other), Jesus found it opportune for some teaching (8:14ff.). He tells them to beware of the yeast (ESV "leaven") of the Pharisees and of Herod. How does spiritual yeast corrupt? Also, how does their "yeast" differ from the "bread" of Christ?
- Why is the question, "Who do you say I am?" (v. 29) significant for understanding the Gospels?
- The yeast of the Pharisees had to do not just with their attitude toward Jesus, but with their whole outlook to life. How can today's church avoid corruption from "the yeast" of popular and worldly influences?
- Jesus talked about hardening of heart in 8:17. What does having a "hardened heart" mean to you? How has Jesus softened your heart lately?
- It is clear that Jesus' frustrations were brought about by His profound desire for people to have faith. When have you "sighed" for people? How can you turn disappointment into positive action?

## **Session 9: The Destiny of the Servant**

Read Mark 8:31–10:52

### *Exploring the Surface*

- Did Peter want Jesus to go to the cross? Why not? (8:31–33).
- In 8:34, what does it mean to take up the cross of Jesus and follow Him?
- Jesus took Peter, James and John (9:2) to the mountain and here God spoke to them, telling them to listen to Him (9:7). Are we taking pains to listen to Jesus today?
- Please read 2 Peter 1:16–18 where, many years later, Peter reminded His readers of this incident that he was a witness to. According to Peter, this event actually happened. Do you feel that the life of Jesus, His death and resurrection were cleverly invented stories? Do you believe Jesus was the Son of God?
- In 9:20–21 they brought a troubled boy to Jesus. When Jesus asked how long the boy had been this way, they replied and said “from childhood”. Are your childhood experiences affecting you today as an teenager/adult? Have you made peace with the past?
- Later on, Jesus taught them about greatness (9:35). What did He mean when He said that in order to become first we must be the very last?
- In the discourse on true greatness (9:33–37), Jesus used a child as an object lesson. How effective was His live illustration?
- How is this different from what the world teaches about greatness?
- From the text in 9: 42–48, how serious is Jesus about us getting rid of sin?
- Why does He want us to be like “salt” (9:49–50).

- In 10:13 Jesus was indignant when people were bringing children to Him to have Him touch them. Why was this the case? How did Jesus see little children?
- Was the rich young ruler not able to enter God’s kingdom because he was rich? Do we all have to be poor in order to be accepted by God?
- In 10:45, Jesus said that He was given as a ransom for many. What does this mean? What did Jesus pay a ransom for?

*For marrieds only:*

- Why did they want to issue certificates of divorce in the first place? Was it in order to have an easy way out of difficult marriages?
- Is this the same today?
- Was Jesus for or against the issuance of a marriage certificate?
- Why was this associated with a hard heart (10:5)?
- So what should be done when there are challenges in a marriage?

*Digging Deeper*

Chapter 8 is a turning point in Mark’s Gospel. The narrative “changes direction” as Jesus embarks on His journey to Jerusalem (8:31–10:52, cf. Luke 9:51). He explains more about His destiny at Calvary, how His future carries both suffering and glory.

This section has several significant moments. There are three predictions of the Passion (8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34), all defining the close trajectory of Jesus’ journey. Then there is the Transfiguration (9:2ff), which involves two Old Testament VIPs, Elijah and Moses. On that mountain, the voice of God is heard once more.

This section also carries important teachings. Jesus spends time on a number of vital topics: requirements of discipleship (8:34–9:1, 43–50), true greatness (9:33–37), divorce (10:1–12), and riches and the Kingdom of God (10:17–31).

- What four things about Himself does Jesus proclaim in 8:31–32? For further study, contrast 8:31 with 9:30–32.
- Reflecting on the requirements of discipleship in Mark, what does a person stand to lose by following Christ? What does one stand to gain?
- Think about how Jesus rebuked Peter (8:33). When are the times when you have in mind “the things of men” rather than “the things of God?”
- The trip to the high mountain where Jesus was transfigured had many parallels with the trip to Mount Sinai that Moses made. Here are some similarities:
  - In Ex 24:16 Moses was called to meet with God on the seventh day. Likewise Jesus took the three with Him and was transfigured on the seventh day.
  - A cloud came and covered the characters in both episodes.
  - Jesus changed and was transfigured (9:3) and Moses also became radiant  
Ex 34:29–35.
  - In Deuteronomy 18:15 God told Moses that, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me” and then says, “You must listen to Him”. God uses similar words at the transfiguration, in 9:7, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him.”
  - When both Moses and Jesus came down they faced problems. Jesus in frustration said, “O unbelieving generation...” (9:19). When Moses came down and saw them worshipping the golden calf he burned with anger (Ex 32:19).

- After the transfiguration there was an argument about who was the greatest. Could it be that since only Peter, James and John were invited to go with Jesus that this privilege got into their head and they felt that they were somebody and the other nine disciples were triggered and entered into a debate with them about this? Or could it be that since Moses only took Joshua to the mountain that the three of them wondered who was the Joshua among them and this sparked an argument which spilled over to the rest of the nine disciples?
- It is so easy to lose sight of our servanthood and to sometimes get caught up with how “important” we are in the church. Such worldly thinking can hinder us from understanding the cross. Incidentally, at that point the 12 had not understood about the cross (9:32) because of their worldly thinking. What are current worries/worldly thinking/anxious thoughts that are keeping you from grasping the cross more deeply?
- How is blind Bartimaeus (10:46ff) different from the rich young man in 10:17ff? Might this show something about what Jesus is looking for in a disciple?
- What did Bartimaeus do after being healed by Jesus? Did he go his own way?
- Throughout the text, there is a strong sense of destiny displayed by Jesus, seen in 10:32–34. How can you have the same in your own life?
- In 10:31 and 9:35 Jesus says the same thing — “Whoever wants to be first must be last”. How difficult is it to apply the desire to be “great” and to be “rich” as “last”, not “first”? Did Jesus model it for us?

## Session 10: The Testing of the Servant

Read Mark 11:1–12:44

### *Exploring the Surface*

- How did Jesus react to corruption at the temple? (11:15–19). Did He overreact?
- Consider the Parable of the Tenants (12:1–12). The tenants did not welcome the servants to collect fruit from the vineyards. Do you welcome healthy accountability, or do you react negatively to it like the teachers of the law (12:12)?
- How significant is the Great Commandment in your personal life (12:29–31)?
- How does Jesus wisely tackle the question on taxes (12:13–17)? Do you declare your taxes accurately and pay them?
- What contrast do you see between the teachers of the law (12:38–40) and the widow (12:41–44) when it comes to “secret” deeds?
- What do you do in secret for God that others don’t know?

### *Digging Deeper*

Have you ever been interrogated by authority? Jesus certainly had. With His triumphal entry into Jerusalem came a barrage of questions—His authority, His teaching, even political opinion! Through it all our Lord was unwavering, turning the tables on the rampaging religious leaders.

A couple of things in this section deserve some extra attention. First, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a colt (Grk: *pōlos* = youngling or foal), in fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9. The Servant-King came with both royal authority and remarkable humility (cf. Isaiah 53:2–3, 7; Matthew 11:29).



He brought true peace (Zechariah 9:10), as symbolised by His coming on a colt and not a war-horse.

Furthermore, the cleansing of the temple showed that the city was not ready for the King's visit. The trafficking and profiteering caused Jesus to drive out both buyers and sellers. But His reaction pointed to a deeper conviction. Quoting Isaiah 56:7, our Lord instructed them on the vision of God's house being open to "all nations". With all this chaos, how could a Gentile pray and worship? Apparently, while Jesus was being tested, it was Jerusalem that was failing the test.

- Mark purposefully sandwiches the temple-clearing episode with the story of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–25). How are the two stories related? Hint: Consider the themes of fruitlessness and judgement.
- Jesus probably entered the Temple premises through the Court of the Gentiles, where non-Jews were allowed to worship. How would this be significant for the story? For Mark's emphases?
- Notice how Peter reacted in 11:20–21. How does this relate to the subsequent passage on faith and prayer?
- When questioned on His authority, Jesus doesn't answer the Jewish leaders directly (11:27-33). Their grilling backfires. What is the brilliance in Jesus' reply?
- Imagine Jesus "clearing the temple" at your church. How would you react?
- How does the incident of the widows offering (12:41-44) challenge us Christians on how we do our budgets?

## Session 11: The Warnings of the Servant

Read Mark 13:1–37

### *Exploring the Surface*

- The disciples were impressed with the magnificence of the buildings, but Jesus brought them down to earth by giving them a longer-term view of things — that in the end, nothing would stay intact. Every stone will be thrown down. Do you have a fear of God and a long-term view that all of man’s achievements will one day be thrown down and nothing will stay intact? Do you realise that the only thing that matters is our relationship with Him?
- What short-term achievements matter to you so much that they could come between God and you?
- With a long-term view in mind, at the end of His discourse in 13:1–31, Jesus then told them (Peter, James and John) that they should, in the text 13:32–37, do the following: Be on your *guard*; be *alert*; *keep watch*...when the *rooster crows*; do not let Him find you *sleeping*; *watch*. If these words were told to you personally, how would you have reacted? Keep these points in mind when we process chapter 14, which is next.

### *Digging Deeper*

I (Roland) remember sitting in Intermediate Greek class. We were reciting passages from the Gospels and translating them. My professor, an erudite German, kept reminding, “Read as if Jesus were speaking!” Those words prompted me (until today) to ponder how Jesus would have spoken the original lines.

Imagine our Lord on the Mount of Olives conversing with Peter, James, John and Andrew. His tone is matter-of-fact, His countenance serious. “Watch out... do not be alarmed... the end is still to come... be on your guard.”

Warnings a-plenty make up Chapter 13. Our Lord must have spoken these with great intensity. He cast some of His most important and controversial teachings in terms of coming judgement. Incredible as it may have sounded back then, Herod’s temple buildings, according to Jesus, would be destroyed. This prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70. The Roman general Titus and his armies sacked Jerusalem and the temple was utterly ruined.

Note: Mark 13:24–27 may be referred to as an “apocalyptic” passage (cf. Matthew 24; Luke 21). The term refers to literature that uses words like brushes, painting sometimes-bizarre images—like in sci-fi comics. The Old Testament prophets (see Isaiah 13:10; 34:4) used apocalyptic language to convey their messages in symbolic form, much like what the apostle John does in the book of Revelation.

- The Jerusalem temple was not only an architectural wonder, but also the focus of vital biblical teachings in both Old and New Testaments. Why do you think Jesus began His warnings with a discussion of the future of the temple?
- Consider the reaction of the disciples (13:3–4). What do you sense from their questions? What events might lead them to conclude (wrongly) that the end had come (13:5–8)?
- Jesus said that Christian persecution is something to be expected (as does Paul in 2 Timothy 3:10–13). Also, God can use it for something good. How can Jesus’ words in 13:9–13 be an encouragement for believers?

- Reflecting on the chief call to be alert and attentive (vv. 5, 23, 35, 37), how can one be “watchful” in Christian living?
- As a Christian, how should you react to false teachers who claim to know the exact date of Christ’s second coming?
- How can you share in Jesus’ conviction that the gospel must be “preached” (ESV “proclaimed”) to all nations?

## Session 12: The Betrayal of the Servant

Read Mark 14:1–72

### *Exploring the Surface*

- The week called the Passion begins from chapter 14. Judas handed Jesus over for some money as it says in 14:10–11 (the other Gospels tell us that it was actually 40 pieces of silver ). How much would you hand Jesus over for?
- Contrast this with how much the woman was willing to spend (14:5) to anoint Jesus—one year’s wages. To whom should Jesus have meant more to? Judas or the woman? (Judas by this time had already been with Jesus for almost three years).
- Consider Jesus’ words in 14:9. What would you like to do for Jesus that might move Him to appreciate you?
- Previously Jesus warned the disciples with these words: Be on your *guard*; be *alert*; *keep watch*...when the *rooster crows*; do not let Him find you *sleeping*; *watch*. Look at the text from 14:27–42. Pretty much the same words were used again by Jesus—rooster crows, keep watch, sleeping. They failed the test. Be careful you don’t fail the test to be “watchful”.
- There was a general regression—Peter moved from being confident about not leaving Jesus (14:19, 29), to following Him at a distance (14:54), and finally denying Jesus (14:71–72). These are the stages we will go through if we do not keep watch and stay alert. Which stage are you at?
- At the unfair trial Jesus remained silent and gave no answer (14:61). He taught people to love God and each other, performed many miracles and met needs, told them to pay taxes, defended the poor and vulnerable,

and now He was on trial. Did He deserve such injustice?  
What does His silence communicate?

### *Digging Deeper*

We have arrived at the threshold. Mark has purposefully brought us here to witness the events of the Passover weekend, which he amplifies for us in three powerful chapters.

There were three important segments in Chapter 14. First was the plot to arrest Jesus just before the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread (14:1–2). It was significant that His betrayal and death occurred during Passover (Heb: *pesach* = pass/skip over), a commemoration of Israel’s miraculous deliverance from Egypt, particularly during the plague on the firstborn (Exodus 12).

Next came the anointing at Bethany (14:3–9), where Jesus was enjoying a quiet meal at Simon the Leper’s residence. The perfume (ESV/KJV “ointment”) used was very expensive, fit for the anointing of a king. Finally, we had the events surrounding the Lord’s Supper (14:10ff), including the betrayal by Judas, Jesus’ arrest, and the trial before the Sanhedrin.

- Note in 14:3 that the alabaster jar was broken. That indicates how its entire contents were to be all used up. What does it say about the woman? What does it convey about the One to be anointed?
- Most scholars would consider the anointing at Bethany as symbolic of Jesus’ burial. How noteworthy is it that a woman would do this anointing?
- It seems that Judas betrayed Christ simply for the love of money (see Matthew 26:14–16). In what ways should this serve as a warning for believers? Can you think of Bible passages that address this temptation?

- Note how Mark said that Judas was identified as “one of the Twelve”, but also that he sought “an opportunity” to betray Him. Doesn’t this say something about how being identified with Christ is *not enough*? What are the trappings of being “spiritually privileged”?
- Why is it significant that Jesus finally acknowledged himself as Messiah before the religious leaders (14:60–62)? See Matthew 16:16 and Daniel 7:13. Why was it construed as “blasphemy”?
- Have you ever been abandoned by a friend? Reflect on Peter’s denial. Can you recall a time when you could have stood up for Jesus but denied Him instead?
- Note how Judas and Peter have contrasting reactions to their personal shortcomings. How can you *repent like Peter* when you mess up?

## **Session 13: The Rejection of the Servant**

Read Mark 15:1–47

### *Exploring the Surface*

- When Jesus was questioned by Pilate, He made no reply (15:5). Why did His silence amaze Pilate (15:5)?
- Why did Pilate let Jesus be crucified (15:15)?
- Barabbas was released but Jesus was crucified. Do you see that we were like the released Barabbas and Jesus took our place instead? How do you feel, knowing that He did this for you?
- When they offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh He refused. Why did Jesus refuse?
- Jesus felt the emotional pain from the following: betrayal of His 12 disciples, unfair trial, false accusations from the people whom He loved and taught, physical beating, crucifixion, hanging on the cross for six hours (15:25, 33), curses hurled by bystanders, and others. Yet how did Jesus react on the cross?

### *Digging Deeper*

The Servant's sufferings and trials for our sake continued. Previously, Jesus had been betrayed, abandoned, arrested, and tried. The Sanhedrin angrily cast a verdict: guilty of blasphemy. In Jewish law, this was a crime that deserved capital punishment. But for the execution to be carried out, Rome had to be in the loop. Thus Jesus' trial is delayed by a visit to Mr. Governor, Pontius Pilate.

The religious leaders accused Jesus of "many things" (15:3). According to Luke, there were at least three indictments set against Jesus by the Sanhedrin: subversion (ESV "misleading our nation"),



opposing payment of taxes, and claiming to be “Messiah, a king” (see Luke 23:1–2). Here, Jesus chose not to defend himself.

Understandably, Pilate asked, “Are you the king of the Jews?” This question was set essentially on political grounds (15:2, cf. Luke 23:3). The governor was keen to know if this was turning into a seditious case. He had to confirm whether Jesus was any threat to security. So Pilate’s obvious, overriding concern was an earthly one. His character and actions only served to endorse the rejection of the Servant.

- Observe how Jesus answered the question on kingship. “You have said so” (ESV), and “So you say” (WEB) are fairly accurate renditions of the Greek, and carry vagueness along with some sense of affirmation. Why was it important that Jesus did not deny His kingship? How could this answer possibly implicate Jesus?
- Before His crucifixion, Jesus is mocked and manhandled by Roman soldiers (vv. 16–20). How does this mockery further paint the picture of a rejected King?
- What ironies do you see in the crucifixion scene, particularly the sign posted on the cross (v. 26) and the insults directed at Christ (vv. 29-32)?
- Jesus’ final cry, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” was a portion taken from the start of Psalm 22. However, the Psalm ends on a different and optimistic note. In v. 22:24, it says “he (God) has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one...”. Jesus was being watched by God. He was not abandoned permanently. Look at the last words of Ps 22, “...to a people yet unborn: He has done it!” Jesus knew His pain would cover the sins of people yet unborn.

- Who was Joseph of Arimathea? Why was his request for the body of Jesus (v. 43) a bold and faithful act?
- How does it impact you that Jesus endured trial and torture for you?

## **Session 14: The Resurrection of the Servant**

Read Mark 16:1–20

### *Exploring the Surface*

- Notice that the women followers, and not the 11, were most present and available during Christ's crucifixion and entombment (15:42–16:8). What does this say about the character and faith of these women? What does this say about their role in Jesus' ministry?
- The tomb that Jesus was laid in was empty. What was the most reasonable conclusion as to what had happened? Jesus had resurrected. Do you truly believe that He did so.
- Why did Jesus rebuke those who were stubborn to believe in Him (16:14). Why were they stubborn and unwilling to come to the conclusion that He had indeed been raised from the dead?
- Do you know of any historical figures who predicted their death and were precise about when the resurrection would happen following their death? This was the ultimate proof that Jesus was the Son of God. He predicted that He would die and rise again in three days, and He did it.

### *Digging Deeper*

What's the most incredible event you have ever experienced? How about someone rising from the dead? Capping off Mark's story is the Resurrection. It concludes the Gospel on a high note and gives it a future-looking sense. It shows that the Servant's victory comes at the end, confirming that God's plans go far beyond what people might expect.

Mark explains to his Gentile readers (v. 1) that Preparation Day is the day before the Sabbath (Hebrew: *shabbat*, Greek: *sabbaton*, meaning “to cease or rest”). The Jewish *Shabbat* began at sundown, and so all business and work, including food preparation, had to be done before then. After the Sabbath (nightfall on Saturday), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices needed for burial. As the women entered the tomb, they saw a young man (Greek: *neaniskos*) wearing a white robe. Such was the characteristic dress of angels, though Mark does not explain further. What is more important is the message he announced: Christ has risen!

Important Note: The longer ending of Mark (16:9–20) deserves some attention. Modern Bibles include these verses, placing the heading: “The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.” This alerts us to the fact that surviving Greek manuscripts (we don’t have the originals anymore) of the Gospels have *variations*.

The study of the existing manuscripts and their variations is part of a whole scientific enterprise called textual criticism. Much has been written on these textual variants in the last 150 years or so. For further study of this interesting field, I recommend Mike Taliaferro’s *How We Got the Bible and Why We Can Trust It* (beginner level) and F.F. Bruce’s *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (intermediate level).

At any rate, we can be secure that *the truths* presented in Mark 16:9–20 are consistent with what the New Testament teaches elsewhere. The episode on Christ’s post-resurrection appearance to Mary is also in John 20:1–18. The same can be said about His appearance to the apostles (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–23, cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3ff).

- Look at the women's response (v. 8). Do you think they believed the man?
- How significant was it that in 16:7, Peter's name was specifically mentioned?
- Consider the women's response of awe. How sustained is your sense of awe at who Jesus is and what He has done?
- Who did Jesus "send" to tell you about new life in Him? How did you respond?
- How do you see yourself in Christ's desire and plan to spread "the good news to all creation" (v. 15)?
- How does it make you feel that Jesus has resurrected and gone ahead of you? How would it make Jesus feel to see you to follow in His footsteps?

### Concluding Reflections

- The book of Mark can be summarised from this one verse in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". What must you change at the heart level, reflected in your priorities, to have this verse be true of you as well?

## References

Jesus Film Project. 55 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. Retrieved from <https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog-and-stories/old-testament-prophecies.html>



