

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

**A STUDY GUIDE
FOR MARK'S GOSPEL
CHAPTERS 9 - 11**

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INTRODUCTION: IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

For the first 8 chapters of this incredible recounting of the life of Jesus, Mark has focused us on the astonishing person of Jesus of Nazareth. What he *told* us in the beginning - “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” - he has now *shown* us. Truly Jesus was not an ordinary man, not simply a great Teacher, and not just a wonder-worker. In these 8 chapters Mark has *shown* us the Son of God. And the crowds absolutely marveled! The disciples willingly followed! The sick were miraculously healed! The lame got up and walked! The blind suddenly saw!

Who, then, is this?

In some ways, the first 8 chapters have been a set-up. Mark has wanted us to see, beyond a doubt, that this Jesus must be the long awaited Messiah, the rightful King of the World. He has told the story in such a way as to draw us in, to help us experience the life of the disciples in their early days with Jesus.

But nothing has prepared us for the shock of the next 8 chapters.

From the end of Chapter 8 on, the cross dominates Mark’s narrative. In each story, Jesus is making his way slowly but purposefully toward Jerusalem. At each step, he predicts his death, teaching his disciples exactly how it will all go down:

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit

on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” (Mark 10.32-34)

Throughout the first half of the story, Mark has made much of the greatness of this King. In this second half, he draws us into the surprise of the disciples as they come to realize that *this* King is a dying, suffering, servant King.

What Mark is trying to get us to see in this second half is that the death of Jesus was not an accident, not an unfortunate turn of events, not a tragedy. In fact, if you read the story carefully, the cross has been the destination from the beginning. Jesus has always been heading toward the cross! The disciples just haven’t seen it.

In fact, every time Jesus tells them, they respond in ways that reveal they have not a clue what he is talking about: Peter rebukes Jesus. James and John ask for the seats next to Jesus when he becomes King. The disciples argue about which one of them should get the “best disciple” award. Jesus’ impending death is something that they cannot get their brains or hearts around!

Their problem, of course, is no different than ours. Even though we know how the story ends, we still think that following Jesus should be about what we get out of the deal.

If, like Peter, we make the confession, “You are the Christ,” then we must realize the cost that comes with it. Peter didn’t get that, at least not at the end of chapter 8. He had the right name, but not the right content. Mark wants us to not make Peter’s mistake. Get the name right - Son of God, Messiah, Anointed King - but be sure you get the content right, too: giving his life as a ransom for many. And if you do that, if you get that right, then you quickly realize what that means for your life as a follower. You, too, are called to be a servant to a hostile world.

You see, if you want to be a disciple, then the upside down dynamic of the kingdom, the first-will-be-last reversal, the give your life for the sake of others principle must become your way of life. Indeed, since the only perfect man ever, the God-man himself, lived life this

How does this understanding of the Church challenge what you think the church should be?

Jesus is the one through whom the blessing of God goes out to the nations. But Jesus has sent us, his body, into the world so that he can work through us. This is why the Bible says that the church is the “temple of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is sending his church into the world in order to draw the world to Jesus.

Are we as a church effectively fulfilling God’s purpose to draw the nations to himself? Why or why not?

So this is the practical outworking of believing Jesus to be the temple: we are brought into the Family of God, and we are then agents of extending that Family to our neighbors and to the nations.

May we never become a church consumed with the internal elements of our house to the neglect of the needs of the nations. And may we pray with wild-eyed abandon that God would move mountains into the sea as we move forward in our mission to see our city rejoice in Jesus!

Can you imagine Jesus doing this in a church today? What might he be angry about in the church today?

What does it mean for us that Jesus is the Temple substitute? What did the Temple represent that can now be found only in Jesus?

The second theme in this passage is prayer. The temple was intended to be a “house of prayer for all nations,” and Jesus later instructs his disciples how to pray. The connection is this: if we have the true Temple in Jesus, then the Church, the body of Jesus, ought to be a praying, faith-filled community, one that enjoys access to God through Jesus and prays that others might experience the same. And should we not pray to this end with great boldness since we believe that in Jesus God has come to us, and that he has now placed his Spirit in us, calling us “the temple of the Holy Spirit?”

way, and lost his life in the end, should we expect anything different as those who want to be associated with him?

Are you sure you want to bear the name of Jesus? It will cost you your life.

And what will he make a claim on, if he becomes your Lord and you his disciple? Simple: *everything*. In these final 8 chapters Jesus lays claim to your marriage and sexuality, your children or lack there of, your money, your time, your political involvement, your freedom, your safety and comfort, your plans and goals, and most of all, your heart. That just about covers it all, doesn't it?

Why would anyone sign up for *that*?

In one sense, you don't sign-up. You must be called. You can't follow Jesus unless he calls you. And when he does call you, you've got a major decision to make. You can make excuses, try to postpone the call, or even feign a positive response, but it won't get you very far. A decision is needed. Are you in or not? Will you follow or not? Will you lose your life for his sake or not?

And here is the other thing. What else can you do, really? When you see the power, humility, and grace of Jesus in the first 8 chapters, you *want* to follow him. You *want* to give him your life. You realize quickly that he is more competent in living than you will ever be, more gracious, more humble, more courageous than you could ever hope to be. And he says that he does it for you. His life can be your life. You can have his record on our account, your wrong and sin and failure erased, and his perfection indelibly counted to your life.

He gives his life as a ransom for *many*, and you are one of them.

So when he finally makes his way to the cross, you realize he hangs there not because of the Jewish leaders, nor because of the Roman government officials. He hangs there because of you. He hangs there for you. His life is a ransom, and he is paying for *your* life. His death is *for you*. His death is a substitution: God's just and right-

eous wrath against sin poured out on his own Son instead of you, making you forgiven, clean, and free.

You see, if his death is for you, then when he says, “lose your life for my sake,” you must realize you are getting the better end of the deal! He has, in his life and death and resurrection, given you everything! He lost heaven so you could gain it! He lived a perfect life and died the death of a criminal so that you could live the life of a criminal and get his perfect life record! He suffered the worse of punishments so that you could have the greatest of pleasures - friendship with God himself!

He did it for you. He came not to be served by you, but to serve you. In his life, death, and resurrection he has served you everything you could ever need in this world! Acceptance. Love. Joy. Peace. Justice. Hope. Purpose. Meaning. Forgiveness. Grace.

This is the Good News. This is Jesus!

James Edwards notes, “the Messiah was popularly expected to purge Jerusalem and the temple of Gentiles, aliens, and foreigners. Jesus’ action, however, is exactly the reverse. He does not clear the temple of Gentiles, but *for* Gentiles” (Edwards, 343). In fact, Jesus is quoting from Isaiah 65 where Isaiah predicts that God will bring salvation to those who are ritually excluded from the temple: foreigners, eunuchs, and the outcasts of Israel!

Jesus is claiming, then, to be the true Temple, the person and place through which God blesses the nations, drawing them to himself in forgiveness and mercy, and restoring what was lost in the Fall, particularly for those who do not and cannot measure up to God’s standards! This is good news!

Take a moment to re-read the passage in light of this understanding of the Temple. What strikes you about the passage?

What do you make of Jesus’ actions in cleansing the Temple? Why is he so angry?

In light of this picture of the Temple, can you understand why Jesus was so angry about what the Temple had become?

It is difficult to explain how subversive Jesus' actions were. The Temple was not only the heart of the Jewish system of worship; it also represented their status as God's chosen people. Temple worship reminded the Jews that God had chosen them out of the nations of the world, and it proclaimed to the nations that salvation could only be found by becoming a Jew. Jesus was basically claiming to be a living replacement for the Temple!

In his highly symbolic actions, Jesus is questioning the validity of the Temple vis-à-vis his own personhood. The fig tree was a symbol of Israel, and Jesus' cursing it is a living parable of God's judgment on the failure of Israel to produce the kind of fruit that God intended it to produce. God's aim in calling Abraham and creation the nation of Israel was to make them a blessing to the nations. God would work through Israel to bring redemption to the world, and God would dwell in the Temple as a sign of his favor upon this people. In this way, all the world would be blessed through God living among his chosen people.

Unfortunately, the Temple was nothing like that at this point in history. The Temple was a money-making machine, and the Gentiles who wanted to worship were forced to remain outside the holy sanctuary and forced to spend great deals of their money in order to buy the right kind of sacrifices and money for the Temple. Despite all the activity in the Temple, it had effectively been turned into a "den of robbers" when God intended that it be a "house of prayer for all nations." There was no true worship of God happening, no blessing of the nations, no faith-filled praying.

READING, STUDYING, AND BEING GRIPPED BY THE GOSPEL

As you read the Gospel of Mark, it is important to remember that there is simply no way that everything Jesus every did and said could be written down. So Mark has the job of choosing which stories, events, and sayings had to be included in his retelling of the story. The stories that he chose were important ones, not only to Jesus' first disciples, but also to the early church. These are the stories Peter himself recounted to the early church, many of whom did not know Jesus in his earthly life. And Mark has taken these stories and carefully and accurately woven them together in order to draw us into the experience of Peter and the other disciples.

It is not enough for Mark to tell us the story; rather, he tells it in such a way that we perceive both the experience and the meaning of the event. And he does it with almost zero commentary! Through the events & sayings he chooses, the order in which he recounts them, and the careful attention to all the details involved, Mark weaves a powerful and concise re-telling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

So what does that mean for how we read Mark?

First, as you read, pay careful attention to the details: word choice, phrasing, order of events, etc. These are intentional! Mark leaves clues to understanding the sayings and events of Jesus' life in the details. No word is accidental! No phrase is turned without purpose! Mark is writing this for the early church in Rome in a time of great persecution of Christians. So he writes carefully, not wanting to stir up unnecessary conflict with the authorities, and yet including references and clues to his meaning clearly enough that this suffering church would have been encouraged and strengthened to be reminded of what God has done in Jesus. So look for the details!

Second, Mark wants you to tune in to what he is saying because, ultimately, he wants you to *know* Jesus. So pay attention to what he is telling you about Jesus in each story. Ask what each passage reveals

about the character, identity, and purpose of Jesus. If you had been there during the event, or listening to the things Jesus was saying, what would have been your conclusion about who he is?

Finally, ask the question of discipleship: what does this mean for me as I believe in and follow Jesus in my everyday life? If Mark is telling you something about Jesus, then he is telling you something about yourself as a Christian. A Christian is nothing more - or less - than one who conforms his or her life to the life of Jesus. The main thrust of the second half of Mark is the fact that Jesus is giving his life for us, and that, therefore, we ought to lay down our lives for others. Mark has written a handbook for how to be a disciple of Jesus!

MARK 11.1-25: JESUS AND THE TEMPLE (SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18)

Jesus' conflicts with the Temple and the Temple authorities can leave us 21st Century westerners a bit baffled. The donkey-ride into the city, the cursed and withered fig tree, Jesus' vented frustration with the moneychangers - what does it all mean?

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright summarizes it well: "[the Temple] represented... all that Jesus was then himself offering in his own work and actions. Forgiveness of sins, restoration into fellowship with God; Jesus was offering them to all and sundry who would believe and follow him. He was acting as a one-man Temple substitute... when Jesus came to Jerusalem the place wasn't big enough for both of them" (N.T. Wright, *Jesus' Self Understanding*).

Read 2 Chronicles 7.1-3 to see what happened when the original Temple built by Solomon was finished. What does God do in the Temple?

How do the people respond to God's presence in the Temple?

MAIN THEMES OF THE CROSS-SHAPED LIFE

As we study this next section of the Gospel According to Mark, there are a number of important themes that we will return to again and again. As we read, study, and discuss the Gospel, you'll want to familiarize yourself with these themes and look for how they are woven into the Gospel.

Story: The Bible tells the True Story of the World. It is God's Story, a story that he continues to write even to this day. It began in a Garden, where God created a perfect place and gave it to a sinless humanity, entrusting the development and cultivation of this world to this first couple. That is the *First Act of the Story*, and it reveals God's purpose for Creating: a people, place, and a kingdom displaying his glory.

In the Second Act, the harmony of His Creation is decimated by the rebellion of his people. In one short chapter, God's good intent for Creation begins to unravel, humanity is plunged into life under the Curse of God and begins to live life outside the Garden, separated from the presence and friendship of God.

In the Third Act, God sets in motion a plan to redeem what has now been lost. He calls a man named Abram, and proceeds to grow a nation from this man, calling the nation his own people, a people through whom he plans on blessing the world. And though this people are ultimately rebellious and don't become a blessing to the world, in God brings one from the nation through whom the blessing will come.

Act Four centers on Jesus, through whom God restores and reconciles the world to himself, offering his own Son as the perfect sacrifice, and the justice and mercy of God are united in the Cross.

The Fifth and final Act is broken into 3 scenes. In the first scene, God fills a people with his Spirit, the Church is born, and they are sent as witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Though we are given a vision in the book of Revelation about what the final scene will look like, we live in the second scene of this final Act.

The question for us is this: will we live in ways that are consistent with the previous Acts and the final scene? Will we live in the True Story of the World? Will we see that our lives find meaning and purpose as they are entwined with this True Story? Or will we content ourselves to write our own little stories, all about ourselves, and, therefore, though we continue to exist, we will never really live?

Servant: Jesus, though the true King of the World, did not come in pomp and power but in weakness. He gave His life as a ransom for many. His way of being Human is the true and new way to be human. We who are identified with him by faith become like him - servants for the good of others, laying down our lives, shouldering sin, redeeming and re-creating. If we truly believe that he has done this for us so completely, then we are freed to do it for others. It becomes for us a daily way of living, a way of being a witness without words, a way of showing others the depths of the love that God has shown to us.

Mission: Jesus did not stand in the Temple and call people to change their actions. Rather, he came to humanity, lived as one of us, set up his tent in the neighborhood, and brought the kingdom to bear on their lives. As disciples, we are sent into the world. The Church is a family on a mission, going out of our way to be and bring good news to our city. Following Jesus does not remove you from your neighborhood but launches you into it with grace, blessing, and practical acts of love.

Gospel: The only real motivation for a life of discipleship is to be thoroughly swayed by the power of the Gospel. We must endeavor to see in each passage and verse the profound love of God expressed to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We must learn to hate our sin, complacency, and self-sufficiency because God hates it, requires the penalty of death for it, and then pays that penalty in the death of his own Son. We must meditate on, soak in, and drink deeply of the grace of God that is extended to us in the Gospel. Our

Finally, in his resurrection from the dead, Jesus conquered the powers of sin, Satan, and hell. When you place your faith in him, the power of sin in your life is destroyed. This resurrection power is available in your life to enable you to put sin to death. You don't have to be mastered by your sin any longer. What difference does it make in your life to believe that you can be increasingly freed from your sin?

The atonement of Jesus is not just a doctrine to believe; rather, it is a doctrine that must be lived and worked out into our daily lives. So stake your life on the truth that you are a beloved child of God, freed from the bondages of sin and self, and empowered to walk in holiness before God!

There is simply nothing more important to know, believe, and daily apply in life than the ongoing experience of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for you.

In his death, Jesus took God's full wrath against your sin - yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's sin. Take some time to jot down the sin that seems to cause the most shame and guilt in your life. What does it mean to believe that God has completely and totally forgiven that sin?

In his life, Jesus lived a perfectly obedient to his father. There was no place ever in Jesus' heart, intentions, words, or actions where he did not please the Father. And if you place your faith in Jesus, God not only forgives your sin he also gives you the perfect record of Jesus. Think again about your most besetting sins. What difference does it make to believe that you have a perfect record in that area despite your repeated failures?

hard hearts must be so melted by the Gospel that we want to walk in obedience. We must motivate radically selfless living through the sufficiency of the Gospel. Jesus is not just our Example but first and foremost our Savior!

Do you understand what Packer is telling you? What strikes you most about this quote?

Jesus' life was for you, his death was for you, his resurrection was for you. It all counts in your place when you put your faith in Jesus, and continues forever like that. Once you place your faith in Jesus, trusting him with your life, your sin is forgiven and erased, and your record is permanently stamped with the record of Jesus! This is the good news! And it is really, really good news.

If Jesus has fully satisfied the wrath of God against your sin, eternally, then God sees you constantly and eternally as he sees his own Son. You have been adopted into His Family! You are his, and nothing can separate you from him.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was known to say, "Whenever we gaze at the cross, we ought to be constrained to say, 'Does He love *me* more than He loves *Him*? That He would give *Him* for *me*?' " Do you live in that? Do you believe that?

substitute. This is the central purpose to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He came to “give his life as a ransom for man,” to take upon himself the sin of the world, and to bear the full weight of God’s wrath against sin.

Reflect on that for a moment. How does it make you feel to know that God had to kill his own Son in order to secure forgiveness for you?

Consider this quote from J.I. Packer:

“There is unspeakable comfort, the sort of comfort that energizes, in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me - in the way I am so often disillusioned with myself - and quench his determination to bless me. There is certainly great cause for humility in the thought that he sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow men do not see, and that he sees more twisted corruption in me than I see in myself. There is however equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that for some unfathomable reason he wants me as his friend and desires to be my friend and has given his Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose.”

7 STUDIES IN MARK’S GOSPEL:

MARK 9.2-29: LISTEN TO HIM!

(SUNDAY, OCT. 7)

MARK 9.30-50: HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP

(SUNDAY, OCT. 14)

MARK 10.1-16: JESUS AND YOUR FAMILY

(SUNDAY, OCT. 21)

MARK 10.17-31: JESUS AND YOUR STUFF

(SUNDAY, OCT. 28)

MARK 10.32-52: WHAT DO YOU WANT?

(SUNDAY, NOV. 4)

MARK 10.46: THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS

(SUNDAY, NOV. 11)

MARK 11. 1-27: JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

(SUNDAY, NOV. 18)

“ransom” implies that Jesus is buying us back, restoring us, and setting us free. Which begs the question: Back from what? Free from what? What is it that we need to be ransomed from?

Think about the idea of ransom. What images does it conjure up in your mind?

Consider what you and I might need to be ransomed from. Do you know what Jesus is talking about?

Throughout history, this “ransom” has been the subject of more than a bit of debate. Some say that humanity has been given over to Satan ever since eating the fruit in the Garden, and that Jesus, in a cosmic bait and hook, offers himself as a payment to Satan, and then crushes Satan in his resurrection, thus setting humanity free. Others have said that Jesus was a “ransom” in the sense that his death showed the holiness of God and taught us how we should trust and obey God no matter what the cost.

While there is truth in many of the various theories of the “ransom,” the one with the most compelling and Biblical support is what is called Substitutionary Atonement. Basically, it means that God, being holy and righteous and just, must punish sin; if he doesn’t punish it, he is no longer just. Therefore God must either punish us eternally for our sin, or he must provide a perfect, sinless, obedient

Does it surprise you that Jesus says he came as a servant? Why or why not?

Do you think that, if you were God, you would come to your rebellious people to serve them? How would you try to get their attention and draw them back to you?

Why do you think God chose to come to us as a servant?

When Jesus adds the statement, “and give his life as a ransom for many,” he goes beyond example. This is the language of substitution, Jesus giving his life in the place of the lives of many, many others. It is language that implies what later became known (in weighty theological language) as the “substitutionary atonement.” The word

MARK 9.2-29: LISTEN TO HIM!

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7

Mark begins the second half of his Gospel with a most unique and profound event: a mountaintop glory moment that profoundly affected these disciples. What are we to do with it? What are we to learn from this incredibly unique event?

Start by just reading verse 2-8. Write down some of the important details of the event: who, what, when, and where.

When you look at the event in the wider context, you notice a couple important things. First, at the end of chapter 8, Jesus began to teach his disciples about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Their minds must have been swirling! What does it mean? Why is he talking about death? He is the King! Didn't Peter get it right when he said, “You are the Messiah?”

He got the name right, but he didn't understand the kind of Messiah that Jesus was sent to be. After the traumatic experience of being rebuked by Jesus - he called Peter Satan! - the disciples might have walked away. And if they weren't quite ready to throw in the towel altogether, certainly they more than a little confused, dismayed, and disheartened!

How might this experience on the top of the mountain have encouraged the disciples?

The first half of Mark's Gospel started with the Voice from heaven to Jesus: "You are my Beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The second half starts with that same voice, though this time, speaking to the disciples: "This is my Beloved Son; listen to him." The Father's first speech launched Jesus into his public ministry with a clear sense of identity and the empowerment of the Spirit. The second speech seems to be more for the disciple's sake, establishing the uniqueness ("my Beloved Son") and the supremacy ("listen to him") of Jesus.

Why do you think Peter responds, "Let us make three tents..." (v.5)? What is he hoping for?

Have you ever had a "mountain top experience" where God has seemed especially near or accessible? Describe that time, reflecting on what factors contributed to that experience.

10.45: THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS (SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11)

Mark 10.46 is one of the most power-packed sentences Jesus ever said. It is both profoundly simple and simply profound. Rich and multi-layered, it is easy enough for a child to understand, and yet deep enough for the wisest scholars to probe indefinitely. It is fitting then that we take some time to understand the depth of this little verse.

Reread Mark 10.32-45. Why do you think Jesus concludes the section with this saying?

The first word of the sentence, "For," is a connecting word, telling you that what Jesus has just said about being a servant and slave of others is grounded in what he is about to say. All that Jesus says about the kingdom life, all his commands and all that he teaches, is always grounded in his own personal example. He does what he demands of us to do.

So when Jesus instructs his disciples about servanthood, about becoming a slave, he is not talking abstractly; rather, he is teaching and demonstrating what is true in kingdom of God. This is the way it is in ultimate reality, in the heart of God, in the kingdom of heaven. The fact that it is contrary to our world reveals just how far we are from what God intended humanity to be.

Do you think these types of experience should be the norm for Christians? Why or why not?

As important as it might have been for the disciples, Jesus does not want the experience on the mountain to somehow become what discipleship is about. No way! Following Jesus is never primarily about your mountain top spiritual experiences. Those times are good – often great – and serve as important times for us to learn about Jesus, to know him more intimately, and to be renewed and strengthened in our resolve to follow him. Hopefully throughout your life you will have a number of experiences where Jesus becomes more real to you, more central to your life, more defining of your reality. But those experiences must ultimately send us back down the mountain, to the real world, to the real needs of real people in our real world. It is only in the real world that faith is tested, tried, and worked out.

Now read vs. 9-29. As you think about your mountain top experiences, can you remember the experience of “coming down the mountain?” What makes the real world so difficult?

What confronts Jesus and the 3 disciples when they reunite with the others? What has been going on while Jesus was gone?

Jesus immediately heads down the mountain to find the rest of the disciples in a trying ministry situation, one that has thoroughly tested them and left them frustrated, overwhelmed, and defeated. But this is one of Mark's themes: the disciples are inadequate for the work before them. It is overwhelming, and will never *not* be so! But their insufficiency is exactly the environment needed for the unique identity, sufficiency, and supremacy of Jesus to be shown! It is down the mountain, in the real world, where the mountaintop experiences must be applied.

Why do you think the disciples are having such a hard time casting out this demon?

If the disciples who couldn't cast out the demon had experienced Jesus on the mountain, do you think they would have been more capable of handling this exorcism? Why or why not?

"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."

That is the leadership of Jesus. Will you follow? Will you, like blind Bartimaeus, follow him "on the way," the way of a servant and slave of all?

Greatness is service; leadership is coming under others in order to meet needs and support them; influence is measured in personal cost, not personal success. And no one lived this more fully or in a more costly way than Jesus.

James Edwards in his commentary on Mark says it this way: “Service to others is *the* primary way in which believers imitate and fulfill the mission of Jesus” (Edwards, 287). That’s a weighty statement, and a stinging indictment against the church in America in general, and Vintage Faith in particular. Are we known as a church that serves? Is that one of our primary identities? If not, then we must question whether or not we can rightfully call ourselves believers in and disciples of Jesus, the one who came to serve.

Reflect on your personal influence. Are you more of a Gentile leader or a servant leader? Why?

What can we do as a church to more fully embrace this servant leader mentality?

In some ways, it seems that Jesus *enjoys* when his disciples are overwhelmed! It gives an opportunity for him to teach them, and it keeps them from being self-reliant. The conclusion to this story – “this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer” – suggests that what the disciples lacked was not power or strength but reliance upon God.

Have you ever been involved with something for which you simply felt inadequate? Are you involved in something like that today? Take a few moments and write down some of these challenges.

How does this passage encourage you as you face these difficult situations? What is the role of faith in trying circumstances?

As a disciple of Jesus, you will often be called into things that seem overwhelming. According to this passage, how should you respond to these “real world” challenges?

Though we've just launched into this second half of Mark's Gospel, we've already encountered two of this section's main themes: the sufficiency of Jesus and inadequacy of disciples. There are going to be a number of passages in the next few weeks that stress this tension. Jesus is the center of the story, he is the hero, he is the one on whom our eyes should be fixed - even while we are asking questions about what it means for us to follow him. The simple reality of following Jesus is that the closer you remain to him, and the more consistent and ongoing your fellowship with him is, the more effective you will be in whatever situation you find yourself as his disciple.

Feeling inadequate is a normal and expected part of discipleship. In fact, one of the ways we can evaluate ourselves as followers of Jesus is to consider whether or not we feel inadequate enough! In other words, if your life isn't characterized by being involved with things that take you out of your comfort zone and force you to exercise your faith, you might need to question your discipleship!

So: if that describes you, what can you do?

Take a look again at vs. 17-18. This man has brought his son to Jesus, but because Jesus is up on the mountain, the man asks the disciples to do the exorcism. You can almost read the disappointment in his words when he says, "and they were not able." Do realize what this implies about the interaction between this man, his son, and the disciples?

The first thing it implies is that *the disciples were associated with Jesus*. When this man needed Jesus, he found the disciples, assuming that they would be like their Lord. He assumed that a disciple would have the same compassion and care that Jesus himself had.

Think about that for a moment. Is your life characterized by the compassion and care of Jesus? When people around you need a listening ear, do they come to you? When they need encouragement, do they seek you out? When they need help, are you the first one who comes to mind? For many of us, the answer is no, so it is no wonder that we don't experience much sense of inadequacy. But,

Which describes you more - James and John, or blind Bartimaeus?

Can you imagine James and John as they try to trick Jesus into making them the most important disciples?! It is hard to believe that they still don't understand Jesus and have desires that are so contrary to his! If I were Jesus, I think I would be let these disciples go and find some new ones.

But Jesus, in his great patience and care, doesn't simply dismiss James and John. He is committed to them coming to a right understanding of him. He uses the opportunity to teach them - again - about the way of His kingdom. It isn't like the rest of the world, where everyone is concerned with who is best, first, and greatest. It isn't the success ladder, where you step on anyone and everyone else in order to get ahead. In the kingdom, down is the new up.

Reread Jesus' words in vs.42-44. How does he contrast the world's systems of leadership with kingdom leadership?

Are you naturally more like Jesus, ready and willing to do what is necessary for the good of others, or more like the disciples, caught up in arguments about who is most important? Why?

Contrast James and John's request with the story of the blind man, Bartimaeus. Here is an outsider, a man who makes his living by sitting along the road begging. He cannot even see Jesus, but when he hears that Jesus is coming, he not only uses a Messianic title for Jesus ("Son of David") but also understands that Jesus can heal him. This time, Jesus asks *him* the question: "What do you want me to do for you?" What contrasts do you see?

James and John are after greatness; Bartimaeus wants mercy. James and John, sensing they are in competition with the other disciples for Jesus' favor, want to be first; Bartimaeus, knowing that he is last and has nothing to lose, has the favor of Jesus *before he even makes his request*. James and John think they deserve something from Jesus; Bartimaeus knows he doesn't deserve anything, but that Jesus is full of mercy!

when people learn that we are followers of Jesus, they begin to expect that we act like Jesus - and that's overwhelming!

Take a minute and jot down some of the names of people who might know that you are a Christian. If you are the only glimpse of Jesus they ever get, what do they think about the character, compassion, and care of Jesus?

List some ways that you can tangibly begin to meet the needs of these people so that they come to know that Jesus is deeply and sincerely concerned with the issues of their lives.

The other thing it implies is that *the disciples tried to help*. Maybe that is a little obvious, but it needs to be pointed out. As disciples, we don't get to decide when God heals or saves or cures anyone. We aren't told the logic behind God's mysterious ways. But we are commanded to pray! We are told to ask! We are told that Jesus can and will work according to our prayers!

As you look over the above list of ways you might be able to meet the needs of people around you, are you at all afraid that you might not be able to do it? Are you afraid that you won't know what to say, or that you will look silly if you offer to pray for someone? Why?

Inadequacy drives us to pray. Desperation makes us call out to God to do what we are incapable of doing. This is a passage about the inability of the disciples of Jesus, but it is also a passage about the great ability and power of Jesus, the Son of God!

Before concluding this study, take some time to write out the ways that you will move out of your comfort zone in order to begin to minister to the needs of people around you. Choose one or two people whom you can tangibly serve this week. Write down their names, pray for them, and then move into your inadequacy and watch how Jesus does the work!

Let me sum up our story: Jesus goes up the mountain to reveal his glory; he comes down the mountain to fill up what is lacking in the

MARK 10.32-52: WHAT DO YOU WANT? (SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4)

Jesus is the greatest leader who has ever lived, and in this passage we see just how he defines and demonstrates true leadership.

In v.32, Mark tells us that Jesus is leading his disciples toward Jerusalem, in full knowledge of what is about to happen to him there. Jesus is "walking ahead of them" as they make their way to Jerusalem, revealing his strength and vision as a leader. Though he knows that a bloody, torturous death awaits him, Jesus leans into it, his face set like flint for the final conflict.

Do you picture Jesus as reluctantly being killed in Jerusalem, unable to stop the injustice about to happen to him? Or do you see him as this passage shows, leading the way to Jerusalem and leaning into the suffering, rejection, and shame of the crucifixion?

While Jesus is out in front leading the charge to laying down his life, His disciples are still self-absorbed and self-aggrandizing. They think they are on their way to Jerusalem to become great and important co-rulers with King Jesus. As they are making their way there, James and John make an absurd request of Jesus: "Do for us whatever we ask of you." And then they proceed to request the places of prominence in the coming Kingdom of Jesus. They want to be first and important!

are a first, one who gains more than you ever gave up, and who is welcomed for eternity into the kingdom of God.

Let's ask the question of discipleship once again: is this "last shall be first" dynamic at work in your life?

How can this kingdom way of living become your way of life?

disciples. The disciples go up the mountain, experience his glory, and are commanded to listen to Jesus; they come back down the mountain to the real world, where relying on Jesus is the key to effective and fruitful ministry!

Have you suffered for following Jesus? In what ways?

Has the suffering you experienced been greater than the joy of following Jesus?

Take some time to reflect on the ways that following Jesus has resulted in blessing in your life. What has Jesus done for you?

Jesus' concluding statement clarifies what he has been saying all along, and what he will continue to say to the cross and beyond. If you put yourself first, if you function in this world as a "first," you will find in the end that you are a "last." If, on the other hand, you put yourself last, least, lowest, then you will find in the end that you

spond just like the disciples - how can anyone be saved if getting into the kingdom is like trying to get a camel through the eye of a needle?

The good news is that it isn't impossible, because "all things are possible with God!" And when Jesus takes over as the One Thing in your life, your One True Possession, then with him you gain a new family, full of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, children, and lands - and eternal life!

Take a minute to reflect on vs.28-31. What is Peter saying to Jesus?

In what ways is Jesus' response encouraging? In what ways is it discouraging?

Though there is incredible blessing in following Jesus, he is careful to make a clear warning, too: you gain persecutions. Making Jesus your Ultimate won't be easy, many won't understand, and you will suffer.

MARK 9.30-50: HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14

The second half of Mark 9 seems, on first read, like a smorgasbord of sayings and teachings from Jesus that Mark has haphazardly collected into one place. But, having come this far in Mark, we know that Mark doesn't write anything haphazardly. It is all intentional! So this will require some careful reading and studying!

The theme that holds the chapter together is the theme that holds the whole book together: discipleship! The theme is the upside-down dynamic of the kingdom: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (9.35). Beginning with another prediction of how he will live this out to the extreme (v.30-32), Jesus launches into a mini-sermon on the implications of that for the lives of the disciples.

Begin by reading the whole passage in one sitting. What repeated words, phrases, or ideas do you see?

In vs.30-32, Jesus predicts his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion for the 2nd time in Mark's Gospel. Look back at 8.31-33 and forward to 10.32-34, the 2 other predictions.

What do they have in common? How are they different?

Each time Jesus explains what is about to happen to him, the disciples are shown to be utterly opposed to the idea. In vs. 33-37, how is their argument contrasted with the life & death of Jesus?

Does it surprise you at all that his disciples are arguing about which one of them is the greatest disciple?

deeper issue is that his possessions are more important to him than Jesus. If the man truly wants to inherit eternal life, then the one thing that he lacks is *Jesus*: the only way anyone can have eternal life is in Him! When Jesus tells him to “sell all that you have and give to the poor” he has pinpointed the deepest motivations of this young man. This man wants control, significance, and comfort more than he wants discipleship. So he is “disheartened by the saying,” not because he was wealthy, but because he had “great possessions,” rather than the One Great Possession – Jesus.

The simple reality is that the man could have sold all that he had, and still not followed Jesus, and he would not have found eternal life. His unwillingness to sell all simply revealed the true nature of his heart. Here is a man who bases his identity and worth on his ability to keep the commandments and make money. But salvation is not found there! If your whole identity is wrapped-up in your accomplishments and possessions, then once your money is gone, once you are out-performed, you’re devastated, and your sense of security and worth is gone, too.

In what ways are these words of Jesus hard and harsh? In what ways are these words of Jesus grace?

After the rich man turns away, Jesus teaches his disciples about the way in which wealth has the ability to own us, creating a sense of security and comfort that makes trusting Jesus nearly impossible. On one hand, this is an incredibly discouraging passage! We might re-

According to the passage, what would Jesus say to that question?

Jesus points to a deficiency in the man's life, a glaring and incriminating weakness. Notice again the man's question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" If eternal life comes through obedience, then this man seems to be on the right path. Jesus states that he still lacks one thing.

Look at the passage again. What does Jesus ask the man to do?

Jesus has encountered other rich people in his life, and he doesn't tell them to sell everything. Look back at Mark 2.13-17, when Jesus calls Levi, a rich tax collector. We are not told that Levi had to sell everything. Why does he tell this man to sell everything?

Look carefully at the passage again: this man's lack is not his unwillingness to sell all his possessions. Yes, it is true that his sorrow over the whole event is connected to his "great possessions." But the

Read Jesus' initial response to them in v.35. What do you think this phrase means?

As soon as he finishes saying that, he brings in a child, and teaches about the way in which discipleship demands a gentleness and tenderness that openly welcomes and serves the weakest among us (v. 33-37). How does the example of the child challenge their desire to be first and greatest?

Then there is the question of loyalty, again emphasizing the servant nature of discipleship that cares more for the name of Jesus than for any church, ministry, or program logo (v.38-41). What is it that John was concerned about in v.38?

Why is that a concern to the disciples?

This is followed by a series of short but challenging sayings about how our sin has the potential of harming those around us - especially the weakest and most vulnerable - and why therefore it is a great responsibility of the disciple to deal ruthlessly with sin or prepare to suffer eternally in hell (v.42-48).

What does it mean to “cause one of these little ones... to sin?”

Why do you think this causes such strong words from Jesus?

But the most difficult part to understand is the last few sentences about salt and fire (v.49-50). Some of these sayings appear in the other Gospels in different places, clueing us into the fact that Jesus used these kinds of metaphors on regular occasions as he taught his disciples. But how are they connected here? Reread vs.49-50, and jot down any thoughts about what Jesus might be saying.

MARK 10.17-31: JESUS AND YOUR STUFF (SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28)

What does it cost to be a disciple of Jesus? Is there a price on that? If you respond to his call, what will he require of you? In this powerful section of chapter 10, Jesus answers these questions.

What is most important to you? What are the top 5 things that drive your daily decisions? Take some time to think deeply about this question, and then jot down some thoughts.

The young man who comes to Jesus is rich - incredibly wealthy for his day. But he is also a good man, the kind of man that we'd all like to know or even to be. He is upright, moral, and hardworking, and as a result, he has gained great wealth. We might even be tempted to say, “God has *blessed* him with great wealth!”

Do you think wealth is a blessing? Why or why not?

Why do you think the mistreatment of the children makes Jesus indignant and angry?

Consider your own view of children. Do you see them as unique human beings, full of their own dreams, ideas, and desires, and worthy of being respected and protected?

Jesus points to the children as examples of how one enters the kingdom of God. What is he saying?

It is important to note that Jesus is not saying we need to be childish. What he is saying, though, is that the helplessness and dependency of young children is what we need in relationship to Him. Because they are vulnerable and weak, they need to be protected and loved.

According to Jesus, the kingdom of God belongs to those who can't fix themselves, help themselves, or change themselves!

What Jesus is saying has to do with Jewish Temple sacrifices. Both salt and fire were used in the ritual worship sacrifices that signified a Jew's devotion to God. Jesus takes these elements and places them in the context of the life of discipleship, radically redefining worship and sacrifice. According to Jesus, devotion to God is no longer about ritual, sacrifice, and Temple observance; rather, worship and devotion are about believing in Jesus and thereby conforming your life to the upside-down dynamic of the kingdom.

Devotion is discipleship. Worship is welcoming the least of these. Sacrifice is self-less servitude. How do these phrases challenge your understanding of worship?

By weaving each of these themes together, Mark begins to paint a picture of what following Jesus actually looks like in the real world. Back at the end of chapter 8, Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." It will become increasingly clear that Jesus has taken up a huge cross – not just the physical one, but the full weight of the sin of humanity is riding on his shoulders. There is no other cross like it. So what might it mean for you and I to take up *our* crosses and follow Jesus?

That is the question he begins to answer in this section. In the next sections, Jesus will get even more specific as he teaches us what discipleship means for our marriages, our parenting, and our possessions. But here he has laid down some important ground rules that

apply to any and every situation, relationship, and community we find ourselves in: Service. Sacrifice. Ruthlessness with sin. Patience with weakness. Unity for the name and fame of Jesus. Ego-less ministry. A life wholly devoted to Jesus and his Kingdom work in the world.

Take some time to read over the passage again. Would you say that your life is characterized by the upside-down nature of the kingdom? Is Mark 9.35, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" central to how you relate in the world?

What are some specific situations and/or relationships where you need to live according to this upside down dynamic?

If you have ever tried by sheer will power to be "servant of all," you are probably aware of just how contrary this way of living is to us! Sure, most of us can keep it up for a while... until it goes unnoticed and unappreciated! So how can we move beyond simply acting like a

How can we, as a church, commit to making the marriages in our church reflect God's original intent?

Having concluded the discussion about marriage, Mark tells us that people began to bring their children for Jesus to bless. 1st Century Jewish culture did not have a particularly high view of children. Their value and worth were connected to their role in continuing the family name, and were seen as a necessary burden until they became adults. Compare and contrast that with our culture's view of children. Does our culture view children as special, unique, and worthy of attention?

With the number of abortions, broken families, and parent-less children, Jesus next words on what discipleship means for children are a much-needed challenge. The disciples, typical of their misguided zeal (and revealing the view of children commonly held in the 1st Century!), are trying to protect Jesus from the "nuisance" of all these kids trying to get close to him. But Jesus is "indignant," a word that implies vented frustration. The mistreatment of these children riles Jesus up!

committing adultery, since God himself does not acknowledge their divorce. This is a far cry from our culture's attempt to redefine and reduce marriage to a temporary arrangement between mutually consenting partners, regardless of gender, commitment, or maturity.

Marriage requires a 100% commitment between both the man and the woman: "What God has joined together let no man separate." If you are married, reflect on your commitment to your spouse. Are you waiting for your spouse to change or start serving you before you choose to obediently and selflessly love your spouse?

What difference would it make in a marriage if each spouse honestly and faithfully committed themselves to making the marriage work no matter what the other spouse did?

servant and actually becoming servant-minded, where our natural posture is that of serving others? Is that even possible?

As we look at Jesus, we need to remember again and again that he is never simply giving us rules to obey, as if what we need is just some new information about the kind of life we ought to live. Jesus does not operate as simply a teacher; rather, he *embodies* and does for us what he then calls us to do for others.

This the heart of the Good News: In Jesus, God comes to us and becomes servant and slave of us! He lays down his life for us, fully and completely meeting every need we have for love, recognition, value, and worth. He gives himself for us completely, and the more fully the love of God in Jesus is the center of our being, the more fully we are free to serve others!

Think about it this way: What hinders you most from consistently and authentically serving others?

If you're like me, the answer has something to do with *pride*. On one hand, I usually think that others should serve me: "I deserve it! I work hard! I am a good person!" On the other hand, I usually think that others don't deserve to be served: "They haven't served me! They are jerks! They are self-absorbed!"

Thankfully, the Gospel tells us the truth about ourselves. It reminds us that we, too, are absolutely self-absorbed and totally undeserving. It reminds us that we have made ourselves enemies of God, haters of what is good, and have joined the rebellion against God's purposes in the world. We don't deserve anything but hell! In fact, you are so bad that Jesus *had* to die for you to pay for your debt against God. You could not save yourself.

Take a few minutes to think on this truth: “I am so bad Jesus *had* to die for me.” Write down what that means to you.

But the Gospel also tells us the rest of the story. It tells us of a God who freely chose to rescue us from our sin, guilt, and shame. It tells us that God chose to send his only Son to take the punishment that was due to us for our participation in the rebellion against him. And the glorious truth of the Gospel is that he loved us so much *he delighted* to die for our sin. It was for his glory and our joy!

Now take a few moments to think on this truth: “I am so loved Jesus *delighted* to die for me.” Write down what that means to you.

and loving and leading her into God’s vision of life-long marriage. Suddenly, liberal Jesus is ultra-conservative!

What do you think about the husband having the greater responsibility for the marriage relationship?

How does this challenge the Pharisees’ discussion about when and how to get a divorce?

How does this challenge our view of marriage today?

According to Jesus, marriage is a God-ordained bringing together of two lives into one. It is not simply a pledge between two people, something that can easily be dissolved if one or the other doesn’t uphold their end of the bargain. When a man and a woman become one flesh, it is God who has joined them together, and no man should attempt to separate them. In fact, Jesus goes so far as to say that if a man and woman get divorced and then remarry, they are

Jesus takes his listeners back to Genesis, the book of beginnings, to talk about God’s intent in marriage. The command that Moses gave about when one could divorce was given as a concession to the “hard hearts” of God’s people. It wasn’t a prescription for marriage, but an attempt to protect a woman if and when her husband wanted to get out of the marriage. Giving a woman a “certificate of divorce” helped her to retain her place and value within the society, rather than simply being seen as “damaged goods.”

Jesus quotes 2 passages in Genesis. First he quotes Genesis 1.27, “God made them male and female,” using the passage to establish an equality between men and women that was not a part of the current debate about divorce. Women had little rights or value in this culture apart from a man, either a father, a husband, or a son. They were second-class citizens, somewhere closer to property than partner, so the question was never framed in terms of their rights. Jesus uses Genesis 1.27 to remind the Pharisees that women are equal image-bearers of God, not property, and therefore must be treated with the same dignity and value as men! Jesus is a liberal!

How does this view of marriage challenge the way that marriage is viewed in our day?

Then He quotes Genesis 2.24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.” In this second text, Jesus emphasizes the husband’s responsibility to care for, lead, protect, and love his wife. When a man leaves his parents to be married, he establishes a relationship with a woman that takes priority over all other relationships, and he is instructed to “hold fast” to this woman in covenanted marriage. If a husband takes his responsibility to “hold fast” to his wife seriously, the whole debate about divorce is moot: rather than looking for a legal loophole, he ought to be serving

Can you begin to see how the Gospel sets us free to become servants? The more deeply you take the sacrifice of Jesus into your soul, the more deeply you believe the truth of the Gospel, the more wonderful the cross becomes to you, to that very same degree you will joyfully and consistently choose the servant role!

Take a moment to reflect on the above paragraph. Simply by looking at how consistently and authentically you serve others, what can you say about how deeply and truly you believe the Gospel?

MARK 10.1-16: JESUS AND YOUR FAMILY (SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21)

Discipleship that doesn't mean anything for your closest relationships is simply not discipleship. Being a follower of Jesus will radically effect your understanding of marriage and family.

Marriage was as hot an issue in Jesus' day as it is in ours, particularly amongst the religious leaders. The question put before Jesus has to do with the situations where divorce would be justified. For the religious leaders, there were 2 main camps, both arguing about how to interpret a passage in Deuteronomy concerning when it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. The conservative camp argued that divorce was only for when a woman had committed adultery. The liberal camp argued that a man could divorce his wife for *any* reason. So they wanted to know: "Which camp are you in, Jesus?"

Before diving into Jesus' response, consider your own view of marriage. What would you say constitutes a rightful divorce?

Jesus refuses to be trapped by the categories offered. He isn't going to argue about marriage loopholes. He won't diminish the importance of marriage by talking about how to get out of it!

How does Jesus respond? To what Scriptures does he point the religious leaders?
