

Shepherding Notes

Mark

By Caleb Bunch

As we begin our journey through the book of Mark, I want to prepare you for what is ahead. Mark's gospel is the shortest of the four historic accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. As such, it is the most fast-paced and punchiest of the gospels. Perhaps you noticed the pacing by the repeated use of a particular word here in this first chapter. We are told nine different times that something happened "immediately." That means that 20% of the verses in this opening chapter include this word — used to reveal that when the Messiah arrived, everything began to unfold at a break-neck pace.

Instead of kicking off with the birth narrative, Mark initiates his gospel account by trumpeting, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He does not slow play the reveal concerning the identity of Jesus. Right up front, Mark is saying as clearly as humanly possible that Jesus is the Christ — the Messiah that was foretold — and He is the Son of God.

It is this identity of Jesus that can allow Mark to proclaim that this is the beginning of the gospel. Gospel simply means good news. The arrival of Jesus is the beginning of the good news. If He never came, then there would be nothing but bad news as all of us would have no hope of redemption. But, by the grace of God, Jesus was sent to save sinners like you and me, which is why Mark so joyfully declares that good news has finally arrived.

At the beginning of the chapter, Jesus is virtually unknown to the public. By the end of the chapter, Jesus has attained a level of fame so extreme that Mark tells us He could not even enter into the cities and towns because He would be swarmed by crowds. What happened to bring about such a committed following?

- Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River, and all three persons of the Trinity were observable by the human senses for the first and only time in human history.
- Jesus revealed that He had authority over the spiritual world by casting a demon out of a man in the Synagogue.
- Jesus displayed power over sickness by healing everyone that was brought to Him.
- Jesus revealed that He even had power to cure leprosy, which was the death sentence of the ancient world.

If Jesus had done just one of these things, He would have already been the most powerful person in history. Yet, notice the surprising turn of events that takes place toward the end of the chapter. One morning a line had formed around Peter's house, where Jesus was staying. Everyone had heard that Jesus was there and that He could heal them. But when the disciples woke up and opened the door, they had to inform the crowds that Jesus was not there.

Where was He? He had gone out to a hill to pray. And it seems like this was a common practice for Jesus because the disciples knew exactly where to find Him. When they requested that Jesus go back to the crowds waiting to be healed, Jesus said, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." (Mark 1:38) Jesus certainly did many miraculous things. But He makes it clear right up front in Mark's gospel that the main point is not the miracles, but the message of the gospel.

"The main point is not the miracles, but the message of the gospel. Mark's very first chapter makes this plain — Jesus came to preach."

Our focus today will zone in on the first narrative in chapter 2 about Jesus healing the paralytic. The story begins with Jesus teaching in a crowded house. He is interrupted when the ceiling began to break open and a man was lowered down on a stretcher. Let's break this story down by considering three key heart motives on display.

Belief in Action

We don't know much about the man who was on the stretcher. He had no agency in getting to Jesus — he was completely passive in the sense that he was carried there by his friends. But consider the tenacity of those four friends who would not give up when it was too crowded to get inside. Unwilling to take no for an answer, they climbed onto the flat roof of the house and began to break apart the thatch. It says, "When Jesus saw their faith..." Anyone can see that these men certainly had faith that Jesus could heal, because they did whatever they could to get their friend to Him. Genuine faith results in action.

Consider your own life. Are you a friend like this? Do you believe that Jesus can save? Do you do whatever you can to get your unsaved friends to Him? Just like the paralyzed man had no agency to get to Jesus on his own, unbelievers cannot believe the gospel if they have not heard it. (See Romans 10) Let's strive to be this kind of faithful friend to our unsaved family and friends.

Unbelief in Action

When the paralyzed man reached the floor, it was evident to everyone what he wanted Jesus to do. But instead of healing him, Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Jesus read the hearts of the unbelieving scribes and knew that they were judging Him and accusing Him of blasphemy. So Jesus asked them a heart-revealing question: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?"

Notice that Jesus does not ask which is easier to do. If He asked which was easier to do, the answer would be that they are both impossible. Instead, He asked which is more difficult to say. Right now, somewhere near you, there is a hospital where somebody is dying. And there is a Roman Catholic priest that will meet with that person and claim to forgive the dying person's mortal sins. But those priests will never say "get up, you are healed." They won't say that because healing requires immediate proof while forgiveness can't be tested till the judgment. So, Jesus declared, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." then turned and healed the man. The

healing was there to point to the greater reality of Jesus' saving power.

Salvation in Action

If you are a Christian, you have been saved from the wrath of God by receiving forgiveness for your sins. The Old Testament declared that this day was coming. Micah 7:19 says, "He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Psalm 103:12 adds that, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." But what gives Jesus the right to forgive? He will eventually go to the cross and pay for that paralytic man's sins. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." Our healing, our forgiveness, our salvation comes through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

"By forgiving that man, Jesus was promising to die for his sins. Now, on the other side of the cross, we can see that our sin was finished on Calvary."

In Mark 3, we see the hard-hearted nature of legalism contrasted with the compassionate heart of Jesus. Our focus today will be on verses 1–6 regarding Jesus' healing of the man with the withered hand. I want you to notice five things.

It's a Trap!

After their previous encounter with Jesus at the end of chapter 2, the Pharisees have conspired together to trap Jesus by tricking Him into publicly breaking the Sabbath so that they could point out to the watching world that Jesus was a Law breaker.

Jesus Intentionally Walked into Their Scheme

Jesus knows what they are doing, yet He sets up the exact scenario that the Pharisees were hoping would happen. The Pharisees are looking on like a fisherman who can see a fish circling the bait. When Jesus called the man over to Him they were probably holding back joyful smiles, believing that He had almost taken the bait hook, line, and sinker.

Jesus Undermined Their Plan

If Jesus would have healed the man without saying anything, the Pharisees would have used that event to completely discredit Jesus in front of the entire Synagogue community. Jesus utterly diffused the Pharisees' plan by asking a simple question in vs. 4: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. If the Pharisees said it was unlawful to do good on the Sabbath, they would be calling into question the goodness of the God who gave the Law. On the other hand, if they admitted that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, they would have been openly allowing Jesus to heal with impunity. So they said nothing. This is when they realized that Jesus was not a simpleton that could be easily manipulated into discrediting Himself. Rather, He used their trap against them to unveil their hard hearts to the public with a single question.

Jesus Is Humble

Jesus does not take this opportunity to gloat in His PR victory. Rather, He becomes angry and grieved by their legalistic, unloving hearts. As a Bible reader, it is really easy for us to cheer for Jesus by booing the other team. But Jesus is grieved by these Pharisees. It is a sorrowful thing that they are more concerned about trapping Jesus than they are about

this man whose life is radically altered by Jesus's healing! The heart of God is one of grace and mercy. Legalism is brutal, ruthless, and unwaveringly heartless.

Bad Company

The Pharisees are so concerned about protecting their system of legalistic additions to the law that they immediately go out and conspire with the Herodians — the Jewish people that joined the court of Herod, a vassal king set up by the Romans who was wicked and rejected most of the religious aspects of Judaism. The Pharisees hated everything that Herod and his court stood for. But they were so desperate to hold onto their power and their system of teaching that they allied themselves with the Herodians — and eventually the Romans — to kill Jesus.

"The heart of God is one of grace and mercy. Legalism is brutal, ruthless, and unwaveringly heartless."

Our time of meditation on Mark 4 will be directed at the events of verses 35–41.

The Humanity of Christ

Jesus had just experienced a particularly long day. He had been confronted by the Pharisees who called him "Beelzebub." He was confronted by His family, who tried to convince Him to stop ministering and return home. He then spent the afternoon teaching the crowds in some of the most iconic parables in the Bible. That evening, Jesus hopped into a boat with His disciples as they were presumably attempting to find a place to camp up the coast, away from the crowds. But Jesus, worn out from the events of the day, fell asleep.

Our need for sleep is a constant reminder that we are finite and frail. Consider the amazing statement that is being made by the Psalmist in Psalm 121:4: "Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." Yet Jesus humbled Himself. He set aside His eternal endurance to experience our weaknesses. In this moment, we see the humanity of Christ on full display. When we observe the reality of the humility of God made flesh, it should result in humble awe.

The Deity of Christ

For the disciples, Jesus' humanity was obvious. Where we see the disciples' confusion is around the issue of Jesus' divinity. At least four, and as many as seven of the disciples were fishermen. They were well aware of the dangers of the sea. When they wake Jesus up, they ask, "Do you not care if we are perishing?" Each of these disciples has discerned the reality that this is probably how they are going to die. The disciples understood what was going on with the boat and outside of the boat. What they did not understand was who was in the boat with them.

The very God who made the sea and said to the mighty waves, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed," was napping comfortably. When Jesus awoke, He simply said the word and the wind and waters were stilled. Just as the wind and the water could not resist the words of Christ when He called them forth into existence, even so they could not resist His command to be calm.

Trusting Christ

The disciples asked Jesus, "Don't you care if we are perishing?" It seems as though their question is a veiled accusation — something like, "Jesus, if you really cared about us, you wouldn't let this happen to us right now." Give a closer look to verse 35: "On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'" Whose idea was it to travel across the lake? This was Jesus' plan. He led them into this storm. It can be really easy to worry and fear and fail to trust God when we forget that God is in control. Trials are coming. Storms are coming. These storms are not designed to make you doubt God. They are designed to strengthen you and make you see Jesus more clearly.

Fearing Christ

Verse 41 says, "And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" They were afraid of the waves; now they are scared speechless. They just realized that there is more to fear inside this boat than there is outside of it. Jesus just shut down the danger by uttering a few syllables. Christian, you don't have to fear anything in this world. Fear God with holy reverence. Recognize that Jesus is in control. Your biggest fears are perfectly under the authority of His sovereign plan. Know Him, trust Him, fear Him, love Him.

"Jesus was not surprised by this storm. He led them into it. Storms are designed to strengthen you and make you see Jesus more clearly."

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche defined faith this way: "Not wanting to know what is true." That is the polar opposite from the way that the Bible defines faith. Genuine faith is seen in four steps in the Bible.

- Cognizant — Being aware of the gospel (the good news about Jesus). It must be in your mind before it will ever be in your heart.
 - Confirming — Affirming in your heart and mind that the gospel is true.
 - Confident — Trusting that you are made right with God through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.
 - Conforming — All genuine faith will be displayed with a pattern of change. True faith results in increased conformity to God's will.
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Mark 5 contains one of the clearest examples of Mark's favorite literary tool, the "inclusio." It starts with one story (Jairus), is interrupted by another story (the woman with the issue of blood), and then returns to the first story (Jairus). Think of it like a sandwich — whenever Mark employs this method, he is using the meat to enhance the bread, and the bread to enhance the meat. They bring clarity to one another.

Diseased

This woman had been suffering from a discharge of blood for 12 years. But it is necessary to understand what this would have meant for her socially. According to the Law of God given in Leviticus, she was unclean — not allowed to be in public. She would have been an outcast, a social pariah. This disease was usually considered to be a punishment from God, resulting in extreme social rejection. Moreover, she was not allowed to attend any religious gatherings at the Synagogue or the Temple until this disease had been gone for a week. In verse 34, the word that Jesus uses for disease is actually the word for scourge or whip. It implies deep affliction. This disease has devastated her.

Destitute

Apparently, at one point in her life she had means and money. Now, all of that is gone. Doctors during this time were terrible. Needless to say, all of the prescribed treatments left her no healthier — just much more poor. Her money is gone, her options have been

exhausted, and she is hopeless.

She is basically the exact opposite of Jairus. He is named; she is not. He is esteemed; she is shamed. He is an elite member of society; she is the lowest. He has enjoyed 12 years of love with his daughter; she has experienced 12 years of pain with her disease. He is wealthy; she is destitute. He is a worship leader; she has been banned from public worship. But they have two things in common. First, they both identified that Jesus was their only hope. Secondly, they both had faith in Him. We worship the same Jesus that they did. If you are a Christian, He has rescued you. Continue on in active trust as you grow in your faith in Christ today.

"Both Jairus and the bleeding woman identified that Jesus was their only hope — and both had faith in Him. We worship the same Jesus. He has rescued you."

Have you ever felt as though God had left you alone to fight through a trial without Him? In Mark 6:45–52, we once again find Jesus's disciples in a boat. This time Jesus is not with them. Mark emphasized Jesus' role in sending them out into the water by saying that "he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side." Jesus did this knowing exactly what the disciples were about to encounter on their journey. So, Jesus sent them out and went up onto the mountain to pray for several hours.

Rowing a boat is hard work in the best of circumstances. Rowing against the wind is miserable. Mark highlights that every inch they moved in the right direction was gained "painfully." The wind slowed their journey to such an extent that they were still out on the water during the fourth watch of the night — roughly 3am to 6am — meaning the disciples had probably been rowing for between six and nine hours.

Pay close attention to the wording of vs. 47–48. It is very clear that Jesus is standing on the land, "and he saw" the disciples who had been rowing for so long. He was not ignorant of their striving or suffering. He saw them in their despair. That is why it might seem strange when it says that "He meant to pass by them." This does not mean that Jesus intended to avoid them. On the contrary, Jesus was making Himself known to them. Mark is drawing an important connection to the book of Exodus.

When Moses requested to see the Lord, he was told yes, but with the exception that no man shall see God's face and live. The Lord then passed by Moses in His glory, proclaiming His own name and character (Ex. 34:6). Each of the four gospels highlight the deity of Jesus in different ways. This event is Mark's way of revealing that the same God who passed by Moses is now desiring to pass before the disciples. Jesus was revealing His glory by walking into their view on the water.

If you have been sent by the Lord into a storm, He has sent you with the same purpose as these disciples. Jesus is going to use that trial to reveal His glory to you. In your weakness Jesus will reveal His might. When Jesus entered the boat, He told the disciples, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Are you going through one of those difficult seasons in life? Look up and see Jesus. He has not left you or forsaken you. He is your strength and your shield.

"The same God who passed by Moses is now passing before the disciples. Jesus was revealing His glory by walking on the water — and He sees you in your storm."

Today we are going to focus our attention on the interaction that Jesus had with a woman in verses 24–30. This would be the kind of person with whom every first-century Jew would try to avoid contact. James Edwards hits the nail squarely on the head when he describes her this way in his commentary: "Of all the people who approach Jesus in the Gospel of Mark, this individual has the most against her from a Jewish perspective. Verse 26 reads like a crescendo of demerit; she is a woman, a Greek Gentile, from the infamous pagans of Syrian Phoenicia." No scribe or Pharisee or teacher of the law would ever be caught dead speaking to a person like this. Yet Jesus does not have her taken away. Rather, He listens to her request.

She falls down in worshipful humility before Jesus and begs Him to heal her daughter who is demon possessed. This woman has probably tried everything else. She lived in a land of idols and had likely worshiped and prayed to them seeking restoration for her daughter, but nothing had ever worked.

We see this kind of request from many people in the gospels and the response is generally a willingness on the part of Jesus to heal immediately and completely. This is why it may shock you to read that Jesus responded to this woman by saying, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

In these days the term "dog" was extremely derogatory — dogs were much closer to coyotes than anything you have seen as a pet today. However, when Jesus says that this woman and her daughter are dogs, He does not use the traditional word. He uses a diminutive form much more similar to our English word "puppy" — removing the venom and racist hatred that usually accompanied it. Jesus did not say this to offend. He does so in order to put her faith on display.

I believe I can discern two main reasons Jesus responded this way. The obvious reason is to make clear that the gospel was to the Jews first (Rom. 1:16, Eph. 2:11–17) — what Jesus is saying is about timing, not targeting. Secondly, Jesus is giving her an opportunity to display her genuine faith, which stands in brilliant contrast to the unbelief of the scribes and Pharisees earlier in this chapter.

When Jesus said, "Let the children be fed first..." the woman grasped onto that word and recognized that Jesus was good and planned to also care for her. She humbly requested to be given just the scraps from the table of God. Her faith in Christ was strong enough

that she believed even the smallest crumb from God's table would be enough to heal her daughter. And here is the best news. God has not given us scraps. He has graciously given us the most valuable gift that has or could ever be given: Jesus, God's own Son.

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Today we have reached one of the central metaphors that Jesus used to describe the Christian life. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) There are some who try to explain away the challenging nature of this passage by saying this was a command for the 12 disciples. But please notice that this passage is talking to all people. Notice in verse 34, Jesus calls the crowds to Himself. What crowds? Jesus is in the land of the Gentiles — surrounded by idol worshipers, not just the 12 disciples. This call goes out for everyone. God, through this verse, is speaking to you.

If we are not careful, we could easily misconstrue this metaphor. What came right before this command to carry your cross? A promise from Jesus that He was going to carry His. Jesus had just finished informing them that He would suffer many things and be killed. This command of Jesus is not a message about working hard until you make your way to God. Rather, these words of Jesus show us what it looks like when we have been redeemed from our sin and brought into God's family.

You Must Deny Yourself

Denying yourself does not mean giving up chocolate for Lent or cutting out TV or fasting twice a week. It isn't about giving up something you love — that would be far too minimal an understanding of this text. Robert Stein says it best: "It is not the denial of 'something' but of 'someone' — oneself!" Self-denial means no less than giving up all of your passions for sinful things, and giving in to the King, Jesus Christ.

You Must Take Up Your Cross

The cross was a brutal form of torture designed to produce maximum pain until death. To carry your cross meant that every step you take you are getting closer to the end of yourself. It signifies the total relinquishing of your rights and ambitions. The call to discipleship is a call to come and die. Deny yourself speaks to putting something off. Taking up your cross indicates putting something on. You have a mission. If you have been saved, God has prepared good works in advance that you should walk in them. We willingly, voluntarily, and decisively accept the pain and shame and persecution that God has prepared for us.

You Must Follow Him

Jesus is not asking us to do anything He has not already done for us. We can follow Him by carrying our cross because He already carried a cross up to Calvary. In order to follow Him, you need to look to Him. I believe that one of the reasons that Jesus speaks of following Him with the imagery of the cross is because He is telling us to look to how He carried His cross. This is the way that Jesus was telling us that the gospel is of first importance.

"Jesus is not asking us to do anything He has not already done for us. We can follow Him by carrying our cross because He already carried a cross up to Calvary."

One of the hot-take questions often asked in the world of sports is, "Who is the GOAT?" Part of the reason this debate rages on is that nobody can agree on the criteria for being the greatest. In Mark 9:33–37, the disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest. I am certain that they each had their own reason for assuming that their role as a disciple was more significant than the others.

The disciples must have known the whole time that their arguing was inappropriate. Otherwise, why would they purposefully remove themselves from earshot of Jesus before arguing about this? Then, when asked about it, they sheepishly became silent. Then, as Jesus did so very often, He undermined all of their arguments by revealing that the kingdom of God works in a way that is diametrically opposed to the kingdoms of this world. He taught them that, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." Jesus inverts the formula for greatness.

Jesus then illustrated by taking a child and placing him in the center of the group, making it clear that they were to view this little one as someone to love and serve and "receive." This was spoken into a world with no toy stores or Disney World. Children were not given the kind of attention and abundance that we shower them with in the modern world. Children had nothing to give in terms of wealth or status. This child that was small enough for Jesus to lovingly hold in His arms while teaching was the perfect example of the extent of our servanthood. We are to serve the least and the lowly.

This kind of greatness is most clearly displayed in what Jesus told the disciples directly before their foolish argument. Jesus had just informed them once again that He was going to be handed over to be killed. Even as the disciples were arguing about being the greatest, Jesus was walking closer to the cross with every step. The King of heaven was displaying true greatness as He marched ever closer to the cross where He would serve us to the greatest extent imaginable: bearing the wrath of God on behalf of undeserving sinners.

You would probably never get into a verbal altercation claiming that you are the greatest. But in the depths of your heart and the recesses of your mind, do you retain that mentality? Do you get angry when you don't get your way? Do you have high expectations for others to serve you? Jesus has not only taught us, but also displayed for us what true greatness looks like. It is selflessly and humbly serving others even when they have nothing to offer us.

"May Jesus' example through the cross propel you to serve others faithfully today. He is the greatest — and His greatness was displayed by becoming the servant of all."

If Mark's gospel could be summed up in a single verse, it would be Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In yesterday's notes we considered what Jesus said concerning being the servant of all. Mark 10 proves that they didn't get it. He had illustrated his point by putting a small child before them and revealing that, in order to be great, they must serve those that are just like that child.

Now in Mark 10:13–16, just a few short verses later, the same disciples are shooing away small children because they don't perceive them to have anything to offer Jesus. But Jesus, filled with love for the children and indignance with the disciples' attitude, rebuked them because "to such belongs the kingdom of God." Jesus was not highlighting innocence, but dependence. The kingdom of God is made up of people who acknowledge their absolute need for Jesus.

A wealthy young official made his way to Jesus. The disciples would have been looking at this man as the exact sort of person they should be recruiting to their team. He came running to Jesus. He asked the question that we long to hear people ask: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He has an appearance of humility. But Jesus saw through this man's outward appearance and directly to his heart. Jesus zoned in on the biggest idol in that man's heart: "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Jesus viewed the man's many possessions not as abundance, but as lack — because they revealed there was a lack of love for God. The man went away sad because of his unwillingness to give up his idol.

The disciples were stunned. Jesus had drawn in children that the disciples perceived to have no value, and He caused the disciples' ideal candidate to turn away. "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Instead of discussing this, James and John found this to be the proper time to ask Jesus for the seats at His right and left hand when He took power. It is into this context that Jesus said those thermonuclear words: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus is a different kind of King, a better kind of King: a

servant-King.

"Jesus is a different kind of King, a better kind of King — a servant-King who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Today we arrive at a unique moment in the ministry of Jesus: the time He refused to answer a question. Chapter 11 begins with what we traditionally call Palm Sunday. Jesus entered into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, to shouts of jubilee and singing and celebrating from the crowds going to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. What happened next seems almost anticlimactic. Once Jesus arrived in the city, He went into the temple courts, looked around, and left.

The following day — Monday of Passion week — Jesus returned to the temple courts, but this time He did much more than just look around. In a calculated manner, Jesus flipped over the tables of those who were selling animals and those who were changing money. He declared that the people had turned God's house into a house of robbers. And directly after this, Mark tells us in verse 18 that "the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching."

Their goal was to remove Jesus and His teaching, even if it meant killing Him. The first attack comes from a conglomerate of the chief priests and scribes and elders of Jerusalem. They asked, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" If Jesus had said Rome, the crowds would have rejected Him as a traitor. If He had said a Jewish source, they would have claimed higher authority. If He had appealed to His status as a Rabbi, the Sanhedrin would have pulled rank on Him.

Jesus did not answer these fools according to their folly. But even by not answering, He was displaying that He was in charge — it is the teacher, not the student, who says, "Answer me." Instead, He turned the tables on them and required them to answer His question first. It was a question they could not answer without losing credibility with the crowd, so they refused to answer. Jesus wisely refused to answer them in return.

There are times when people will come to you with genuine questions. But there are also times when people just want to tear down what you believe in. It can be incredibly helpful to turn questions back on the one who asked them. In my experience, most atheists don't have sufficient answers to their own questions about God. How could you grow in discernment regarding how and when to answer a fool?

"It is the teacher, not the student, who says 'Answer me.' Jesus displayed sovereign authority not by what He said, but by what He refused to say."

Today we once again find Jesus in the temple courts as He is continually confronted by people attempting to discredit Him. Yesterday we saw the chief priests and scribes take their best shot. Today we see the Pharisees team up with their archrivals, the Herodians, in order to trap Jesus with a question about taxes (vs. 13–17). Then the Sadducees asked Jesus a question about the logistics of marriage in heaven. Finally, a single scribe asked about which commandment was the greatest of all — a common question debated by the religious elites of that day. In perfect wisdom, Jesus was able to perfectly frustrate the intentions of His enemies. However, our focus in today's notes will be on the parable that Jesus told at the beginning of the chapter.

The chapter begins with a parable of the tenants. Remember, Mark 4 has already shown us the reason why Jesus spoke in parables — not so that He might make things clearer for everyone to understand. Rather, Jesus taught that His purpose in the parables was to obscure His message from those on the outside. (Mark 4:10–12) However, Jesus did want the chief priests and scribes to get the point of this message. They might not have perceived all the details, but they understood that "he had told the parable against them." (vs. 12)

The parable represents the way that God had sent prophet after prophet to speak authoritatively on God's behalf to the leaders of Israel. Their response had not been to humbly submit to His Word, but instead to mistreat the messengers. So, the Lord sent His own Son. But what was their wicked response? "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."

This is a very important line because Jesus is informing us that the chief priests and the scribes knew what they were doing. They understood that Jesus was truly sent from God and that they were supposed to bow their knee to His authority. Instead, they decided to attempt a cosmic coup by eliminating Jesus from the picture. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but they conspired against Him anyway.

The actions of the chief priests and scribes is a fully realized expression of what happened in the Garden of Eden. They knew God's Word better than anyone. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah and was supposed to be in charge. But, just like Eve, they wanted their own way. Instead of following God's command, they knowingly, belligerently, vehemently rebelled.

Look in the mirror. Isn't that exactly what you did before bowing the knee to Jesus? Notice what Jesus said would happen to those particular people He was talking to — He was going to destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. However, the Lord is abundantly gracious. Acts 6:7 says, "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

"God is both perfectly just, and gloriously merciful. Every Christian started out as an enemy of God. In His kindness, the Lord makes us His own."

"What wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" The disciples surely had no idea what can of worms they were opening with that exclamation. They were enamored with the temple building — oohing and ahing at the architecture. (On the one hand this was understandable because it was truly one of the most glorious structures of the ancient world. On the other hand, it was designed to be a picture of the true and better temple, Jesus Himself, but they did not see His beauty clearly.)

The disciples must have been shocked and dismayed when Jesus said to them, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." All they could do was ask, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

There is no part of Jesus' teaching that is more debated than the Olivet Discourse — a fancy name for the sermon in chapter 13. The early church understood that this was speaking about the destruction of the temple. When did that occur? In A.D. 70 when Titus led the armies of Rome against Jerusalem and the surrounding region, killing anyone who remained. The church, however, was not wiped out because they had seen the signs listed in this chapter and fled before the armies of Titus arrived.

There is a point in the text when Jesus turns to speaking about His final return. People have been speculating about that return for roughly 2,000 years. People have developed all sorts of charts and maps and timelines to identify the exact day. In the New York region, the most recent high-profile example is Harold Camping. His ministry was completely built around the guarantee that Jesus was going to return on September 6, 1994. His next major prediction was May 21, 2012. Thousands of people sold their homes, went into debt, and spent every penny getting the word out that Jesus was returning that day. Obviously, he was wrong.

You should never trust anyone who makes these sorts of predictions. "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (vs. 32) The return of Christ is going to happen right on schedule. But you can't read that schedule. All you are told to do is "be on guard, keep awake."

What does that look like? It looks like living every day before the face of God. The imminent return of Christ should result in a passion for holiness and a zeal for evangelism and missions. It should eliminate the thinking that we can put off our sanctification or repentance for tomorrow. Tomorrow might not come. We should live for Christ in such a

way that we would have no regrets if He were to return at any moment.

"The imminent return of Christ should result in a passion for holiness and a zeal for evangelism. Live for Him at all times – when He returns, you will be found to be a faithful servant."

People love courtroom drama: Law and Order, Boston Legal, LA Law, Damages, The Practice, Matlock, Perry Mason, Rumpole of the Bailey. Since television began, there has never been a time when you could surf the channels without bumping into a legal drama of some flavor or another. What is interesting to me about these shows and movies is that most of the time we — the audience — usually know whether the person is innocent or guilty before the beginning of the trial. The drama is not found in whether the person is guilty or innocent; the drama is whether or not the court gets it right. Is justice served?

On the night that Jesus was betrayed and the following morning, He was forced to undergo six trials. The first three were ecumenical trials before the religious leaders. The last three were civic trials before governmental authorities. There was not one branch of government that was left out of the equation of Jesus' death. Groups and individuals who often hated each other and stood as political opponents joined hands for the common cause of crucifying the Savior.

Today we are only considering the ecumenical trial of Caiaphas whereby Jesus was declared guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death. Here are twelve reasons why it was an illegitimate trial according to Scripture and the legal code of the Jews found in the Talmud.

- Night trials were illegal. This trial took place between 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning.
- Bribery and collusion — "joining hands with wicked men" is condemned in Exodus 23. They "joined hands" with Judas as well as "seeking false testimony against Jesus." (Matt. 27:59)
- It was illegal to begin court proceedings without an official charge. Mark 14:55 tells us that they arrested Him without probable cause and were fishing for a reason after the fact.
- Location — It was illegal to have a trial anywhere but the Chamber of Hewn Stone in the temple complex. This was so that impartial witnesses could be present. Jesus was tried at the high priest's house.
- It was illegal to have a trial the day before the Sabbath so that people could prepare.
- It was illegal to have a trial right before a high holy day. This trial was treated like a Friday news dump that they wanted to get lost in the shuffle of the holiday.

- Capital cases required a day between the trial and sentencing to ensure that there was not any hasty judgment. Jesus was condemned by Caiaphas around 3am and was on a cross six hours later.
- It was illegal to make a judgment based upon one witness. (Deut. 19:15) Even though the Sanhedrin could not find two witnesses in agreement, they still condemned Him.
- The high priest was not allowed to speak, but only served as the tie-breaker vote. In this case, Caiaphas overstepped and led the proceedings.
- The defense was never allowed to make a case — a major breach of Jewish law.
- The "jury" was rigged. Mark 14 says that "all condemned Him." But there were a few that were not present — we know of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50–51) and Nicodemus (John 19:39). It seems that they hand-selected the priests who were unsympathetic to Jesus.
- Jesus was condemned by Caiaphas for blasphemy, but they told Pilate that He was being charged for sedition.

Before you get all high and mighty and condemn Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin for their sins, please recognize that you once stood in the place of Caiaphas. You declared Jesus a fraud. You stood in shameful opposition to the rightful King of the Universe. Jesus died in place of sinners. "The just for the unjust." (1 Peter 3:18) There is only one perfectly just person, and He experienced injustice in order to save unjust people like us.

"There is only one perfectly just person, and He experienced injustice in order to save unjust people like us. The just for the unjust."

1 PETER 3:18

Today we have reached the heart of the entire Bible. The cross is the central event in all of history. Everything that had ever happened before this moment was flowing to it, and everything that has happened since has flowed from it. Your life, whether you recognize it or not, is defined by the cross. We are going to zoom in on one very small portion of this chapter. Consider the sarcastic accusation that the chief priests and scribes levied against Jesus in verse 31: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe."

Think back to the prophet Elijah and the contest that took place on Mount Carmel. Whichever God answered by sending fire was to be acknowledged as the true God. Do you remember how Elijah taunted the priests of Baal as they were doing everything in their power to get their pagan deity to listen to them? He said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." (1 Kings 18:27)

That taunting and jeering had now turned away from an idol that deserved it and was instead aimed at the Lord of the universe. The religious rulers were taunting Jesus, claiming that if He had real power He could prevent the brutal punishment of the cross.

Jesus did remain on the cross. Not because of His limitations, but because of His commitment. He remained there due to His love, not His lack. In John 10:18 Jesus said, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." Jesus remained on the cross as a willful act of obedience.

Jesus had told Nicodemus back in John 3:14–15, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." The taunts of the chief priests said that they would believe if Jesus came down, but that is precisely the reason He stayed up. For the sake of our salvation, Jesus remained suspended between heaven and earth. They were completely wrong, but their statement would have been correct if they would have said, "He saved others by not saving Himself." It was one or the other, and He chose us.

In the wonderful hymn "How Deep the Father's Love for Us," one line says, "Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon His shoulders. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished!" If you have been saved by

God's grace, then you know that you used to be one of those scoffers. What amazing love and kindness Jesus has shown in His commitment to save the very people who have scoffed at Him.

"He saved others by not saving Himself. It was one or the other, and He chose us."

I don't know about you, but I love good books. Often, the ending makes all the difference in my rating of the book. Today we have arrived at the conclusion of Mark's gospel account. The way that the book ends might surprise you. If you take a close look at the footnotes in your Bible, you will notice that verses 9–20 are not part of the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of the Bible. In other words, the book of Mark actually ends at verse 8.

As usual, Mark provides us with fewer details than the other gospel authors. He leaves out all of the events of Jesus meeting in the upper room with the disciples, the restoration of Peter, and the ascension. In fact, the book concludes with the women who had gone to the tomb leaving in fear. The main point that Mark is getting across in his condensed gospel is simple and powerful: Jesus is alive! Or, as the angel said it, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here."

The most condensed and simplified explanation of the gospel that we ever find in the Bible is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, in which Paul says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." The gospel is not just that Jesus died for us, but that He was also brought back to life to rule forever as our King.

The resurrection means everything for believers. For as Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Corinthians 15:17) The fact that Jesus was raised to life also has significant meaning for our daily lives. Consider the following four ways that Scripture teaches we are affected by the resurrection of Jesus.

- Regeneration — "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you." (Romans 8:11)
- Justification — "But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." (Romans 4:23–25)

- Sanctification — "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)
- Glorification — "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." (2 Corinthians 4:14)

"The gospel is not just that Jesus died for us, but that He was also brought back to life to rule forever as our King. He has risen; he is not here."