

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

March 2013

THEME: The Gospel According to Mark (Part 3)

Series Introduction

In the first quarter of 2013 our series focuses on the first part of Colossians 2:6 “As you have RECEIVED CHRIST JESUS AS LORD...” so the selected preaching passages will focus on Jesus from different perspectives.

These passages contain various titles for Jesus e.g. Son of God, Lord of the Sabbath, The Holy One of God, etc., leading to the last 2 sermons “Who Do You Say I Am?” and “Good Teacher, What Must I Do?” by which time the congregation would have seen enough of Jesus as Lord to make a commitment or re-commitment, just before Good Friday and Easter.

Mark’s Gospel was chosen because looking through past series, it does not seem to have been covered comprehensively. It is the shortest Gospel which deals with the events in Jesus’ ministry chronologically, and should be supplemented by fuller parallel passages from the other Gospels.

Date	Topic	Passage
3 Mar	Compassionate Shepherd	Mark 6:30-56
10 Mar	Seeing Through Traditions	Mark 7:1-23
17 Mar	Who Do you say I am?	Mark 8:27-38
24 Mar	Good Teacher, what must I do?	Mark 10:17-34

3 March

Compassionate Shepherd

Mark 6:30-56

Introduction

This feeding miracle performed by Jesus is recorded in all four gospels (see also Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-13). In studying this miracle and the other one on walking on water, it is important to remember what Mark is trying to do in the first 8 chapters – he is building up a case for answering the questions “Who is Jesus?” and “Why did Jesus come?”, questions which Peter attempted to answer in Mark 8:29.

For Study and Discussion

1. Jesus feeds the five thousand (6:30-44)

- a. Jesus had compassion on the large crowd because “they were like sheep without a shepherd” (v34). What did such compassion lead him to do? See also Luke 9:11b. How example towards service does Jesus’ response set for us?

- b. Why did Jesus say to the disciples, “You give them something to eat” (v37a)? Surely, he must have known that what he was asking them to do was impossible. This indeed was confirmed by the manner of the disciples’ response in verse 37b (see also John 6:7-9). What lessons did the disciples have to learn before Jesus could and would use them in feeding the people? In what ways can we apply such lessons in our lives?

- c. On one level, verses 42 and 43 – “They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish” merely state the physical facts. What spiritual lessons can we learn from this? Consider Isaiah 25:6-9.

2. Jesus walks on the water (6:45-52)

- a. Jesus *made* his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd (v45). The word “made” is emphatic, i.e. Jesus commanded his disciples to do that; literally he *directed* them. Why did Jesus do these? Consider verse 46 and John 6:14-15 in framing your answer.

- b. In a sense, the disciples appear to be in trouble with the storm, as a result of obedience to Jesus’ instruction in verse 45. How does this illustrate our life of discipleship with its “troubles”? Share an experience in which you encountered a particularly difficult time because obeying God.

- c. Compare the expression in verse 48 “He was about to pass by them” (NIV) or “He meant to pass by them” (ESV) with Exodus 33:18-23 (v22) and Job 9:1-13 (v11). What do you recognise as a divine purpose of that moment?

- d. Why were they terrified by the sight of Jesus walking on water (v50)? Do you think that there was any change at all in the disciples' understanding of who Jesus is, after Jesus got into the boat (v51)? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Jesus continues to heal many (6:53-56)

- a. What insights do you gain about Jesus as you read this passage?

Discipleship Pointers

Jesus is the divine shepherd who cares for his flock, and who also demands their trust in his divinity.

- Because of his compassion for the people, Jesus takes the initiative to teach them (about the Kingdom of God) and to heal those who are sick.
- We may have no or limited resources, but to do God's work and will, we would do well to trust him to provide adequately and abundantly.
- In our walk of faith, we must remember Jesus is God at all times. We do not doubt him in the storms and difficulties of life which may scare us.

Family/Group Moment

- Take time to talk about what it means to trust in God to provide for us on a daily basis. By their words and actions, parents can demonstrate this in practical terms.
- What practical way may we engender a trust in Jesus not just as a moral model, but as the God who cares for human welfare, and who also "walks on water"? The more we recognise Jesus' humanity and divinity to a fuller extent, the better we are prepared to respond well to him in the storms of our lives.

10 March

Seeing Through Traditions

Mark 7:1-23

Introduction

Jesus' authority as the Son of God now comes into direct contest with the authority of men – the elders of the Jewish community. The disciples have to choose either to follow the teachings of Jesus or the traditions of the elders. It is a choice between keeping to a [man-made] form of religion that is powerless to transform sinners from outside-in, and obeying to God's commands that is powerful to transform sinners from inside-out. More and more, Mark shows his readers that the authority of God is breaking into the realm of the Jewish religious authority, challenging their traditional rules that nullify true worship of God and usurp truths that bless life. Having been freed from the bondage of sin in Christ and being sanctified by his Spirit, are we still being held hostage by the bad traditions of men?

For Study and Discussion

1. The Tradition of the Elders (7:1-5)

- a. Why does eating with “unwashed” hands cause such great offence to the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem? (v2)

- b. What is this “tradition of the elders” that they expect Jesus' disciples to abide with? What is it meant to achieve? [Note: “Tradition of the elders” refers to a body of unwritten instructions from past honoured rabbis that have become authoritative source of scribal teachings.]

2. The Commandment of God (7:6-13)

- a. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and the scribes with words from the Prophet Isaiah (vv6&7; cf. Isaiah 29:13). How have they offended God instead?

- b. In verses 10-12, Jesus illustrates the way they have cleverly circumvent the fifth Commandment of God (Ex 20:12) with the tradition of men in the practice of Corban (i.e. gift to God). Why does the practice dishonor God in this particular case cited?

- c. In verse 10, what is the significance of linking Exodus 20:12 with Exodus 21:17? What serious warning is Jesus issuing here which applies to other situations where they have been deliberately disobeying God (v13)?

3. “Clean” Foods (7:14-19)

Having criticized the religious leaders for their disobedience of God, Jesus returns to teach the people in a parable concerning hand-washing and eating.

- a. Does the logic of Jesus' argument in verses 15 and 18-19 make sense? Discuss. What is the significance of the "heart" and "stomach" metaphors use in his argument?
- b. What flawed assumption of the elders' "hand-washing" tradition is exposed by Jesus' "clean foods" argument? Refer to your answer to question 1(b).

4. "Unclean" Hearts (7:20-23)

- a. Which is more deadly – "unclean heart" or "un-cleansed hands"? Why?
- b. Read Isaiah 29:13-21. What will happen to those who are wise in their own wisdom and ways, and who scorn and defy the words of the Holy One of Israel and mislead the people of Israel with their meaningless arguments (vv20-21)? What a strong condemnation of the Pharisees and scribes!

Discipleship Pointers

Sin comes not from breaking religious traditions set by men, but from disobeying the commands of God.

- Good religious traditions/practices are those that are shaped and constantly reformed by God's word to help believers relate with God; whereas bad religious traditions are human constructs that impose are weakly based upon the commands of God. What are some examples of good and bad religious traditions/practices?
- Non-observance of a good religious tradition/practice in and of itself does not constitute a sin; rather, it is a distancing of one's heart from God leading to a disregard of his words that may be symptomized by a rejection of good religious tradition/practice. What are some symptoms of a weakening relationship with God?
- Bad religious traditions/practices are often driven by individual or institutional authority to protect its influences and safeguard its interests/agendas. Any Bible-centred and responsible Christian should reject such individual or institutional authority.
- God desires "clean hearts" yielded to his word and yearning to worship. God is not impressed by "clean hands" polished by human policies and popularized by religious politics.

Family/Group Moment

- Religious pilgrimages to the Holy Land and spiritual/silent retreats to prayer-mountains have become popular practices today. Some Christians have even elevated them to the level of religious essentials that reflect well on their supporters. What is good about these practices? When do they run the risk of becoming bad traditions of men?
- Certain dress-codes and protocols can become distinctive of religious institutions. When is it wise to challenge those practices? When is it better to flow along?

17 March
Who do you say I am?
Mark 8:27-38

Introduction

This passage is half-way through the Gospel of Mark and represents a turning point in the narrative as the disciples having recognised who Jesus is, begin to work out what it means to be his disciple. The implications challenged those first disciples and continue to challenge anyone who is called to be a disciple today. Two big questions – perhaps the biggest questions of our Christian faith – are contained in these twelve verses: who is this man Jesus and what is expected of me if I am to be his disciple?

For Study and Discussion

1. Jesus' Identity (8:27-32)

- a. In the first seven chapters of Mark, the question of who Jesus really is surfaces several times. What are some strange opinions about his identity that you can find? Do people still carry similar opinions today?
- b. Jesus then asks his disciples (a) who others are saying he is and (b) who they believe him to be. What does Peter say (v29)? Read the NIV footnote for the Hebrew equivalent of the title.
- c. Peter's response is not surprising. The Jewish people had been waiting for someone 'anointed by God' to restore and return the Jewish kingdom to the glory it enjoyed under King David many centuries earlier. What characteristics would the Jews and presumably Peter expect in this person?
- d. So, does Jesus confirm or deny their identification of him (v30)? In any case he warns them 'not to tell anyone about him'. Why? Discuss.
- e. Jesus then identifies himself with a different title in verse 31. What is it and what must happen to this person? The NIV 'must' is better translated 'necessary' which conveys the idea that the Son of Man is destined to suffer, die and rise again.

2. Satan's Opportunity (8:32-33)

- a. It is difficult not to sympathy with Peter's reaction to Jesus (v32). What do you think Peter is trying to achieve with his rebuke?
- b. Jesus counter-rebukes Peter, calling him "Satan". Read Matthew 4:8-10 where Jesus also rebukes Satan. What exactly is Jesus being tempted to do and why is he so stern with Peter (v33)?

3. The Cost of Discipleship (8:34-38)

- a. In Roman times, what kind of instrument was a cross? When someone 'take up his cross' (v34), what was about to happen to that person?
- b. Surely Jesus went to the cross on our behalf, so why must anyone who follows him also 'take up his cross' (v34). Consider John 15:18-20?
- c. For whom and for what must we lose our life (v35)? What does this mean? Discuss.
- d. What is the cost of being ashamed 'of me [Jesus] and my [his] words'? What does that imply (v38)?

Discipleship Pointers

This passage presents two of the biggest questions we must face in our Christian faith and life...

- **Who is Jesus really?** The other disciples told Jesus who others said he was. Peter had the courage to state clearly who he believed Jesus to be with all its associated expectations of what Jesus would do. But who do YOU say Jesus is? Is he the Christ/Messiah and what does that mean? Is Jesus the Son of Man and what does that mean? Is Jesus fully human? Is Jesus fully divine? Is Jesus an example for YOUR life? Is Jesus YOUR Saviour? Is he both of these?
- **What must I do to follow Jesus?** Will you take up your cross? What does this really mean for you? Are you prepared to die for Christ – many had become martyrs in the last 2000 years? Or do you understand it to mean coping bravely with the trials of life? But is this anything to do with your Christian faith? It's very easy to be a Christian in Singapore... or is it? People read Bibles openly on the MRT and discuss 'my church and your church' around the water cooler. But what if your employer expects you to engage in illegal or immoral activities. What if friends – Christian or not – expect you to behave in ways which contradict your faith. Do you make a stand, or are you ashamed of the Gospel?

Family/Group Moment

- Imagine you are part of that first 'group' – the disciples. You've just heard Peter's rebuke to Jesus and Jesus' rebuke in reply. What would you have done with Peter and Jesus? What would you be thinking about Jesus' strange words concerning the plight of the 'Son of Man'?

24 Mark

Good Teacher, what must I do?

Mark 10:17-34

Introduction

This passage begins where Jesus is all geared up to enter Jerusalem, to suffer, sacrifice and redeem us (Mark 11). But the apostles, disciples and the rich young ruler who follow him are not fully with him. Their pursuit after him is commercial, worldly rather than eternal. The rich young ruler is also mentioned in Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30. The warnings that Jesus gives about hoarding worldly wealth, the love of money, covetousness are relevant to every society and generation. Many most Jews and even our society (including church members) believe that possession of great wealth is an evidence of God's special blessing. The rich young ruler wants the best of both worlds – temporal and eternal. He is doomed to fail. Every soul can only serve one master. Who do you serve (Matt 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17)?

“The rich young ruler is a warning to people who want a Christian faith that does not change their values or upset their lifestyles. Jesus does not command every seeking sinner to sell everything and give to the poor, but He does put His finger of conviction on any area in our lives about which we are dishonest.” (Wierbse, 1989)

For Study and Discussion

1. The Rich Young Ruler

- a. List all the good qualities of the rich young ruler that he may possess. How much of his qualities do you desire to have? But what does he lack? Why?
- b. In what way(s) has this young man held a **“superficial view of Jesus Christ”** by calling him “Good Master” and yet reluctant to follow his last instruction (vv21-22)? Discuss some possible ways listed below (Wiersbe, 1989).
 - i. Flattery – Jewish rabbis did not allow to use the word “good” to be applied to them for “Only God is good” (very much like the word “awesome” but has been loosely used these day by many!).

Jesus, who is God, is not denying this term “good” be used on him. Rather, he is affirming it and wanting the young ruler to really know he means with what he says and be responsible to accept it. Does he really think Jesus is God? If so, would one reject God's commands and instructions?

- ii. Bragger – superficial young man who says one thing but does another. Are you?
 - iii. Dishonesty – deceiving himself and God? How about you?
 - iv. Others: What do you suggest?
- c. The young man has held a **“superficial view of the Law of God”** (Wiersbe, 1989). How does he justify his obedience? At what point does he fail? Consider the 10th

Commandment and also 1Timothy 6:10.

The Law of God is used as a mirror to reveal our sins. Jesus turns him to the Law but he sees not. The Law brings sinners to Christ but cannot make sinners like Christ. Only grace does (Gal 3:24) with real faith (Wiersbe, 1989).

2. Peter's response

- a. In what way(s) has Peter's response in verse 28 revealed a rather "**commercial view of the Christian life**" (Wiersbe, 1989)? Contrast his response with the three Hebrew men in Daniel 3:16-18 and his own testimony later in Acts 3:6. How much has he progressed from "What will I get?" to "What I have, I will give!"
- b. How does Peter's faith compare with that of the young ruler?

3. Jesus's response

- a. In response to Peter's comment, "Jesus promises all for them blessings in this life and reward in the life to come, but he balances His words with another announcement about his impending suffering and death. How could Peter be thinking about personal gain when his Lord is going to Jerusalem to be crucified?" (Wiersbe, 1989). In what similar way(s) do we also think like Peter while serving God?
- b. The disciples are shocked to hear Jesus says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (v23). For the Jews believed that riches were a mark of God's blessing. "If rich people can't be saved," they reasoned, "what hope is there for the rest of us?" (Wiersbe, 1989). Compare Jesus' response in verse 27 to the parable he tells in Luke 16:19-31. Who then can be saved?
- c. Does Jesus say you cannot be rich? Consider this: "It is not possessing riches that keep people out of heaven, for Abraham, David, and Solomon were wealthy men. It is *being possessed by riches and trusting them* that makes salvation difficult for the wealthy. Wealth give people a false sense of success and security, and when people are satisfied with themselves, they feel no need for God" (Wiersbe, 1989). What is your conviction?

Discipleship Pointers

Extract from: Lawrence O. Richards, "The Daily Devotional Commentary". Kingsway Publications Ltd. 1990. Pages 701-702.

The disciples were shocked when Jesus spoke of wealth as a hindrance to entering His

kingdom. In the first century the wealthy man was considered blessed. Only the wealthy would have time to study the Torah, the written and oral Word of God. Only the wealthy would have resource needed to do the good deeds that characterised the righteous.

This in part explains the shock of the young man who refused to abandon his wealth to follow Jesus. He depended on his money to help him find his way to eternal life. He was totally unwilling to abandon it and depend instead on Christ.

I suppose there is nothing really wrong with wealth. I have one or two Christian friends who are millionaires, and committed Christians too. But most of us aren't equipped to handle great amounts of cash and maintain our perspective. All too many of us, like the rich young man who came to Jesus, would discover that our money pulled against complete dependence on God, rather than encouraged it. And that the freedom to do anything and go anywhere that money brings, pulled against a disciplined search for God's will each day.

Sometimes I think I'd enjoy trying to be godly despite great wealth. I even suspect I might be able to use wealth wisely. But when I check my bank balance, I'm confronted with the fact that God doesn't trust me with any extra at all!

Then, if I remember, I think of the wealthy young ruler, and I thank God for this special expression of His grace. He has preserved me from a temptation that has caused many to fall.

Group/Family Moment

Consider: "Has He taken over in your heart? Perhaps He resides there, but does He preside there?"- Vance Harvner. Thank God for what He has chosen not to give you, as well as for what He provides.

Quotable:

"Every time Jesus offers an opinion about riches, it is negative. Every time He teaches about the use of wealth, He counsels disciples to give it away. For people who take the Bible seriously, and who take Jesus most seriously of all, how serious should we respond to these teachings about wealth? It may be time for more believers to consider the most obvious and least comfortable option: to obey them – to conform our lives to the commands of our Lord rather than the other way around." – Thomas Schmidt

References:

Warren W. Wiersbe. "The Bible Exposition Commentary – An Exposition of the New Testament Comprising the Entire "BE" Series" Vol 1. Victor Books, Scripture Press. 1989. Pages 145-147; 250; "With the Word – The Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Handbook". Oliver-Nelson Books, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1991. Page 661.

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