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# The Gospel of Mark

**A Practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter**



Mark was most likely one of the youngest of the twelve apostles. History speculates he was a cousin to Barnabas and possibly a Levite. (See Colossians 4:10.) Many believe that he was the Mark talked about in Acts 12:12. He was also known as John Mark. He moved quickly from one supernatural event in the ministry of Jesus to the next. The word “immediately” is used around 40 times in this short Gospel. Mark emphasized the divine nature of Jesus Christ through His miracles rather than His teachings. He presented Him as “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” To Mark, Jesus Christ Himself was the Gospel or the Good News. He was absolutely enamored with Jesus Christ because of His miraculous powers.

Some look at Mark as being a bit more simplistic and not as philosophically-minded as the other three gospel writers, others see him as more practical and to-the-point. And yet, it has been said that one could build an entire future preaching this one Gospel alone and never exhaust its wealth about Jesus Christ. The wide spectrum of miracles Jesus performed and Mark shares with us can only lead us to conclude that Jesus’ claim of being the Son of God was absolutely validated.

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Edited and occasional comment by Dan Jones.

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## **The Gospel of Mark: Mark 1:1**

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

We now begin our study of the Gospel of Mark. He was most likely one of the youngest of the twelve apostles. History speculates he was a cousin to Barnabas and possibly a Levite. (See Colossians 4:10.) Many believe that he was the Mark talked about in Acts 12:12. He was known as John Mark.

Less than 10% of this book is unique to the gospel of Mark. He focused more on the miraculous deeds of Jesus Christ than on his teaching. He moved quickly from one supernatural event in the ministry of Jesus to the next. The word “immediately” is used around 40 times in this short gospel.

He emphasized the divine nature of Jesus Christ through His miracles rather than His teachings. He presented Him as “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1) To Mark, Jesus Christ Himself was the Gospel or the Good News. He was absolutely enamored with Jesus Christ because of His miraculous powers.

Some look at Mark as being a bit more simplistic and not as philosophically minded as the other three gospel writers. I see him as more practical and to the point. He examined the wide spectrum of the miracles Jesus performed and concluded His claim of being the Son of God was absolutely validated.

Let me share a short story I have seldom mentioned publicly. The story strangely connects me to the Gospel of Mark.

When I was a new Christian back in high school, I arrived at church early one Sunday evening for Bible Quizzing practice. Sitting in his car in the parking lot was an elderly man known as “the Pentecostal Evangelist.” Many shunned him. We had briefly crossed paths a few times from a distance, but I had never conversed with him directly.

I was prompted to approach him and asked if he needed help. He said, “God sent me here tonight to pray for you.” He then said I had a call on my life for ministry. Then he abruptly laid his hand on my head and prayed over me for an unction of the Holy Spirit to consume my life.

When he finished, he said; “Young man, build your life on the Word of God, especially the Gospel of Mark. You could build your entire future preaching ministry on this one Gospel alone and never exhaust its wealth about Jesus Christ.”

He then looked up toward heaven and said; “Jesus, the mantle is now passed.” Without another word, he got into his car and drove off. I never saw him again, but circumstances in my life took a remarkable turn.

Within weeks, invitations to preach in many churches and youth events where I grew up in central Minnesota started pouring in. I was launched into an evangelistic preaching and teaching ministry that consumed my last two years of high school. And somehow, it so happened that open doors to preach the gospel at home and abroad have consumed all of my life.

I have also had an affinity for the Gospel of Mark. This very short Gospel presents a very big view of Jesus Christ. You cannot read the Gospel of Mark without being confronted with the supernatural power and works of Jesus Christ.

### **The Nature of Biblical Prophecy: Mark 1:2-3**

“2) As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way; 3) The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.’”

This text illustrates the prophetic nature of the Bible. Hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament have been exactly fulfilled. Over three hundred of those relate to the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. Some like this one, pointed to the forerunner ministry of John the Baptist. (See Isaiah 40:3-4 and Malachi 4:5-6)

The biblical frequency and exact fulfillment of prophecy puts the Bible in a category all of its own among ancient writings both religious and secular. No other writings come close.

There were periods of significant fulfillment of prophecy. For example, the ministry of Jesus Christ, giving of the Holy Spirit, and establishment of the church represents one of those prophetic events. The four gospels and the book of Acts cite many fulfilled prophecies. The book of Matthew points to many. That time frame marked the beginning of a new epoch of biblical history. (See Acts 1:7)

Then there were years and even centuries of prophetic silence. Very little was prophesied about the time span from AD 100 up to around AD 1800. Some see the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 providing significant prophetic insight of the condition of the church through these ages.

I had a professor in Bible college fill me with awe and wonder as he used the seven letters from the book of Revelation to tell the story of church history. He was an accomplished historian and biblical scholar. Day after day I emerged from his class glorifying God for the prophetic details of His Word.

We are again in a period of rapid fulfillment of prophetic Scripture. With the dawn of every new epoch comes rapid fulfillment of biblical prophecy. It announces that God is at work announcing the dawn of a new age.

From the time of the industrial revolution to present, the momentum of fulfilled biblical prophecy has been building. As we approach these end times, the eyes of the world are again captivated by biblical prophecy.

Ironically, it's the Bible world religious leaders and secular historians alike are turning to for clues about an apocalyptic end of the world. But their eyes are blinded unless the Spirit of God uses this to draw them to salvation.

But for the Christian, biblical prophecies from both the Old and New Testaments are screaming with fulfillment these days. It is almost like a script unfolding about current events. These truly are amazing times to be alive and see the promises of God rapidly fulfilled.

There is no excuse to sit on the side lines or let your Bible gather dust. Biblical history and prophecy are rushing toward a climatic fulfillment right before our eyes. It is so exhilarating that some days I can hardly contain myself.

Sure, there are theologians with different views of how the end times will unfold, but they all agree on one point: We have arrived at the end of this age. The dominos of end time prophecy are already falling.

God is pouring out His Spirit on the end time church. Satan is countering with his deceptions and deluding influences. (Read 2 Thessalonians 2 and 3) Scene One of the end time prophetic Script has already begun!

### **Three Dimensions of Baptism: Mark 1:4-5 and Matthew 28:18-20**

“4) John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5) And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

“18) And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”” Matthew 28:18-20

Have you ever noticed the groupings of three in the Bible? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Body, soul, and spirit. Outer court, holy place, Holy of Holies. Repentance, forgiveness, and power.

When you compare Mark 1:4 with Mathew 28:19-20, some interesting comparisons emerge. Mark 1 was at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus while Mathew 28 was at the end. Things were changing fast.

So let me ask a basic question; “Whose Name do you suppose John the Baptist used when baptizing?” Was it the name of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit?

The answer is self-evident. It had to be the Father. He was introducing the Son and the Holy Spirit was not yet given.

So what kind of baptism was it? According to the text, it was a baptism of repentance. (Mark 1:4) This is about to get interesting, especially for you who followed the study we just completed called “Spirit Quest.”

So why baptism in the Name of Jesus? What kind of baptism was it? According to Acts 2:38 it was a baptism of forgiveness. Repentance was still important, but forgiveness was its focus.

Let me ask the obvious next question; What is the purpose of Baptism in the Holy Spirit? According to Acts 1:4-8, it is a baptism of power.

Suddenly, the groupings of three are starting to line up in a sequential order. Look at these logical groupings:

Father... body... outer court... Repentance



Son... soul... holy place .... Forgiveness

Holy Spirit... spirit... Holy of Holies... Power

Do you see the wonderful picture that is emerging? Be careful not to confuse the simplicity and glory of this picture, but it seems like God is saying something profound. (This gets me so excited. When I first saw this it was like turbo-charging my walk with God.)

Repentance from the deeds of our flesh seems to be directed toward the Father. It acknowledges that our sins have separated us from God.

Forgiveness seems to be applied to the soul based on the work of Jesus Christ. It is trusting Jesus to remove the wall of separation and bring inner healing.

Power emerges from the renewed human spirit when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is stepping into our new life in the spirit.

Suddenly, the born-again believer becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20) We have three parts: the outer court, the holy place, and the Holy of Holies. (body, soul and spirit)

I don't want to press this comparison too far. Some want just a baptism in the Name of Jesus and have forced this progression to the exclusion of Matthew 28:19.

This is a tragic mistake. We need to relate to all three persons of the godhead. We need reverence toward the Father. (1 Peter 1:17-19) We need Shepherding from the Son. (1 Peter 5:4, John 10) And we need inner power through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:8) The three harmonize together to make us complete.

The ministry of John the Baptist was to prepare Israel for their Messiah and to prepare them for a major shift from the system of the Law to the system of truth and grace. (See 1:14-18) What a glorious picture when the full scope of salvation is understood. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the full significance of these biblical truths to you. Enjoy the journey into the depth of God and His original design for mankind.

*(The place where John the Baptist baptised is called "Bethany Beyond the Jordan." It's about six miles north of the Dead Sea and over 20 miles from Jerusalem, so when Mark says all of Jerusalem and all of Judea came out to hear John the Baptist, that's pretty amazing because that means thousands of people were traversing miles and miles of harsh, inhospitable desert to go listen to some crazy, bug-eating guy wearing camel hair and a leather belt. This was not an afternoon stroll. Even with a donkey or camel to help, this was a harsh and unpleasant journey. Why would all of Jerusalem and Judea do this? The answer is that the Jewish people had been praying for centuries: "I believe with complete faith in the coming of Moshiah (Messiah). And though he may tarry, I shall wait anticipating his arrival each day." John's message was that the Messiah, the King who would rule over His kingdom, had come and their many, many years of waiting were over! It was also why they should repent! -dj)*

## **A Glimpse of John the Baptist: Mark 1:4-8**

“4) John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5) And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. 6) John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7) And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8) I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.””

Each of the four Gospels describe John the Baptist and his influential ministry. God used him to spark a revival that prepared the way for the Messiah. After years of relative silence, his public ministry was like fresh air to the mundane spiritual routine and fog that overshadowed Palestine. What caused him to stand out?

First, his message stood out. He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He called people to repent and baptized those who responded. This message and method was not part of Old Testament religious ceremony.

Second, his appearance stood out. He was a rugged man clothed in a garment of camel's hair with a leather belt about his waist. What a contrast to the robes and costly garments of the religious elite that paraded about Jerusalem!

Third, his diet stood out. He ate locusts and wild honey. Some say he dined on the locust plant, others say it was grasshoppers and wild honey. I can imagine the stinging ritual of locating and gathering wild honey. This guy qualified as a hermit. His diet was accommodated by the Law but by no means prescribed by the Law.

Fourth, his physical address stood out. He dwelt in the wilderness of Judea. He may have been homeless or more accurately, he made the wilderness his home. He did not abide in a palace. He was unknown among the high society of Jerusalem.

Fifth, his appeal stood out. People started going out to him from all across Judea and the whole city of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River to confess their sins and be baptized. There was a definite shift in traffic flow from Jerusalem to the Jordan River. I can start smelling serious jealousy from the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

Sixth, his purpose stood out. He came to prepare the way for the Messiah. He pointed to the One who would come after him and baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11)

Finally, his loyalty to Jesus stood out. When the public focus shifted to Jesus and His ministry, the disciples of John came in a panic wanting John to do damage control. His classic response is recorded in John 3:30; “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

So what can we learn from John the Baptist? Be yourself. Fulfill your calling. Uphold biblical righteousness. Call people to repentance. Point everyone to Jesus. Know when to get out of the way.

## **Living to Lift Up Jesus Christ: Mark 1:7**

“7) And he was preaching, and saying, “After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.’ ”

This verse exposes one of the tragic shifts in the modern church away from early Christianity. Today the emphasis is on “self.” Within the early church the focus was on “Jesus.”

John viewed himself as not being worthy “to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.” He did not see himself as worthy of a menial servant role compared to the glorious and majestic identity of Jesus Christ.

Yet today, we expect Jesus to wash our feet and meet our every whim. We boss Him around as if we are lord and He is servant.

Both Peter and James quoted the principle that “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5-6; James 4:6) John the Baptist embraced this theology. He absolutely revered Jesus Christ. His goal was to lift up Jesus Christ.

Much of the modern church views Christianity as a “self help” technique. It has the servant-Master relationship turned around.

Until Jesus becomes your Sovereign Master and Lord, Christianity will not work for you. Until you get this right, you will never understand prayer and worship. Even worse, you will shun the Holy Spirit lest you lose control of your own selfish dreams and destiny.

## **The Baptism of Jesus According to Mark: Mark 1:9-11**

“9) In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10) Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; 11) and a voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.””

The beginning of the public ministry of Jesus was marked by Him being baptized by John the Baptist. It should be noted in verse 9 that Jesus went out of His way to get baptized. He traveled all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan River near Jerusalem to be baptized. That was around a three day walk by foot. He walked this path alone. He had not yet accumulated any followers.

He was dedicated as an infant by His parents, but He was baptized as an adult as an act of His own will. It was a public declaration that He was following God. The same is seen of every baptism in the New Testament. Personal faith in Jesus Christ comes before baptism. This is commonly referred to as “believer’s baptism.”

With verse 10, we have the first use of the word “immediately” in the Gospel of Mark. The text says; “And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.” It happened very fast. It intrigues me that the heavens were opening. This describes a phenomenon that we cannot grasp according to naturalism. This was a supernatural sign. There is no natural explanation.

And so would be much of the ministry of Jesus that followed this event. From this point in His life onward, He would perform many miracles, signs and wonders.

According to the testimony of John the Baptist in John 1:31-34, this had been given to Him as a sign of the Messiah. John Baptized many people, but this sign happened only to Jesus. It confirmed His identity as the Messiah.

As this was unfolding, a voice came out of heaven saying; "Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." We now have strong evidence of the mystery of the Trinity. They are often presented as one and the same (John 10:30; 14:8-11) and yet they are separate and distinct from one another.

With these three verses, the ministry of John the Baptist was fulfilled. He came to identify the Messiah to Israel. After fulfilling this purpose, he consciously started stepping back. (See John 3:22-36)

Like John the Baptist, every Christian has a purpose and calling to point people to Jesus Christ. We are not intended to draw attention to ourselves. No matter how gifted we might be, our primary purpose is to point people to Jesus Christ.

As a side note; there is also a sense in which every true Christian is marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. Look up and read John 14:12-20, Romans 5:5 and 8:1-16, 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, Galatians 3:1-5, and Ephesians 1:13-14. The testimony of Scripture is so extensive related to this matter, it boggles my mind that any Christian should be void of the Holy Spirit, shun Him, or deny His importance. The fruit of the Spirit being agape love is the sign of genuine conversion. (See John 13:34-35)

Just as the primary role of John the Baptist was to introduce the Messiah to Israel, John said that a primary role of the Messiah would be to baptize people with the Holy Spirit. (Compare Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33 and Acts 1:4-5) If you deny or are blind to this biblical fact, you have reason for concern. Every Gospel writer emphasized this point.

Stop grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit. If you hold Him at arm's length, by default your flesh governs your life. You will never have the inner power to live the Christian life! There will be a fleshly stench down wind from you that even non-Christians will notice.

### **The Temptation of Jesus: Mark 1:12-13**

"12) Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13) And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him."

We now discover the second use of the word "immediately" in the gospel of Mark. After being baptized by John and receiving the Holy Spirit, "immediately" He was impelled into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Mark does not record the fact that Jesus was fasting for forty days and nights, nor the nature of the temptations, he simply records how quickly it started. Jesus went from the spiritual high of baptism to the wilderness of temptation the same day.

Walking in the Spirit does not make you immune to temptation, rather it gives a way of escape. (1 Corinthians 10:13) Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Satan did not leave Jesus alone, instead he personally handled the temptation of Jesus just as he had the temptation of Eve in the garden. However, Jesus passed every test.

Notice verse 13; "... the angels were ministering to Him." Jesus was not alone. God does not abandon His own. According to Hebrews 1:14, angels are there to help those who will inherit salvation." If your spiritual eyes were opened, you might notice with the servant of Elisha the great army of angels that surround you. (See 2 Kings 6:15-17)

Such was the focus of Mark. He did not dwell on the tempter, instead he focused on the amazing provision of God. Jesus was not alone in the wilderness.

### **A Change in the Times: Mark 1:14-15**

"14):Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

One of the uniqueness about Mark, is that he has a lot of short two or three verse bursts to chew on. This is an example. Though they might be short, they are packed with meaning.

After John the Baptist was taken into custody, Jesus did His preaching tour of Galilee. We often don't think of Jesus in these terms, but He was an itinerant evangelist. He was the gospel and He also went about preaching the gospel.

Notice, one of the themes of His message was "the time is fulfilled." According to Galatians 4:4-5; " "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Jesus marked a "changing of the times." (See Acts 1:7) Old things were passing away, something new was coming. He was ushering in a new age. Some call it the age of grace. Others call it the church age. Some refer to it as the age of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The name is not as significant as the concept of a change of the times.

We are on the dawn of another change in the times. Some refer to it as the end times. Others call it the second coming of the Messiah. We are moving into the tribulation period followed by the millennial kingdom. (See Revelation 20)

The concept of a change in times was part of the gospel message Jesus preached. He said that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Later in His ministry Jesus gave many parables about the coming Kingdom of God. They pointed to this change in the times.

In response to this gospel, Jesus called people to repentance and faith. The faith message was new. Justification by faith in Christ instead of keeping the works of the Law was a new concept.

A change in the times does not happen easily. It is often accompanied by birth pangs. Let's face it, change is hard for some people. The religious leaders fought Jesus and the change in the

times to His death. Ironically, His death and resurrection brought about the change. They accomplished the very thing they were determined to prevent!

### **The Call: Mark 1:16-20**

“16) As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. 17) And Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” 18) Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. 19) Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. 20) Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.”

The first disciples Jesus called were strong and rugged men. They were commercial fishermen. They had calloused hands, dark sun tans from long days in the scorching sun and well defined muscles. Make no mistake, as the carpenter's son Himself was no stranger to hard work. He could most likely match the fishermen callous for callous and muscle for defined muscle.

To be fair, according to John 1:29-42, Jesus had a previous short encounter with Andrew and Peter. It left a strong impression on the two brothers. They in turn most likely shared the encounter with James and John. This may in turn be why they quickly answered the call to follow Jesus.

In their case, they left behind their father Zebedee with the hired servants to manage the family fishing business. The call of Jesus was stronger than loyalty to family. Jesus and the gospel often shakes things up!

The nature of the call was, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” (Vs 17) I see three parts to this call.

First; “Follow me!” Our primary call is “to Jesus!” This supersedes the call “for Jesus!” Beware lest you get so busy for Jesus you neglect your time with Jesus. Any ministry you have for Jesus is merely the overflow of your growing relationship with Jesus. If you get the two turned around, you will dry up, burn out and most likely become a dropout. It happens to many!

Second; “I will make you!” You are called into a discipleship process during which time the Holy Spirit will do a deep and transformative work “in you.” He will clean you up, teach you, empower you, lead you, guide you and give you unique gifts. He will change you into a fruitful follower of Jesus Christ!

In the case of the twelve disciples, this happened on the front lines of doing life and ministry together with Jesus. They listened, watched, learned, and started doing as He was doing. They did not take three to seven years off to study books, write papers, and disengage from life and hands-on ministry. They learned ministry on the front lines of doing ministry!

Finally; “you will become fishers of men!” You will have an influence on many people. You in turn will minister to, equip, lead, and disciple others. You will become fruitful for the glory of God! Your trophies will not be fish, they will be the transformed people God has used you to reach, influence, and mentor.

Salvation is more than just a belief “in Jesus.” It includes a call to “follow Jesus.” God worked through these four rugged fishermen and seven others to change the course of human history.

(Judas became a drop out) The eleven became heralds of the gospel and relational disciple makers. They followed in the footprints of Jesus.

The process is still happening today. The principles are basically the same. Jesus is calling people to Himself, changing them and in turn working through them to impact the world. If you are reading this He is most likely calling you to be one of them!

Note in both cases the two sets of brothers “immediately” followed Jesus. They did not vacillate because “Jesus quickly went on from there.” Respond when the promptings of the Holy Spirit are fresh and strong. This is true for salvation and it is true for the leading of the Holy Spirit in every area of the Christian life. Do not hold Jesus or the Holy Spirit at arm’s length.

### **The Authority of Jesus Christ: Mark 1:21-22**

“21) They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. 22) They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the teaching and overall ministry of Jesus was His authority. Everything He said and did was based on His authority. Do not miss this point.

His office as Messiah carried the authority of being Deity. That’s why miracles happened, demons fled, and diseases were healed. He even had authority on earth to forgive sins. His authority calmed raging seas, filled nets with fish, fed thousands by making food multiply, and raised the dead. It was done based on His authority as the Son of God. But it gets even better!

His authority did not end with His death on the cross. In fact, His authority conquered death and the grave and fueled the resurrection. (See Romans 1:4) But it gets even better!

He gave His authority to His followers. Take a moment and read Matthew 10:1. He gave authority to the twelve over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Then in Luke 10 He gave His authority to the seventy. (See Luke 10:17) But it gets even better!

After His resurrection, He gave His authority and power to all of His followers to go out and minister in His name. It is recorded in each of the four Great Commissions given between His resurrection and ascension. (Study Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:46-49, Acts 1:4-8). But it gets even better!

Paul prayed earnestly that every believer would understand and walk in this authority and power. (Study Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21 and Colossians 1:9-12) That means it is for you and me as well!

I was not taught this in Bible college. It took me years of struggling in ministry and doing my best to fix things for people through my own ability and fleshly efforts to come to the end of myself. That’s when I started crying out to God for help... and that’s when He started opening my eyes to His authority and the power of the Holy Spirit.

That marked a progressive change in my Christian life, prayers and ministry. I am increasingly learning what it means to live and do ministry based on the authority of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mark planted this seed of the authority of Jesus Christ way back in these two verses we are studying today. For years I was blind to the biblical teaching on authority and power, now I see it everywhere in the New Testament. I never want to go back to fleshy, carnal, and powerless ministry again!

### **The Reality of Unclean Spirits: Mark 1:23-28**

“23) Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 24) saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” 25) And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” 26) Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. 27) They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” 28) Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.”

Encounters like this were very common in the New Testament. Jesus encountered many unclean spirits during the course of His ministry. Let's make some brief observations from this story:

First, unclean spirits or demons are real. They are attached to or dwell in people. They create various side effects in people which may include mental torment, physical symptoms that mimic infirmities, and the giving paranormal powers to some. They often abuse people.

Second, they recognized Jesus and His authority over them. They cried out; “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

Third, Jesus rebuked him and commanded him to be quiet and come out of him! He took immediate authority over the demon. And this happened prior to His work on the cross where He disarmed and destroyed all the works of the devil. (See Colossians 1:13-14; 2:13-15, 1 John 3:7-8)

Fourth, the unclean spirit obeyed His command. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the highest authority. Note that He commanded him. Jesus did not request, beg, or suggest. He took authority and gave the command! Rebuking and commanding go hand-in-hand.

This brings us to the final point: Even the crowd recognized the surpassing authority of Jesus. “27) ... What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” It didn't take long for the news about Jesus to spread far and wide.

Jesus has given His followers authority over the demonic realm. Denial or ignorance about this subject is inexcusable. The biblical theology of spiritual warfare is dealt with at length in the Freedom Quest Workshop. You can also do a self-study by ordering the Freedom Quest workbook from the GoServ Global office.



## **Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law. Mark 1:29-31**

“29) And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30) Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her. 31) And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them.”

As mentioned earlier, Mark often used the word “immediately.” Things happened in rapid succession. From verse 28, immediately the news about Him went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee. Jesus became the talk of the whole region because of the signs produced by His authority.

Then verse 29 says; “And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” We can ascertain several things from this verse:

First, it appears that Peter and Andrew shared a house close to the synagogue. It was common in those days to have a family house. Their father may have been deceased. That would explain why Zebedee, the father of James and John, was on the beach with his hired servants, but there was no mention of the father of Simon and Andrew. (See Mark 1:16-20)

Second, Peter was married and his mother in-law was staying with them. There was no social welfare system in Jewish culture. Families cared for their own aging family members. This is common in many cultures around the world today.

Third, when they arrived in the home, Peter's mother in-law was lying sick with a fever. According to verse 30, immediately they spoke to Him about her. They made the need known to Him.

Finally, Jesus did what became customary to Him. He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand and the fever left her. He healed her. The result was that she resumed her normal activity and began waiting on them.

Nothing was too big or too small for Jesus. He ministered to the needs at hand. In this case, His touch imparted healing. There was no mention of her needing faith or believing. Jesus came to her, took her by the hand, raised her up, and the fever left her.

This might sound insignificant, but it caught the attention of Mark. Matthew and Luke also record this miracle. (Matthew 8:14-15; Luke 4:38-39) Why do you suppose it was recorded by three of the four Gospel writers?

We are now left to speculate. That is always dangerous. It may have been the length of her illness, the seriousness of her condition, the kind of fever she had, or the immediacy of her healing. Whatever the case, Jesus completely healed her!

Her condition came from the category of natural causes. Her body was fighting some kind of germ, bacteria, virus, or disease. It was not caused by an unclean spirit. It was physical and not spiritual in origin.

The gospel writers stressed that Jesus healed “every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.” (Matthew 4:23-24; 9:35) This included serious injuries like paralysis.

(Matthew 9:1-8) There was no condition that was beyond His authority and power. He even raised the dead. (Matthew 9:18-26)

But His authority and power went beyond healings. They could be explained away as psychosomatic. He also walked on the water, filled nets with fish, calmed raging seas, and multiplied food supplies to feed thousands. These miracles were beyond any psychological explanation.

All of the above begs the question; “Who is Jesus?” You need to read the gospels, weigh the evidence, and wrestle through this question for yourself. But you need to take one more step.

You need to solve the mystery of Matthew 9:35 and Mathew 10:1. What does it mean that Jesus gave authority to His disciples to do the same in His name? Is this still applicable today? It certainly extended into the book of Acts. Hebrews 2:4 points to God doing signs and wonders to confirm the gospel message.

Welcome to my inner wrestling. The biggest difference between you and me is that I travel extensively around the world and see God working in these same miraculous ways in many places. I cannot deny the authority and power of Jesus Christ for our day. I’m not being radical, I’m just being honest. I am in as much awe and wonder at the authority and power of Jesus Christ as the four gospel writers.

### **The Evening Crowd: Mark 1:32-34**

“32) When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. 33) And the whole city had gathered at the door. 34) And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.”

The reputation of Jesus as an authoritative teacher and healer was spreading quickly. As He was spending an evening at the home of Andrew and Peter, the whole city gathered at the door. They brought the sick and oppressed to Him for healing.

He did two things. He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons. Verse 33 ends with a footnote; “... and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.” This scenario was common in the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded in each of the four gospels.

We are forced by the text (and many other gospel accounts) to conclude that neither disease nor demons were a match for Jesus Christ. He never encountered a disease He could not cure or a demon he could not cast out. His authority and power were unmatched.

Keep in mind, this was before His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. According to Colossians 2:13-15, He utterly disarmed Satan and His works on the cross. We now discover that He was King of kings and Lord of Lords from eternity past. He had authority on earth over diseases, demons and the forces of nature.

So how could anyone believe or propose that His authority and power have diminished at the present time? If anything, it has increased because He came to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) He did that through His death and resurrection.

We are herein exposed. The true nature of our belief system about Jesus Christ is on trial. Let's be honest, the modern western church has a very degraded view of Jesus Christ. We do not walk in His authority or power. In fact, many pastors and modern western scholars conclude with zero biblical support that "God no longer does miracles today."

According to 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, the above conclusion is the position of the natural man. It is the view of secular and lost humanity. Contrast this with the gospel Paul preached and the power of God that accompanied his gospel. (Read 1 Corinthians 2:4-5) The contrast Paul draws in these two chapters is monumental.

These two verses and many others convicted me that the problem was within me and not with God. He has not changed! The many hours, weeks, months, and years I have spent in the study of Scripture have utterly transformed my thinking. My blinders have been removed. My erroneous thinking has been exposed. I now fully embrace the glorified Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no disease or demon that is a match for Him!

As my view of Jesus Christ has been expanding, many small boxes in my life are being shattered and miracles associated with every title and office of Jesus Christ are becoming common. I still have a lot of growing, but I fully welcome the new authority and power Jesus is adding to my life and ministry.

### **The Prayer Life of Jesus: Mark 1:35**

"35) In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there."

I am very intrigued by the prayer life of Jesus. Luke 5:16 says, "But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness to pray." There is a question that I am sometimes asked, "If Jesus was God, why did He have to pray?"

The answer is that prayer is not so much about making petitions as it is about relationship with God. Jesus was spending time with His Father. He constantly communicated with His Father. According to Romans 8:27, Jesus still occupies an intercessory role with the Father on our behalf.

There is another point that must be stressed. If Jesus being God felt an urgency to pray, how much more should we? Prayer is the secret to building intimacy with God and hearing His voice. That's why the Bible from beginning to end places such a high value on prayer.

### **A Shocking Concession: Mark 1:36-39**

"36) Simon and his companions searched for Him; 37) they found Him, and said to Him, 'Everyone is looking for You.' 38) He \*said to them, 'Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.' 39) And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons."

Mark records one of the more surprising characteristics of the ministry of Jesus; He kept moving to new regions. He planted gospel seeds and moved on. He left people seeking Him. Some followed long distances to hear and see more of His ministry. He accumulated a huge following.

He was like a shepherd searching for lost sheep in Israel. There were many of them. They were everywhere. They were hearing His voice and following Him.

Verse 39 is most telling; “And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons.” He encountered significant demonic activity even among people attending the synagogues. Demons seem to be attracted to religious activity. What a shocking concession!

It must be noted that these encounters were among Jewish people. One only wonders at the amount of demonic activity among Gentile populations! Why should we think things have changed today?

Are you ready to get stretched? Stop reading here if you are content with mundane Christianity or are satisfied with censored naturalistic Bible doctrine. What you are about to read may sound crazy, but it's part of a basic biblical worldview.

I don't want to press this observation too far, but I suspect demonic activity is far more common today than people realize. Much of what we run to doctors and therapists for might be rooted in the demonic.

A telltale sign is the fact that many medications treat symptoms but fail to result in cures. The root problem is not being addressed.

A contributing factor is the negative stigma attached to demonic discussions within many western churches. They mostly deny their existence!

Unless the problems are serious and accompanied with obvious phenomena like evil or violent nightmares, hearing voices or paranormal activity, we assume symptoms are rooted in natural causes –and most churches have no help or hope for tormented people.

But Jesus and the early church took the opposite approach. They tested for a spiritual cause first and then the physical. The result was that Jesus dealt with many unclean spirits. He set captives free. Lives were transformed. Sinful compulsions ended. In the process, many were healed of physical symptoms caused by unclean spirits.

Time out... we have a health care crisis in the United States today that is out of control. In many states it is consuming 40% or more of the state's budgets... and it's not getting better. That doesn't include the additional costs to the federal budget. Could it be that much of our physical and mental health care issues are rooted in spiritual problems?

Jesus often talked about the need for forgiveness. Many doctors tell me if people could let go of anger and bitterness their immune systems would drastically improve.

Ironically, the Bible teaches that anger and bitterness gives Satan a foothold in people. (See Ephesians 4:26-27; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11) Surprise, we just diagnosed a spiritual cause to many physical problems! The Bible makes many connections with sinful issues resulting in physical and mental problems.

Unclean spirits are opportunistic. They take advantage of spiritual compromise and dysfunction. They run interference with God, the gospel, and the Holy Spirit. That's why in His ministry, Jesus preached the gospel hand-in-hand with healings and dealing with unclean (opportunistic) spirits.

The modern western church has lost sight of the reality of the spiritual realm influencing physical health. It has actually pushed the pendulum in the opposite direction to where it denies the spiritual realm completely beyond basic salvation. It quickly refers all physical and mental problems to the secular professionals in medical fields.

But here is the hidden problem: Beyond basic treatments related to germs, bacteria, viruses, or injuries, the medical community is not curing people. It is leaving them hopelessly addicted to prescription drugs which carry serious side-effects. This feeds the spiral into deeper medical complications.

When I served in the Iowa Legislature, we simply referred to this as the “HealthCare Crisis” which was crippling our state budget. This may sound simplistic, but you cannot solve spiritual problems with physical cures.

The Bible describes the resulting phenomenon in Mark 5:25-29; “A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse— after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. For she thought, “If I just touch His garments, I will get well.” Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.”

Wow! That’s incredible! What happened in this story?

It unpacks the basic principle that you cannot treat spiritual problems with physical cures! Opportunistic (unclean) spirits are often part of the spiritual problem. The reason Jesus and His disciples were so effective with healing ministry was that they treated spiritual problems with spiritual solutions.

It included standing in the authority of Jesus Christ. But here is a big secret; “You can treat physical problems with spiritual solutions –if you understand who Jesus Christ really is!” Because He is King of kings and Lord of lords, He has dominion over the whole realm of creation!

Here is the irony, this is not an evangelical or Pentecostal perspective. It is a basic biblical principle. This represents the biblical worldview that undergirded the ministry of Jesus Christ and the early church. It is for all believers regardless of denominational affiliation.

But it is ignored or discredited by the Western Church as a whole. We opt for a humanistic and naturalistic worldview... and we are getting corresponding results in our churches.

I don’t want to leave you hanging, but I am extremely confident that our continued study of the Gospel of Mark will be very eye-opening. After all, we are still in the first chapter!

Caution: Avoid the Bible at all costs if you are content with a “Christian” naturalistic world view!

### **Story of the Leper: Mark 1:40-45**

“40) And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” 41) Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” 42)

Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. 43) And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, 44) and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." 45) But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere."

By way of review: Mark was fixated on the miracles of Jesus. Matthew focused on the Old Testament prophecies He fulfilled. Luke covered more of His teachings. John looked at the evidence of His divine nature.

Mark chapter one closes with the story of Jesus healing a leper. He came before Jesus and bowed down beseeching Him; "If you are willing, You can make me clean." Jesus was both willing and able!

This may have been the same account recorded in Matthew 8:1-4. Both accounts record that Jesus reached out and touched him. It was the first time this man had been touched by another person from the day he was pronounced a leper. His scars were much deeper than his skin.

Mark adds the insight that Jesus was moved by compassion. Jesus cared about both his physical condition and his rejection and isolation. Though leprosy deadens sensitivity to physical pain, it compounds emotional pain because of social stigma. Jesus cared for him as a person.

The outer healing was instantaneous, the inner healing undoubtedly took some time. Jesus ministered on both levels. Many people carry emotional baggage. It is easier to hide and deny, but Jesus ministers on both levels. He knows both your outer condition and your inner battles... and He cares! He can be trusted with your heart pain. This brief story speaks volumes about Jesus.

Many wonder why Jesus warned him not to share his story until he was confirmed clean by the priest. This miracle was intended as a witness to the priest about the surpassing authority and power of Jesus Christ.

Think about it, His greatest critic was forced to declare His glory. This irony is astounding! It was equivalent to Jesus forcing the priest to concede publicly that Jesus just put him in "Checkmate."

In the end, the former leper shared his story far and wide. The miracle was substantiated. It was undeniable. It was publicly confirmed by none other than the priest himself.

This elevated this miracle to a higher level of credibility than healing a fever or a common illness. Everyone was starting to take note of the authority and power of Jesus Christ.

We now have a story of a spiritual leader who had the authority and power to heal on the physical level. The limitations of the priest were exposed. By comparison to Jesus Christ, the priest had no power to heal. He abandoned people to their plight and misery in life and had no compassion. Rather than seeking Jesus for answers, jealousy soon began to boil.

## **People Flocked to Unpopulated Places: Mark 1:45**

“45) But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.”

Some decry the former leper for spreading the news about his healing. I surmise many stories were beginning to circulate about both the teachings and miraculous deeds of Jesus. The story of the leper merely added fuel to the fire.

The result was that people began seeking Jesus. He stayed out in unpopulated areas and crowds were flocking to Him. This momentum set up the feeding of both the five thousand and the four thousand. As they started flocking to Jesus and attention started shifting away from the synagogues and the temple in Jerusalem.

Let's be honest, people are searching and seeking for answers. The religion of Judaism had become legalistic and filled with religious rituals, but it left people empty and hopeless. Going through the motions of religion doesn't mean people are finding God or that their inner void is being filled.

The same phenomenon is happening today. People started leaving traditional churches in groves several decades ago. Many flocked to evangelical churches and the charismatic movement. Initially, they offered a bit more personal appeal toward God, but they are increasingly coming up short as well. Many times these churches are being embroiled in inner conflict and scandals and the obvious lack of solutions.

Marriages are falling apart, families are being torn apart, society is falling apart around them, and their answer is to point people to secular doctors, psychologists, and government entitlement programs. The western church is quickly becoming the new institutional Judaism that was self absorbed but mostly irrelevant in the days of Jesus.

Here is a news flash, every major religion around the world is experiencing the same phenomenon. People are walking away. They are giving lip service to the established religion because of social pressure, but they are abandoning the core system and becoming increasingly more secular and hedonistic.

So why were the crowds flocking to Jesus? He was different! He had authority and power over demons, diseases, misery, and death. His message was pointing people to a personal faith walk with God that was healing them, setting them free from sinful bondage, and transforming their lives. Jesus was the real deal.

He was not merely comforting people in their misery as they walked toward the grave, He was filling them with forgiveness and life and raising them from the dead. He was setting people free from their grave clothes.

The early church displayed this same organic authority, power, and faith. The same gospel, authority, power, and signs and wonders continued through the book of Acts and the New Testament. It was persecuted but not extinguished.

You can rationalize and make excuses, but modern society is saying that western Christianity as a whole is empty, dysfunctional, and powerless. We have lost something. Our focus has shifted. We are leaving people helpless, hopeless, empty, and disillusioned.

The explanation is not that God has changed. I hear that so often. The false notion that “God doesn’t do miracles today” has become the motto of the western church. In place of a dynamic view of God, the western church has become humanistic and naturalistic. We have assimilated the secular philosophy of our age into our churches. I am primarily referring to the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia.

But that is not the experience of the body of Christ around the world. God is pouring out His Spirit in extraordinary ways in many countries. Book of Acts kind of stories are ordinary in many countries. They are moving in the power of God. They are shaking off the influence and control of the dead western church.

Let me say it this way; “45) But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.” (Mark 1:45) An explosion of Spirit-filled Christianity is rapidly spreading around the world.

#### **The Paralytic Healed: Mark 2:1-4**

“1) When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. 2) And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. 3) And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. 4) Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.”

I am going to deal with this story in two parts. As the story opens, Jesus was back in Capernaum and a crowd had gathered around Him to the point that the house was full of people. He was spending time teaching them. Jesus was first and foremost a teacher.

Then it happened. Four men came carrying a paralytic to Jesus. In my book, this ranks as one of the greatest miracles of Jesus. The man was most likely a quadriplegic. He had a serious spinal cord injury.

So what makes this miracle so amazing? Two thousand years have come and gone and modern science and medicine have still not found a way to heal spinal cord injuries. This miracle ranks in the realm of “the impossible” according to modern science.

This reminds me of the words of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:37: “For nothing will be impossible with God.” The offspring of one impossible situation was staring into the eyes of a man with another impossible situation. It should come as no surprise that this miracle was about to proclaim the deity of Christ.

The four men did not know they were carrying an impossible medical situation to Jesus. They simply knew Jesus was the healer. I love this story. Because I live in the era of modern medicine, this story resets the parameters of faith for me. It punctuates the words of Gabriel to Mary; “For nothing will be impossible for God!”



## Lessons From the Paralytic: Mark 2:3-12

“3) And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. 4) Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. 5) And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6) But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7) “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8) Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? 9) Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’? 10) But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, 11) “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.” 12) And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.””

There is so much packed into these ten verses. First, the four men had no idea of the severity of the condition of the paralytic. Spinal cord injury is a serious condition. But to their credit, they understood they needed to get him to Jesus.

Second, they went to extreme lengths to get him to Jesus. They even tore a hole in the roof so they could drop him at the feet of Jesus. Our mission is to get people to Jesus!

Third, it was the faith of the four men that impressed Jesus. The text says that, “Jesus saw their faith.” Sometimes our faith needs to carry those who have none. What kind of extreme faith measures are you willing to take to get people in front of Jesus?

Fourth, Jesus said to the paralytic; “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus traced the root problem to sin. I say this figuratively; “sin is always paralyzing.” It causes serious problems in people. The man had both a physical problem and a spiritual problem. Jesus was not about to heal the physical problem and ignore the more serious spiritual problems. Jesus dealt with his spiritual problem first. It would have accomplished nothing to heal him physically but leave him paralyzed spiritually.

Fifth, the scribes took offense at Jesus forgiving sins. They correctly understood that Jesus was making a claim to being Deity. They reasoned within themselves; “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” They were wrestling the right question but missed the significance of the true identity of Jesus. They were right at the door of discovery, but refused to open it. Sin had them blinded! Spiritual blindness is far worse than physical paralysis!

Sixth, Jesus was “aware in His spirit” that they were reasoning within themselves about His statement and identity. This is a significant observation about Jesus. He was functioning on the level of His spirit and not on the level of His flesh or soul.

The scribes were wrestling on the level of their souls, but Jesus was ministering from the level of His spirit. He was discerning the full scope of the situation and turned it into a major witness to the entire crowd.

Seventh, Jesus turned the miracle into a platform to preach the gospel. He made it known that He alone had authority on earth to forgive sins. The focus of the scribes and the temple

sacrificial system was on covering sin, but the focus of the ministry of Jesus was on forgiving and totally removing sin.

Eighth, Jesus closed His message by saying to the paralytic; “I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.” Jesus made him whole. He healed him. The miracle validated His message. The healing was not about the paralytic, it was about the identity of Jesus and the gospel message to the entire crowd, ...and to us who read the story 2,000 years later!

Finally, “the man rose immediately, took up his pallet and went out in the sight of all.” He could not get to Jesus because of the crowd, but the crowd parted like the Red Sea to watch him leave. They had just witnessed a major miracle. They had just heard a profound message from Jesus. The seeds of the gospel were planted and sprouting.

Let me make a closing observation: There is a profound message behind every miracle Jesus does! Don’t focus on the miracle to the point of missing the message. Here it is: “Jesus is the only answer for your sin problem!”

No matter what draws you to Jesus, He will not ignore your paralyzing sin problem. Don’t ask Him to heal you outwardly and ignore your deeper inward sin problem. No matter your condition or excuse, *find a way to get to Jesus*. He is the only One who can make you whole!

### **An Important Relationship: Mark 2:12-13**

“12) And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.” 13) And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.”

This may seem a little awkward, but I want to tie these two verses together to make an important observation. Jesus blended His healing ministry with His teaching ministry. He did not focus on one to the exclusion of the other.

The healing of the paralytic was to highlight the point that “the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” (See Mark 2:10) Note that Jesus emphasized His “authority.” Bingo!

Every sign or miracle Jesus did was a manifestation of His authority. For example, He had authority in His teaching, authority over sickness, disease and injuries, authority over unclean spirits, and authority over the weather and the laws of physics. (He walked on the water!)

But almost without exception, after performing a sign or wonder, He would take time and focus on teaching. The miracle served as the vehicle to deliver truth! Biblical truth and the miraculous go hand in hand.

That is the connection I want to emphasize between these two verses. After healing the paralytic, Jesus went down to the seashore and focused on teaching the multitude. His miracles set the stage for His teaching. Why did they listen to Him? The sign produced by His authority opened their hearts and minds to the truth of His teaching. His authority healed the paralytic, but it was His teaching that brought lasting change.

My observation is that we often get this out of balance. Some groups do all preaching and teaching but deny that God still does miracles today. The teaching is dead. It has no punch.

Others focus on miracles but are very shallow in their preaching and teaching. The miracles are entertaining but they are void of life transforming truth. Both examples are distortions of the biblical balance Jesus exemplified.

I am starting to see a merging between these two camps today. These are exciting days to see what Jesus is doing in His church.

From the four Gospels and the book of Acts we see a beautiful pattern. Miracles and solid teaching went hand in hand. A miracle often open the door for preaching the gospel and teaching. Other times the teaching was undergirded by God working in a miraculous way. The above story of Jesus healing the paralytic serves as a perfect example. The healing was a launching pad for extended teaching.

Tuck this principle in the back of your mind as you study the New Testament. Watch for this balance. Expect God to work this way in your life. Embrace an area of biblical truth and watch God work accordingly. Learn everything you can about a given subject and then expect God to bring His validation. (See Hebrew 2:1-4)

Be willing to learn, change, grow, and rearrange your belief system around biblical truth. This is part of spiritual growth. When God did not punctuate something I believed, it was often because my belief system was wrong. I have grown and changed much in my understanding of Scripture, faith and the Holy Spirit over the years. The problems were within me and not God.

I had to unlearn some things I was taught. I had to replace false beliefs with biblical truth. God has been patient with me. My walk with Christ is much more biblical, dynamic, and Spirit-filled today than it was decades ago.

As we have been aligning with God and His Word, the extraordinary is becoming ordinary. The book of Acts is no longer an enigma. It is becoming our daily experience. God wants to do the same in and through every believer!

Footnote: Let me welcome you into my world. I usually don't do this, but here is a peak at my last 48 hours.

Yesterday involved both deliverance and healing ministry. God worked in what some would consider extraordinary ways. Numerous unclean spirits including one named "destruction" were cast out of a young man and healing took place from the ravages of drug addictions. I love watching the power and authority of Jesus Christ take back ground from the enemy during these sessions. The ministry served as a great platform to mentor others in deliverance ministry. It was a learning experience for me as well.

The day before included attending the Governor's Prayer Breakfast in Des Moines in the morning and mentoring a young man struggling with anger issues in the afternoon. In the early evening, I climbed into my trusty C-150 and enjoyed some solo flying with just Jesus and me. A few hours in the middle of the night were occupied writing a devotional post and then active involvement in a sustained 85-hour prayer meeting at our church.

Today may include sanding sheetrock mud in the house we are building in preparation for texturing while listening to biblical audios and preparing to preach tomorrow. I might even fit in a few "power naps!" Trust me, the emphasis is on the word "power" and not "nap." These are times of focused communion in the Spirit. Sometimes I even drift off into deep sleep.

## Reaching a Matthew: Mark 2:14-17

“14) As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, “Follow Me!” And he got up and followed Him. 15) And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. 16) When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?” 17) And hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.””

Matthew was a tax collector. He was a Jewish, but worked for the Roman government. Most tax-gathers got wealthy by siphoning from the public more than what was actually needed. Rome got paid, but they kept the balance for themselves. The title “tax-gather” was defamatory and sinful. They were despised by the Jewish people.

As Jesus walked by his tax office, He called Levi to follow him. He immediately closed the tax office and started following Jesus. He later became the writer of the gospel of Mathew and had a mastery of genealogical records and prophecy. Part of his job was knowing family trees for tax purposes.

He was a man of wealth and owned a home near the Sea of Galilee in the town of Capernaum. His home was large enough to entertain large crowds. It appears that he put on a feast for Jesus, his disciples, and many tax-gatherers and sinners. Mark specifically notes that there were many of them, and they were following Jesus. Welcome to backyard barbecue!

Upon seeing this, the scribes of the Pharisees scorned Jesus to His disciples because He was eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners. In their minds, Jesus had crossed over a social barrier. He was interacting with the “party crowd” and seemed to be fitting in well. These sinful people both welcomed Jesus into their company and many were following Him.

Upon hearing their grumbling, Jesus replied, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

He was on a mission to seek and to save the lost. He was actively seeking them and He was finding them... and they were not repulsed by Him. Jesus was very different from the judgmental, condescending, and condemning Pharisees. Jesus was godly but not religious. He was joyous but not stuffy. He was light in dark places.

Many of these people were hurting, broken inwardly, most likely rejected, scorned, and lost. They were seeking God, but not finding Him in the legalism of Judaism. They didn’t fit into the fake religious mold. But they were sincere, open, honest, transparent, and searching. Jesus walked right into their hurting hearts and started healing them.

Jesus was not condoning their sin, He was ministering to their brokenness and sinful bondage. He was reaching out and “touching them” as He had the leper in the previous chapter. He wasn’t concerned about being defiled by them, He was establishing relationships with them. He was modeling relational ministry. He was breaking down barriers and false stereotypes. He was pulling down religious walls that were separating lost people from the Savior.

I'm not going to sermonize about this story. It speaks volumes all by itself. I find it very convicting. I confess, this story stretches me. I want to be more like Jesus! Matthew went on to become one of the twelve Apostles. He was radically changed by Jesus.

*(The Pharisees weren't just accusing Jesus of associating with tax collectors and ordinary "sinners." The Greek word for "sinners" in this passage is "ἁμαρτωλῶν" (hamartōlōn) and Strong's Concordance defines it as, "sinning, sinful, depraved, detestable." The Pharisees were very clearly looking down their noses at these people, referring to them as "scum" and unworthy and even incapable of being saved. -dj)*

### **No More Patchwork: Mark 2:18-22**

"18) John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" 19) And Jesus said to them, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20) But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. 21) "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. 22) No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

A lot was happening in this story. The disciples of John had bought into the legalism of the Pharisees. They were being sucked into keeping the oral traditions of the elders as Jesus warned about in Matthew 15:1-14 and Mark 7:1-13. They were judging Jesus and others by the hyper-legalism of the Pharisees.

But a change was coming. The Old Covenant was passing away and the New Covenant was being ushered in. Make no mistake, Jesus lived under the Old Covenant and fulfilled the Law right down to the smallest punctuation marks.

He kept the Sabbath, circumcision, and every ordinance of the Law. In fact, Jesus Christ was the only person ever declared righteous by keeping the Law. Everyone else has sinned and fallen short of the holiness of God.

Romans 3:19-31 describes the futility of trying to gain self-righteousness by keeping the Law. The Law was not given to make people righteous, it was given to expose human sinfulness. The whole system failed as a means to bridge the gap between sinful humanity and a Holy God.

Jesus did not come to put a patch on the old, He came to usher in something new! The wineskins of the Old Covenant could not hold the wine of the New Covenant. Trying to patch up the old system was futile.

Most scholars put the start of the New Covenant at or around the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out and born-again believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. This was the Promise of the Father. (See Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-47)

The attempt in the above text to force Jesus into the false righteousness of the Law by honoring the traditions of the elders failed. He constantly frustrated them. He dined with tax-gatherers and sinners, healed on the Sabbath, forgave sins, and called God His own Father. He did not keep or honor the religious fasting calendar nor did He practice ceremonial washings. He even spent

time ministering to the Samaritans. He totally violated their notion of external religious self-righteousness. Why?

Because Jesus was preparing His followers for the coming New Covenant of justification by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and the inner ministry of the Holy Spirit. He wasn't trying to patch up the failed old system; He was replacing it!

Jesus gave a New Commandment based on Agape love. (John 13:34-35) Salvation was about to be based squarely on faith in Jesus Christ resulting in being born-again. (John 3:1-21) The inner life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit was about to replace the outward letter of the Law that brought death. (2 Corinthians 3:1-18) The old system was passing away and Jesus was ushering in the New Covenant. (Matthew 26:20-35)

There are some today who try blending the Old and New Covenants. They try blending faith in Jesus with keeping the Law. They look at Jesus as patchwork to a failed system. They are spreading confusion. The same thing happened in the early church. Paul gave his life fighting against this false legalism.

They demand keeping aspects of the Law and worshipping only on the Sabbath. They ignore the fact that the word "Sabbath" is only used two times in the New Testament Epistles and neither has anything to do with salvation or righteousness.

The two mentions of the word "Sabbath" in the Epistles are Colossians 2:16 and Hebrews 4:9. Neither contain a command to keep the Sabbath under the New Covenant or are extolled as a means of righteousness or merit with God. Keeping the Sabbath has nothing to do with salvation or righteousness! In fact, Jesus was condemned as a Sabbath-breaker. The early church started celebrating the New Creation ushered in by the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first day of the week. (John 20:1-2; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Colossians 2:16-17)

They also insist on ceremonially keeping festivals and various requirements of the Old Covenant. They miss the fact that the Jerusalem Council refused to trouble the Gentile believers with a yoke the Jewish nation could not carry. (See Acts 15:1-35) They are perpetuating a system very similar to the traditions of the elders and the Pharisees were using to confront Jesus in this text.

Keep in mind, the time frame of the four Gospels were still under the Old Covenant. The book of Acts was the transition book recording the setting aside of the Old Covenant and the putting on the New Covenant. The Epistles hammer out the details of the Gospel, living by grace and faith, and the holiness produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Don't be confused. By all means read and study the whole Bible... but live and walk in the New Covenant based on the work of Jesus Christ to purchase our salvation and baptize believers with the Holy Spirit. (See Matthew 3:11 and Acts 1:4-8)

Put on the new garments of righteous Jesus offers through saving faith and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Recognize the universal principles and ways of God taught in the whole Bible. But, discover how Jesus fulfilled every example, type, shadow, and image laid out in the Old Covenant. Embrace every spiritual blessing available to you in the heavenly places "in Christ."

### **Lord of the Sabbath: Mark 2:23-28**

“23) And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. 24) The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” 25) And He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; 26) how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?” 27) Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28) So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.””

Jesus and His disciples were under constant scrutiny. On this occasion, they were taking a Sabbath's day's journey and the disciples were picking and eating some heads of grain as they traveled. That irritated the Pharisees.

Though not mentioned in the text, that meant the Pharisees were also traveling on the Sabbath and on duty as critics. They failed to use the Sabbath for its intended purpose. By their actions as self-appointed Sabbath police, they themselves failed to keep the Sabbath. But such is the hypocrisy of critics, they excuse themselves of the very things for which they condemn others.

Jesus had two replies. First, he pointed to David who ate the consecrated bread. How could David eat the consecrated bread and remain innocent?

The answer is that David had been anointed as king by Samuel. He was not an ordinary man. The anointing of kingship was upon him. He was in an office higher than that of Abiathar the priest! His actions pointed to his identity.

The same principle was true of Jesus in this story. As Creator, He ordained the Sabbath. He was Lord of the Sabbath. His actions pointed to His identity! The Pharisees observed what was happening but missed the intended object lesson!

Such is the fate of critics. They are blinded by their own bias and condemnations. They totally missed the significance of what they were observing. The Lord of the Sabbath was right in front of them... and they sat as His judge rather than His admirers.

### **Jesus the Restorer: Mark 3:1-6**

“1) He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2) They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3) He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward!” 4) And He said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. 5) After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6) The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.”

The story quickly moves from the grain fields to the synagogue on the Sabbath. The self-appointed “Sabbath police” followed Him into the synagogue. He had just told them that He was Lord of the Sabbath. (Mark 2:28) Jesus was about to punctuate the full meaning of that phrase.

Either by coincidence or by set-up, there was a man present with a withered hand. He had an obvious physical deformity. All eyes were on Jesus to see if He would “heal” on the Sabbath or refrain and rest from His office of Healer on the Sabbath.

What Jesus did in this story is often missed. He merely stepped into a different office He has held from the finished days of creation. Jesus said to the man, “Rise and come forward.” Jesus then asked them the question; “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?”

As the story unfolds, Jesus and the Pharisees were on opposite sides of that comparison. He was about to do good, they were bent on harm. He wanted to save life, they wanted to kill... and Jesus was their intended target.

Then the text says something significant: “After looking around at them with anger, he was grieved at their hardness of heart.” The word “hardness” comes from a Greek root word meaning “to harden or petrify.” Their hearts had become hard and petrified. They were in serious need of “restoration.”

It was at this point that something happens in the story that is amazing and is amplified in the English translation. The text says, “his hand was restored.” Notice, it does not say “his hand was healed.”

Did you catch it? The Sabbath is for rest... the man’s hand was “rest...ored.” Part of the intended purpose for the day of rest is for God to restore the human body from six days of work and labor. It is a day set aside for “restoration” of the body on every plane. It is a day for physical, emotional, and spiritual restoration.

God is always actively “restoring” people on the Sabbath. That has been true from the beginning of creation. In the previous story, Jesus made the claim of being “Lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28) He said; “The Sabbath was made for man.”

What does that mean? It was set aside as a day for man to be restored. The Lord of the Sabbath steps into His office of “Restorer” on the Sabbath. That’s exactly what Jesus did in this story!

However, the Pharisees had become so hardened and petrified in heart, they missed this subliminal connection with Jesus who actively restores on the Sabbath. Instead, they were bent on “destroying.” Satan holds the office of “destroyer.” (See John 10:10)

On that day, Jesus stepped into the office He has held since the finished work of Creation. The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. He wants to restore man on the Sabbath. It is a day set aside to seek Him as “Restorer.”

Very few Christians know, understand, or seek Him in this office. He intends each of us to seek Him weekly for restoration. He can restore what the locust has eaten in your life. (Joel 2:25)

The obvious next question is personal. Do you need to be restored? Jesus can both heal and restore. You might not be in need of physical healing right now, but you might be in desperate need of restoring! Do you see the difference? What is withered in your life that needs restoring? He alone sits in the office of “Restorer.”



His offices of “Healer” and “Restorer” are closely connected, but slightly different. You may need to start seeking Him as “Restorer” in your life right now! On that Sabbath day, Jesus operated out of His office of Restorer.

### **A Snapshot of the Ministry of Jesus: Mark 3:7-12**

“7) Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, 8) and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. 9) And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him; 10) for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him. 11) Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, “You are the Son of God!” 12) And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was.”

As we move to this next section of the Gospel of Mark, he gives a snapshot of the overall ministry of Jesus. As mentioned previously, Mark focused more on the deeds of Jesus than on the teachings of Jesus.

We here discover that people came from many places with many needs and were following Jesus. “ ... a great multitude heard of all that He was doing and came to Him.” (Vs 8)

They were pressing in on Him so desperately, that it almost became dangerous. It was at this point that Jesus ordered the disciples to have a boat stand ready for Him so the crowd might not trample Him. Sick, afflicted, and oppressed people were desperate for help and no case was too difficult for Jesus. He healed the sick and set captives free.

It must be noted that the priests, Sadducees, scribes, and Pharisees were not getting these results. They claimed to be ministers of God but were powerless. They were threatened by Jesus both because of His teaching and His miraculous deeds.

Paul later adopted the same test for true ministers of the gospel. He measured both their message and their deeds. The power of God had to accompany their ministry. Read texts like 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 4:19-20. If the power of God did not accompany their ministry, Paul questioned their validity.

This is what separated Jesus from the religious leaders of His day. This is what separated the early church from false religions. Jesus promised His followers who would receive the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:4-8) I cannot find a biblical record of this being repealed or changed.

Dwight L Moody became frustrated by the mere academics of his pastoral students. They were filled with knowledge but carnal and void of Spirit. His solution over the protest of the teachers was to cancel classes and draw the students away for a week dedicated to seeking God and the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. They were not disappointed.

The same renewal is happening today around the world in many places. Reports are abounding, especially in strong Islamic and politically oppressive places of God working in extraordinary ways. God is reaching people with a gospel accompanied by signs and wonders, reverence and holiness.

I have had numerous conversations with people from different Christian circles and different parts of the world so far this year, and the stories are the same. Two things are common and consistent. First, the spread of the true gospel is being accompanied by the power of God, holiness and reverence. Second, the dead but apostate church is becoming increasingly more sinful, worldly carnal, and oppressive of biblical truth, but is void of power and Spirit. A polarization is taking place among what is called "Christian."

As you study the Gospel of Mark, the same polarization was happening in the days of Jesus. But don't miss this point; it was the powerless religious crowd that persecuted and crucified Jesus. They were His critics, judge, jury, and executioners.

There was only one problem: God didn't abandon Jesus to the grave. He not only rose from the dead, He poured out His mighty Holy Spirit on His followers. He started building His Church on truth and power. He has not changed His approach or strategy.

### **Understanding Authority: Mark 3:10-15**

"10) for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him. 11) Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, "You are the Son of God!" 12) And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was. 13) And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. 14) And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, 15) and to have authority to cast out the demons."

The two most common miracles Jesus performed related to healing people and casting out demons. They seemed to go hand-in-hand. From this text, it can be ascertained that these miracles were based on His authority.

Look at the text. Whenever an unclean spirit saw Him, it would fall down and declare, "You are the Son of God!" Jesus warned them to be quiet because He did not want to entrust His marketing department to demons.

But the question must be asked: "Why were unclean spirits responding this way?" Answer: It was because of His identity and office as the Son of God. They recognized Him. He was the highest authority. They had to obey His command.

When you take a broader look at the four Gospels, you discover that sickness, disease, demons, and the natural realm all recognized and obeyed His authority. He was a higher authority than all of them. If sickness or diseases could speak, they would have said the same thing about Jesus Christ; "You are the Son of God!" The conclusion would have been the same: "We have to obey you!"

For that matter, the water, waves, wind, fish, bread, and trees all recognized Him and His authority and also obeyed Him. Mark 4:35-41 records the story of Jesus calming the raging storm. Verse 41 says, "They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" Notice they focused on obeying Him. Authority is intended to be obeyed! These created elements recognized Him and obeyed.

If you go back to the fall, Adam and Eve were the only earthly created beings that questioned His identity and authority and disobeyed. Granted, Satan was also in rebellion, but he fell from

heaven. So why did every other part of creation obey Him? Because they do not have free will! They must obey.

Now look at the second part of this text, when Jesus sent out the twelve, He granted them His authority to cast out demons. (Vs 15) When this is compared to Matthew 10:1, it is slightly expanded, "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness."

This may sound trivial, but both texts say "authority" and not "power." He certainly had power, but it was the extension of His authority. Prior to Pentecost, the emphasis was on authority and not power.

The emphasis of the Great Commission as given in Matthew 28:18-20 was also based on His authority. I maintain that this did not change with Pentecost. The Holy Spirit adds power to our witness, but we are still called to operate in the authority of Jesus Christ.

Inner power can grow and increase, but authority remains constant. This is where your faith can waver and you can be fooled into thinking you do not have enough power for healing or casting out unclean spirits. But, the authority of Jesus Christ never wavers. He is always the Son of God.

Why is this important? Think for a moment, sickness and disease, wind and raging water all have power, but they do not have independent authority. You and I might not win a power battle with them, but during His ministry, Jesus always exercised authority over them. Why? Because He is the Son of God. He is their Creator. They must obey Him!

This is why the early church stressed the name and authority of Jesus Christ. (See Acts 3:6, 4:8-12) I encourage you to study this subject and shift your focus to the authority of Jesus Christ. I in no way minimize the power of the Holy Spirit, I merely anchor it in the authority of Jesus Christ.

### **Building the Team: Mark 3:16-19**

"16) And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), 17) and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); 18) and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; 19) and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him."

After spending the night in prayer, Jesus picked His twelve Apostles. He started building His team. He would pour most of the next three years into these men. They would eventually take the baton and build His church.

I believe this should be the model from salvation to maturity. It shouldn't take twenty to forty years to be ready for ministry, leadership or disciple making. Those who walk with Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit should become fruitful quickly.

I believe the early church followed the model of Jesus in building fruitful disciples. According to Ephesians 4:22-24, they put off the old self, were renewed in the spirit of their mind, and put on the new self quickly.

I believe that leadership is built on the front lines of doing ministry. Jesus invited these men to join Him in ministry quickly. Ministry is more caught than taught.

Jesus modeled “on the job training” for those He called to follow Him. As they grew and produced fruit, Jesus put them in leadership roles.

The amazing thing about this text is how quickly Jesus promoted them. They were not perfect and had plenty to learn, but they were ready for increased responsibility. In slightly less than three years, Jesus was heading to the cross and this team had to be ready!

Don’t sit and wait too long before getting busy for Jesus. Share your testimony, tell people about Jesus and offer to pray for people. The Samaritan woman brought her entire town to Jesus within a few hours of meeting Him. That should be the norm.

### **The Crowd and the Critics: Mark 3:20-22**

“20) And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. 21) When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, “He has lost His senses.” 22) The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.””

Jesus had become so popular that crowds gathered everywhere He went. When He came home, the multitude gathered to such an extent that Jesus and His disciples could not even eat a meal. Jesus had become famous and any hope of peace and quiet were lost. Large crowds began pouring into His home town seeking Jesus.

As the text continues, His critics had two opinions. First, His own people complained He had lost His senses and went out to take Him into custody. The claim of Him being the Son of man sounded to them like He had gone crazy. They were dismayed that He had abandoned the carpenter’s shop. Strangers could be misled, but they knew His true identity.

Transformed believers often face the same unbelief. People hold them hostage to their former reputation and practices. Family members and neighbors are sometimes among the strongest critics.

The second group of critics were led by the Scribes. They had come from Jerusalem and accused Him of being demon-possessed. They claimed He was possessed by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. They were loud, vocal, and condemning.

This verse gives insight into the great distance from which the crowd had come. It was a three day journey from Jerusalem to His home region. Even prestigious Scribes and Pharisees had made the journey in an attempt to discredit Jesus. They were on a mission to destroy Him.

If we stop and think about it, we see the crowd was made up of three groups of people. Most were believers and sincere followers. Jesus had healed them and changed their lives. Others like the Scribes and Pharisees were dogmatic critics sent to do damage control. They were jealous of Jesus and wanted to stop Him. The third group represented His hometown. They were perplexed by all the commotion and thought Jesus had lost His mind. They wanted peace and tranquility to return to their quaint little community.

It intrigues me that everyone had an opinion about Jesus. Rather than watching and listening, many wanted to pass judgement on Jesus based on hearsay, spin, and propaganda.

Not much has changed. Most negative bias against Jesus today comes from hearsay and unfounded ignorance.

My challenge to you is simple: Take the time to read the four Gospels and the book of Acts and investigate the historical story for yourself! Then interview those whose lives have been transformed by Jesus Christ. Get the full story before passing judgement.

Caution: Sincerely following this advice might change your life!

### **The Dark Heart of the Critic: Mark 3:22-27**

“22) The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.” 23) And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24) If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25) If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26) If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! 27) But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.”

The reasoning of the critics was getting pathetic. They could not deny the fact that Jesus had authority to cast out demons. That was obvious to all. But they themselves offered no help to people who were tormented. The fact that they were void of power was equally evident. So they opted for another strategy. They became critics!

In verse 22, they alleged; “... He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.” Sometimes your effectiveness can be measured by the irrationality of your adversaries. Such became the case in this story.

Jesus simply called the people together and laid out His response. He started with the question: “How can Satan cast out Satan?” What an intriguing question! Why would he do that?

He followed this with four lines of reasoning. First, any kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Imagine, Jesus just divided the kingdom of darkness. I would say that was a big win for Jesus!

Second, Jesus noted that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Infighting in a family is a major indication of trouble. If Satan’s inner house was imploding, I would chalk that up as another win for Jesus.

Third, he noted that “if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished.” To credit Jesus with finishing off Satan is actually a major compliment! (By the way, that’s exactly what Jesus did through the cross and His resurrection!)

Finally, Jesus noted that “no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property unless He first binds the strong man.” The gospel Jesus was preaching, His miracles of healing and casting out unclean spirits amounted to plundering Satan’s house. The lost were being saved, captives were being set free, and people were being healed. Wow! What amazing fruit!

Matthew recorded the same dialogue in Matthew 12:22-37 with a few additional points. Comparing these two texts adds depth to the case Jesus was making.

The bottom line was that Jesus flipped the case against them. (See 33-37) They were the ones doing evil and speaking evil. They were like bad trees producing bad fruit. They were speaking very careless words. They were becoming mean, grumpy, bitter, and desperate. That usually happens to critics!

It amazes me how quickly different Christian groups pick up the rhetoric of the Scribes and Pharisees when criticizing others. I fully believe in exposing blatantly false teachers and deceitful workers, but stepping into the shoes of a jealous critic is dangerous. Some Christians are carelessly dividing God's Kingdom and the family of God.

I have always focused on diligently fulfilling my own calling rather than criticizing others. I believe in planting and cultivating my own orchard rather than chopping down others.

I have learned much from others with different gifts and biblical views over the years. Yes, I measure the message and fruit by Scripture, but I am very slow about stepping into the shoes of the critic.

Preaching the truth in love is my calling. It is a full time job. To do it well requires my undivided attention. I have always focused on cultivating my own heart and spirit. I've had my share of weeds to uproot in my own life over the years.

I have observed that those who become self-appointed critics of others soon develop heart trouble themselves. Their hearts become dark. Their personal fruit turns bad. Agape love fades from them. They soon start shooting their own soldiers. Many churches self-destruct from within because of the pride, arrogance, jealousy, and bitterness that feeds a critical spirit.

Jesus was into healing and not hurting, building up and not tearing down, casting out demons and not castigating team members. He was compassionate and not critical. He defended the woman caught in adultery rather than throwing stones at her. In the end, she was saved and radically changed. The Pharisees wanted to kill her. Jesus imparted life to her!

Truth delivered with agape love in holiness is powerful. Criticism fired from a judgmental cannon is destructive. The Scribes and Pharisees distribute their sandals free of charge. But finding godly people walking in the shoes of Jesus is a premium! They are welcome at my campfire anytime!

### **Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit: Mark 3:28-30**

“(28) Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; (28) but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— (30) because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.””

Questions about blasphemy are common. Biblically, blasphemy includes but is not limited to denying, mocking, ridiculing, cursing, and denouncing the work of Jesus Christ or the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Much of this is forgivable with repentance, but the unpardonable sin is dying a state of calloused rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit drawing you to the gospel and faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

In this context, Jesus issued this warning to the Scribes and Pharisees. They were religious but lost. They attributed the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus to Satan. They were stiff-necked and refusing the grace and forgiveness of God which comes through the gospel.

They were aligning with Acts 4:10-12. They were the builders that were rejecting Jesus Christ as the very cornerstone. They were rejecting the salvation that comes through personal faith in the only name under heaven by which we must be saved. They were heading down a path of dying in a state of rejection, unbelief, and blasphemy of the work of the Holy Spirit that leads to salvation.

Satan often tries convincing people that they have committed the unpardonable sin and are eternally lost. If your heart is pumping and breath is still in your lungs, you can repent and trust in Jesus as your Savior. But I caution you not to delay. Do it now!

According to 1 Thessalonians 1:12-15, Paul was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor, yet he was shown mercy and saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. If you are wrestling with guilt over your vulgarity and aggression against Jesus Christ up to this point, it is the Holy Spirit convicting you! Do not harden your heart. Humble yourself and repent and cry out to Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

If you are good and religious but holding Jesus Christ at arm's length while living life your way, you are also resisting and blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Humble yourself and repent and cry out to Jesus Christ for forgiveness.

Let me be frank; if you are an atheist or agnostic, you are blaspheming Jesus Christ and the gospel. If you are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Satanist or embracing a false religion, you are blaspheming Jesus Christ and the gospel. According to the Bible, you are rejecting God's only plan of salvation for humanity. All of the above have adopted a stance contrary to Jesus Christ and the gospel and He is the only means of salvation. (Review again Acts 4:10-12)

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not so much an action you commit as it is a path in life you choose. You are living in rebellion against God, His Word, Jesus Christ, the gospel and the Holy Spirit who draws people to salvation. This is blasphemy against the Creator God.

Hebrews 9:27 says; "... it is appointed unto man once to die and then comes the judgement." Death seals your eternal destiny. Dying in a state of rejection of Jesus Christ and the gospel is the ultimate blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. There will be no forgiveness of this sin for all eternity. Many are walking on this very broad path. (See Matthew 7:13-23)

### **The Transition: Mark 3:31-35**

"31) Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. 32) A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." 33) Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" 34) Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! 35) For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Some people look at this text and conclude that Jesus was being rude to His home community and His earthly family. I believe something entirely different was happening. I see Him transitioning from His human role to His Divine role.

Notice that Joseph was not present. As the oldest son of His widowed mother, the responsibility to raise His siblings and provide for His family fell on His shoulders until they could become self-sustaining. As He entered His public ministry at age 30, He had fulfilled this responsibility.

The transition had actually been promoted by His mother. Keep in mind, she was the one who had pushed Him into the first miracle at Cana of Galilee. (See John 2:1-12). By doing so, she was indicating it was time for Him to spread His divine wings and fly! It was a nudge that was needed, but was accompanied by much pain, sorrow, and regret.

On this occasion in Mark 3:31-23, He was well into His new role. He was publicly emphasizing His transition from the carpenter's son to The Son of God.

In this story, He was stressing His transition from His physical family to His spiritual family. He was laying aside His earthy residency and picking up His heavenly citizenship. The final visit to the family carpenters shop of Joseph was now behind Him. He was handing the mallet, hand planes, and wood chisels to His younger brothers. They now held the keys to the family business.

From this point forward He fixed His focus on His new role as the Lamb of God destined for the cross to accomplish human redemption. He was now embracing His responsibility to provide for the entire family of God!

### **The Crowd: Mark 4:1-2**

“1) He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. 2) And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching,”

It is sometimes said, “Don’t follow the Crowd!” However, there are times the crowd gets it right. When it came to the signs and teachings of Jesus, they were getting it right!

On this occasion, the crowd grew so large that Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and pushed out a little way from shore. It made the perfect stage and pulpit. The surface of the water helped His voice carry.

What is special about this scene is that He was focused on teaching. His miracles prepared the way for His message. The eternal change came to those who believed His message! The seeds of the gospel were being planted. Don’t seek the miracle to the neglect of the message.

### **Parable of the Sower: Mark 4:2-9**

“2) And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3) “Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow 4) and as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5) Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6) And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7) Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8) Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” 9) And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.””



Jesus was a master at using simple stories from everyday life to illustrate profound spiritual truth. This is one of those occasions. In this story, he is in the boat and tells the crowd gathered on the shore the following parable.

In the story, the farmer was doing his spring sowing. He had a bag full of valuable seed and was broadcasting it into his field. This approach was used for wheat and barley.

The sower took a handful of seed and as he walked along, he cast it evenly into his field. He repeated the process until the whole field was evenly covered with seed. Good sowers were skilled at this process.

The story focuses on four plights that came to the seed. As the sower was moving down the field, some seed fell on a hard packed pathway or road, and birds gathered behind him and started feeding on the seed. As the story goes, the sower kept right on sowing. He didn't stop and start chasing birds. He knew the birds were going to devour some of his seed.

The second group of seed fell into rocky ground where it did not have much soil. The sun came up and heated the rocks and the seed sprouted very quickly. Soon however, the daily sun baked the shallow soil and dried it out quickly. The result was that these plants quickly withered away. Unfortunately, the hot sun took its toll on more of the farmers' valuable seed.

The third group of seed fell among the thorns. As it started growing, the thorns emerged and quickly choked the life out of the new plants. The thorns claimed more of the farmer's valuable seed.

Finally, a good amount of the seed fell into good and productive soil. As these grew up and increased, they produced an amazing harvest of thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. They more than made up for the loss to the birds, rocks, and thorns.

He closed His story by saying, "He who has an ear to hear, let him hear." It was left to the hearer to ponder the story and squeeze meaning out of it.

Later, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. They were eager to understand its full meaning. The parable was having its intended effect. It was causing them to think and seek deeper truth. The story holds a wealth of wisdom and has many applications. It becomes the backdrop for the law of the sower seen throughout the Bible.

Such is the nature of parables. They cause the reader to think, meditate, learn, and grow. Such is the intended purpose of parables. They yield a growing crop of wisdom for years to come.

### **The Sober Transition: Mark 4:10-12**

"10) As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. 11) And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, 12) so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.'"

This text is hard to wrestle with. It is sandwiched between the parable of the sower and its interpretation. Jesus spoke these words only to the twelve and His devoted followers. It serves as a sobering transition between the public parable and its private interpretation.

It appears there were four groups of people present to hear the parable of the sower. There were the critics, the crowd, the cowards, and the called. Each group might represent a different kind of soil. We will start looking at each kind of soil in the next four sections, but first I want to make a sweeping observation.

It appears that Jesus spoke in parables to wrap a cloak of mystery around the kingdom of God. This may be hard to accept, but of the four kinds of soil, only the last went on to bear fruit. The seed was wasted on the first three kinds of soil.

Jesus did not have the goal of saving everyone, He had the goal of sanctifying those who were saved. He preached to many but focused on His faithful, called and devoted followers. To them it was granted to embrace the full benefits of kingdom life.

I find this text very sobering. It appears there was a 75% drop-out margin among those who heard the gospel from Jesus. Which kind of soil best describes you? Are you among those abiding in Jesus and bearing thirty, sixty and a hundredfold for the kingdom?

### **Those Cruel People: Mark 4:16-17**

“16) In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17) and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.”

The second kind of soil Jesus called “rocky places.” The seed sprouted quickly, but then the sun beat down on the rocks and the little plants were cooked. (Mark 4:5-6). They shriveled up and died.

Jesus said these are the people who when they hear the word immediately receive it with joy, but they have no firm root in themselves. They are only temporary.

Then it happens. They start experiencing affliction and persecution because of the word. It might come in the form of teasing, ridicule, mockery, or rejection... and as a result, they immediately fall away.

Think about it –this enemy relates to other people. It might be family, friends, work associates or a scornful college professor. People can be cruel. Rejection hurts, but it’s not worth abandoning Jesus because of some ridicule.

So far, Jesus has identified two enemies that are against you. They are Satan and other people. You better be prepared. If you want to be fruitful for Jesus, you will face both of these enemies. I dare say that the enemies are gaining in severity. I have found the third one to be the most difficult.

## **An Enemy Called “Self.” Mark 4:18-19**

“18) And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19) but the the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” Jesus now talks about the third kind of soil. This could be called “the thorny ground.” As the seed started sprouting in this soil, the thorns grew up and choked out the little plants. As a result they were dwarfed and produced no fruit.

He likened this to the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things. When you study this list, you quickly discover the third enemy is “self.”

I have found “self” to be the most difficult enemy in my Christian life. Jesus defeated Satan, I can choose not to listen to others, but “self” is always present.

In these three soils, we have an unseen enemy, an external enemy and an internal enemy. My flesh feeds on pleasures and distractions. Over the years, I have been my own worst enemy.

Jesus classified the distractions as 1) the worries of the world, 2) the deceitfulness of riches, and 3) the desire for other things. They each cry for attention and mess with our emotions, priorities, and value system. They have sucked much time, attention, and resources from me over the years.

At some point on your way to Christian maturity, you need to take up your cross and crucify “self.” According to Galatian 5:16-17, the flesh and the Spirit are in constant war with one another. There will be no fruit of the Spirit if the deeds of the flesh thrive in your life!

You need to take this enemy seriously. If you neglect your garden for one week, weeds sprout in abundance. If you neglect your garden for two weeks, the weeds spread like crazy. If you neglect your garden for a month, the weeds surpass your valued plants. If you neglect your garden for two months the weeds totally take over and choke out your harvest. Like a garden, one’s life can become a mess very quickly.

It is no coincidence that Jesus used the parable of the sower to illustrate the Christian life. Adam was created to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden. After the fall, dealing with weeds and thorns became a daunting task. Studying this parable contains all the wisdom and insight you need to produces an abundant harvest.

Jesus Christ has put thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold yield within your reach. If you neglect your garden, you will forfeit your harvest! A life is a terrible thing to waste! Learn well the parable of the sower and put daily diligence in your favor. Jesus has put everything in your reach for an abundant harvest! Cultivate your life and unleash your potential in the Spirit!

## **Increasing Your Yield: Mark 4:20**

“20) And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.””

It was the same seed sown in four different types of soil. The problem was not with the seed, it was with the soil. It amazes me how different people can attend the same church, listen to the

same sermons, and even read the same translation of the Bible but produce such radically different yields.

There were even different yields on the good fields. They ranged between thirty and a hundred fold. Again, the text suggests the variant was not with the seed. Something was different with the soil.

Modern farmers work with their soil. They know how to increase their yields. The same is true with our lives. We can learn, study, grow, and increase both our works and our faith.

The law of the sower says, “you reap what you sow.” It also says “you reap as you sow.” If you want a bigger harvest, start sowing more seed! Instead of sowing 10 acres, sow 100 acres. Instead of sowing 100 acres, sow 1,000 acres. I know some farmers who sow 10,000 acres. Their total yield is unimaginable.

But you argue, “Is it really that easy?” No one said increasing the harvest is easy, but it is doable, especially in today's world. I know people who sat for years before stepping out in ministry. Suddenly they tasted missions and immediately began to change their focus and expand their capacity. Their focus changed. Their activities changed. Their priorities changed. Their giving changed. They're going changed. Guess what? Within three to five years their harvest radically changed!

This excites me. The seed of the gospel and God's word are still changing lives. Maybe you need to start sowing more seed! There's no telling how abundant your harvest for the glory of God can become!

### **Let the Light Shine: Mark 4:21-23**

“21) And He was saying to them, “A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? 22) For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. 23) If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.””

This was most likely a reference to an oil lamp. Its intended purpose was to shine and give light. In modern times oil lamps have been replaced by electricity and light bulbs, but they have the same purpose of illuminating the darkness. The parable still applies.

So is God's Word and the gospel. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. It exposes things hidden in darkness. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Jesus is the light of the world. The Holy Spirit brings to light things hidden in darkness. He exposes sin. Christians are called “the sons of light.” (See Ephesians 5:8-11) God intends us to shine in this dark world.

But the problem is that lost people love the darkness rather than the light. (John 3:19-21) They want enough of the light of Jesus to soothe their conscience but not enough to interrupt their sinful living. Human society wants the message of God's universal love, but they want to put a shade on His call to holiness and the warning of coming judgement.

So what has human civilization done? We have distorted the gospel. We redefined God. We have hidden truth under the veil of man-made religion. We put the light of the gospel under bushel baskets with little cracks to give light only where it's convenient and where we want it.

Many Christians try to do the same thing. They try to control God, the gospel, and the Holy Spirit. They try to hang onto the kingdom of darkness while selectively embracing the kingdom of light. It doesn't work that way.

If you want the light, put it on the lamp stand. If you want to be set free by truth, accept the whole counsel of God. If you want Jesus and the gospel, expect to be exposed. If you want the Holy Spirit to shine in your life, be prepared for Him to radically change and heal you. Born-again Christians are expected to engage in daily "Son-Bathing." We are to walk in the light as He is in the light. (See 1 John 1:5-7)

### **Guard Your Heart: Mark 4:24-25**

"24) And He was saying to them, 'Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25) For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.'"

Take care what you listen to, what you plant in your mind and soul comes out in the garden of your life. If you let random seeds get blown into your mind by the things you carelessly watch and listen to, your soul will soon resemble a tangled bed of weeds. The end result will be mental and moral confusion. Your heart will be messed up!

By your standards and ethics it will be measured to you. If you sow lies and dishonesty you will reap the same. If you steal and cheat, others will steal from you. But if you live by truth and integrity, others will soon begin to respect and honor you. That's called "influence!"

The person who has much will often have even more given to him. When you learn to manage and maintain little things, you will soon be entrusted with bigger things. Diligence and faithfulness are rewarded. They point to honorable character.

But those who are slothful, careless, and negligent lose the few things they have. Through neglect and lack of maintenance things quickly wear out, deteriorate or shrivel up and die. Your surroundings say a lot about your character.

The above two verses sound more like Proverbs of wisdom than parables of mystery. It is easy to observe that the book of Proverbs was well-planted in the heart and mind of Jesus. He practiced what He preached. He guarded His own heart with all diligence.

In these two verses, Jesus was still focused on the Law of the Sower. It says; "What you sow, you will reap." This is called "practical application." If you want your circumstances to change, pay closer attention to the seed being sown in your heart, soul, and mind. They will come out in your life!

### **The Miracle of Good Soil and Seed: Mark 4:26-29**

"26) And He was saying, 'The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27) and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28) The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29) But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'"

Jesus again pictured the kingdom of God by a parable about gardening or farming. In a sense, we could say He was adding depth to the parable of the sower. In this parable He is focusing on the faithfulness of God!

Look closely –this parable minimizes the role of the sower. He sows the seed in good soil and watches the miracle unfold day by day. In fact, in this story the sower sleeps until the harvest. He wisely trusted God to fulfill His role.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 adds depth to this parable. It acknowledges that Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God was the one causing the growth. No doubt, the gardener can irrigate and cultivate, but unless God does His part there will be no growth.

This forces us to acknowledge three things: First, the condition of the soil is important. We are responsible to make sure the soil in our life is good. A good farmer works his soil every year to improve its quality. Never stop improving the condition of your soil.

Second, the DNA of the seed is important. Make sure the best seed is being planted in your life. There is an overwhelming amount of bad seed in churches, Christian literature, and the world today. The seed you plant in your soul will determine the crop you harvest. I spend most of my time putting the heirloom seed of God's word in my heart, soul, and mind. I waste zero time on new modified seed. It's worthless and counterproductive for godliness.

Finally, the main focus is on God. He is the one who causes the growth. It is a mystery, but when good seed interacts with good soil, miracles happen! God is at work. Soon the seed sprouts. It's like the fields come alive. Within a few weeks, the fields change color from brown soil to green crops. Then the blades appear followed by the fruit. Some crops come to maturity quickly, others take more time, but thanks to God... there will be a harvest.

Where I live in north Iowa, we have one growing season and then the harvest. As in the previous parable of the sower, good soil mixing with good seed can produce thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. But wait, that's just one growing season.

As a Christian, I've now enjoyed more than fifty growing seasons in my life. By God's grace, I constantly work to improve my soil and select quality seed... but my primary focus is on God. The Holy Spirit is producing fruit in my life I never dreamed was possible even ten years ago. I take John 15:8 seriously; "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

Like most farmers, I have had some very disappointing years. I was negligent preparing the soil of my soul and allowed some weed seeds in my garden, but God was faithful! The good news is that by God's grace He has given me many more growing seasons. Obeying and walking with Jesus keeps getting better and better!

Such is the kingdom of God. Past performance does not dictate future fruitfulness. If you've had some bad years in your life, take advantage of a new planting season. Invite the Holy Spirit to renew the soil of your soul. Get serious about planting better seed in your life. By all means, stop putting weed seeds in your heart and mind! Then ask God to do His work in and through your life.

Caution: Be prepared for a radically different harvest. Then repeat the process every year. Good gardening has a compounding effect in every growth cycle. Walking with God gets better and better as you tend your fields properly. He is always faithful to do His part.

### **Kingdom Potential: Mark 4:30-32**

“30) And He said, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? 31) It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, 32) yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.””

In this parable, Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. Though the seed is tiny, the plant becomes large. It may start small but has huge potential.

I have watched many times how small, broken, despised, and insignificant people come to Jesus. Soon He changes them and they become men and women of character, dignity, faith, and influence. They soon pass up their counterparts in the world.

This is the thrust behind 1 Corinthians 1:26-30. God has chosen the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, and the despised to shame the noble. He does it all the time. They may start small, but soon they surpass in wisdom, stature, and influence their counterparts in the world.

It happened to Joseph. It happened to David. It happened to Daniel and his three friends. It happened to four fishermen and the ragtag group of men Jesus called to be His disciples.

God works this way so that He gets the glory! A small seed of faith can transform any person who sincerely embraces Jesus Christ into someone very special. The Holy Spirit changes them.

He quickly multiplies gifts, character, confidence, power, and influence in them and through them. Many from very humble beginnings and modest surroundings go on to have national and international impact.

God can turn failures into successes, tragic mistakes into providential opportunities, brokenness into wholeness, poverty into wealth, sickness and disease into wellness, oppression into influence, weakness into power, followers into leaders, and obscurity into fame... and He does in such a way as to baffle the world. (See Acts 4:13)

The message of the kingdom when planted in the right soil has unimaginable potential. Don't measure anyone's future potential "in Christ" by their past performance "in the world." The indwelling Holy Spirit transforms them into radically different people. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17)

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, let Him do this work in your life. Stop making excuses. Let go of your old self and your old identity. Step up and step out and embrace your new life "in Christ." Spread your wings of faith and fly.

### **The Inner Teacher: Mark 4:33-34**

“33) With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; 34) and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.”

Jesus became known as the “Teacher.” Over fifty times in the four gospels He was called by this title. Sometimes they called Him by the name “good Teacher.” His teaching skills were recognized by all, including his opponents.

Jesus often taught in parables. His teaching increased in depth and substance as His disciples grew in understanding. There were some things they did not understand even after nearly three years of being with Him. For example, He told His disciples repeatedly about His coming suffering and resurrection and it still did not register with them.

There are two mysteries at work in genuine believers. The first is talked about in John 10:22-30. His opponents were constantly quizzing Him for specific disclosure of His true identity. To them He replied; “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.” The Bible will forever be a mystery to non-Christians. It is important to start with the basics of the gospel and build on the foundation of salvation.

Second, Jesus promised that born-again believers would receive the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 contains this promise. It was John that quickly picked up on this coming ministry of the Holy Spirit as recorded in John 14-16. He also focused on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 2:27. Study these verses as a whole.

Paul also touched on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 and 2 Corinthians 3:1-18. These are amazing texts! I want evidence of the inner teacher illuminating people. The natural mind is closed to mysteries of God. Those filled with the Holy Spirit hear His voice and are alive with hunger for the Word of God and have corresponding illumination from the inner teacher.

I am not impressed by religious people who approach the Bible and theology from a merely rational basis. This was the pattern of the scribes and Pharisees. They had blind eyes and deaf ears. They were void of the inner teacher. They were neither hearing nor following the voice of Jesus. They talked about God, but their morals and theology were very messed up.

If the Bible is a mystery to you, then you need to meet Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. He will fill you with His Spirit and then the inner teacher will take up residency in your spirit.

The natural mind cannot understand the Scriptures nor the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-31) I learned a long time ago that it does no good to send ducks to eagle school. No matter how much training you give, it will always be a duck.

### **Ministry in Motion: Mark 4:35-36**

“35) On that day, when evening came, He said to them, “Let us go over to the other side.” 36) Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.”



These two verses speak volumes. It is easy to skip over them. But let's hit the pause button and muse on these verses for a few minutes. I believe they contain an important message for us.

As the crowds were increasing, Jesus made the abrupt decision to depart to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Keep in mind, these parables started because the multitude had grown so large that Jesus got into a boat and had His disciples push off shore so He could teach from a floating pulpit. (See Mark 4:1)

When He finished teaching, Jesus did something astounding. Rather than landing on shore and trying to navigate the crowd, Jesus simply ordered His disciples to cross over to the other side. Verse 36 says; "Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him."

They didn't return home and pack, buy supplies, or even say goodbye. They merely pointed the bow toward the other side of the lake and departed. It is reasonable that the boat had some supplies on board, but not for Jesus. The text says, "they took Jesus along with them, just as He was..." Other boats also followed, but the storm may have caused some to turn back.

So what is the application to these verses? This is easy to miss and even get wrong, but ministry is often spontaneous. We need to be flexible to set our plans aside and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We thrive on detailed schedules. For example, I like setting a day aside to pray and prepare for intervention sessions with demonically tormented people. But I don't always have that luxury. I am learning that Jesus is always present with me and ready for anointed ministry.

We in the western church expect the Holy Spirit to show up during the slot of time set aside for Him in our Sunday morning service. We are gracious and flexible to allow a fifteen minute margin just in case something really special happens. But then we need to pack up and move on to the other activities we have planned.

But Jesus and His disciples were always prepared and ready for whatever they encountered. They were ready to preach, teach, heal, cast out demons, and meet pressing needs whenever and wherever it unfolded around them. They practiced "Ministry in Motion."

When you study the four Gospels and the book of Acts, you discover that much of ministry was not planned. It was spontaneous, providential, and powerful. Ministry unfolded within the ebb and flow of daily life. They didn't always have time to pray, plan, and schedule the next event. They did ministry in motion as they went through each day.

Frankly, these two verses convict me! God is showing me that walking in the Spirit means 1 Peter 3:15; "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence..." I am consciously trying to follow those inner promptings throughout the day and talk to people with open ended conversation. I am trying to learn "ministry in motion."

Let me be clear, this is not my usual western mindset. I am conditioned to schedule the working of the Holy Spirit. The balance of the time is for me, my bucket list and my activities.

I've been a difficult case, but I am trying to learn the meaning of ministry in motion. Faith is in the now. Ministry unfolds in the now. Walking in the Spirit is in the now. Ministry happens in

motion. Praying and communing with God is in the now! The filling of the Holy Spirit is constant throughout the day. As a result we can always be ready for spontaneous ministry.

Here is the application: God wants to use you and me for His glory just as we are in the now. Ministry unfolds in the now through the ebb and flow of everyday life. God is always at work around us and He invites us to join Him and discover the power of "Ministry in Motion."

### **Facing Storms in Life: Mark 4:37-41**

"And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, 'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?' And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still.' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?' They became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'"

As they were crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus took the opportunity to catch some needed sleep. His intense ministry schedule was exhausting. His humanity had the same needs for rest and good nutrition that you and I have.

Crossing the sea was an easy task for His disciples. Four of them were experienced fishermen and mariners. They were back in their own environment. I'm sure they even offered Jesus the sleeping cushion and assured Him they had everything under control. He fell into a sound sleep.

Soon a fierce gale of wind came upon them. Waves were beating over the bow and they were taking on water quicker than they could bail. The boat was filling with water. They were losing control. They were close to perishing. Panic seized them.

Meanwhile, Jesus was peacefully sleeping on the cushion platform in the back of the boat. Question: Are you ever caught in a life crisis and wonder if God even notices?

As a last resort, they awoke Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" The statement was emphatic; "We are perishing!" In other words; "We are going to die!" That was it. They didn't even ask Him to save them. They were fixated on a natural perspective.

I may have this wrong, but it reads as if they were actually annoyed that Jesus wasn't helping them. An extra set of hands may have made a big difference. But let's be honest, the storm was stronger than their combined natural abilities. Two more hands in the natural realm was not going to make any difference. Jesus was not opposed to human effort. After He calmed the storm they needed to row to shore.

This was the ultimate test of their theology. If Jesus was a mere man, maybe they expected Him to grab a bucket and help them bail water. I'm not sure from the context they even considered the "God option." They were about to discover His true identity. What Jesus did absolutely shocked them.

Jesus being aroused from His sleep spoke to the wind and the sea. He gave them a command. He simply said; "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. At His command the storm immediately ended.

Then He asked them two questions: “Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?” In other words, “Why did you face the storm with a physical response and didn’t even consider a faith response?” He marveled that they only considered the natural or physical options. Fear always nullifies faith. The opposite is also true.

Instead of answering His question, they became very much afraid of His demeanor. They had witnessed a phenomenal miracle and they each recognized the implication of what just happened. They said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

Think about the progressive revelation into the true identity of Jesus Christ they had witnessed in recent weeks. He had authority in His preaching and teaching. He had authority over unclean spirits and demons. He had authority over fever, sickness, disease, leprosy, and paralysis. He had authority to forgive sin and to heal on the Sabbath. But this was a new level of authority.

They were dumbfounded by what they had just witnessed. Jesus also had authority over the natural forces of fierce winds and waves. They were all wrestling with the same question; “Who is this guy?”

That was the preliminary question they needed to settle before they were ready to answer His two questions to them. He had given them His authority, but they were not ready to apply the good fight of faith to every life circumstance until they resolved His true identity mystery.

The same is true of you and me. We will always respond naturally and carnally until we fully comprehend our true identity and authority “in Christ.” We will forever be frantically grabbing buckets to bail water in the flesh, rather than speaking to our storms in the name and authority of Jesus Christ.

As I read this story, they were astonished by what Jesus did in calming the storm. Jesus on the other hand was equally astonished that they were so timid that they didn’t even consider standing in their faith and the authority that He had given them in facing this storm. He was implying that they could have done the same thing He did in the story, but they were too timid to even try. They didn’t even consider the faith option.

I confess, this story provokes me especially when I analyze the two questions that Jesus asked them. Sadly, they were so amazed by the miracle that they missed His questions. He was trying to teach them a profound truth about faith and authority and how to face storms in life. But they totally missed it!

I will go no deeper at this time except to refer you to 2 Corinthians 10:2-5. It appears that Paul got it. He was living on the level Jesus was trying to build into His disciples. He was living on the level of faith and not fear. He faced his battles through the divine authority and power given him “in Christ.”

But you protest; “Why then did Paul not calm the storm in Acts 27?” I respond; “His faith did bring him through the storm and spared the 276 people traveling with him. It also resulted in reaching the Island of Malta with the Gospel and Paul’s eventual safe arrival in Rome with many open doors among Roman soldiers.”

Living on the level of faith doesn't mean we don't endure some storms in life. But it does mean our composure is different. We take bold "faith measures" in the face of the storm and it ensures supernatural outcomes with all glory going to Jesus! Are you living by faith or fear?

*(The Sea of Galilee is eight miles wide, thirteen miles long, and 150 feet deep. It sits in a rift valley, meaning the earth has split apart and created the mountainous valley and the lake inside it. Storms come up suddenly and, because of the size of the lake and the mountains around it, they can be very severe.*

*In 1986, there was a drought in Israel and some local fisherman discovered a sunken boat in the northwest corner of the lake. It turned out to be from approximately the same time as Jesus. Great care was used to remove it from the lake, preserve it, and move it to a museum in Ginosar, on the western side of the lake.*

*While no one claims this is the same boat mentioned in the Bible, it does tell us a lot about what the boat in this passage would have been like. The "Ancient Galilee Boat," as it is called, is 27 feet long, 7 ½ feet wide, and about four feet deep. This is not a small boat.*

*While it is built primarily from cedar, experts found many types of wood were used to repair it while it was in use –probably over the course of about 100 years. It was probably passed down from generation to generation.*

*What that means for us as we read this passage is that the four disciples who were fishermen almost certainly came from many generations of fishermen of that same lake. When Mark says the "boat was already filling up," that means the water inside the boat was approaching four feet deep. When the disciples cried out that they were all going to die, those cries were not the hysterics of scared little girls. These were seasoned, experienced, fishermen of this very lake. They were absolutely qualified to assess the situation as life-threatening. So, when Jesus rebuked the wind and waves and everything went flat and calm – and they weren't going to die like they thought was inevitable just seconds before – it's absolutely understandable that the disciples were astounded and amazed.) – dj*

### **Confronting Legion: Mark 5:13**

"1) They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. 2) When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, 3) and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; 4) because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. 5) Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. 6) Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; 7) and shouting with a loud voice, he said, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!" 8) For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" 9) And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many." 10) And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11) Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. 12) The demons implored Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." 13) Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea."

This text is pregnant with insight into the spiritual realm. As Jesus and His disciples came to the other side of the sea, they landed in the country of the Gerasenes. This was the gate of the region known as "Decapolis." (See Mark 5:20)

Immediately, they were met by a man who was possessed with many unclean spirits. It was almost like Satan had planted him there as a gatekeeper to the region of Decapolis. His job was to run interference with anyone trying to bring the good news of the gospel to his region. (See 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

It will take a few sections to squeeze the insights out of this text. For now, I simply want to look at some common characteristics that accompany people who are demonized.

In the New Testament, there appears to be two kinds of demon possession. First, there were those who “used” or channeled demonic spirits and had paranormal powers. This could be illustrated by Simon the magician. (See Acts 8:9-24) Second, there were those who were “abused” by the demonic spirits. This can be illustrated by the man with legions in this text in Mark 5:1-20.

Though not a complete list, today I want to look at some common characteristics of those abused by demonic spirits. These points come directly from the description of the man possessed by legions in this text in Mark.

First, they often have a preoccupation with death. He was living in the tombs. Demons often isolate captive people by default because demonized people soon start to display various degrees of social abnormalities, vices, fixations, vulgarities, or perversions.

Second, they can have abnormal physical strength. He was not able to be restrained by shackles or chains. He would break them to pieces. No one was strong enough to subdue him. He was bent toward violence. (See also Acts 19:15-17)

Third, he was emotionally and mentally tormented. He would cry out night and day among the tombs and in the mountains. He was being abused by the unclean spirits. Mental anguish can be severe and tragic.

Fourth, he practiced self mutilation. He would cut and gash himself with stones. The end goal can be suicide. (John 10:10 is very descriptive.)

Fifth, he was possessed by many spirits. In Mark 5:9, the dominant spirit confessed to Jesus, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” This condition is common among demonized people. (See Matthew 12:43-45)

Sixth, he recognized Jesus. Verse 6 says; “And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him.” Demon spirits always recognize Jesus and His authority.

Seventh, according to verse 8, the unclean spirits were resisting the command of Jesus to come out of him. The timing of this story happened before the work of Jesus on the cross which added some theological drama to the story.

Eighth, unclean spirits have names, a purpose or mission, their own persona and can speak through people with their own voice. (See Mark 5:6-12) This is often referred to as a “demonic manifestation.”

Ninth, the demonic spirits were able to go into the swine. It appears that some animals can serve as hosts to demonic spirits. This point is a mystery, but tragically some animals are frequently associated with ritualistic ceremonies.

Finally, the man was totally set free by Jesus from all demonic activity. Verse 15 says; “They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the “legion”; and they became frightened.” Jesus Christ came to break every yoke and set captives free. He is both Savior and Deliver.

This serves as a brief synopsis of the subject of demon possession. If you want a deeper biblical study on this subject, please attend a Freedom Quest Workshop or order a workbook from our GoServ Global office. The Bible has much to say about this subject and spiritual warfare is a reality. The good news is that Jesus Christ is still in the business of saving people and setting them free from darkness, oppression and bondage.

### **The Power of a Testimony: Mark 5:10-17**

“10) And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. 11) Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. 12) The demons implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.” 13) Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea. 14) Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. 15) They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the “legion”; and they became frightened. 16) Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. 17) And they began to implore Him to leave their region.”

This might qualify as the shortest mission trip in the Bible. It doesn’t take long for the seeds of the gospel to be planted. When they sprout and start growing, amazing things can happen.

The herdsmen observed the exchange between Jesus and the man with the legion of demons. I often chuckle at this picture. Who wants a job herding two thousand swine in the open range? Pigs are known to have minds of their own. It is not mentioned how many herdsmen were required for 2,000 swine, but it must have been many.

Luke 15:15-17 gives some commentary on pig farming in this region. The prodigal son ended up in the pig fields feeding swine. It was the lowliest of jobs. The text indicates the swine were concentrated around feeding troughs.

The lunatic man with legions of demons made his home between the tombs and the swine fields. It is not a stretch to assume that he satisfied his appetite eating slop among the swine. This was the same temptation as that of the starving prodigal son in Luke 15:16. The man with legions of demons was more at home among the swine than with people.

But, don’t make the mistake of assuming that all demon-possessed people become this dysfunctional. Those being “abused” by unclean spirits certainly can be mercilessly tormented. But those being “used” by demons can be given positions of power, influence, and authority. (See Luke 4:5-6) Such was the deal Satan offered Jesus during His temptations in the wilderness.

As Legion begged Jesus not to send them out of the country, he entreated Him to send them into the swine. It must be noted that this encounter took place prior to the death, burial, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ where Satan was defeated. We are now in a different time and epoch. (See Acts 1:7) Today, born-again Christians minister by different rules when engaging the enemy in deliverance ministry.

As soon as they departed into the swine, the herdsmen lost control over the pigs. We could say that chaos broke out. The entire herd of swine rushed down the steep bank and perished in the sea. They committed mass “pigocide.” I know that is not an English word, but it captures the sadistic nature of Satan. (See John 10:10) He treats swine and people the same.

It is here that the story takes a tragic turn. The herdsmen ran into the city and reported the whole incident. (Mark 5:14-17) Many came out to see and hear what had happened. The scene that awaited them was frightening. The contrast was chilling.

To one side, they saw the formerly demon-possessed man seated by Jesus fully clothed and in his right mind. Jesus always gives new clothes and a new mind to those who come to Him. Toward the sea they saw the two thousand pigs. Some were already dead and bobbing in the waves. Others were most likely still squealing and drowning.

Fear gripped them and they did the most unthinkable thing. They began to entreat Jesus to depart from their region. Being the perfect gentleman, Jesus beckoned His disciples back into the boat and peacefully departed. However, as we shall see in the next section, Jesus left behind one new believer to tell his story throughout Decapolis. (Mark 5:20)

What difference can one man or woman make? Ask the city of Sychar about the influence of the Samaritan woman. (See John 4:1-45) Ask the people of Decapolis about the impact of the formerly demon-possessed man who Jesus set free and healed. (Mark 5:18-20)

Never underestimate the power of a testimony. Ask the people in the wake of your testimony and influence if Jesus can make a difference? If there are none, you have a problem that needs fixing.

### **Go and Tell Your Story: Mark 5:18-20**

”18) As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. 19) And He did not let him, but He said to him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” 20) And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.”

The story now takes a surprising turn. The formerly demon-possessed man begged Jesus to let him go with him into the boat and become one of His followers, but Jesus said “no.”

Jesus had totally set him free. He was seated with Jesus and his disciples. He was clothed, and in his right mind. He had a new life and for the first time could interact with people. Because of his previous manner of life, he had nothing and no one to go back to. He was basically homeless with no family or friends as a support group..

Verse 19 says; “Jesus did not let him go, but said to him, go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you.” He was a new believer. All he had was his story, but it was an amazing story.

So what difference can one man or one woman make? Verse 20 says that he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for himself, and everyone marveled.

Let this story burn into your mind. Jesus and his disciples got into the boat and began to row away. Meanwhile, the former demon-possessed man was left alone to tell his story throughout Decapolis.

We pick the story up again at Mark 7:31. Jesus and his disciples returned again to the region of Decapolis, but this time the people ran to meet Him. What a contrast to the rejection He had received following his first few hours in that region.

What brought about this transformation to the entire region of Decapolis?

It can be attributed to one new believer, faithfully telling his story. This time, Jesus received such a welcome that according to Mark chapter 8:1-10, this became the very location where Jesus ended up feeding the 4000.

I believe this is a picture of what Jesus wants to do in and through every new believer. He wants to radically change them and then use their story to spread the gospel far and wide.

Jesus wants to change you and then have you share your story with people around you. This is a picture of the great commission. The question is what is your story? Has Jesus made a change in your life and are you willing to share that story with others?

### **A God-Sized Problem: Mark 5:21-25**

“21) When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. 22) One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet 23) and implored Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.” 24) And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him.”

As Jesus returned to the other side of the sea, a large crowd gathered around Him. They all had needs that demanded attention. Most people are motivated to seek Jesus from selfish motives.

Soon, a synagogue official named Jairus came up and fell at His feet. He was entreating Jesus to come and heal his little daughter because she was at the point of death.

He was a religious leader, but he was not there to argue theology. He was seeking Jesus because of a life-and-death situation. Jesus was the only hope for His little girl.

I have discovered that people's theology tends to be colored by their life circumstances. Most people facing a serious life crisis are desperate to cry out to Jesus. But when life is normal, they often have no time or desire to seek Him. I believe in seeking Jesus through both the good times and the bad. I also believe in crisis evangelism.

In keeping with His compassion, Jesus went off with the synagogue official, but the crowd was pressing in on Him and blocking their progress. The untimely delay proved deadly. As the story goes, the little girl died before they could reach her.



I don't want to skip ahead, but sometimes our situation gets worse. It now became a matter of raising the dead rather than merely healing a sick girl. The question is: "Which is too difficult for Jesus?"

It now becomes a matter of your theology and your view of the identity of Jesus Christ. If He is a mere man, healing the sick is much easier. If He is God, the severity of the situation is irrelevant because all things are possible with God!

### **The Healed Woman: Mark 5:25-34**

"26) A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, 27) and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse— after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. 28) For she thought, 'If I just touch His garments, I will get well.' 29) Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30) Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched My garments?' 31) And His disciples said to Him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' " 32) And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33) But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. 34) And He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.'"

This is an amazing miracle and story about healing. The woman had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years. That's a long time to be sick. She sought help from many doctors, spent all of her money and her condition only got worse.

I have seen this happen to many people today. She was not alone in her plight. There is a place for medical intervention, but not to the exclusion of God. Good doctors are the first to point people to God, faith and the need for prayer.

As Jesus and the crowd walked past her, she developed an interesting plan. She thought to herself, "If I just touch His garments, I shall get well." She had gained huge faith in the healing power of Jesus Christ. She had lost all faith in doctors.

Her problem had not been a lack of faith, her problem was misplaced faith. She had been believing in doctors, medicine, and various medical treatments above God!

Sure enough, as she touched the garments of Jesus, she was immediately healed. Her flow of blood dried up. She felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.

Much has been written and preached about this story. Some imply that you need to touch Jesus just right or be sincere enough in order to be healed.

I maintain that small faith in the right object can make a huge difference. It wasn't the amount of her faith that suddenly made the difference, it was that she finally put her faith in Jesus. He was and is the right object!

The interesting part of the story is that Jesus perceived that power had gone out of Him. This seems to indicate that the healing was not from His active will, it was from sincere belief in His identity, authority, and power. Why? He alone has the authority and power to heal!

I am sorry, but the context forces that conclusion. She was not double-minded. She didn't wrestle with whether or not it was God's "will" to heal her. She put her faith in the identity, authority, and power of Jesus. She didn't even ask Him to heal her. For her, the healing had nothing to do with His will, it was about His identity.

Jesus immediately looked around to see who had touched Him. The disciples noted the size of the crowd and the many incidentally bumping into Jesus. But Jesus was looking for the one who was healed!

Soon the woman, fearing and trembling, came and bowed down before Jesus and told the whole truth. Then, In verse 34, Jesus openly commended her faith. She went away healed.

I like this story! It stretches my understanding of faith, healing, and the authority of Jesus Christ. When praying for healing, I no longer say; "If it be your will." That is a confession of double-mindedness. I cringe when people join the praying and cancel all faith with that phrase.

James 1:5-8 exposes the futility of double-mindedness. Later, in James 5:13-16, James commands the sick to call the church leaders and pray for healing.

This text helped me settle the issue about God's will when it comes to praying for healing. According to James; it is always God's will for us to pray for healing. I removed the phrase "If it be Thy will" from my praying for the sick.

Honestly, the more biblical prayer would be; "Jesus, I ask you to heal because of your identity, authority and power... and I am praying this way because your Word commands us to pray for healing."

Another version might be; "I now command your healing based on the identity, authority, and power of Jesus Christ!" Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out unclean spirits. It must be His will that we do so! (Matthew 10:1; 7-8)

When I pastor a church, I adopt the policy; "if you're sick enough to go to the doctor, you're sick enough to call the elders to anoint you with oil and pray in faith for healing!" We have seen God do some amazing things. It always helped!

I will leave you to wrestle with this text and these concepts. More and more, I am moving to "the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick..." (James 5:18) Did you notice the word "will" in that verse?

My faith is not in healing or a personal gift of healing. My faith is in the identity, authority, and power of Jesus Christ. My focus is on Him. My faith is in Him. I make Him responsible for the healing. In this way, His Name and reputation are at stake for the results!

### **False Perceptions About Jesus: Mark 5:35-44**

"35) While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" 37) But Jesus, overhearing what

was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.” 37) And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38) They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. 39) And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep.” 40) They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child’s father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. 41) Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). 42) Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. 53) And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat.”

Because of His delay, the little girl died. As a result, Jesus has to combat four false perceptions.

False perception number one: You’re too late! The girl had died! But God’s timing is always perfect.

False perception number two: You’re too weak! “This is now too difficult for you.” But according to a similar story in John 11:25; Jesus is the resurrection and the life!

False perception number three: You’re too shallow! “You don’t care!” “If you really loved us, you would have been here on time to heal our daughter!”

False perception number four: You’re crazy. This was the reaction of the crowd when Jesus said the girl was only sleeping.

What Jesus did in the story by raising the girl from the dead sent a strong message to everyone who heard: “Your perspective is too small!”

### **The Peril of Unbelief: Mark 6:1-6**

“1) Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. 2) When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? 3) Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him. 4) Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.” 5) And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6) And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.”

This was the first major trip Jesus made back to His hometown after launching his public ministry. In His home town He was simply known as “the carpenter.”

On the Sabbath, he entered the very synagogue where He grew up, accompanied by His disciples. But to everyone’s surprise, He went forward and started teaching. He had attended this synagogue for thirty years, but this was the first time He stepped into the role of the teacher.

The people were astonished and began asking insightful questions. First, where did this man get these things? Second, what is this wisdom given to Him? Third, where did He get the power to do these miracles? Finally, is this not the carpenter and these His family members?

He was most likely preaching the gospel and calling them to repentance. They took offense at Him. They accused Him of being judgmental.

But then the text takes an astonishing turn. It says; “5) and He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6) And He wondered at their unbelief.

It appears that faith and the working of God go hand in hand. He did heal a few people, but it was very minimal. Those healed may have been outsiders who were following Him from place to place.

Among those from His family were His step brothers James and Judas. Each of them were later used by the Holy Spirit to write a book of the New Testament.

James 1:6-8 may serve as an insightful commentary on what transpired in His hometown; “6) But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7) For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

My unbelief does not limit the infinite God, but it hinders me from experiencing His amazing work in my life. Faith is not only the basis for salvation, it also has a bearing on entering into His protection, provision, deliverance, healing, and our heavenly blessings “in Christ.”

The good news is that faith can grow! It grows through worship, the study of Scripture, intercessory prayer and serving on the front lines of world evangelism. Hearing the stories of what God is doing for others also feeds our faith. Ask God to increase your faith!

Gather some courageous people and engage in Acts 4:29-31 praying. I love earth-shaking prayer meetings where the Holy Spirit is poured out in fresh ways.

It is also important to step out and take God at His Word! This is the best way to kill fear and doubt. If God says it, then do it, and expect Him to keep His Word!

I also avoid spending much time with critics, doubters and pessimists. Faithless people mumble, groan, and complain. They suck up time, energy, and emotions. These people constantly opposed Moses during the Exodus. If you want to walk in God's presence, separate from them. They will drag you down.

### **Sending the Twelve: Mark 6:7-13**

“7) And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; 8) and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belt— 9) but to wear sandals; and He added, “Do not put on two tunics.” 10) And He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. 11) Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.” 12) They went out and preached that men should repent. 13) And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.”

This is the condensed version of Jesus sending out the twelve to do ministry. Jesus wanted them to learn how to live by faith.

He wanted them to preach the simple gospel, call people to repentance, cast out demons, and anoint many sick people with oil and heal them.

I confess, this is not how I learned to do ministry. The training Jesus gave His disciples was way too radical to be taught at my Bible College. We were taught a more rational and systematic approach. We got natural results and turned out carnal believers.

The training Jesus gave His disciple was on par with Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. He wanted people to develop a dynamic faith that was rooted in the power of God! The modern church turns out a static faith rooted in the wisdom of man.

As I travel the world, I am discovering that many Christians are following the simple approach Jesus taught His disciples here and in Matthew 10. Not surprisingly, they are seeing the same results and witnessing profound conversions.

I am not going to elaborate on this text, except to say the church in the book of Acts followed this instruction by Jesus. They saw dramatic conversions and produced disciples of dynamic faith.

### **Descriptive Verses: Mark 6:12-13**

"12) They went out and preached that men should repent. 13) And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."

I want to make a few more comments on these two verses. First, they are descriptive and not prescriptive. In other words, these verses are describing what the disciples were actually doing in ministering to people. They were casting out demons and healing people in Jesus' name.

Second, the timing is important. This was happening prior to the day of Pentecost. They were not acting from spiritual gifts of healing, they were doing these things through the Name and the authority of Jesus Christ.

These two insights may sound trivial, but they are of profound importance. It sounds like each of the disciples were getting these results. Granted this is describing the twelve. We could argue that this authority only applied to the Apostles. But in Luke 10:1-20, Jesus gave the same command to the seventy, and they had the same results.

As easy as it is to skip over the implications of these verses, Mark 16:16-18 includes casting out unclean spirits and healing people as part of the Great Commission. These are among the signs that would accompany those who believe. Again, Mark 16 was prior to Pentecost.

What does that mean? It appears that casting out unclean spirits and healing is not restricted to the Apostles or those with gifts of healing, rather it is for every believer who understands their authority "in Christ."

Having been involved in deliverance ministry for years, I totally understand how unclean spirits respond to the Name and authority of Jesus Christ. We have worked with many people and watched Jesus Christ set them free.

But when it comes to healing people, I have been shy about even praying for healing. To my shame, I have hidden behind the excuse that, "I do not have the gift of healing!"

That is why I wrestle with these texts in Luke and Mark. (Similar texts also appear in Matthew and John) These texts, when understood in the context of timing, totally obliterate my excuses. I have shared this previously, but I will highlight it again. These texts are not based on the spiritual gift of healing, they are based on the authority of Jesus Christ!

Could it be that we have not because we ask not? The root problem may be that we are ignoring the simple command of Jesus to heal people in His name. We do not understand our authority "in Christ."

### **The Twisted Theology of Herod The King: Mark 6:14-28**

"14) And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." 15) But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16) But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" 17) For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. 18) For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19) Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; 20) for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him."

Political figures often dabble in religious pursuits for selfish reasons. God can and does want to reach people in high places with the gospel. There are numerous examples of this in the Bible. (See 1 Timothy 2:1-8)

But the problem comes when the political figure has no desire to obey or follow God, but merely placate their own conscience or manipulate people. Such was the case with King Herod.

Herod's motivation for promoting the notion that Jesus was John the Baptist who had risen from the dead was to appease the people. He was trying to rebuild public trust and favor from his fiasco of killing John the Baptist.

I love watching God work in the lives of political figures. I utterly despise watching political figures use and manipulate religion for selfish or political reasons. There is a huge difference between these two.

God has every right to influence those in politics, but political figures are often very poor theologians. The theology of Herod the King was disastrous. His root problem came down to him using "god" rather than obeying God!

### **Team-Building: Mark 6:30-32**

"30) The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. 32) And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) 33) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves."

Just like the seventy would later return and report to Jesus about their ministry success (Luke 10:17), so had the twelve. There is no record of their stories, but they shared with Him all they had done and taught.

I like this text. Jesus was interested in their stories. The same is true of you and me as we serve Him. He wants to be part of our lives.

Unfortunately, they were so busy with the people, the ministry team did not have time for meaningful exchange. Jesus saw the value of team-building. So they got in a boat and sought a place of solitude to debrief, reflect, and relax. There are valuable lessons to learn from these verses.

### **The Crowds: Mark 6:33-34**

“33) The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. 34) When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.”

We now come to a growing phenomenon that accompanied the public ministry of Jesus. He was constantly attracting crowds. It actually became problematic. In this story, He was seeking solitude, but the crowd ran to intercept Him and His disciples.

We now have to answer the question, “Why?” What attracted people to Jesus from everywhere to the point that they thronged after Him?

I see at least four things: His ministry was based on compassion. His messages were based on truth. His miracles were based on authority. And His mannerisms were based on agape love. He alone promised faith, hope, life, and love... and He delivered. People were starving for these things. In this story, 5,000 people frantically ran to a remote place to meet Him.

It should be observed that the same phenomenon accompanied the spread of the gospel in the book of Acts. People are hungry for these things. It was true then and it is true now!

### **Five Thousand Hungry People: Mark 6:35-37**

“35) When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, “This place is desolate and it is already quite late; 36) send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” 37) But He answered them, “You give them something to eat!” And they said to Him, “Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?”

The disciples recognized they had a problem brewing. The crowd was huge, the time was getting late, they were all hungry and there were no restaurants in this remote place. They had a crisis brewing.

Their solution was that Jesus needed to send the people away immediately so they could return to the city to buy food. They were unprepared for His next command; “You give them something to eat!”

Their response was so natural. I can imagine one of them turning to Judas and asking, “How much money do we have?” The second question quickly followed, “What is our budget for this project?” I don’t know who proposed the budget, but two hundred denarii was quickly proposed. Then someone did the math; they were still short of the needed amount.

We often reduce ministry to money. I admit, money can help, but ministry is not measured by money. Many times the absence of money sets the stage for the true miracle. They were looking to money as their provider. They failed to acknowledge that the true Provider was standing right in front of them. They were stuck in a money mindset!

Sadly, not one of them asked, “Jesus, what would you do?” Neither did anyone propose turning to God in prayer.

I’m not going to be too critical of the disciples. Their sandals fit really well on my feet. We are conditioned to think in terms of ministry and budgets.

Apart from a major prompting from Jesus, I would have never directed the people to sit in groups of fifties and hundred and then taken the five loaves and two fish and blessed them. This miracle was in a category way beyond healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits. This was changing the laws of physics. This was pulling fish and bread out of thin air. They needed some big food trucks to show up quickly.

Speaking of food trucks, this was small compared to what Moses faced. He had millions of people in the wilderness to feed for forty years. He needed a daily supply chain.

At some point, ministry is going to include food, clothing, and shelter. It is going to include trusting God to take care of the daily physical needs of people.

### **Abundant Leftovers: Mark 6:38-44**

“38) And He said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go look!” And when they found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” 39) And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. 40) They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. 41) And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. 42) They all ate and were satisfied, 43) and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. 44) There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.”

This scene is hard to imagine. The total number of people was staggering. Matthew 14:21 says, “There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.” The total crowd may have been upwards of fifteen thousand. That requires a lot of fish and chips!

Think about it, with groups of fifty to one hundred each, that meant there were over 150 groups. The two fish and five loaves were inadequate for even one group. It may have met the needs of Jesus and His disciples, but feeding fifteen thousand people with two fish and five loaves was humanly impossible.

The amazing thing about the story was everyone ate and was satisfied. When they collected the leftovers, they had twelve baskets full. That was one basket for each disciple. The two fish and five loaves would have barely filled the bottom of one basket.



There are a few stories of God multiplying food in the Bible. It happened under Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, but this was huge. For the people, this put Jesus in the category of the three people mentioned above. This miracle was Jesus saying; "I am the God of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha."

This is an example of Ephesians 3:20-21; "20) Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21) to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." The twelve full baskets were abundantly beyond the need.

### **Jesus the Intercessor: Mark 6:45-46**

"45) Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. 46) After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray."

These verses speak volumes. After feeding the 5,000 Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and depart for Bethsaida. Meanwhile, He Himself sent the crowd away. I can only imagine the conversations He had with the departing people.

Jesus had another meeting in mind. He departed for the mountain to pray. He often spent time alone with His Father in prayer. This was the fuel that filled His ministry tank.

I will not labor long over this point, though I have pondered it often over the years; "If Jesus needed time for prayer and solitude with His Father, how much more do we?" This was the #1 delight of His earthly journey.

According to Romans 8:27, Jesus still occupies the office of intercessor. It seems to be an eternal office for Him. It is another office He invites us into. How blessed is the man or woman who ventures into the mountain alone with Him.

### **Night Vision and Walking on Water: Mark 6:47-52**

"47) When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. 48) Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. 49) But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50) for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." 51) Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, 52) for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened."

Mark gives a slightly different spin on this story than Matthew. (See Matthew 14:22-33) Mark leaves out the incident of Peter attempting to walk on the water. Instead, he focuses on two miraculous qualities of Jesus.

First, Mark comments on the incredible eye sight of Jesus. He noted that Jesus saw them clearly from a long way off in the dark of night struggling against the wind.

I don't know how to respond to the incredible eye sight of Jesus, but He saw their struggle. I'm not sure if He had super night vision because He was seeing through His Spirit or through His omniscience. Was this a hint He was Jehovah Elroi? (God who sees)

Mark stresses the fact that He clearly saw them in the fourth watch of the night from a very long distance. It is comforting to note that He also sees every struggle you and I have as well. Nothing escapes His notice. He saw both their physical struggle with the winds and their spiritual struggle of faith in His true identity.

Second, Mark commented on the fact that Jesus was walking on the water. One thing is for certain, you can make better progress walking into the wind than rowing a boat into the wind. He was moving faster than them, and intended to pass them.

That's when they saw Him. They were so terrified by the sight, they thought He was a ghost. This was the first time any human had taken a stroll across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had to speak to them to calm them down. When He got into the boat with them, the wind stopped and they were greatly astonished.

Mark then pointed out that Jesus was disappointed that they were void of understanding. They failed to gain any insight about Jesus from the feeding of the 5,000. They had seen and heard so much, but their hearts were still hardened. Unfortunately, this describes many followers of Jesus.

### **Healing Ministry in Gennesaret: Mark 6:53-56**

"53) When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. 54) When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, 55) and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. 56) Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured."

Jesus had an amazing reception in the land of Gennesaret. As soon as He came out of the boat, people recognized Him and ran and reported in the whole region that Jesus had come.

This started a fruitful healing ministry. They brought to Him all who were sick. Some had to be carried on pallets. The text states that everyone who touched the fringe of His cloak was cured. The word "cured" might indicate enhanced recovery rather than immediate healing.

Whatever the case, whether it was enhanced recovery or immediate healing, people were restored to health. It caused His popularity to explode in the entire region.

There is not much more to say about these verses. Mark makes it clear that by far the most miracles in the ministry of Jesus related to His healing ministry. Healings accompanied Him everywhere He went. They saw healing as being part of the nature of Jesus Christ. They believed in Him as the Great Physician!

### **Here Come The Critics: Mark 7:1-4**

“1) The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2) and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3) (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4) and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)”

Keep in mind, Jesus was in the land of Gennesaret. It was located in the region of Galilee on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. It was a fishing village located a very long way from Jerusalem. It was at least a four day journey by foot to get to Gennesaret from Jerusalem. It was a rather remote area.

But the popularity of Jesus was spreading fast and everyone seemed to be tracking His itinerary. Keep in mind, this was way before any form of electronic communications. Yet the ruling religious leaders down in Jerusalem knew exactly where Jesus was and sent critics and agitators to run interference with His ministry.

Sure enough, this band of scribes and Pharisees arrived at Gennesaret and started their devious work. Ironically, they could not fault Jesus with His teaching or miracles, even though they constantly accused Him of casting out unclean spirits by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. (See Matthew 12:22-37)

This time they tried a new tactic. They accused Jesus and His disciples of violating the traditions of the elders. They could not counter or match his authority, miracles, power, or teachings, so they accused him of violating established religious traditions. Many use the same tactic today!

Look carefully at the text. They specifically went after the disciples neglecting to follow ceremonial washings as laid down by the religious elders before eating. When you pause and think about this accusation, it's both comical and ridiculous. They were accusing a group of rough fishermen and former tax gathers of not following good religious etiquette.

I could imagine the disciples looking down at their calloused and blistered hands and wondering; “What do manicured hands and fingers have to do with being godly?” One glance at the Carpenter and His hands were as calloused and rugged as theirs!

Frankly, if being religious means becoming girlish, most rugged men aren't interested. That's how ridiculous most religious traditions are, yet they are followed without question or serious thought.

Some ask, “Why are men absent from most churches?” If you analyze this text closely, you might discover the answer. Many religious traditions attack masculinity. I sincerely doubt these wimpy scribes and Pharisees would have endured one day with David and his nightly men! Who made the Pharisees the standard of godliness?

We need to step back and ask, “What is a Christian?” For that matter; “What does it take to be godly?” I confess, I'm a bit of a maverick. I love Jesus and the Bible but have zero tolerance for most religious traditions. They distort the gospel and give a false picture of Christian living. Most are external and do nothing to change the human heart.

Stay tuned as Jesus answers the critics. They were about to get a dose of reality and maybe a whiff of fish slime and body odor from hard working men and broken people crying out for help and healing. The traditions of the elders didn't translate very well into the trenches of real life.

### **The Religious Narcotic: Mark 7:5-13**

"5) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, 'Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?' 6) And He said to them, 'Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, 7) But their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' 8) Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.'" 9) He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 20) For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; 11) but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' 12) you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13) thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.'"

This text serves as a strong rebuke to the entire religious system of Israel. They distorted the system God gave them and turned it into a religious system that accommodated their own morals and values, but they basically left God out. They gave lip service to God, but focused on themselves.

This could be excused with pagan religious systems, but Israel was God's chosen people. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul records the fall of the gentiles from God. According to verse 25, "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." Then in Romans 2-3 he records the apostasy of the Jewish people. They were worse than the gentiles because they practiced willful disobedience.

It's amazing how quickly religious systems become "man-centered" rather than "God-centered." If we were honest, it would shock us how much of Christianity today is about "self" rather than "God." We give lip service to God but much of our ceremony is about self.

Theology doesn't shape us as much as we shape it! God created man after His own image, but mankind quickly recreated god after his or her own morals, values, and life philosophies.

We like to cite the fact that Jesus came to His own people and they rejected Him. (John 1:11-12) At least they retained the Ten Commandments. Many modern Christian denominations are polar opposites of the morals and values taught by Jesus and the Bible.

This rebuke of Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees is sobering because it is our measuring stick as well. We are even more guilty of rejecting the Word of God for our religious traditions than they. Why? Because we live after the printing press. Bibles are everywhere, but seldom opened.

Instead, much of Christian literature today is based on secular psychology, self help techniques, and humanism. Throw in some new-age mysticism, evolutionary theory and feel-good conservative politics, and what comes out is modern evangelicalism!

We then baptize this new pseudo-religion in the name “Christianity” and fool ourselves into thinking we are honoring and serving God. Religion often becomes a delusional narcotic that has nothing to do with the God of the Bible.

I know there are many godly Christians out there who genuinely love Jesus and walk in the Spirit, but these are very confusing times. As a whole, Jesus could preach the same Mark 7:5-13 sermon to the modern Christian Church and hit the nail on the head.

### **Jesus gets to the Heart of the Matter: Mark 7:14-19**

“14) After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 15) there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16) [If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”] 17) When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 18) And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19) because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.)”

Jesus was making the strong statement that righteousness and godliness are not determined by external things like hand-washing or diet, but rather by inward things like moral character. The scribes and Pharisees were outwardly keeping the ceremonial traditions and dietary regulations, but inwardly they were filled with anger and jealousy and were actively plotting murder. There was something tragically wrong with this picture.

The digestive tract can eliminate bad food, but a change of heart is needed to clean up bad character. Jesus was explaining a profound principle. Religious legalism has no relationship to godliness. Guard your inner self and the condition of your heart with great diligence. This is where the Holy Spirit starts His work of sanctification immediately after salvation. (See Titus 3:4-7)

Verse 19 says; (Thus He declared all foods clean.) This phrase has been terribly misused. Jesus was in no way declaring all foods equal in terms of health benefits or nutritional value. Old Testament principles provide amazing nutritional insights, especially in these days when our food source is so compromised.

Due diligence when studying good diet and nutrition. Not all foods are produced or created equally. Your diet will not keep you out of heaven. In fact, a bad diet and poor nutrition will get you there much faster. Most chronic diseases come down to lifestyle issues related to poor choices of food, nutrition, diet, and exercise. The Old Testament provides great wisdom on healthy living.

Jesus was simply saying the greatest problem with mankind is connected to the moral condition of the heart and not the foods that enter the stomach and digestive track. He was exposing the vile inner condition of the scribes and Pharisees. They were suffering from a problem that went much deeper than unclean hands or food. They had evil hearts.

### **Changing the Human Heart: Mark 7:20-23**

“20) And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21) For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22) deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23) All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”” Mark 7:20-23

Foods are not moral. Carrots, onions, lamb chops, and beef sticks are neither good or bad, right or wrong. What you eat is not the basis of morality. It passes through the stomach and ends up in the latrine.

But actions are rooted in morality. What you think or do can be good or bad, right or wrong. Action start as thoughts. Evil thoughts, give birth to evil actions. Good thoughts, give birth to good actions. The heart of man is capable of all kinds of evil. This is an inner problem.

The big question is; “what does it take to change the human heart?” That is thrust of the gospel and the inner ministry of the Holy Spirit! That is the hope Jesus came to deliver to humanity. Jesus Christ and the gospel changed people from within!

### **Impossible to Escape Notice: Mark 7:24**

“24) Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice.”

The popularity of Jesus was exploding. Everywhere He went caused traffic jams and stampedes of people. The region of Tyre represented new turf.

As this verse reads, He entered a house seeking rest and solitude. He tried to travel under the radar. This verse is profound, it says, “He wanted no one to know of it, yet He could not escape notice.”

We now deal with the phenomenon of what caused the gospel to spread? The answer is that people who Jesus touched were telling their stories. Everyone was talking about Jesus.

We call these people, “witnesses.” Those healed, set free from demonic oppression or impacted by His teachings were telling their stories.

But let me make an observation, the same thing happened in the book of Acts. The gospel spread and exploded because the witnesses were excited and telling their stories.

Acts 1:8 captures this divine strategy; “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”” God wants His people to tell their stories.

Faith is not intended to be a private or personal matter. Those saved by the gospel and the power of God are expected to tell their stories. Soon others will be impacted by the gospel and start sharing their stories as well. As momentum builds the result can become an awakening.

Two principles accompany faith in the Bible. These principles are seen in Hebrews eleven and throughout the Bible. They are simply that “faith speaks” and “faith acts.” Faith is never intended to be silent or passive.

As you read about the heroes of faith in Hebrews eleven, they all took bold action. They became witnesses for God. The book of Acts might serve as the Hebrews eleven story of faith for the New Testament believers. The four Gospels are the faith stories of those impacted by the public ministry of Jesus.

So what can we glean from this often overlooked and obscure verse in Mark 7:24? It screams of the impact of the witnesses!

When people start talking about Jesus and what the gospel has done for them, great things begin to happen! The wind of the Holy Spirit begins to blow on their stories and phenomenal things start happening. Soon it can resemble a mighty forest fire and spread through the land. Many people can be engulfed by its spread.

Your story is a spark. Sparks start fires. Fires are powerful as they spread. The Great Awakenings started with a few fire brands for the glory of God!

If Jesus and the gospel has impacted your life, then tell your story as you go through life. The wind of the Holy Spirit will take over and do the rest. Saturating your life with prayer and the Word of God will be like adding gasoline to the fire.

Don't swallow the lie that faith is a private matter! Shout it from the rooftops! Go tell it on the mountain! Tell your story often enough and God will use you to start a tsunami for His Glory!

### **The Syrophenician Woman: Mark 7:25-30**

“25) But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. 26) Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27) And He was saying to her, “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” 28) But she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs.” 29) And He said to her, “Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.” 30) And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.”

Matthew tells this same story but adds a few important details. (Matthew 15:21-28) According to Matthew, she was a Canaanite woman and possibly the victim of sexual exploitation. Her dress and boisterous mannerisms were most likely repugnant.

The mention in Mark that she was from the Syrophenician descent means she herself was the byproduct of Greek/Canaanite intermingling common in the Greek and Roman Empire. Her lineage and life story was heart-wrenching.

Her spiritual background was a combination of many pagan religions. The mention of “dogs” is interesting because they were significant creatures of worship seen in art forms from many ancient pagan religions. These religions all channeled demonic entities.

According to Matthew, she came to the house and literally begged Jesus to help her daughter. The disciples were very annoyed by her and wanted Jesus to send her away. But she kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David, for my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." (Matthew 15:22)

Her daughter was being mercilessly tormented by demonic spirits. Her daughter most likely shared many symptoms of the man with legions from Mark 5:1-20. It may have been his story that gave her hope that Jesus could help her daughter. The merciless demonic torment motivated the woman to be persistent and literally shout out after Jesus.

According to Matthew 15:28, Jesus commended her great faith. The woman recognized the identity and authority of Jesus. She was content feeding on crumbs falling from His table. She also understood that His ministry was to the lost people of Israel.

This is where the story becomes very interesting. She recognized that crumbs falling from the table of Jesus offered more hope and help than the orgies and banquets from all the pagan religions combined. They offered no hope or help for her daughter. In fact, the pagan religions perpetuated her daughter's problems.

This woman herself was most likely a victim of the wicked, perverted, cruel, and sadistic practices so common in these pagan religions. It is likely that both she and her daughter had been victims of Satanic Ritual Abuse associated with these pagan religious rites. Many today suffer this same fate and only Jesus Christ can set them free and bring total healing.

Both Matthew and Mark emphasized that Jesus was moved by her answer. He sent her home with the promise that "the demon has gone out of your daughter."

Sure enough, upon returning home, she found the child lying peacefully on her bed, the demon having departed. Jesus set her free! This is the same description found in Mark 5:15 of the formerly demon possessed man sitting down, dressed, and in his right mind. Normality had come to both of them! It is so exciting watching Jesus set the captives free!

It's time to start growing your faith! Jesus Christ has power, dominion, and authority over all the work and activity of the kingdom of darkness. The overwhelming testimony of the four Gospels and the book of Acts is that Jesus has the authority and power to break every sinful bondage, addiction, demonic oppression and heal every form of sickness, disease and injury.

Tragically, few pastors and Christian leaders today have the same view of the authority and power of Jesus Christ displayed by this woman. Many others minimize, resist, or quench the work of the Holy Spirit.

Don't wait for a hopeless crisis or illness to drive you in desperation to the feet of Jesus Christ. Start building your faith and walk in the Spirit now! Read the Bible at face value and believe and live accordingly.

### **Decapolis Welcomes Jesus: Mark 5:21 and 7:31**

"31) Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis."



This is a pivotal verse in the ministry of Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark. The last time the region of Decapolis was mentioned in the text was Mark 5:20. Let's briefly review the story.

After delivering the Gerasene demoniac from a legion of demons, Jesus sent him into the region of Decapolis to tell his story. God used him to break up fallow ground and prepare for the coming of Jesus to that region.

I cannot prove it, but I strongly suspect that everything that happened between Mark 7:24 and 8:38 was building on the delivered man's story and subsequent ministry. That includes such fruitful ministry, that this is the location where Jesus fed the four thousand. Through Jesus thousands more heard the gospel, were healed and fed. Their spiritual hunger and thirst was being satisfied far beyond their physical needs.

Never underestimate the power of your story. Just make sure your story is anchored in the Bible, accurately illustrates the gospel and portrays the power of the Holy Spirit to radically transform a life and free people from sinful bondage.

I know the ministry of the Holy Spirit was future tense from this vantage point in the Gospel of Mark, but the ministry of Jesus looked forward to the giving of the Holy Spirit. (Review John 13-17)

The book of Acts fulfilled the promise of the Father in giving the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:3-8) We are now living in the age of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus has been building His Church for the past 2,000 years. The Epistles lay the foundation of our position "in Christ" and our authority to minister in the Name of Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

Pray, study, learn, and embrace everything the Holy Spirit has for you "in Christ!" Pray Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11 and Colossians 1:9-23 over your life until they become your experience.

Put off the old self, be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self that transforms you into Spirit filled godliness. (Ephesians 4:17-24) Do your part in inviting the Holy Spirit to totally renew you into a fruitful soldier for Christ.

Don't be religious but lost! Develop a deep and personal walk with Jesus Christ through His Spirit. Answer your calling "to God" with more zeal, focus, and priority than your calling "for God." Let ministry be the overflow of your daily walk with God! Seek everything the Holy Spirit has for you "in Christ!" Pursue Jesus Christ with holy abandon and serve Him with your time, talents, spiritual gifts, and financial resources.

Expect Him to greatly expand your boundaries, reach and influence for His glory. You will soon start walking in the ministry secret of 1 Corinthians 2:4-13 as you begin to live and walk in the power of God.

Join with other like minded believers in building "His Church" and impacting the world. Stop controlling Him or stuffing Him into your small humanistic and naturalistic boxes. He is not restricted, defined or limited to the small parameters of human experience.

The story of the man delivered from legion should be small compared to what Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit can do through any consecrated man, woman, teenager, or child walking in the fullness of Christ and the filling of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace, be such a man or woman!

### **Jesus Heals the Deaf and Mute Man: Mark 7:32-37**

“32) They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. 33) Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; 34) and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!” 35) And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. 36) And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. 37) They were utterly astonished, saying, “He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.””

We now have the story of Jesus healing a deaf and mute man. Of course, he also had a speaking impediment that commonly accompanies hearing problems.

A few unique things stand out about this healing: First, Jesus took him aside by himself. The reason for this is not stated, but it may have been the amount of unbelief among the people. Prayer for healing has to be done in faith. (See James 5:15)

Second, Jesus put his finger in his ears and touched his tongue with saliva. He directed His touch specifically to the two areas of impairment. This was very specific treatment. Jesus used a variety of approaches when treating infirmities.

Third, Jesus looked up to heaven with a deep sigh. It appears that He was moved by the man's condition. He had sympathy, empathy, and compassion for him. The man undoubtedly was the victim of social scorn and bullying from his infirmity. He carried inner emotional wounds.

Finally, Jesus spoke the word “Ephphatha” over him. It is a command meaning: “Be opened.” Sure enough, the man was completely healed. I believe he was healed from all three problems. He had two physical infirmities plus most likely had deep emotional scarring that affected his identity. People are cruel to those with hearing and subsequent speech impairments.

This miracle astonished the people. His hearing was healed and immediately his speech became clear. Jesus bypassed the need for speech therapy. This man had years of communicating to catch up on. I wonder what he had to say? Everyone was talking about Jesus and this miracle.

### **Ministry to the Whole Person: Mark 8:1-3**

“1) In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, 2) “I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. 3) If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.””

Before looking at the full story of Jesus feeding the four thousand, we need to look at His heart. What prompted Him to feed this multitude?

First, it must be noted that this was a spontaneous crowd in a remote place. It was not a planned event so there were no provisions for food, clothing, or shelter.

Second, many of them had been there for three days and nights. It turned into an impromptu time of fasting.

Third, there was no end in sight for the spiritual awakening. They had found something in Jesus Christ that was more fulfilling than food or shelter. Such has often been the phenomenon accompanying spiritual awakenings. Time consciousness is often lost in the presence of God.

Fourth, Jesus felt compassion for the many people. He was not on an ego trip, He cared for them. Think about this: He was the Creator and knew well the physical needs of the human body. He cared for them both spiritually and physically.

Finally, Jesus took the initiative to minister to their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. Some would say He had a holistic approach to ministry. He is the Provider of both our physical and spiritual needs.

### **Feeding the Four Thousand: Mark 8:4-12**

“4) And His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?” 5) And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.” 6) And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. 7) They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. 8) And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. 9) About four thousand were there; and He sent them away. 10) And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.”

There are times God responds to needs without being asked. In this story, they were attracted to Jesus by His teaching and healing ministry. After lingering for three days, Jesus perceived the need for food without being asked.

This story underlines the fact that God knows our needs and promises to take care of us. Jesus took inventory of supplies on hand and took the seven loaves and two fish and fed the multitude.

This is an illustration of grace. God does many things for us that we do not realize or even recognize. It most often comes in the areas of provision and protection. He gives us life and breath and our next heartbeat.

If we could see the spiritual realm, we would be shocked by the activity of guardian angels protecting us from unseen dangers and providing for us in ways we take for granted. (See Hebrews 1:14) God is always on duty.

In this story, Jesus blessed the people with an unsolicited provision. It wasn't based on their faith, it was based on the overflow of His goodness. But it was both tangible and obvious.

There is an old hymn that says; “Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.” Our blessings are many! Grace abounds daily!

### **The Folly of Religious Arguments: Mark 8:11-13**

“11) The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. 12) Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, “Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.” 13) Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.”

According to these verses, the Pharisees came out to argue with Jesus. Those who are stagnant in spirit usually resort to religious arguments and debate. (See Zephaniah 1:12) I loathe religious arguments.

They demanded to see a sign from heaven. They were testing Jesus. Think about it, the Pharisees claimed to be the religious leaders. They claimed to be spokesmen for God. Why didn't they offer a sign to prove their spiritual power? Answer: they had none!

In 1 Corinthians 4:19-20, Paul demanded not empty words but proof of spiritual power from his critics. Paul had a valid approach.

The longer I am in ministry, the less impressed I am with theological debate, logic, or empty rationalism. Show me the confirming fruit of God working through your ministry. Show me what God is doing to confirm that you are from Him and not void of spirit.

Matthew covered this same exchange in 16:1-12. There Jesus offered the sign of Jonah. His coming death, burial, and resurrection were going to be the ultimate proof of His claim to Deity.

But think of the context. Jesus had just finished feeding the five thousand and the four thousand. He had healed many who were sick and cast out demons. He had even walked on the water. What more proof was needed?

Meanwhile, His critics had done absolutely nothing to prove their power or authority. But they were relentless in their attack on Him. This was the height of hypocrisy.

Jesus then rebuked His disciples for having such small faith! He seemed to pin it on the empty religious leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their attacks were having a dulling effect on His disciples as well. Their faith was being undermined.

Be careful of the hypnotic effect of empty religious arguments and debate. They can be void of spirit and have a dulling effect on you. Always stop and examine the fruit!

### **The Problem of a Short Memory: Mark 8:14-21**

“14) And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. 15) And He was giving orders to them, saying, “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” 16) They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. 17) And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18) Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, 19) when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They \*said to Him, “Twelve.” 20) “When I broke the seven for the four thousand,

how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." 21) And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

Worry and anxiety are often the result of forgetfulness. No, the problem was not forgetting to take bread. The problem was the tendency of forgetting the extraordinary ways Jesus provided in the past!

Let's do the math. If Jesus could take five loaves and feed five thousand and He multiplied seven loaves to feed four thousand (plus women and children), how many people could He feed with the one loaf they had in the boat? The answer is that they had enough bread with them to sink the boat... because Jesus is the bread of life!

The leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod was denying the Deity of Christ. It was refusing the logical conclusion of His multiple teachings, signs, wonders, and deeds. They rejected Him as Messiah. They had blind eyes, deaf ears, and hard hearts.

We often do the same thing. We fret about little things in the future because we forget about the great things God has done in the past!

If Jesus is God and He dwells in you through faith, then all things are possible. But, if you are an agnostic about the identity of Jesus Christ, naturalism will constantly feed your anxiety! You will live by fear and not faith.

### **A Unique Story of Healing: Mark 8:22-26**

"22) And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. 23) Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" 24) And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around." 25) Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. 26) And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village.""

Jesus and the disciples now travel to Bethsaida. Soon they bring to Him a blind man who entreated Jesus to touch Him. No one was prepared for what Jesus did.

Let's pause for a moment. We often have preconceived notions of what God is going to do or how Jesus is going to meet our needs. The blind man expected Jesus to lay hands on him and heal his sight in the presence of all the people. But that's not what happened.

Instead, Jesus brought him out of the village. Then instead of laying hands on him, Jesus first spit in eyes and then laid hands on Him. I'm shocked at the variety of ways Jesus ministered to people. Some methods, like this miracle, were very unconventional.

Then Jesus asked him a question; "Do you see anything?" The answer was, "I see men, for I see them as men walking about." He had made progress, but the blind man wasn't completely healed. His vision was very blurred.

He most likely had lost his sight at some point, because he had some recognition of people. It's not as if he had been born blind and never seen people before.

But here is the big takeaway from this story, Jesus continued to minister healing to him! This was not a “one and done” event of healing. He again laid hands upon his eyes and looked intently at him. I wonder what Jesus was doing through His intense look?

I believe we give up too easily when praying for healing! Sometimes healing in the ministry of Jesus was immediate. With some the word “recovery” was used because it took time. Some were healed as they departed and obeyed Jesus. (Luke 17:11-19)

In this case, it took more than one touch from Jesus to heal the blind man. Sometimes Jesus laid hands on people and other times He did not. Occasionally Jesus pointed to the faith of the person as being the key for the healing. Other times, touching His garment healed them or His shadow falling on them brought healing. We even have cases of the disciples anointing with oil in the healing process.

But there is more. Jesus sometimes did healing in public and other times in private. He sometimes told people to go and tell their story, yet other times He admonished them to tell no one. In this case He told the blind man to return home without entering the village.

The more I study healing from a biblical perspective, the more exposed my false presumptions become. I have much to learn, but I am convinced the problem with dismal results is rooted within me and not a lack of power or will from Jesus. He still holds the office of the Great Physician. He is still in the business of healing people and setting them free.

I am developing a growing faith and tenacity when it comes to this subject. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

I no longer shun or explain away biblical texts that deal with deliverance, healing, or miracles. I am starting to double down when ministering to people and appeal to the authority of Jesus Christ and the power of His name. I am starting to understand and apply the Bible literally in these areas.

### **The Most Important Question: Mark 8:27-30**

“27) Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, “Who do people say that I am?” 28) They told Him, saying, “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.” 39) And He continued by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” 30) And He warned them to tell no one about Him.”

They had traveled with Jesus for nearly three years. His disciples heard His teachings, beheld His miracles, and observed Him on a daily basis. It was now time to answer a few big questions.

First, “Who do people say that I am?” The answer came quickly; “John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.” Everyone had an opinion about Jesus, but none were right. The multitudes of people missed His identity.

Second, “Who do you say that I am?” This is now personal. This was the most important question! Peter quickly answered; “Thou art the Christ.” Matthew 16:16 adds; “the Son of the living God.”

The Holy Spirit had been working in Peter. He revealed the truth to Him. This answer was the rock and cornerstone of the church Jesus was about to build. He said the gates of hell could not prevail against His Church. (See Matthew 16:17-19)

Then Jesus warned His disciples to wait and tell no one at that time. He faced an unfinished task. The cross awaited Him. It was not time to make Him King. His work was not yet complete. People need much more than physical healing. They need spiritual healing.

Before we look at the response of Peter to the revelation of His coming rejection and suffering, the most important question must be asked of each of us; "What is your opinion about Jesus?" "Who is He?" What separates Him from all others?

Let's be honest, most people have an opinion about these questions. Some recognize Him as a good man. Others say He was a religious leader or a prophet. Even Islam acknowledges His status as a prophet. But those answers all fall short.

Until you acknowledge Him as "the Christ, the Son of the Living God" you miss the target. Even then you must repent and put personal faith in Him! He must become both Savior and Lord of your life. It is possible to be religious but lost.

### **The Double Rebuke: Mark 8:31-33**

"31) And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32) And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33) But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.""

Peter forgot who was Lord and who was in control. He rebuked Jesus because he didn't agree with the coming plan of the death, burial, and resurrection.

Satan always gets a foothold when we think our ways are higher or better than the ways of God. Peter was being controlled by his emotions. This text actually included a double rebuke. Jesus put Peter in his rightful place.

There is much to learn from these three verses. Lordship means obeying Jesus and submitting to the will and ways of God. We don't have the authority to change His Word or rewrite the rules.

Many fall into this momentary error of Peter. We think we can correct Jesus and change His Word. In this text Jesus corrected Peter in the strongest of terms.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 explains the purpose of inspired Scriptures. They are given for teaching, reproving, correcting, and training. They are the standard for equipping in godly living and ministry. The Word of God was given to change us. We do not have the right, authority, or power to change it.

Lordship involves dying to self and submitting to the Word of God! Rejecting His Word is rejecting Him! Either Jesus is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all!

## **The Cost of Discipleship: Mark 8:34-38**

“34) And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 35) For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. 36) For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? 37) For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38) For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.””

This is sometimes referred to as the “Cost of Discipleship.” To be a follower of Jesus Christ means we lay our lives down to serve Him. He becomes Lord, we become servants.

These verses are a far cry from the “easy believism” often associated with Christianity today. The wrongful message today is that you are lord of your life and dreams and Jesus is your servant. You can live and do whatever you please as long as you say you believe in Jesus.

But Jesus said; “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.”

I challenge you to study these five verses and count the cost of discipleship! It is a terrible thing to gain the world and forfeit your soul. Don’t waste your life on fun, games, hedonism, and pleasure. Rather invest your life in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

## **The Prophecy: Mark 9:1**

“And Jesus was saying to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.””

Jesus concluded His message on the cost of discipleship (Mark 8:34-38), with a powerful prophecy about His coming kingdom. (Mark 9:1) This prophecy caused confusion for some people. Such is the nature of prophecy.

Matthew quoted the prophecy slightly differently; ““Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28)

There were three important aspects of this prophecy. First, some of those standing in the crowd would not see death until they witnessed His glory as it will be during the coming Kingdom age. Scholars agree that it was fulfilled for Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Second, there will be a literal future Kingdom that Jesus will rule over. Many Scriptures capture the promise of a future kingdom, but Revelation 20:1-6 talks clearly about the millennium kingdom. This will be a period of a thousand years when Jesus rules on earth. (See also Acts 1:6-7)

Third, the kingdom period will be accompanied by power and great glory. Jesus is going to reign on earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. (See Revelation 19:11-21) His coming will bring a swift end to the one world government and deception of the antiChrist.



It is important to note that Jesus made this prophecy after His disclosure of His coming suffering in Jerusalem and prior to his ascension to heaven. (Mathew 8:31; Acts 1:9-11) The big question is “Can this prophecy be trusted and will it be fulfilled literally?” We will answer those questions in the next few sections.

### **The Transfiguration, Part One: Mark 9:2-4**

“2) Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. 3) And He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4) Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus.”

We now come to what is called “The Transfiguration.” Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him up into the mountain. These three were often singled out for special leadership training. (See Matthew 26:37)

Then suddenly He was Transfigured before them. His garments became radiant and exceedingly white. He most likely had a brilliant glow about Him similar to what John described in Revelation 1:12-20 and Revelation 19:11-16. They were seeing Him in the fullness of His glory.

Then Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Jesus. It should be noted that Moses finally made it into the Promised Land. (Deuteronomy 32:48-52) Neither the bodies of Moses nor Elijah were ever recovered in the Old Testament. Elijah was caught up to heaven. (2 Kings 2:11-12) These two will also be together as the two witnesses described in Revelation 11:1-13.

Many have speculated on the significance of Moses and Elijah. Certainly, they were key figures in the Old Testament. I see a profound statement here that Jesus fulfilled everything written about Him

In both the Law and the Prophets. Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets.

There is also a strong punctuation in this story that Jesus is “God of the living and not of the dead.” (Matthew 22:32) The death of the physical body does not terminate a person. It merely moves them into the spiritual realm. The transfiguration speaks strongly that mission, purpose, and assignment awaits God's people after physical death. Life here is preparation for what awaits us in eternity.

The full context of The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13), makes it clear that Jesus was the focus of this mountain-top encounter. More about that in the next section.

But let me highlight another point. Peter later wrote about this event in 2 Peter 1:16-21. This encounter both punctuated and validated the identity of Jesus Christ and the accuracy and reliability of biblical prophecy. He stressed that because of this event, we can count on future fulfillment of prophecy unfolding exactly according to the prophetic testimony of the Bible.

I do not want to stretch this point, but much of the book of 2 Peter is built on Peter's encounter on the Mount of Transfiguration. The rest of the book lays out end time prophecy and beyond. This drops Peter's encounter with Jesus on the holy mountain right in our laps today!

Peter was saying; "Take heed and pay attention because the end times will unfold exactly according to the prophecy of Scripture. Because of who Jesus is, He always keeps His Word!

### **The Transfiguration, Part Two: Mark 9:4-8**

"4) Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. 5) Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6) For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. 7) Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" 8) All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone."

Suddenly, Elijah and Moses appeared to them and were talking to Jesus. I've often wondered how they recognized Moses and Elijah, but this revelation is far greater than that mystery.

Then Peter asked a foolish question, "Shall I build here three tabernacles; one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah?" The idea might have been a booth or temporary shelter. Peter as the servant was most likely trying to be hospitable.

Sometimes it is better to remain quiet. They were terrified and Peter was compelled to say something.

Luke 9:31 adds a small commentary on the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. It says, "Who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." This was very different from the conversation Jesus had with His disciples which evoked a rebuke from Peter. (Mark 8:31-32) Moses and Elijah had a radically different perspective of reality.

Then a cloud formed around them and overshadowed them. This was most likely the Shekinah Glory or fire that accompanies the presence of God Almighty. (See Exodus 19:18-20, Exodus 40:34-38, 1 Kings 8:10-11, 2 Chronicles 7:1-3)

Then a voice came out of the cloud; "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" It was time to listen and not speak or react. We need to silence ourselves in the presence of God and listen.

Suddenly, they looked around and saw no one but Jesus alone. Like the servant of Elisha, their eyes had momentarily been opened to see the reality of the spiritual realm. (See 2 Kings 6:16-17)

As mentioned in the previous section, this experience had a profound impact on Peter. (See 2 Peter 1:16-21) It set the tone for their conversation coming down from the mountain and his understanding of the trustworthiness of prophecy.

I don't want to stretch the comparison too far, but the day of Pentecost was a similar visitation of the fire and glory of God. (Acts 2:1-4) It inaugurated a new epoch and work of God within born-again people. Every true believer becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20) The power and glory of God should be present and transforming in every believer. (Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 1:2-4)

## **Coming Down From The Mountain: Mark 9:9-13**

“9) As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. 10) They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. 11) They asked Him, saying, “Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” 12) And He said to them, “Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13) But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.””

This is an instructional text. Jesus did not waste the return trip from the mountain. He spent the time processing with them and preparing them for what was soon going to take place.

The paramount topic was His coming death, burial, and resurrection. Preparing them for this event had become a recurring theme for Jesus. (See Mark 8:31-33, Matthew 17:22-23, Matthew 20:17-19, Matthew 29:18-19, Mark 14:27-28) He rehearsed this theme over and over again to prepare them before it happened.

Yet, they did not understand or accept this teaching from Jesus. This was the theme Peter rebuked Jesus for giving (Mark 8:31-33), yet it is the core of the gospel. (John 3:10-21)

The fact of the resurrection was often tied to this discussion. Death is a common human experience. Though a few people were raised back to life in the Bible and through the ministry of Jesus, this was going to be an extraordinary event. (Review John 11:1-53) Jesus is indeed the resurrection and the life.

Peter, James, and John then started unpacking their theological understanding by asking Jesus about the teaching of the Scribes related to the coming of Elijah prior to the return of the Messiah. This may have been a reference to Malachi 4:5-6.

In this discussion, Jesus connected Elijah to the forerunner ministry of John the Baptist. (See Matthew 17:19-13) Keep in mind, these three had also just witnessed Elijah and Moses appearing to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But what about prior to the second return of Jesus to set up His earthly kingdom? Will Elijah have another forerunner role in the end times? Many see Elijah and Moses as the two witnesses talked about in Revelation 11:3-13. This will also fulfill Malachi 4:5-6.

This is an example of the dual nature of some prophecy. A prophecy can apply to more than one occasion. Though the Scribes has some things right, they missed many of the dual fulfillments of prophecy related to both the first and second coming of the Messiah. They were separate events.

But let's shift our focus for a moment. How long do you suppose it took Jesus and His disciples to descend from the mountain? The time frame is not mentioned, but Jesus took advantage of the time to process what had just happened. This is part of disciple-making.

Debriefing is often where the most growth takes place. Take time to reflect, rehearse, and squeeze meaning out of your encounters with God and key people in your life. There is a great blessing for those who practice journaling.

Debriefing goes beyond what happened to answer the questions: “1) What does it mean?” 2) What can I learn from this experience? 3) How does it apply to me?

### **The Nine Became Ineffectual: Mark 9:14-18**

“14) When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15) Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. 16) And He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?” 17) And one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18) and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.””

This is the beginning of a very interesting story. When Jesus and His three companions came down from the mountain, they were met with a chaotic situation.

First, the remaining nine disciples were embroiled in a dispute with some scribes. You will always face critics. It appears that the argument may have undermined their faith for they were not able to cast the spirit out of the boy. Beware who you associate with, it might impair your spiritual growth and effectiveness!

In verse 15, Jesus asked them; “What are you discussing with them?” It is unclear if He addressed this question to His disciples or to the Scribes. Unfortunately, the father of the demon tormented boy spoke up before the question was answered. I am really curious about what the dispute entailed.

Second, the disciples were attempting to cast a demon out of a boy and failed. That was perplexing because in Mark 6:7-13 Jesus had given them authority over unclean spirits and they had previously cast out many spirits and healed many people.

It is comforting to know that even the disciples had a learning curve. The good news is that they did not give up. By the time we reach the book of Acts their track record improved dramatically.

We are now left with a description of the demonic manifestation on the boy. Every demon has a different personality and effect on people. This demon had five descriptive manifestations.

First, it made him mute. The boy was unable to speak. Second, it often “seized him.” The meaning of this word is that it took control or overpowered him. Third, it would dash or throw him to the ground. Fourth, it caused him to grind his teeth forcefully. Finally, the attack would end by him stiffening out and becoming unconscious.

Unclean spirits abuse people. The torment can be horrendous. These people need help and Jesus Christ is their only hope!

Unfortunately, many times these people are confined to mental institutions, strong medications or succumb to tragic and often premature death. They don’t need counseling, they need deliverance! (John 10:10)

Jesus equips His church to help these people and set them free in His Name. According to Matthew 10:7-8, casting out demons was part of ministering the gospel. According to texts like Acts 5:15-16; 13:37-39; 14:3, Hebrews 2:4 and James 5:13-16, God continued to work in these

ways in the early church. Many other verses from Acts and the New Testament can be added to this list.

The church can no longer ignore the needs of people. Either Jesus Christ and the gospel has an answer for people or it does not! For some reason, His nine disciples had lost their faith. They had become ineffectual. This scenario forces me to dig deeper into their problem.

But this story screams that the problem was not with Jesus. He quickly resolved the situation and set the boy free from demonic oppression. As noted above, the problem was resolved in the early church.

Don't make excuses for failure. Seek Jesus and address the problem. The Bible is packed with answers for our learning curve. Don't ignore, run from or explain away the power of God. Don't let failure paralyze you into thinking God does not do miracles today.

Many segments of the church today are operating in the same authority and power as recorded in the book of Acts. I seek to learn from them!

### **Jesus Takes Over: Mark 9:19-29**

"19) And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" 20) They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. 21) And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22) It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" 23) And Jesus said to him, "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." 24) Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." 25) When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." 26) "After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" 27) But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. 28) When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" 29) And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.""

Remember from the previous section, the nine disciples could not cast this spirit out. They had tried when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration but failed. (See Mark 9:14-18)

When Jesus took over, the first thing He did was comment on their unbelief. The unbelief related to the true identity and authority of Jesus Christ.

I wonder what would have happened in this story if Jesus had turned to Peter, James, and John and said, "Ok, you three were with me on the Mount of Transfiguration, you know who I am; cast out this Spirit!" I suspect they would have had very different results than the nine! Their understanding of Jesus Christ took a huge leap forward on the Mount of Transfiguration.

I want to make the point that the unbelief or lack of faith Jesus exposed lacked an anchor. Faith in faith is as ineffectual as no faith at all. Faith in doctors is only as good as their ability. Faith in anyone or anything is only as good as the object it is directed toward. You can have great faith in a small thing and be tragically disappointed.

The nine were wavering in their faith in the identity and authority of Jesus Christ most likely because of their interaction with the skeptic Scribes. (See Mark 9:14) Peter, James and John just had their understanding of Jesus Christ take a huge leap forward on the mountain top.

Instead of involving the three, Jesus just stepped in and took over with the deliverance of the boy. I can imagine Peter, James, and John looking at the nine and saying; "Watch this, that unclean spirit doesn't have a chance!"

I want to underline something from the four Gospels and the book of Acts. Healing and deliverance are both based on the authority and identity of Jesus Christ. They are not dependent on an anointing we have, the amount of our faith or some spiritual gift.

But you say; "I object, wasn't the problem with the nine disciples and the boy's father a lack of faith?" Not exactly! Let's review the dialogue between Jesus and the boy's father in verses 22-24.

The boy's father said; "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" You have to admit, the boy's father was both sincere and desperate, but there was a problem. He was not convinced Jesus could set his son free from demonic torment. He lacked faith in Jesus Christ!

The response of Jesus in verse 23 was profound; "And Jesus said to him, 'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." Jesus exposed that the boy's father lacked faith in His identity and authority! That was the root of the problem for both the boy's father and the nine disciples.

In verse 24, the father replied to Jesus, "I do believe, help my unbelief." Question: How did Jesus answer his prayer?

Verses 25-27 records His answer; "He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." Then he took Him by the hand and raised him up."

Jesus simply displayed His authority and power. He took charge! He is King of kings and Lord of lords!

I want to say this clearly: Faith, grace, and power all increase according to our growing understanding of the identity and corresponding authority of Jesus Christ! We don't need more faith or a bigger anointing, we need a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ!

If you doubt me, go back and study Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21, and Colossians 1:9-23. Our effectiveness expands as our knowledge of Jesus Christ deepens! We need growing and focused faith in the identity and authority of Jesus Christ. He must be the object and anchor of our faith.

### **Preparing His Disciples: Mark 9:30-32**

"30) From there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. 31) For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." 32) But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him."

By this time, Jesus is spending much time preparing His disciples for His coming rejection, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. It was becoming a recurring theme.

But, they were in denial. They did not understand what He was teaching them. They did not understand His office as Savior or mission as Passover Lamb.

Jesus came with the cross in mind. Human sin had to be paid in full. Satan's power had to be defeated. Death had to be conquered.

Neither did the priests, scribes, or Pharisees understand. They were blind to the meaning of Scriptures like Isaiah 53:1-12. They were fulfilling prophecy.

The death, burial and resurrection were by far the greatest sign, wonder, miracle, and work of Jesus Christ. They were the final great punctuation mark on His identity and earthly ministry.

Apart from His death, burial and resurrection, the gospel would not be complete. Human redemption would not be possible. Mankind would have been forever lost. Though He repeatedly tried preparing His disciples for this coming event, they did not understand.

I maintain that few believers today understand or enter into the full significance, meaning, and power of His death, burial, and resurrection. Romans 6-8 is a mystery to them. They are blind to the full meaning of Ephesians 1:19-23. They are baffled by the book of Hebrews and avoid most of it.

These three obscure verses in Mark 9:30-32 are monumental. They point to the apex of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ!

### **Servanthood Leadership: Mark 9:33-35**

“33) They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34) But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35) Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.””

It was a sad moment. Jesus was trying to prepare His disciples for His coming rejection and the cross. Meanwhile, they were locked in self-promotion, pride, and jealousy. They were arguing over which one of them was greatest.

Those in the shadow of success often wrestle with the illusion of personal greatness. They were each focused on the god in the mirror. They were each drunk with the wine of self-significance.

The boastful pride of life is one of the three deadly sins. (See 1 John 2:15-17. It is like poison. It makes self the focus of every conversation, the subject of every sentence, and the top of every agenda.

Jesus used this occasion to introduce “servanthood leadership.” It is the model of leadership that puts others first and seeks to add value to them. It is the opposite of the world’s view of leadership. It says, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

This defines the leadership style of Jesus. He laid down His life for us all. He put our interests before His own.

### **Child-Like Faith and Service: Mark 9:36-37**

“36) Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, “37) Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.””

Only Mark includes this incident of taking a child to illustrate servanthood leadership. When the whole context of Mark Chapter Nine is kept in mind, there is some question if Jesus was trying to illustrate childlike faith or pure devotion to Christ. Maybe both fit the context.

No matter, His object lesson was powerful. We often complicate both faith and service. Human reason gets in the way of our faith and self-pride gets in the way of our service.

We have much to learn from children. I have a six year old grandson in Peru, South America who prays with simple unwavering faith. Adults are baffled by the mountains God moves when He prays. The stories are amazing.

At the same time, he lifts up Jesus and not himself. His worship is equally as pure and unassuming. He has zero doubt about the existence, power, goodness, or love of God.

He is a delight. It is very easy to receive him because there is no question about his simple but pure sincerity. As adults we often complicate things.

The journey to spiritual maturity sets its focus on childlike faith and service. I yearn to take God at His Word without inner debate and trust Him without being double minded.

Receiving Jesus and the Father is that simple. We need not wrestle with science, naturalism, humanism or various views of theology. We simply need to take God at His Word.

Remember, this chapter began with Peter, James, and John with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, while the nine who remained behind were embroiled in a theological argument with the Scribes. (Mark 9:14) For the nine, it seemed to have a negative effect on their childlike faith.

### **Exposing the Danger of Turf Mentality: Mark 9:38-41**

“38) John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.” 39) But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. 40) For he who is not against us is for us. 41) For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.”

This is an interesting context. I have a theory about these verses. Let me elaborate. I may be wrong, but there is something very intriguing about the timing of John’s interaction with Jesus.

Mark does not include the story of the seventy being sent out. According to Luke 10:1-20, it happened shortly after the Mount of Transfiguration and the other events recorded in Mark Chapter Nine.



This might help explain why others were ministering in the name of Jesus and casting out demons. Maybe John and the other Apostles were a bit jealous that others were being sent out by Jesus. While the twelve were arguing over who was greatest among them, Jesus was enlarging His circle of helpers.

It intrigues me that neither Matthew, Mark, or John included the story of the seventy in their writings. Only Luke, the historian, provided that detail. The timing seems more than coincidental with John's questioning of Jesus in this context.

I recognize this is speculation, but it underlines the importance of welcoming and empowering other gifted people in ministry. I am very conscious of the fact that God's team is much larger than my small perspective and sphere of influence.

So how does this apply to us today? I believe the days of turf mentality are over, especially in world missions. Cooperation is so much more effective than competition. I am a firm believer in partnerships and a kingdom mindset.

The above four verses are profound! They speak volumes; "He who is not against us is for us!"

### **Warning Against Child Exploitation: Mark 9:42**

“42) Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.”

Burn the screen into your mind. Jesus had just set a child in the midst of His disciples and talked about child-like faith and service. The context included an argument among the disciples over which of them was greatest.

But in this verse, Jesus goes further by issuing a stark warning against child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In the ongoing context, He said whoever causes one of these little ones who believed to stumble would face eternal judgement in hell.

I want to underline this warning. Those who steal the innocence of a child, beware, hell awaits you! Those who spiritually, mentally, or emotionally abuse children, beware, hell awaits you! Those involved in child or sex trafficking, child pornography, or Satanic Ritual Abuse, beware, hell awaits you!

I will take this a step further and warn teachers, coaches, scout leaders, Sunday School teachers, pastors, priests, professors, and anyone with an influence on young people: If you undermine the faith and innocence of a young person, hell rightly awaits you! Beware how you treat children and young people. You will be held accountable.

This context in the Gospel of Mark and other parallel texts in the other gospels contain the strongest warnings from Jesus. He literally said any other fate in life would be better than the judgement that awaits stumbling blocks, especially for children and young people.

Don't be a stumbling block. In Matthew 18:10, Jesus added a unique commentary about children; “10 ) See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” Wow!

By contrast, receive and help children. (Matthew 18:5) Help orphans and widows. (James 1:27) Be a voice and genuine friend to them and for them.

Let me encourage you to go to our GoServ Global web page and sign up to monthly sponsor an orphan or student. The needs are huge! If we were not there, many of these precious children would become victims of horrendous crimes. These are cruel days for children in many countries.

### **Warnings Against Stumbling: Mark 9:43-50**

“43) If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44) [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] 45) If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46) [where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.] 47) If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, 48) where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. 49) For everyone will be salted with fire. 50) Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

In this text, Jesus issued strong warnings against both stumbling and being a stumbling block. The consequences of stumbling were severe. Jesus spoke of hell and the unquenchable fire.

Let me stress that Jesus spoke of hell as a real place. In fact, in His teachings He spoke more about hell than heaven. The warning was always that hell was to be avoided at all costs.

Most people live in denial of hell and eternal judgement. They have the opinion that a God of love would never allow a place like hell to exist. But it was Jesus Christ in texts like this that warned of the reality and severity of hell.

The whole mission and ministry of Jesus Christ was to reach lost people and open the doors of salvation. I align with the biblical view that both heaven and hell are real places and only faith in Jesus Christ leads to being born-again. (Study 2 Peter 1:2-11 for keys to living a stumble-free life)

### **The Big Move: Mark 10:1**

“Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them.”

Jesus now makes a major move south from Galilee to the region of Judea. Though the traveling details are not recorded in the text, it most likely took several days.

This move was significant because it positioned Him much closer to Jerusalem. He stayed “beyond the Jordan River.” This was most likely close to where John the Baptist had his ministry and where Jesus and His disciples were baptizing a few years earlier. It was a place well known by Jesus and His disciples.

Matthew 19:1-2 covers this same relocation. However, Matthew adds the detail that Jesus also was healing them there. He ministered to the whole person wherever He went. Teaching and healing went hand in hand in the ministry of Jesus.

As was His practice, He continued to teach publicly. A significant group accompanied Him from the region of Galilee. Crowds from throughout Judea also flocked to Him.

The geography of this verse is important because it placed Him near Jerusalem for His final Passover where He would be arrested, condemned, and crucified. He would not return to Galilee again until after His resurrection. (See Matthew 28:16 and John 21)

This move had another implication. He was now much closer to His critics from among the Sanhedrin. The religious leaders in Jerusalem used His new proximity to double down their attacks against Him.

Sadly, as we shall see in the next section, the Pharisees used the sanctity of marriage as the basis for their next attack. Matthew 19:3-12 and Mark 10:2-12 cover the same heated exchange.

### **The Sanctity of Marriage: Mark 10:2-12**

“2) Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3) And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?” 4) They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” 6) But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. 7) For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, 8) and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9) What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. “10) In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. 11) And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12) and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.””

We now have a record of the trap the Pharisees tried to set for Jesus. They wanted a basis of accusing Him of disobeying the Law of God. Unfortunately, they picked the subject of divorce and remarriage. The sanctity of marriage had been thrown under the bus by the Jewish religious leaders. They were using Moses as support for an adulterous practice.

Their question as recorded in Mark 10:2 related to “whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.” Matthew 19:3 adds the phrase “for any cause at all?” They were stretching Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to the point of becoming a legal basis for no-fault divorce and remarriage. Worse, it became a tapestry to cover an evil practice of legal wife-swapping.

Moses wrote Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to be restrictive and not permissive. It is instructive that the Pharisees conveniently ignored Malachi 2:14-17. The practice of divorce and remarriage had destroyed the relationship between many in Israel and God. It had become sinful and even abominable to God. “God hates divorce.” (Malachi 2:16) Divorce destroys people, families, communities and nations. Malachi pointed out that not one had participated in this sinful practice who had a remnant of the Spirit. (Malachi 2:15)

Jesus laid out His position very skillfully. A synopsis of Mark and Matthew is helpful. First, Jesus went back and looked at God’s original design for marriage. It was between male and female until death. (See Romans 7:1-3) Second, He appealed the permanence of the marriage covenant. Third, He stated that marriage made the two into one. Fourth, He pointed out the destructive consequences of separating what God joined together. Fifth, He concluded the

problem behind most divorce and remarriage can be traced to bitter and hard hearts. Finally, He conceded that divorce and remarriage was permissible only if the marriage itself was immoral and therefore unacceptable by God. This included any relationship forbidden in Leviticus 18 and 20.

They undoubtedly did not like the narrow position of Jesus on this subject. It exposed them. It uncovered another area of sin and corruption among the religious leaders. It pointed to willful and immoral hypocrisy. Like Paul in Romans 7:1-3, Jesus summarized the position of the Pharisees as being adulterous. (See Mark 10:10-12)

This subject exposes a serious problem within the modern church. We have become like the religious leaders of Israel practicing divorce and remarriage for any cause at all. We are grieving God and the Holy Spirit in this matter. Why not rather trust God to heal marriage relationships and do a glorious work of redemption? Why contribute to the breakdown in the Sanctity of Marriage and the family structure?

As a side note, this teaching of Jesus on marriage radically impacted the early church. It totally eradicated the Old Testament practice of polygamy and made a good marriage a qualification for leadership in the church. Jesus brought a level of righteousness and holiness into His church that was unknown by religious Judaism or Greek/Roman secular culture of the time. His view of the Sanctity of Marriage and Family fueled the Christian awakening of the first few centuries of Christianity.

### **The Value of Children: Mark 10:13-16**

“13) And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. 14) But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15) Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.” 16) And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them.”

It would be a stretch to say that Jesus had a children’s ministry department. It would equally be wrong to say that Jesus had no ministry to children. Unlike Jewish culture, Jesus took time to bless children. He did not view them as a distraction.

Luke 18:15-17 records this same story, but he adds the detail that “they were bringing even their babies to Him, that He might touch them.” This is common today in many countries. People will line up with their infants and little children to have them touched and blessed by perceived leaders.

The disciples tried to hinder and rebuke this process. They saw it as an annoyance. But Jesus quickly made room for the little children.

Neither text indicates that the children were sick or ill. They merely wanted Jesús to touch and bless them. He did this by laying His hand on them. In some cases this was accompanied by a verbal blessing, but Mark stresses the point that He merely “touched them.”

In one sense, this was an indication of the status and honor Jesus had gained by these parents. They did not ask any of His disciples to touch or bless their little children. But they intuitively understood that Jesus placed high value on children and that a touch from Him would impart blessing.

I will resist the temptation of moving into a discussion of laying on of hands, but it was often included in the way Jesus ministered to people. A touch from Jesus imparted life, blessing, and often healing.

Jesus again stressed the point of the kingdom of God belonging to children. Some look at this as a reference to innocence while others stress childlike faith. No matter your view, adults have much to learn from children. Take time for them!

However, this reference from Jesus should not be construed as meaning children are automatically born-again or saved. It does mean it was much easier for them to place saving faith in Jesus.

### **The Rich Young Ruler: Mark 10:17-22**

“17) As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 18) And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19) You know the commandments, ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” 20) And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” 21) Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” 22) But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.”

This same story is recorded in Luke 18:18-30. Luke adds the detail that he was a ruler. We have no idea what level of government was under his charge, but he was a very good, moral and upright man.

He came and bowed down to Jesus with a pressing question, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” It appears that he was sincere but had no assurance of salvation.

That is a byproduct of a works-based system of religion. You never know when you’ve done enough to be approved. He fell short in his own conscience.

Jesus responded by commenting on His greeting of “Good Teacher.” Verse 18 says, “And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” He was so close! He recognized Jesus was “Good” but he fell short of acknowledging Him as God. This is a fate shared by many self-righteous people.

In His response, Jesus quoted six of the Ten Commandments. The man responded that he had kept these from his youth up. In other words, he was saying, “I too am a good man!”

His response was like so many religious people today. When you ask them why God should let them into His heaven, they say, “I’m a good person!”

Jesus then raised the mark. He said; “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

He had a choice between following Jesus or the ways of the world. Sadly, he turned away from faith in Jesus Christ and embraced self-righteousness and the deceitfulness of riches. He viewed himself as good enough apart from following Jesus.

Rejection of Jesus Christ is a terminal decision. He was rejecting Jesus as both Savior and Lord. He fell short of the only means of salvation. (See Acts 4:8-12) He refused to humble himself and trust in Jesus Christ for his salvation.

### **The Miracle of Salvation: Mark 10:23-27**

“23) And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” 24) The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25) It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” 26) They were even more astonished and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?” 27) Looking at them, Jesus said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.””

Salvation is a difficult thing. If you look at the context, Jesus exposed several false hopes of salvation. Works-based religion cannot save you. Self-righteousness cannot save you. Keeping the Ten Commandments cannot save you. Money cannot save you!

Verse 26 says, The disciples were even more astonished and asked; “Then who can be saved?” What an amazing question! They were beginning to wrestle deeply with the question of salvation.

Jesus replied; “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God!” Did you notice what Jesus said? Only God can save you! What does that look like?

John 3:16-18 might be the best answer; ““16) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18) He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Tragically, the rich young ruler walked away from Him. Many turned away from Him. The religious leaders had crucified Him. But God raised Him from the dead and made Him both Savior and Lord.

Take time to study the short message of Peter to the religious leaders as recorded in Acts 4:8-12. Peter and the other disciples resolved the issue of salvation.

### **The Rewards Far Surpass the Cost of the Sacrifice: Mark 10:28-31**

“28) Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” 29) Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30) but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31) But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.””

Following Jesus often includes a sacrifice. We leave behind the world’s value system to embrace a kingdom value system. Often the sacrifices seem huge being away from family and living on less for the sake of the gospel.

Such was the case for Peter and the other disciples. They left much to follow Jesus. They were starting to wonder if it was worth it! At some point every child of God on the front lines ponders the cost.

Jesus' answer was amazing. What you gain in relationships and service of Jesus is many, many times greater than anything you give up in a worldly value system! There is no comparison.

Paul may have said it best in Philippians 3:7-11. He found in Christ a surpassing value that made his old life like sewage by comparison. What he gained "in Christ" was immeasurably more than what gave up and left behind.

In his case, he embraced being single and traveling an insane schedule for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. Eventually, it cost him his life.

His reward in knowing Christ and living in the presence of God in the power of the Holy Spirit was a value greater than he could measure in worldly terms. He could not put a price tag on the value of knowing Christ! Yet God gave back much more than the cost of his sacrifice.

I can only imagine his eternal reward! The entrance into the eternal kingdom was abundantly supplied to him. It will be worth it all when we see Jesus! The rewards far surpass the cost of the sacrifice. Eternal life has no price tag!

#### **Out Of Tune With Jesus: Mark 10:32-34**

"32) They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, 33) saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. 34) They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."

This text corresponds to Matthew 20:17-19 and Luke 18:31-34. The final week of His earthly ministry had arrived. Jesus was trying to prepare His disciples for His coming death, burial, and resurrection.

This was not a new theme. If you go back and review Mark 8:31 and 9:31, this was the third significant time He focused on this theme. Yet, they were living in denial.

It appears from verse 32 that the delegation traveling with Jesus from Galilee included more than His twelve disciples. How many accompanied Him is a mystery, but it included those mentioned in Acts 1:14 and Barsabbas and Matthias. (Acts 1:21-26) It was not unusual for large caravans of people to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover.

The reader gets the picture from Mark 10:32 that the caravan traveling with Jesus was spread out. Jesus went ahead and some straggled behind. However, there was a sense that something unusual awaited them on this trip. Mark said some were "amazed" and others were "fearful."

It was at this time that Jesus pulled the twelve aside and warned them of His coming arrest, trial, and crucifixion. (Mark 10:33-34) Luke 18:34 adds; "But the disciples understood none of these things, and the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said."

This helps what happens in the next section. It never surprises me when Christians and the church in general are out of sync and out of tune with what God is doing. Such seems to be the case in our days.

### **The Campaign for Self-Promotion: Mark 10:35-41**

“35) James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.” 36) And He said to them, “What do you want Me to do for you?” 37) They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory.” 38) But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” 39) They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40) But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” 41) Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.”

Jesus was heading to the cross and His disciples were arguing about the crown. James and John were campaigning for the highest positions in His coming kingdom.

The only good news about this story was that they genuinely believed Jesus was the Messiah. From childhood they had heard that the coming Messiah was going to free Israel and restore the kingdom of David. He was going to rule as a King. They wanted to occupy the highest positions in His coming kingdom.

The problem was their theology didn't include His suffering, death on the cross, resurrection, or the church age. Though He tried to prepare them in the previous two verses, it did not fit their theology. They were blind.

When the others heard of this campaign by the sons of Zebedee, they became indignant. They were jealous. His earthly ministry was coming down to the final week and His team was disintegrating from within.

Satan often attacks the team. He seeks to undermine leadership and derail focus. There is always trouble when Christians seek personal agendas. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for the pride, self-promotion, and corruption of the world.

### **Servanthood Leadership: Mark 10:41-45**

“41) Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42) Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles Lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43) But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44) and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.””

Jesus had a crisis brewing among His team. They were fighting over who was greatest. They were grasping for power and authority.



They did not understand that in the Kingdom of God all authority and power remains with Jesus Christ. We are merely servants and conduit through which He works. When we exalt ourselves we grieve and hinder His work.

The greatest workers in the kingdom of God get out of the way so as not to hinder or distort God's love, grace, gifts, and power through them. When self gets in the way, we quench and grieve the Holy Spirit. The most effective workers in the kingdom see themselves as "bond servants" of Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Colossians 1:7; 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:24; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1; Revelation 1:1; Revelation 15:3)

Early church leaders took this identity seriously. Jesus was Lord and Master. They were His servants. Whenever this changes, exploitation, personal agendas, abuse, and corruption keeps into leadership. Such has become the plight of the modern church.

### **The Bartimaeus Avenue to Healing: Mark 10:46-52**

"46) Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. 47) When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48) Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49) And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." 50) Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. 51) And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" 52) And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road."

From beyond the Jordan, Jesus and His caravan started toward Jerusalem. In doing so they passed through Jericho. That day they had already traveled ten to twelve miles. A great multitude accompanied Jesus.

It was there they encountered a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. His story is recorded in each of the synoptic gospels. It was deemed significant by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

It was unusual that a blind beggar was named. His story undoubtedly gained significance. He may have become a key figure in the early church. This was the last great miracle of healing Jesus performed before His Triumphal entry.

When Bartimaeus heard Jesus was passing by, he cried out; "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He had been hearing multiple stories of Jesus healing people from those passing by over the previous few years. His theology was correct. Jesus was the Son of David and He was his only hope for healing.

As he cried out, many tried to silence him, but he cried out all the more. Don't let anyone silence you from seeking Jesus. Get urgent! Cry out! Let your faith be heard!

Shortly, Jesus stopped and called for Him. Think about the significance of this story. Jesus had set His face toward Jerusalem for His appointment with destiny, but one blind beggar got His attention. The big question is "Why?"

I'm sure Jesus passed other sick and needy people on His way to Jerusalem, but He only stopped for Bartimaeus. I pose the question again; "Why?"

I believe it was his faith. He wanted to regain his sight. Notice, Jesus didn't pray for him, lay hands on him or touch his eyes. He just said, "Go your way, your faith has made you well."

Jesus merely affirmed what his faith had already accomplished. At some point faith has to take action. It has to step out and claim "it is done!"

So we now have another question; "Did Jesus heal Bartimaeus or did his faith in Jesus bring his healing?" I will leave you wrestling with that question, but I think it is important.

Ultimately, they both come back to Jesus, but the avenue to the healing was arguably different. It is worth pondering, because with the earthly ministry of Jesus being complete, His physical touch is no longer the basis of healing.

Bartimaeus may have been a transition to a slightly different avenue of healing. His faith in Jesus as the Son of David became the basis for His healing. It was a personal inner approach to healing based on faith in the authority of Jesus Christ.

The whole subject of healing fascinates me. I am growing in my understanding of the biblical doctrine of healing. Bartimaeus may represent one of several approaches to healing found in the New Testament. Let me elaborate.

We may have access to a person with a gift of healing (1 Corinthians 12:9), or we may call the elders of the church to anoint us with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:13-18) But it seems that we also have a direct line to Jesus through personal faith in His authority as the Son of David. Any believer can step into the sandals of Bartimaeus and believe for personal healing. (1 Peter 2:24)

I am making baby steps in my own life with this approach, but I have seen some amazing results. It has been a faith journey, but I am learning much about Jesus being my authority for personal healing.

### **A Colt and Divine Providence: Mark 11:1-6**

" 1) As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, 2) and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. 3) If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." 4) They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. 5) Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" 6) They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission."

This story has always intrigued me. Was Jesus giving a word of knowledge to His disciples? Was He prophesying future events? Or, was He speaking from His Omniscience? No matter how you answer the mystery, He was giving exact details of future events related to the colt and the owner.

When the disciples started untying the colt, technically they could have been accused of theft. This could have escalated into a serious situation.

But Jesus even mentioned what to say to the owner of the colt and his affirmative response to the disciples. For that matter, how did Jesus arrange for the owner to have the colt tied to the hitching post at the exact place and the exact time? I love this story. It builds my faith!

This was not a coincidence. This was an example of Divine Providence! Matthew 21:4-5 records this as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. It was recorded in Zechariah 9:9. God always keeps His word to the smallest detail.

I maintain that the Spirit of God can and does speak to people to accomplish divine appointments. Stories like this are common today in countries with intense persecution. The Holy Spirit can and does arrange transportation, meetings, meals, lodging, and specific contacts between people.

This is a signature working of the Holy Spirit in the course of spreading the gospel. The story of Philip speaking to the Ethiopian eunuch as recorded in Acts 8:26-40 may fit this scenario.

In a sense, the words of Jesus to the twelve in Matthew Ten speaks of Divine provisions and encounters between people in the context of spreading the gospel. Do not put God in a box. He can and does orchestrate divine details in the course of spreading the gospel.

He is in charge of the hitching post, the door post, and the guard post. He opens doors, connects people, and provides in miraculous ways for the spread of the gospel.

Burn out comes when we take charge and try to figure out and control every detail. Always leave room to walk by faith and trust Divine Providence to build bridges, open doors, connect people, and provide needs.

Our big job is to stay focused on spreading the gospel. When we minimize that calling, the power and provision of God seems to be quenched and we get stuck in self-maintenance mode.

We need to be fiscally responsible, but God wants us to focus on “the faith account” more than “the bank account.” Our job is to get out there. God's job is to connect the dots! It's our job to tell the story, it's God's job to move the mountain!

### **The Triumphal Entry: Mark 11:7-11**

“7) They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. 8) And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. 9) Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; 10) Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!” 11) Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.”

This is called the “Triumphal Entry.” Jesus entered Jerusalem just like a king. His arrival in Jerusalem on a colt was like that of the coronation of King Solomon riding on King David's mule. (1 Kings 1:33 & 44)

The celebration that accompanied Jesus also resembled the inauguration of King Solomon preparing to sit on the throne of King David. (See 1 Kings 1:28-53) The comparisons are many.

Matthew 21:5 and John 12:15 records the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 related to the significance of His entry into Jerusalem seated on a colt. He was the long expected Messiah King.

People spread palm branches on the road and placed their garments down as is fitting for a King. Then they cried out "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!"

The Triumphal Entry was recorded by each of the gospel writers. A comparison study should be made of each gospel related to the Triumphal Entry. It is like coloring in a black and white picture.

As His followers cried out in celebration, the Pharisees tried to prevent them. The response of Jesus as recorded in Luke 19:39-40 is classic; "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" Rocks are smarter than people blinded by a spirit of religion.

Luke 19:41 adds the detail that Jesus wept as He approached the city. What He saw broke His heart. The city was blinded by religion. Even the temple grounds had become a thriving center of commerce and not a place to seek God. His first day in Jerusalem was merely to take inventory. On this occasion He was mostly silent.

Though I do not like to spiritualize every biblical story, this has overtones of how King Jesus rides into the life of every new believer. He weeps, takes inventory, and then rolls up His sleeves and starts cleaning the temple. He is both aggressive and thorough with the process.

It is at this point that people either accept the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit or reject Him. Jesus wants to rule as Master, Lord, and King in our lives. Unfortunately, many set out to muzzle, resist, and silence the Holy Spirit. But for those who humble themselves and worship, the results are transformational and amazing!

*(This scene, which we refer to as "Palm Sunday," took place on the Mount of Olives. The road Jesus and His followers walked leads to The Golden Gate in the wall of Jerusalem. It is the gate through which ancient Jewish tradition says the Messiah will enter Jerusalem at the end of days. That gate has been bricked shut since 1541, presumably to prevent false prophets from entering through it. Zechariah 14:4 says that when the LORD returns, He will stand on the Mount of Olives and it will split in two, "... making a wide valley from east to west." In 1964, a hotel was built on the Mount of Olives and a geological fault line was discovered, running from east to west. It lines up precisely with The Golden Gate.) -dj.*

### **The Barren Fig Tree: Mark 11:12-14; 20-26**

"12) On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. 13) Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14) He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

20) As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. 21) Being reminded, Peter said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." 22) And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. 23) Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. 24) Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you. 25) Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. 26) [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.]"

We now have the story of the Barren Fig Tree. Mark divides the story into two parts. Verses 12-14 sets the stage with Jesus leaving Bethany and heading to Jerusalem. As they traveled, He becomes hungry and approached a fig tree in hopes of eating some figs. Unfortunately, the tree was barren.

Mark notes, "it was not the season for figs." Nevertheless, Jesus pronounced a curse on the tree; "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." (Vs 13-14) His disciples were listening as He spoke to the tree.

One might consider it strange that Jesus spoke to physical objects. But the record is that He spoke to rushing winds and raging seas. He commanded sickness, diseases, and demons. Here He spoke to a fig tree. Later in verse 23, He talked about commanding mountains to move.

I confess, this really stretched me. Some see this as a connection back to Genesis 1:26-31 when God gave mankind world domination. He told Adam to rule over the created realm.

After the fall, everything became very chaotic. Mankind lost control. The many stories of Jesus speaking to the created realm underlined the fact that He retained world dominion. He was in charge and in control. He had authority over the whole realm of creation.

The next morning as they passed by the fig tree, the disciples noticed that the tree was completely withered. In Mark 11:21, Peter said to Him; "Rabbi, behold the fig tree which you curses has withered."

Jesus used this as an object lesson to teach on faith in God and prayer. He went on to say; "whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him."

This stretches my theology, but Jesus seemed to be telling His disciples to stand in His authority and issue commands to the created realm. Prayer has many facets. It includes both asking and sometimes commanding in the name of Jesus!

Jesus closed this context by teaching about the value of forgiveness. Paul taught that anger and bitterness gives the devil a foothold and grieves the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 4:26-32) Peter added that marriage dysfunction can hinder a man's prayers. (1 Peter 1:7)

As Jesus approached His final week, it is more than coincidental that He doubled down on teaching His disciples about faith, authority, and prayer. He also focused on humble servanthood leadership.

Some spiritualize the story of the Barren Fig Tree. I lean toward taking it at face value and squeezing insights on the multiple facets of prayer, walking in faith, and standing in our authority “in Christ.”

The mystery of Jesus speaking to the fig tree is the focal point of this story. It provokes the question, “Do we as believers regain some world dominion through Christ after salvation?” As you wrestle through this question, include Romans 8:12-25 in your research.

I am growing in my understanding of this story related to my prayer life. I am being stretched, but I am starting to embrace my authority “in Christ” and my standing as a redeemed child of God. This includes some degree of regaining world dominion “in Christ.”

Like often happens in the study of Scripture, sometimes the small story is the big story. Such is the case of the obscure story of the Barren Fig Tree which is often overshadowed by the Triumphant Entry. Yet this story speaks volumes! God included it for a reason.

### **Cleansing the Temple: Mark 11:15-18**

“15) Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; 16) and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. 17) And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a robbers’ den.” 18) The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.”

Jesus had His Father’s House in mind. He again entered the temple and began cleansing it from the moneychangers and the merchants. The temple grounds had been reduced to a secular center for fun, commerce, and festivities. Apart from lip service, there was little actual focus on God. The priests and religious leaders had become rich off their captive patrons.

Jesus tried desperately to return the focus to God. He wanted the temple to be a house of prayer for all the nations, But the religious leaders had turned it into a mafia-like money machine. The clash was unavoidable.

The chief priests and scribes responded immediately by hatching a plan to destroy Jesus. They plotted murder to protect their power, control, and money scam. They were able to bargain with Judas because they shared the same root sin of greed.

As a side note, the body of every born again believer becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20) Jesus sets out to cleanse our bodies as well. He wants us to be holy and consecrated to Him.

Do not be surprised at the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in your life. It is an indication of genuine salvation. He wants us to be holy for He is holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)

### **The Trap: Mark 11:27-33**

“27) They came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, 28) and began saying to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?” 29) And Jesus said

to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30) Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." 31) They began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 32) But shall we say, 'From men'?"—they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. 33) Answering Jesus, they \*said, "We do not know." And Jesus \*said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things.""

As you study the context, the chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people were most likely asking about His authority to cleanse the temple and make reforms to buying and selling sacrificial supplies in the temple grounds.

The scribes were most likely present to argue Deuteronomy 14:24-26 with Him. In this text, Moses permitted those coming from a distance to exchange their goods for money and purchase new sacrificial goods in Jerusalem for their sacrifices. They were eager to pit the authority of Moses against Jesus.

Of course, the problem was that the religious leaders had cashed in on this captive audience and moved the merchants and money changers right into the temple grounds. They were reaping a profit on everything bought and sold. Prices were inflated and they were getting rich. Moses by no means would have approved of this practice.

But instead of engaging in religious debate, Jesus asked them about the ministry of John the Baptist. "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?"

It was a valid question because the people held John in high regard. Being the eldest son of Zechariah, John was also of priestly descent. (See Luke 1:5-25; 57-80, 3:1-20) The circumstances of his birth and the scope of his ministry were widely known. His whole life and ministry were stamped with heavy fingerprints.

It was none other than John the Baptist that called the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of viper and warned them of pending wrath from God. He called them to repentance. (See Matthew 3:7-8)

The trap from the religious leaders was defused. They were exposed and reduced to fools. The implication was that John called them to repentance because of their sinful and devious ways.

However, the question of authority was important. Jesus had both heavenly authority and self authority as the Son of God. This was the very claim the religious leaders one week later used to convict Jesus of Blasphemy and crucify Him.

I believe that was their hidden agenda behind this meeting with Jesus in the temple. But the timing was not right. The Lamb of God had to be sacrificed on the Passover.

Keep in mind, It was John the Baptist who had introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (See John 1:19-24) When Jesus brought John the Baptist into this conversation, He was laying out a much deeper case before the people.

## **Parable of the Vine Growers: Mark 12:1-12**

“1) And He began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 2) At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. 3) They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4) Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. 5) And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. 6) He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 7) But those vine-growers said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ 8) They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. 9) What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. 10) Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; 11) This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes’?” 12) And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.”

Jesus had just cleansed the physical temple. With this parable He is exposing and cleansing the corrupt religious leaders over the temple system. He basically calls them thieves, robbers, and murderers.

The landowner in the parable represents God the Father. The wicked vine growers represent the religious leaders of Judaism. The many servants sent to collect rent represent the many Old Testament prophets that God sent to Israel and Judah. The beloved son represents Himself.

The story makes a transition in Verse 9. The owner was coming and about to destroy the vine growers and rent the vineyard to others. Many see this as the transition from the Law to the gospel of grace. This points to Pentecost and the inauguration of the Church age. The whole temple system was about to be replaced with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The gospel was about to go to all nations.

Then Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23. Jesus was the cornerstone rejected by the religious leaders, but became the cornerstone of the church. The Promise of the Father seen throughout the Old Testament was about to be fulfilled.

They understood the parable was spoken against them. Their response was not repentance. Rather they doubled down on trying to destroy the beloved son and steal the inheritance.

This parable has been fulfilled. By 70 AD the gospel was spreading around the world while the temple and its whole system was destroyed. The priesthood, the Levites and the Pharisees and Sadducees were displaced. The Apostles and Spirit-filled workers stepped into leadership.

Sadly, it didn't take long for the church to become corrupt and a new oppression to begin. Welcome to the dark ages and the blinders of institutional Christianity.

Starting with the Great Reformation and followed by the Great Awakenings; Jesus began purifying His bride.



We are now approaching the end of the church age. Jesus is pouring out His Spirit in unprecedented ways. Denominationalism is being replaced by a new awakening around the world. People are seeking Jesus, His solid Word, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Get ready. A great purging is taking place. The Groom is right at the door and ready to come for His bride.

### **Whose Image Do You Bear? Mark 12:13-17**

“13) Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. 14) They came and said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? 15) Shall we pay or shall we not pay?” But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.” 16) They brought one. And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” And they said to Him, “Caesar’s.” 17) And Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him.”

They were relentless in their attempt to find fault in Jesus. This time they sent some Pharisees and Herodians seeking to establish a charge of insurrection against the government. They always sent a small delegation that every charge might be confirmed by two or three witnesses.

This question related to paying poll-tax to Caesar. There was already a Jewish religious movement that rejected Roman rule over Israel and refused to pay taxes. They were trying to pin the blame on Jesus.

Knowing their malice and hypocrisy, Jesus wisely asked for a denarius. On one side was stamped an image of Caesar. Jesus held it up and asked; “Whose likeness or inscription is this?” The question was literally; “Whose image is this coin made after?”

The answer was obvious. It was minted in the image of Caesar. It was the tenure of Rome. It was often used to pay poll-tax.

The next statement of Jesus silenced and amazed the adversaries; “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”

The parallel was unavoidable. People are created in the image of God. He is interested in people and not money. It behooves every person to seek God and not money, government or the world.

Every human was created in the image of God. We, like the coin, are image bearers. Within us is a void in the shape of God. We are not complete until we are born-again and the Holy Spirit fills that void. We need to render ourselves to God! Only Jesus Christ can make us complete and fill the inner void.

### **The Peril of Hypothetical Questions: Mark 12:18-27**

“18) Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, “19) Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves behind a wife and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother. 20) There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no

children. 21) The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; 22) and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. 23) In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her." 24) Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? 25) For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26) But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27) He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.'"

They were taking turns trying to discredit Him. This time it was a group of Sadducees. In their theological bias, they rejected the concept of a resurrection. They came and posed a hypothetical question to Jesus. These questions usually are packed with false pretense.

The question related to Deuteronomy 25-5-6 and raising up offspring for a deceased brother who died childless. In their question, they pose seven brothers in turn marrying a widowed sister-in-law and dying childless. They wondered whose wife she would be in the resurrection? Note, their theological error was denying a resurrection. The construction of their question was loaded with bias.

Skeptics and agnostics come up with all kinds of ridiculous hypothetical questions to undergird unbelief. For example, "Can an omnipotent God create a rock so big He cannot lift it?" The problem is that weights and measurements pertain to the physical realm. God is Spirit and dwells in the heavenly realm, therefore the question is both foolish and irrelevant. It amplifies the ignorance of the beholder.

Jesus responded with a profound answer; "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?" (Mark 12:24)

Most theological blunders can be traced back to one of these two problems: 1) They don't understand the Scriptures. 2) They don't understand the power of God. Tuck His response in the back of your mind. It is fruitless arguing with people from either deficiency.

In the next few verses Jesus annulled the myth that earthly marriage relationships and procreation takes place in the next life. He also stated clearly that He is not the God of the dead but of the living. There is conscious existence after death. There is a resurrection of the dead. (Study 1 Corinthians 15:12-58)

Beware that you are not swept away by theological error. Many theologians and philosophers think logically to wrong conclusions. Study the Bible and the power and nature of God! Don't swallow any presupposition thoughtlessly. It is a sure ticket to the wrong eternal destiny.

### **The Biblical Definition of "God." Mark 12:28-34**

"28) One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" 29) Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; 30) and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31) The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32) The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; 33) and to love Him with all the

heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34) When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."

This interchange between Jesus and this Scribe is very interesting. Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This is known as "the Shema." It is the cornerstone statement of monotheism that separated the God of Israel from the polytheism or many gods of the pagans.

Yet the Hebrew word play in Deuteronomy 6:4 is interesting. It is an affirmation of the existence of the plural/singular God. Theologically, it encompasses verses like Genesis 1:6 where the text says, "Let Us make man in our image, according to Our likeness." It also embraces Genesis 3:22 when after the fall, "the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil."

This mystery of a plural/singular God is equivalent to the Christian concept of the Trinity, which recognizes "One God eternally existing in the three persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit." This is the mystery of monotheism that acknowledges the plurality of the godhead as taught throughout the whole Bible.

It should be acknowledged that Orthodox Jews who accept the Shema do not embrace the concept of the Trinity. The word play statement of Deuteronomy 6:4 is the extent of the mystery of God that they embrace. This defines the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of Creation and is totally different from the polytheistic gods of the pagans.

Ironically, the Shema also embraces the mystery of Isaiah 9:6; "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." This Old Testament prophecy opens the door for Jesus to be "the Only Begotten God."

A literal translation of John 1:18 says, "'No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.'" (NASB translation) This begins to shed light on the controversy with the Jews over Jesus claiming to be "the Son of God." His claim ultimately led to His condemnation for Blasphemy.

Yet, there is no room for the concept of a Messiah without embracing the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 as the basis for the mystery of the Trinity. That's why Jesus responded to this Scribe that he was not far from the kingdom of God. He was close to embracing the gospel as expressed in John 3:16-18.

Those who understand this mystery of God understand, value, and love other people as created in the image of God. They see intrinsic value and dignity in humanity not shared with the animal kingdom. They value human life. They love their neighbor as themselves.

### **Biblical Evidence of Deity: Mark 12:35-37**

"35) And Jesus began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? 36) David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet."' 37) David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him."

Many biblical mysteries are packed into the Old Testament. This is one of them. Jesus quoted David from Psalm 110:1; “The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”” David, through prophetic insight given him by the Holy Spirit called the coming Christ by the title “Lord.” It is a title reserved for God.

In other words, David understood that one of His future descendants would be God Incarnate. The full Psalm is packed with more insight on the identity of the coming Messiah and His Kingdom. It is the biblical evidence of the claim of Jesus Christ to Deity.

Psalm 110:4 includes the detail that He would be a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. See Hebrews 5-7 where this full mystery is unpacked. This includes a claim to eternity.

The next verse in Psalm 110 says; “The Lord is at Thy right hand.” Compare this with Matthew 26:63-66. This claim of being at the right hand of Power resulted in Jesus being accused of blasphemy, but none other than King David substantiated this claim. Revelation 5:11-14 is the ultimate fulfillment of this claim. (See also Acts 7:55)

Though Mark 12:35-37 sounds benign to the casual reader, it was explosive. This short exchange loaded the guns of His opponents with the ammunition for His condemnation of death. But in doing so, they denied the clear teaching of David and the Bible. They became willfully blind.

Theological bias is blinding. It contributed to the crucifixion of Jesus despite the clear teaching of the Bible. At this point Jesus could say or do nothing in His own defense. The entirety of His public ministry screamed of His identity. The religious leaders would soon scream back; “crucify Him.”

### **The Scribes Exposed: Mark 12:38-40**

“38) In His teaching He was saying: “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, 39) and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 40) who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.””

In this section, Jesus publicly exposed the proud, pious and self-righteous pageantry of the Scribes and religious leaders. He laid out six indictments against them.

- They parade around in long ornate robes.
- They demand respectful greetings in the marketplace.
- They expect the chief seats in the synagogues.
- They run to the places of honor at banquets.
- They gain wealth by preying on widows and devouring their estates.
- They offer long and eloquent prayers for self-praise and notoriety.

This list is sad and tragic. Their hearts were proud, their motives wrong and their intentions were wicked. They were self-promoting rather than God-honoring.

Jesus warned that it is an easy trap to fall into. A little success, praise from men, and seasoning from religion and pride starts its cancerous work.

Both James and Peter warned that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5) In both texts the devil is present and ready to devour the proud.

### **Story of the Poor Widow: Mark 12:41-44**

“41) And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. 42) A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43) Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44) for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.”

Jesus was a people-watcher. In this text, He sat down on the temple grounds next to the treasury and watched the way people gave money to the work of God. You can tell a lot about people by their relationship to money.

He observed that many rich people were putting in large sums of money. They did it in such a way as to be noticed by men. Jesus did not criticize them for their giving, but He observed they were giving from their surplus. For them, it was a small offering.

Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins. It was a very small amount, but it was all she had to live on. For the woman, it was a huge sacrifice. It was all she owned. None but Jesus were impressed by her gift.

When Jesus observed her sacrifice, He called His disciples and commended her dedication. She was all-in for God! He alone was her Master, Lord, and Provider.

Paul wrote about stewardship in 2 Corinthians 8-9. I encourage you to study those two chapters. He likened giving to the law of the sower. God loves a cheerful giver. He has ways of blessing our seed for sowing and our future harvest to insanely bless kingdom work. (See 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

His grace can abound in our lives when we practice kingdom giving. The poor widow was engulfed in God's grace. (2 Corinthians 9:8) She lived depending on God as her Provider.

She was an example of the words of Jesus to His disciples as recorded in Matthew 10:9-10. Their money belts were to be empty so their faith accounts could be full. Jesus wanted them to tap into the miraculous grace of Divine Provision. He wanted them to experience the miracles of God taking care of His workers and supernaturally providing for kingdom ministry.

### **Magnificent Stones: Mark 13:1-2**

“1) As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” 2) And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.””

I confess, I love beautiful buildings and great architecture. The original temple of Solomon qualified as one of the wonders of the ancient world. Even this second temple was a sight to behold.

It was most likely rebuilt using many of the original stones from Solomon's temple. It lacked some of the glory of the original temple, but was still ornate and magnificent.

Therein was the problem. Many people worshiped the temple building and religious system it housed instead of God. Such happens to many cathedrals and churches today.

It was at this time that Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple building. This happened in 70 AD.

During His trial, this was confused with His statement in John 2:18-21 that He would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. In that prophecy, He was speaking of the temple of His body.

He was about to start working on a new spiritual temple. (See Ephesians 2:19-23) Peter picked up on this mystery in 1 Peter 2:4-5. In that text he says; "4) And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

This has an intriguing connection back to Mark 13:1. The magnificent building and stones the disciples were admiring were nothing compared to the living stones in the spiritual building Jesus is constructing.

It took forty-six years to build the original temple. God has been actively building the spiritual temple for nearly 2,000 years. The stones for the original temple were quarried by skilled craftsmen and transported to the site. The living stones are being fashioned in the quarry of life and fitted by the Holy Spirit into the living building.

As believers, God sees you and me as magnificent living stones. Though the trials and struggles of life may not make sense to you or me, God is using them to fashion us into living stones for His glory. Don't fight the process. Trust God as the Master Craftsman in your life.

*(If you go to Israel and visit the Western Wall you may wonder why this wall still exists when Jesus said, "Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." The answer is that the Western Wall is a retaining wall of the Temple Mount, not part of the temple itself. The Romans did indeed completely destroy the temple in 70 AD, leaving not one stone on top of another, just like Jesus said. Note: Calling this the "Wailing Wall" is considered offensive by Jewish people. -dj)*

### **Panoramic View of the Coming Church Age: Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25**

"3) As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "4) Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"

After leaving the temple and observing its magnificent structure, Jesus accompanied by four of His disciples walked up the slopes of the Mount of Olives and sat down overseeing the city of Jerusalem. The panoramic view was amazing!

With Him were Peter, James, John, and Andrew. These were the first four disciples Jesus originally called by the seashores of Galilee nearly three years earlier. (See Matthew 4:18-22)

As they sat down, the conversation returned to His prophecy of the destruction of the temple. It is helpful to compare the “question” as asked in the Gospel of Mark to the “questions” asked in the Gospel of Matthew.

According to Mark, they asked; “when will these things be, and what will the signs be when these things are going to be fulfilled?” (Vs 4) The “question” from the Gospel of Mark related to the destruction of the temple and accompanying events.

The “questions” as recorded by Matthew were much broader. Matthew 24:3 says; “when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

I do not see a contradiction in these two accounts, but rather Matthew elaborated more on the full scope of the conversation. He makes it sound like more of the disciples drifted into this impromptu gathering. As they talked, one subject led to the next.

Keep this in mind as you study Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25. The full conversation covered three very different subjects and three different time frames. This will become significant in a moment!

For example, the destruction of the temple happened in 70 AD. The return of Christ and the end of the age are still future events from our perspective. Can you see how broad the scope of this conversation became?

But here is the catch, many events Jesus foretold matched both time frames. Wars, famine, natural disasters, and intense persecution to the point of being perceived as tribulation all happened to the first century believers and the Jewish nation. They thought they were living in the end times or the last days.

From our vantage point in history, we try to force Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13 into what we consider “the end times.” Many look at these passages through the lens of the Great Tribulation, the rapture of the church, and the return of Christ to set up His Millennial Kingdom.

I see that view as far too narrow. Technically, the scope of the questioning of Jesus by His disciples covered the entire church age. It covered everything from the destruction of the temple in 70 AD to the return of Christ to set up His Millennial Kingdom. It was very broad!

When Acts 1:6-8 is added to this conversation, we have a unique twist. The disciples were wondering if Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that very moment after His resurrection. Jesus replied; “It’s not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority, but you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you...”.

Please understand this, the end times span the entire church age marked by the filling of the Holy Spirit and the world wide spread of the gospel. In other words, we have been in the last age for the past 2,000 years. The next big event or epoch on God’s calendar will radically change everything.

Let me summarize: Jesus was painting with a very broad brush in Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13. He was giving a macro view of the entire church age and not a micro view of the final decade before His return. It was a panoramic view of the entire church age.

If you are being caught up in the end time frenzy, take a deep breath, stand back, and look at the bigger picture. I believe we are rushing toward the climax of this age, but God has been coloring in the details of Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13 for the past 2,000 years. Not everything has to happen in the next few years. Many of these events have already been fulfilled.

This same macro view should also be applied to the book of Revelation. Biblical prophecy is very broad and not narrow. From the perspective of God and eternity, it spans a few days. From the vantage point of earth, it spans a few thousand years. (See 2 Peter 3:8-9)

In Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25, Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives and sharing with His disciples a panoramic of Jerusalem, As they questioned Him, the conversation became a panoramic view of the entire church age!

*(If you go to the Mount of Olives today, you will find the entire western side is covered in over 100,000 above-ground graves. The site has been used as a Jewish cemetery for over 3,000 years. -dj)*

### **Jesus Introduces Coming Events: Mark 13:5-10**

“5) And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you. 6) Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He!’ and will mislead many. 7) When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. 8) For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” 9) “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. 10) The gospel must first be preached to all the nations.”

These six verses serve as an introduction by Jesus on the subject of future prophecy. As we shall soon discover, these verses can be broken into three parts. No matter which view you adopt related to Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13 about events leading up to the literal return of Christ, we are slapped in the face with a startling realization.

After nearly 2,000 years of the gospel being preached, believers being filled with the Holy Spirit, and the presence of the body of Christ on earth, human civilization has not changed. In fact, it has declined and grown worse.

Think about this: The Law as given through Moses reigned for approximately 2,000 years and it failed to change the human heart. It did not prevent the need for the first coming of Christ or His Redemptive work on the cross. The Law failed to create a utopia on earth.

Tragically, the gospel and the church has now also had nearly 2,000 years to impact human civilization. It has also failed to create a utopia on earth. It has not resulted in a spiritual kingdom of God ruling on planet earth and making things better. Let me state the obvious –the church has not supplanted the need for the literal future return of the Messiah to rule planet earth!



If you adopt a macro view of the teaching of Jesus spanning the past 2,000 years, something amazing comes into focus. We discover the rise of many false religions trying to deceive the world and displace the gospel. To name a few, this includes the rise of Islam, Communism, Humanism, and a dead and apostate Christian Church including many cult groups that I do not have time to mention. This fulfills Mark 13:6.

If you adopt the micro view of the teaching of Jesus that Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13 all apply to the last days of the church age, the culminated failure of the church to create the kingdom of God on earth is even greater. Let's be honest... things are not getting better.

The gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit has radically changed some people, but human civilization continues to decline. If anything, during the last century, the slide down the destructive slope of human depravity has accelerated.

Now, let's briefly look at the next two verses. Wars and rumors of wars have greatly increased. Since WWI, more people have died in wars than all of history combined. The trend continues. The potential for mass destruction has never been greater than today with the development of multiple weapons of mass destruction. These include nuclear and biological warfare. The hope for an earthly utopia is becoming much more evasive. (Review Mark 13:7-8)

Now let's look at the last part of the introduction Jesus gave on this subject as recorded in Mark 13:9-10. As the surge to bring the gospel worldwide has gained huge momentum, so has the opposition. Persecution has increased and martyrdom has greatly compounded. Did you know that more Christians have been martyred for their faith in the past 100 years than in all of church history combined? It's true!

So you might ask; "What on earth is happening?" It looks like spiritual warfare is a reality. The kingdom of darkness is in an all-out war against the kingdom of light. The god of this world is trying to destroy both Israel and the church and prepare an assault against the return of the King of kings. The history of this present church age is rushing toward a climax.

I do not have much hope for human civilization or planet earth apart from the literal return of the Messiah to set up His earthly kingdom. Just as the Law as given through Moses did not prevent the need for the coming of the Savior, neither has the church age prevented the need for the literal return of Christ to rule on earth. (See Revelation 20)

For the doom and gloomers out there, this teaching by Jesus in Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25 are very exciting! So is all future prophecy including the book of Revelation. They scream that Jesus wins! His literal return thwarts the plans of Satan to destroy humanity and planet earth. God is in control!

When I read these verses and the book of Revelation, I get so excited I can barely contain myself. The King is coming!

### **Special Grace and Anointing for the Suffering Church. Mark 13:9-13**

“(9) But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. 10) The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11) When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12) Brother will betray

brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13) You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

Trying to attach a time frame to these verses is difficult. This harsh treatment of Christians was very applicable to the persecution endured by the early church. It has also become increasingly more applicable in the past few centuries as the gospel has spread quickly around the world.

Such is the nature of much of what Jesus said in these verses. They can be equally applied throughout the whole span of church history.

Verse 11 has special significance to any believer enduring persecution before governors, magistrates, or judges. The Holy Spirit gives a special grace and utterance of speech to those under trial for the gospel. Let me underscore this point.

In Acts 3-4, this grace and anointing was given to Peter and John as they stood before the Jewish council. In Acts 4:29-31, this special anointing and boldness was the prayer request of the early church leaders. In Acts 5, this grace was given again to the apostles after the angel released them from prison. In Acts 7 an amazing unction was given to Stephen to speak to those who eventually stoned him. Throughout the rest of the book of Acts, Paul was repeatedly given special grace and utterance by the Holy Spirit as he stood before many governors and magistrates for the defense of the gospel.

Stories from Foxe's Book of Martyrs report the same poise, grace, and utterance given to countless Christians as they stood before their accusers or faced death in the coliseums of Rome. This supernatural grace and poise became the signature of the early Christians when facing death for the sake of the gospel.

Peter specifically wrote about this special grace and anointing given to the suffering church. In 1 Peter 4:12-14 he wrote; “12) Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

This has been true throughout church history whenever Christians have been targeted for persecution. It has been amplified again in the modern church since the Reformation. This past century alone has seen a rise of suffering and persecution for the gospel much like in the early church. God gives a special grace and anointing to those set apart to defend the gospel with their very lives.

I write all of this to underline the point that Mark 13:9-13 has been applicable throughout the whole of church history. This promise from Jesus of a supernatural grace and anointing when suffering for the gospel has rested on His bride from the beginning of the church age.

### **Abomination of Desolation: Mark 13:14**

““14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.”

Jesus now talks about “the abomination of desolation.” Keep in mind, here in the book of Mark, Jesus was answering the question about the 2nd temple being destroyed.

The phrase “abomination of desolation” was referring to the prophecy of Daniel as recorded in 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11.

Daniel was living toward the end of the deportation following the destruction of the first temple. The seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah were nearly complete. During the time of his prophecy, there was no temple in Jerusalem. This explained his utter dismay of his own vision. Nothing made sense to him.

Shortly, the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah launched to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Many Jewish people returned from captivity to rebuild the temple. It was one of the huge miracle stories in the Old Testament.

This second temple was the one in existence during the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Mark 13 opened with Jesus and His disciples on the temple grounds and the disciples admiring the temple building and stones. In verse 2 Jesus said, “2) ... Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.””

Jesus was talking about the coming destruction and desolation of that temple. He was the only one to issue the prophecy of the destruction of the second temple.

It surprised both the disciples and the religious leaders. (See John 2:19) During His trial before Caiaphas He was later accused of threatening insurrection because of those words. (See Matthew 26:60-62)

Though He was talking about His death and resurrection in three days, this conversation recorded in Mark 13:2 and Mathew 24:2 is also clearly related to the destruction of the second temple.

That happened in 70 AD with the invasion of Rome. Nearly all scholars see this as the fulfillment of the words of Daniel related to the abomination of desolation.

But many also speculate that a third temple must be rebuilt on the temple grounds before the end times and be desecrated by the anti-Christ. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12) Thus they see a dual fulfillment of Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 and the prophecies of Daniel.

In support of this view, the book of Revelation was the last book written in the New Testament. It was written by the Apostle John around or shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem. The book of Revelation does talk about the existence of a temple and an altar in what we consider end times even from our present vantage point. (See Revelation 11:1-2)

Of course, the mystery is that no Jewish temple currently exists in Jerusalem. This explains why many are eagerly watching for Israel to build a third temple on the temple grounds that will be subsequently desecrated by the anti-Christ. In fact, the building of that temple might precipitate the invasion of Israel by the nations.

### **The Great Tribulation: Mark 13:14-23**

“14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 15) The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; 16) and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. 17) But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18) But pray that it may not happen in the winter. 19) For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. 20) Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. 21) And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ’; or, ‘Behold, He is there’; do not believe him; 22) for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23) But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.”

In these few verses, Jesus switched His discourse to the Great Tribulation. He transitioned completely to His second coming and the end of the times. (See the questions as asked in Matthew 24:3) He started addressing the “sign of your coming and of the end of the age.”

Two things stand out about His answer. First, He gave a strong geographically specific answer. He focused on Jerusalem and Judea. His answer related to how the Jewish people would see the tribulation unfold from a Jerusalem setting. The brunt of the antiChrist attack will be aimed against Israel.

This is also true of the book of Revelation. Though it includes a great multitude from every nation, the main focus was on Israel. (Read Revelation 7)

Second, many false Christs and false prophets will arise showing signs and wonders so as to lead astray even the elect, if possible. Paul warned about this in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11. Like the sorcerers who came against Moses in Egypt, Satan always tries to duplicate God's power with false signs and wonders.

The significant thing about Paul writing about the end times in the books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians was to show that the Great Tribulation would extend beyond Israel. Satan will try to deceive the whole earth.

According to Revelation 12:13-17, Satan will target both Israel and Christians in the end times. He will undoubtedly exploit modern technology to export his propaganda. The Great Tribulation will affect people world wide.

Mark did not go much deeper with his record of the teaching of Jesus on the actual Tribulation. In the next section, he moved rapidly to the return of Christ.

I have found it is better to focus on the return of Christ rather than the tribulation. Many are so focused on the tribulation period, they totally neglect the fact that the main focus is the return of Christ. We are always to fix our eyes on Jesus and not our circumstances.

### **Jesus is Coming Again: Mark 13:24-27**

“24) But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, 25) and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the

heavens will be shaken. 26) Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27) And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.”

Jesus now talks about His second coming to set up His earthly kingdom. According to Mark, He will return after the tribulation.

Technically, the three most popular views of the end times and the tribulation all hold to this view. Pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation all teach that His literal return to set up His earthly kingdom happens after the Great Tribulation. The debate relates to the timing of the rapture.

I do not argue over the timing of the rapture. The word is not even used in the Bible. I see verses that could be used to support numerous views. Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:26-27 both lend support to a post tribulation description of Jesus gathering the elect from the earth. Matthew even included the Great Trumpet.

Let me stress, most views of the end times believe in a literal return of Christ to set up an earthly kingdom. Revelation 20 repeatedly talks about a thousand year reign of Christ. This is known as the millennial kingdom. I am biblically convinced of a literal millennial kingdom. I believe this event will end this present age, time, or epoch.

Mark 13:24-25 and Matthew 24:29 both teach the return of Christ will be accompanied by astronomical signs and wonders. As the Creator steps into the created realm, the physical sky will be shaken. The sun, moon, and stars will be radically affected.

The main thrust of the gospel writers is to be ready because Jesus is coming again. The emphasis is to be busy spreading the gospel until Jesus returns.

This is my passion and focus. While I am still here, I am going to be praying, writing, teaching, preaching, and telling people about Jesus. I am going to be ministering to people in His Name every way I can. The time is short!

### **The Sovereignty of God: Mark 13:28-32**

“28) Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29) Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. 30) Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31) Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. 32) But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

Two things stand out in this passage. First, the emphasis is more on who He is than on what He is going to do! This holds true for all of Mark chapter 13. This passage is about the true identity of the Messiah! No one else could pull off these events. He is the Christ!

Second, no one knows the time of these events, but the Father alone. The reason may be because the timing may be a bit fluid.

There are numerous examples in the Old Testament where timing for judgment was changed because certain kings humbled themselves or Israel turned from their sin. God's ultimate plan was fulfilled but the timing was altered.

That seems to be the tone behind 2 Peter 3:8-9. God's highest priority is for people to be saved. The big events will happen according to His Word, but the timing is under His Sovereignty.

That is why it is foolish to set dates or try to figure out the exact time for future events. Prophecy tells the sequence of future events, but it does not establish exact times for the return of Christ or for the end of this age. Neither the angels nor the Son knows the exact time. That detail is under the Sovereign will of the Father!

### **The Final Push: Mark 13:33-37**

““(33) Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. 34) It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. 35) Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— 36) in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. 37) What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’ ””

Mark closed his discourse in a much more condensed fashion than Matthew, but the emphasis is the same. Be focused, diligent, and busy for the kingdom until the Master returns. Don't get distracted from the mission or sloppy with your stewardship. Pour yourself into the spread of the gospel.

Four times in these five verses Jesus said to “be on the alert!” Be watchful, busy, and fully engaged for the kingdom. Don't sit around waiting. Put your hands to the task of doing kingdom work until the Master of the Kingdom returns!

Because I am convinced Jesus is coming soon, I pour myself more diligently into Great Commission work. I don't care about my age, retirement, politics, or entertainment. There is only thing the Bible requires of believers in the end times and that is to “stay alert!”

That means to be intentional about spreading the gospel and doing kingdom work. Don't get distracted or waste time and resources on worthless and fruitless things. The end times will be days of open doors and great harvest. Let me illustrate.

Suppose you are watching your favorite team compete for the world championship in any sport. The score is tied and it is down to the last minute. Do you expect your team to get lax and sloppy and put in the third string players, or do you want them to put everything into a final push and leave it all on the field? Why would you do less for the Kingdom of God?

### **The Passover Lamb: Mark 14:1-2**

““(1) Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; 3) for they were saying, “Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.””

Destiny was converging on Jerusalem. The Passover was at hand. In John 1:29, John the Baptist has introduced Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the people.”

The chief priest and the scribes were seeking to “seize to seize Him by stealth and kill Him.” (Mark 14:1) However, they wanted to avoid the festival, because they feared repercussions from the people.

Leadership was corrupt, but they had to play the game for the sake of public appearance. Soon events would expose them and force them into the middle of the spotlight and the public trial of Jesus.

They were about to fulfill the Passover which was the focus of Old Testament prophecy. (Read Isaiah 53 and Acts 2:22-24) They were key actors in a script written by Divine Providence. They could not change the Script. Human redemption was about to be fulfilled.

### **The Home of Simon the Leper: Mark 14:3**

“3) While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, ...”

This is a short phrase, but it is so meaningful. So, who was Simon the leper with whom Jesus and His disciples spent the evening in Bethany? Let’s make a few observations.

First, he was obviously no longer a leper. He was not self-isolated from people as the law would require if he was still a leper. He owned a house and was welcoming guests.

Second, he was known by name. The text calls him “Simon.” After his healing, he had become a devoted follower and friend of Jesus and His disciples.

Third, Jesus spent His final evening before the Passover with His disciples at the home of Simon the leper. Some of the people Jesus touched during His public ministry became close friends and associates. We sometimes miss this significant point.

Finally, though his exact identity is a guessing game, we can look back to Mark 1:40-45 for the man who became known as Simon the leper. (See also Matthew 8:1-4)

He is the most likely choice. When Jesus was coming down from the mountain after giving His famous sermon, he was blocked by a leper bowing down before Him and saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

The leper made it clear that his healing by Jesus was not a question of power or ability. It came down to the will of Jesus. So, what is the will of Jesus related to healing?

The answer from Jesus was simple but profound. He reached out and touched him, and said, “I am willing, be cleansed.” (Mark 1:41-42)

I don’t want to force the text, but throughout the public ministry of Jesus, healing was always His will. I cannot not find one case in the four gospels where Jesus did not heal the sick or deliver the oppressed. Sickness, diseases, injuries, and demons never beat Him. He prevailed over them all.

Apparently, it was always His will to heal. Why? Because He is the Great Physician and by His stripes we were healed. (See 1 Peter 2:24, Hebrews 12:13; James 5:15; Isaiah 53:5; Psalm 107:20)

I'm not sure where the phrase came from that closes a prayer for healing by saying; "if it be Thy will." In Matthew 26:39-42, Jesus prayed that way as He headed toward the cross. But that settled the doubt; "by His stripes we were healed." Part of the reason Jesus went to the cross was for our healing. Again, He was willing.

God does not want us to be double-minded when praying for healing. He wants us to pray in faith knowing His compassion, power, and provision for healing. James even calls it "the prayer of faith." (James 5:15-16) James was the one who warned about being double-minded when praying. (James 1:6-8)

I believe Jesus wants many stories like that of Simon the leper. These are the stories that help advance the gospel.

### **Contrast Between Mary and Judas: Mark 14:3-9**

"3) While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. 4) But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? 5) For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. 6) But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. 7) For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. 8) She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. 9) Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

This story was also recorded in Matthew 26:6-23 and John 12:1-8. John adds some important details to the story. First, he gives the identity of the woman. It was none other than Mary, the sister of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

The very costly perfume of pure nard may have been purchased for the burial of her brother Lazarus. It was used to cover the stench of death.

Second, John also identifies Judas as the one who complained about not selling the perfume. John also disclosed the true motive of Judas. He was embezzling the money from the money bag. He was a thief. Greedy people always try to control the way others spend their money.

Third, the three gospels all point out that the alabaster vial of pure nard was very expensive. John 13:5 pointed out that Judas had valued the nard at 300 denarii. I repeat, it was very valuable. Yet Mary broke it and anointed both the head and feet of Jesus with the perfume. Breaking the vial indicated she used it all on Jesus.

Furthermore, John added the detail that Mary used her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus with the perfume. She was bowed at the feet of Jesus in the posture of worship.



What a contrast to the testy demeanor she displayed toward Jesus as recorded in John 11:32-34 at the grave of her brother. She now valued Jesus more than any earthly treasure. Keep in mind, the meal was at the home of Simon the leper. Mary came prepared to worship! She brought the vial of perfume with her.

From this text we are also forced to wrestle with poverty. Judas stated the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus acknowledged the poor were always present, but He Himself would remain for just a short while longer.

Mary got it right! Jesus and not money is the best solution for poverty. No force on earth has come close to the work of Jesus Christ over the centuries through His church to help the poor and combat poverty.

Finally, Jesus pointed out that Mary was preparing His body for His coming burial. She was the only one present who understood and heeded His many prophetic warnings about His coming death, burial, and resurrection. She alone was processing the gospel message which was about to be fulfilled. She was worshipping Jesus as the Savior of the world!

There are many applications to be gained from this story. The foremost might be the stark contrast between Mary and Judas. Mary focused on Jesus. Judas focused on the money. Both were fixated on their true God/god.

Be honest. What is your primary focus?

### **The Judas Syndrome: Mark 14:10-11**

“10) Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. 11) They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.”

Judas became a fulfillment of James 3:13-16. He was full of greed, selfish ambition, and jealousy. After being exposed by Jesus because he degraded Mary's act of worship in the previous few verses, Judas became angry and bitter and decided on a course of revenge. (Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-11)

James warns; “15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.” (James 3:15-16) The life of Judas ended in demonic torment and suicide. Back to the story as recorded by Mark:

Immediately, Judas Iscariot left the gathering at the home of Simon the leper and went to the chief priests to make arrangements for betraying Jesus. In doing so, he calcified his wicked heart of hypocrisy.

Think about this, Judas rebuked Mary for worshipping Jesus with perfume worth 300 denarii, but then He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. (See Matthew 26:6-16) the money was intended for self-consumption. There was no thought or compassion for the poor.

But there is an ironic twist to his story. According to Matthew 27:1-10, after returning the money in an attempt to soothe his inner agony, the priests took the money and bought the potter's field

as a burial place for strangers. In a sense, his blood money ended up going to the poor. God holds you to your words.

So what is the moral lesson we learn from the pitiful life of Judas? Be careful not to make money your god. It can corrupt your soul. Beware of what you become in the pursuit of what you want! He got his money, but in the process became a traitor. I call it "The Judas Syndrome."

*(People touring Jerusalem can visit the home of Caiaphas the High Priest as it has been discovered, excavated, and preserved. Looking down the hill from the site, one can see a field that is called "Akeldama" in Aramiac. The word means, "Field of Blood." It is said nothing has grown on that piece of ground since Judas hung himself there. -dj)*

### **The Omniscience of Jesus: Mark 14:12-16**

"12) On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" 13) And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; 14) and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15) And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." 16) The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover."

The way Mark tells this story hints that he may have been one of the two disciples sent on this mission. Jesus told them exactly what to do in the city, and so it happened.

They followed the man with the pitcher into the house and talked to the owner. Sure enough, the owner showed them the upper room where Jesus and His disciples kept the Passover. The room had mostly been prepared for them.

This story emphasizes the omniscience of Jesus. As God, He knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows every detail. He knew this homeowner would serve as the last host for Him and His disciples. He knew that the cross awaited Him just beyond the Passover meal in that room.

He also knows the details of your life and my life. He is a very present help in our time of need.

### **The Exposure of Judas: Mark 14:17-21**

"17) When it was evening He came with the twelve. 18) As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me." 19) They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" 20) And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. 21) For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

Mark devotes the least time writing about the upper room discourse between Jesus and His disciples of the four gospels. But He does touch on the betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

According to Mark 14:10-11, Judas had already made the deal with the chief priests to betray Jesus. He was present at the Passover meal, but had a guilty conscience. He was going

through the outward motions of the Passover, but inwardly he was full of hypocrisy, deceit and guile.

Instead of trying to reach Judas, Jesus merely exposed him and pronounced sentence on him; “21) For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.””

This may have been the last chance for Judas. John 13:21-30 tells this same story but adds a few details. First, John pointed out that after Jesus gave the morsel to Judas, Satan entered into him.” (Vs 27) The actions of Judas left the door for Satan wide open. Judas opened the door for demonic activity.

Second, verse 30 says that Judas left immediately from the meal to go and carry out his betrayal of Jesus. He was absent for the amazing teachings of Jesus to His disciples as recorded in John 14-17.

He missed the promise of the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit. It did not apply to him. He was also not included in the teaching of the true vine. He did not belong to Jesus. He made a compact with the devil. He opted for citizenship in the kingdom of darkness rather than the kingdom of light. He was religious but lost and deceived.

I have discovered over the years that there is often a Judas present in churches, Christian organizations, and leadership roles. They look good, talk good, and go through the motions of the Christian life. But they are planted by Satan to run interference with the work of God. They are not in tune with the Holy Spirit and often focused on self.

However, in an unusual twist of fate, God used Judas to accomplish His ultimate purpose. Judas became a tag team with Satan and the Sanhedrin to accomplish the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

Judas had fooled the other disciples with his hypocrisy, but he had not fooled Jesus. In the end, “a Judas” is always exposed. Satan's workers can masquerade as angels of light, but at some point their true nature and agenda comes through. Their eternal condemnation is just.

If your heart and life are not right with God, take heed from the story of Judas and repent. Get in the right posture with Jesus Christ before it's too late. Don't become the victim of your own dark heart, deception, and hypocrisy.

### **The Passover Meal: Mark 14:22-25**

“22) While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is My body.” 23) And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24) And He said to them, “ 25) Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.””

Of the four gospel accounts of Jesus keeping the Passover meal with His disciples, Mark was by far the most brief.

Mark records that Jesus took a piece of bread from the Passover meal and broke it and said; “take it, this is my body.” He was pointing to His forthcoming scourging and work on the cross where His body would be broken. By His stripes we are healed.

Then He reached down and took the cup and gave a blessing. As He did, He drank from it and then passed it to His disciples and they all in turn drank from it. As He passed it to them, He said; “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

In so doing, He was making the bold claim of being the Passover lamb. He was the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:8 that God would prepare Himself as the Lamb of sacrifice. He was also presenting Himself as the fulfillment of the Passover kept by Israel as they were preparing to leave Egypt under Moses. (See Exodus 12)

It was the blood of the Passover Lamb placed on the doorpost of every believing family in Israel that caused the destroying angel who killed the firstborn in every house in Egypt to pass them by. (Exodus 12:23) Why? The blood of the lamb was a sign that a substitutionary death had already taken place in those homes. A lamb had died in the place of the firstborn.

This is what the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross became for us. It was not a coincidence that Jesus was crucified during the Passover celebration. It is impossible to read this account without remembering the words of John the Baptist as he introduced Jesus to Israel as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29, 36)

Jesus was about to fulfill every prophecy, type and shadow about the lamb of sacrifice presented in the Old Testament. He was indeed “the Lamb of God.” From this meal He instituted what we call, “The Lord's Supper” as an ordinance of remembrance celebrated by Christians.

He was about to fulfill the Old Covenant. The New Covenant based on faith in Him as the Savior of the world was about to be inaugurated.

This was the pivot point of human history. Jesus Christ became the substitutional sacrifice for every believer. Faith in Him means that our sins have already been judged and paid in full. He died in our place.

His role as the Lamb for the Redemption of humanity is also pictured in Revelation chapter five. The whole chapter is worthy of careful study. The chapter ends with Him being worshipped together with the Father.

### **The Concluding Hymn: Mark 14:26**

“26) After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” Mark 14:26

Both Matthew and Mark record that Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn at the end of the Passover meal. (See also Matthew 26:30) In both cases the statement is both a sentence and a complete paragraph. It was intended to stand alone as a complete thought. Though a very short paragraph, it is packed with meaning.

The record does not state which hymn they sang. Jewish tradition reveals that the Passover meal was concluded by singing the last portion of the Hallel. The Hallel is composed of Psalms 113 through 118. It is a joyous celebration of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Why is this significant? By looking at these Psalms, we see that there were many references to the eventual salvation of the Lord's people brought by the death and resurrection of Christ. This is especially true of Psalm 118, which served as the conclusion of the Passover meal. It is well worth the time to stop and read these six Psalms while imagining Jesus singing portions of them with His disciples as they departed from the upper room.

Ephesians 5:18-21 and Colossians 3:16-17 both point to the importance of using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for teaching and making disciples. Jesus was no exception. Putting the psalms to music was a common method of memorization.

But there is another important lesson in this short verse. At the conclusion of the Passover meal, Jesus was in the spirit of worship and in control of His emotions. He alone understood what the next several hours would bring, yet He was singing hymns of praise to His Father.

The inner battle was about to begin in the Garden of Gethsemane, but at this moment He was completely reconciled with His mission. He was the Living Word walking in harmony with the written Word.

Herein is a great secret to walking in the Spirit. Always harmonize yourself with the Word of God. (Compare to John 4:23-24) Walk in the spirit of worship. That is exactly what Jesus was doing as He departed the upper room with His disciples.

### **The Futility of Good Intentions: Mark 14:27-31**

"27) And Jesus \*said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' 28) But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 29) But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." 30) And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." 31) But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also."

Jesus warned that they were all going to fall away from Him. The shepherd was about to be struck down and the sheep were going to be scattered.

Peter meant well. He was even sincere. But good intentions in the flesh cannot please God. There is futility in good intentions. The flesh lacks what the Bible calls "power."

How do we know Peter was operating out of the flesh? This was before Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was not yet given. The flesh cannot be trusted.

This is the thrust behind Romans 6-8. Until a man or woman is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they will be plagued by fleshly weakness and failure. They can be legalistic and sincere, but like the testimony of Paul in Romans 7:14-25, they will lose the inner battles to sin.

Peter was a radically different man after Pentecost. Repeatedly in the book of Acts he stood strong and steadfast in the face of harsh opposition.

The difference was the indwelling Holy Spirit. He was no longer living according to the flesh. He began living and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:29-31 is a prime example. They were continually filled with the Holy Spirit. They walked in divine power and holy boldness. God changed them from within.

Good intentions in the flesh cannot please God. In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul contrasted the deeds of the flesh with the walk in the Spirit. They produce radically different results.

It took me years to get over my theological inhibitions against the Holy Spirit. The Bible School I attended was biased against the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It set us up for failure.

Yet in Acts 1:4-8, Jesus focused on the Holy Spirit as the promise of the Father. He promised that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was going to fill them with inner power.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul stressed the importance of being “continually filled” with the Spirit. I believe in one baptism but many fillings.

This text in Mark 14:27-21 is the greatest example of being religious, committed, sincere, and legalistic apart from the inner power of the Holy Spirit. Peter was all of those things, but he lacked the inner power of the Holy Spirit. He was destined for failure.

Peter was sincere and religious, but he was missing the inner flow of rivers of living water. (See John 7:37-39) Radical changes were about to take place in his life.

### **Anguish of Soul: Mark 14:32-36**

“32) They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I have prayed.” 33) And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. 34) And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.” 35) And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. 36) And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.””

These verses are hard to comprehend. Let me try to explain what was happening that caused Jesus so much inner pain and anguish.

It had started. At some point during the Passover meal, the sins of humanity were transferred to Jesus and He became the true Passover lamb. The separation between Father and Son had begun in earnest.

By the time they arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus became very distressed and troubled. This was anguish of the soul. He was alone.

Matthew says, “He became grieved and distressed to the point of death.” (Matthew 26:37-38) Luke 22:44 says; “And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.”

It is hard to capture the inner torment Jesus was going through. “He made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteous of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) Words cannot capture nor can the human mind comprehend the inner pain Jesus was enduring as He was assaulted by human sin and guilt.

Many point to the physical pain He endured during His scourging and crucifixion. It was small compared to the spiritual and emotional pain He was carrying by the full load of human sin suddenly dumped on Him.

In the middle of Isaiah 53:6-7 it says; "... But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and was afflicted..."

It was not only that the full load of human sin was dumped upon Him, He literally became sin for us.

Isaiah 53:10 says; "But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering..." At this point in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was being crushed by the full weight of human sin and guilt.

His prayer life and communion with the Father was severed. He was abandoned and alone. Even His closest disciples slept through His ordeal.

I emphasize His anguish over sin that you might know how utterly awful sin really is. It separates people from God! Isaiah 59:2 says; "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear."

Sin turns people into slaves of Satan. It tears away at the human soul. It deadens the conscience. It leads downward to addictions and shameful lusts and acts of depravity. (See Romans 1:18-32 and Ephesians 4:17-19)

Sin acts like a novocaine that deadens the human soul to guilt and shame. It causes people to laugh and party without realizing they are dancing with the devil right into the pits of hell.

But Jesus had no novocaine. He was assaulted by the full brunt force of human guilt, shame, and depravity. He alone paid for every sinful act committed by humanity. In the Garden, He was already being tied to the devil's whipping post. It was the ultimate assault on innocence.

He voluntarily endured it all because of His great love for you and me. He took our place. He was separated from God so that we might be reconciled to God!

### **The "Daddyhood" of God: Mark 14:35-36**

"35) And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. 36) And He was saying, 'Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.'"

In the Garden, Jesus was at His lowest point of emotional pain and suffering. As He went and fell on His face in prayer. His praying took on a desperate tone. This time He addressed His Father with a new phrase. He cried out "Abba Father."

The formalities were gone. He simply resorted to crying out "Dear Daddy." He knew that all things were possible for His Heavenly Daddy. He wanted the cup of the agony of sin to pass from Him. He wanted the separation between Father and Son to end. He wanted intimate fellowship with His Heavenly Daddy restored.

Yet even at this moment, He yielded Himself to the greater will of the Father; “Yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt.” We often make foolish decisions in the middle of the storm when we are emotionally drained. That’s when we need to trust the “Daddyhood” of God the most!

It is noteworthy that both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 say the Holy Spirit within us enables us to cry “Abba Father.” God answered the cry of Jesus. The separation ended, not only for Jesus but for every born-again child of God as well.

The will and ways of the Father were higher at this moment than the emotional pain Jesus was carrying. He was about to open the doors of salvation and bring many sons to glory.

But this term “Abba Father” sheds the spotlight on the potential intimate communion with the Father available to any child of God. Few press into this realm. Few take the time to build a daily relationship with the Father.

Yet Jesus won the privilege for us. Don’t wait until the storm to build your “Abba Father” relationship with God. Get to know the “Daddyhood” of God!

### **Sleeping Through The Battle: Mark 14:37-42**

“37) And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? 38) Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39) Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40) And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. 41) And He came the third time, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42) Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!””

As Jesus returned three times to find Peter, James, and John sleeping. He told Peter to keep watching and praying.

Some Christian circles around the world practice “watchings.” It is fasting from sleep for the purpose of prayer and intercession. In some circles, all night prayer meetings are common and they are often accompanied by extraordinary movings of the Holy Spirit. They fuel vision and ministry.

These are only found in groups devoted to the inner unction of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said to Peter; “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Only the born-again and Spirit-filled believer have the capacity to be supernaturally strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

The flesh is weak and powerless when it comes to serving and waiting on God. It quickly comes to the end of “self.” Paul highlighted this contrast in 1 Corinthians 2-3 when he drew a distinction between the spiritual man, the natural man and the carnal Christian.

The disciples being overcome by sleep in Gethsemane is a picture of the futility of carnal ministry. They were sleeping through the greatest spiritual battle in biblical history.

It stands in stark contrast to these same men after Pentecost. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit transformed them into different men. They became mighty in spirit. They became seasoned warriors.



There is nothing in the human flesh that qualifies a man or woman for Christian service. No matter the intentions, the flesh cannot please God! (Romans 8:5-11) Only the Holy Spirit can give "life" to our mortal bodies. (Vs 11)

Burnout is the result of trying to pump out spiritual ministry through the strength of the flesh. It is impossible for the flesh to sustain what God designed the spirit to carry. All such self-monuments will eventually crumble and fall.

The remedy is to constantly seek the filling, power, and energy of the Holy Spirit. At some point, you will discover your own Gethsemane. Meeting with the Father through His promised Holy Spirit will become a delight for you. It will be transforming!

### **Being "In Tune": Mark 14:41-43**

"41) And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42) Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" 43) Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders." Mark 14:41-43

Jesus knew the exact moment of His betrayal by Judas. He ended His praying and returned to His disciples for an appointment with destiny the exact moment Judas arrived with the mob to arrest Him.

Was the timing coincidental? Not at all! Jesus knew exactly what was happening and when it would transpire. He was "in tune" with everything happening around Him.

We could attribute this to His omniscience. As God, He knew all things. But, according to the mystery of Philippians 2:7, when Jesus took on human form, He emptied Himself of some Divine attributes.

So this begs another solution for His heightened sense of awareness. I want to suggest another possibility. Because of His communion with the Father in the Spirit, all things were revealed to Him. He knew what the mind of the Spirit was at all times. He was modeling what every Spirit-filled believer can become.

The big question; "Does Scripture support this thesis?" Was Jesus modeling the potential we have in our relationship with God? How far can we stretch Romans 8:29, 2 Peter 1:2-4 and John 14:12? Let's consult a few companion Scriptures.

In 1 Corinthians 2:10-12, Paul taught that the spiritual man or woman should have a heightened sense of discernment from communion with the Holy Spirit. God wants to reveal truth to us through the Holy Spirit. In the context, neither the natural man nor the carnal Christian has access to this depth of communion with God through the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 1:17-23 and 3:14-21, Paul prayed for believers to have the eyes of their hearts opened and receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation into the knowledge of Christ. He was laying out a spiritual dynamic available to every born-again believer, but sadly not embraced by all.

But notice, from our context in Mark 14, this awareness of things happening around Him came from His time with the Father in Gethsemane. While the disciples were sleeping, He was in communion with His Father. Jesus was walking in the Spirit.

This subject should greatly intrigue every believer who longs to become like Jesus. It is not available to the natural man or the carnal believer. (Romans 8:1-17)

As the end times approach, it is essential for believers to be “in tune” with the Spirit of God. There is no shortcut to discerning the mind of Christ.

Jesus is calling His bride to set aside sin and carnality which wages war against the soul and focus on His Word and intimate communion with Him. Jesus wants us to be “in tune” with Him through His Spirit.”

### **The Kiss of Death: Mark 14:43-46**

“43) Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44) Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard.” 45) After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, “Rabbi!” and kissed Him. 46) They laid hands on Him and seized Him.

It is no mistake that His captures came by night. While the city slept, Jesus was being betrayed into the hands of sinners. By the time His loyal followers awakened in the morning, evil had assaulted Him.

Judas had agreed on the sign of a kiss to betray Jesus. Years earlier Solomon had written a proverb that now seemed prophetic. Proverbs 27:6 says; “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”

Both Peter and Judas can be seen in this Proverb. The denials of Peter were like wounds to Jesus, but the kiss of Judas was full of deceit and betrayal. It was the kiss of death.

You will most likely be hurt, betrayed, and wounded by someone very close to you. People will let you down, but Jesus will never forsake you. I highly encourage you to build deep communion with Jesus as your foremost relationship in life.

### **Contrast of Two Swords: Mark 14:46-50**

“46) They laid hands on Him and seized Him. 47) But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. 48) And Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber? 49) Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures.” 50) And they all left Him and fled.

Each of the four gospel writers included the story of the arrest of Jesus. They all add rich details to the event and it is very insightful to consolidate the four accounts. But for our purpose, we are going to stick closely to the story as told by Mark and only borrow slightly from other accounts.

I want to talk today about the contrast between two swords. When the mob came to arrest Jesus, they were armed with swords and clubs. Peter reacted quickly and drew his sword and

cut off the ear of the slave of the high priest. We can call this “the sword of the flesh.” He responded in kind with physical force. He trusted in his arm of flesh. He relied on his natural reaction. He wounded and cut off the ear of Malchus. (John 18:10) Things were about to escalate quickly.

Jesus responded quickly and ordered Peter to stand down. (Luke 22:51) Jesus used the “sword of the Spirit.” He quickly quoted Scripture. He then did the most unusual thing, He reached out and healed the ear of Malchus which Peter had cut off. The sword of the Spirit always brings healing. In fact, this was the last recorded miracle of healing Jesus performed before His crucifixion. He moved the whole ordeal into a different realm marked by love and compassion.

Let’s look at a quick contrast between the two swords. The sword of the flesh always strikes out and wounds. The sword of the Spirit always brings healing and restoration. The sword of the flesh is based on natural reason and reactions. The sword of the Spirit is based on God’s Word and ways. The sword of the flesh is defensive and often attacks its own mission field. The sword of the Spirit always resorts to the power of God and leaves the door wide open for the gospel.

This begs a final question from this story; “Why did John name the slave of the high priest?” (John 18:10) He used his name in a way that indicates the readers were acquainted with him. Could it be that the compassion and healing touch of Jesus planted the gospel for his salvation. Granted, it is mere speculation, but the sword of the flesh always hinders the gospel, while the sword of the Spirit always advances the gospel.

### **The Hasty Gathering: Mark 14:53-54**

“53) They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together. 54) Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire.”

Keep in mind, this was the night of the Jewish Passover meal. The festival was kept by all in Israel to celebrate the first Passover under Moses as recorded in Exodus 12 and the final plague on Egypt, which was the death of the first born.

At twilight, every family who believed in God was to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts of their house. When the destroying angel passed over the land to kill the firstborn, the blood was an indication that a death had already taken place. They were saved by the blood of the lamb.

This became a festival to be kept by Israel annually to celebrate their freedom from Egypt. During Israel’s shameful history, there were long periods of time when they strayed from God and abandoned both the temple and all festivals that indicated loyalty to God.

With the rebuilding of the second temple under Ezra and Nehemiah, the sacrificial system and Jewish holidays were restored. The outer system was thriving in the days of Christ, but inwardly the Jewish leaders had become carnal, sinful, and corrupt.

The height of the hypocrisy was manifest in this text from Mark 14:53-54. Instead of keeping the Passover at home with their families as prescribed by Moses, the high priest, chief priests, elders, and scribes convened a hasty gathering at the courtyard of the high priest to carry out the murder of Jesus. They did it in secret at night under the shadow of darkness.

What they meant for evil, God meant for good. Their actions fulfilled God's plan for human redemption by taking the Lamb of God and making Him the Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. (See John 1:28; 36)

The condemnation of Jesus by the high priest, the timing during the Jewish Passover festival and the method of Jesus dying on a cross fulfilled every type and shadow of the Jewish sacrificial system.

The events of that evening as captured by each of the gospel writers were providential. Let's briefly look at a few Old Testament promises that were fulfilled that evening by this hasty gathering of Jewish leaders.

It fulfilled the story of Genesis 22 and Abraham offering up Isaac and God promising a substitute. It fulfilled the Passover of Exodus 12 and what brings true freedom from human slavery to sin. It also fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah 53 and many other Old Testament prophecies.

Though this gathering of the Sanhedrin and religious leaders in Mark 14:53-54 seems insignificant, it was monumental. This hastily gathering in violation of the Passover ordinance as prescribed by Moses, fulfilled the greatest promise of God in the Old Testament to accomplish human redemption.

#### **False Testimony or Fulfilled Prophecy: Mark 14:55-59**

"55) Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. 56) For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. 57) Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, 58) 'We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.' 59) Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent."

The false trial against Jesus reached a deadlock. According to Deuteronomy 17:6-7 and 19:15, a capital charge had to be confirmed by the exact testimony of two or three witnesses. This was to prevent a malicious trial. The Law was doing its righteous job.

Such was now the challenge of the midnight gathering of the Sanhedrin. Because they were relying on false witnesses, they could not get consistent and collaborating testimony against Jesus. The trial was quickly breaking down.

On a prophetic note, Psalm 27:12 says; "Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence." What an exact description of the midnight trial against Jesus.

Finally, they settled on a claim that Jesus promised to destroy the temple made with hands, and rebuild another made without hands in three days. (Vs 58) The literal nature of the claim was ridiculous. How could one man with his bare hands tear down the temple?

They were referring back to the verbal exchange recorded in John 2:18-22 between Jesus and the Jews. Jesus had just driven the money changers and merchants from the temple during His first Passover visit in Jerusalem after starting His public ministry.

When they asked Him for a sign, He had replied; “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” John takes pains to explain that Jesus was referring to the temple of His body.

As the fog clears away from the story in Mark 14:58, the realization settles on the reader that the Sanhedrin was about to help fulfill the promise made by Jesus of a sign. He had been speaking of His death, burial, and resurrection. The false witnesses helped focus the proceedings on the very sign Jesus promised to fulfill.

And so it happened. That very night Jesus was condemned and handed over for crucifixion. The temple of His body was destroyed on the cross. In the words of John the Baptist, He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (John 1:29)

### **The Loaded Question: Mark 14:60-62**

“60) The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” 61) But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” 62) And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.””

With the trial quickly imploding, the high priest himself stood up and questioned Jesus. He was trying to both provoke Him and intimidate Him. Neither worked.

Finally, he decided on a direct question; “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” He was trying to get Jesus to blaspheme.

It was a loaded question. If Jesus was a mere man and claimed to be God, it was blasphemy. If He was the Son of God and denied it, He was a liar. If He told the truth, He would be charged with a Capital crime.

There is one more option, if He told the truth and was the Son of God, the high priest should have been obligated to study the evidence of His claim. Why? Because biblical prophecy pointed to a coming Messiah. Israel was expecting the Messiah.

Psalms 110 is a prime example. Take a moment and read this short Psalm. It is sighted often in the book of Hebrews as evidence of the deity of Christ. Daniel 7:13-14 also adds insight to this conversation.

In John 5:18-47, Jesus gave a lengthy defense to the charge that He was making Himself equal to God. The religious leaders had plenty of time to research and validate His claim. Everything from His teachings to His signs and wonders supported His claim.

In Mark 14:62, Jesus responded to the question with a short but truthful answer; “62) And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.””

Make no mistake, Jesus died to defend the claim that He was the promised Christ. Tragically, the high priest never considered the option that He was telling the truth. The Messiah was about to be rejected by Israel. (See John 1:11)

### **The Spirit of Jealousy: Mark 14:62-65**

“62) And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” 63) Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? 64) You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. 65) Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophecy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.

There are numerous times in the Bible when crowds were overcome by a mob mentality. I personally believe demonic spirits can work crowds in a frenzy. They feed on violence and destruction and lead to riots and death. Often the innocent and the righteous are their victims.

These spirits enflamed the crowd again in Mark 15:9-15 as they demanded that Pilate hand Jesus over to be crucified. Again they showed up at the stoning of Stephen. (Acts 7:54-69) Paul and Silas suffered because of these same spirits in Philippi as recorded in Acts 16 when they were stripped and beaten publicly without trial. Yet again, this mob frenzy came over the crowd with the riot and confusion that broke out in Ephesus as recorded in Acts 19:23-41.

This could be the fulfillment of Psalms 2:1-3. These verses are especially true related to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. The ungodly can be moved to rage and violence against the righteous.

Reason with me for a moment: What wrong had Jesus done? He preached the gospel, healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out unclean spirits. What caused this rage of the religious leaders and the high priest against Jesus? I maintain they were overcome by a spirit of jealousy.

James 3:14-16 unmasks this spirit of jealousy. He calls it “earthly, natural, and demonic.” In their shadows lurk disorder and every evil thing.

As the end times approach, many will suffer at the hands of unreasoning mobs driven by these same spirits. This evil is currently feeding the persecution of Christians in many countries. The spirit of antiChrist defies reason and logic. It is blinding and deadly.

### **The Denial: Mark 14:66-72**

“66) As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, 67) and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.” 68) But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” And he went out onto the porch. 69) The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, “This is one of them!” 70) But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too.” 71) But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this man you are talking about!” 72) Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, “Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” And he began to weep.”

Peter followed Jesus at a distance. It doesn't work to walk in the shadows or hold Jesus at arm's length. Peter wanted to be close enough to hear the details, but not close enough to be associated as one of His disciples.

Maybe he feared being arrested with Jesus and put on trial himself. He was suddenly focused on himself and his own safety and wellbeing.

But, he was recognized three times. Twice by his appearance and once because of his character and conduct. Obviously, others present had been at meetings led by Jesus. They had heard His teachings and witnessed His miracles. That's why they recognized Peter. At this moment, they desperately needed a leader.

Instead of stepping to the forefront and taking charge, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. He melted away in fear. He changed his character and began to curse and swear. He may have still looked like a follower of Jesus, but he no longer sounded or acted the part. By his conduct, he denied any association with Jesus.

What was the problem? Peter was walking in the flesh and not the Spirit. Pentecost had not yet happened. According to Romans 8:5-8, he was destined to fail because the flesh cannot serve God. He was setting his mind on the things of the flesh and not of the Spirit.

What a difference the indwelling Holy Spirit made in Peter. He was transformed into a new man. Throughout the book of Acts, he stood up repeatedly and confronted the very religious council that put Jesus to death. (See Acts 2:22-24)

Faith in Jesus must be accompanied by the filling, power and surrender to the Holy Spirit. No matter how religious you are, your flesh will at some point fail. Your inner man will be weak and your character hypocritical.

*(Many people who visit Jerusalem say they want to walk where Jesus walked. There's nothing wrong with that sentiment, but Jerusalem has been built and rebuilt many times over in the 2000 years since Jesus walked its streets. There are layers upon layers built over the streets where Jesus walked –up to 20 feet thick. Of all the places in Jerusalem, there is one where we are certain His foot touched the ground – and that's in the dungeon below the home of the High Priest Caiaphas, which has been excavated and preserved.) -dj*

#### **Brief Dialogue Between Jesus and Pilate: Mark 15:1-5**

“1) Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. 2) Pilate questioned Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him, “It is as you say.” 3) The chief priests began to accuse Him harshly. 4) Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, “Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!” 5) But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.”

These are some tragic verses. It seems that a role reversal had taken place. The chief priest and religious leaders were working to ensure death. Pilate was working toward life. The whole saga is strange and dire.

So we discover the New Testament revelation that the Law always brings death. Romans 8:2, 2 Corinthians 3:6-8 and Galatians 3:21-22 all present this contrast. It should be studied carefully.

The irony of this text in Mark 15:1-5, is that as a whole, the religious council of the Jews were bent on death. There were a few exceptions among them, but the letter of the Law kills.

The tragedy is especially noted in the fact that the high priest was dedicated to work toward the atonement of God's people and not condemnation. In a strange twist of events, the Passover Lamb was being selected and presented by the Sanhedrin.

The composure of Jesus before Pilate must be noted. "2) Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "It is as you say." Mark contributed the least space to this dialogue between Pilate and Jesus. He was absent from the hearing.

John contributed the most. He was most likely present. It is at this point the reader should pause and read John 18:28-40. Let me quote verse 36; "Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.""

Jesus made it clear that His kingdom was not of this realm. He reigned over the kingdom of God. What was transpiring included a battle of two kingdoms. As tragic as the crucifixion was, it fulfilled God's plan for human redemption.

Though Pilate tried to rescue Jesus, the Sanhedrin fought viciously to destroy Him. Matthew 27:23-26 now comes into play. Pilate washed his hands of any guilt in the innocent blood of Jesus. The mob cried out; "His blood be on us and our children." And so the fate of Jesus was determined. He was heading to the cross.

### **The Great Substitute: Mark 15:6-15**

"6) Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. 7) The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8) The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. 9) Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10) For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11) But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. 12) Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" 13) They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" 14) But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" 15) Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."

This part of the story is even more tragic. In an attempt to rescue Jesus, Pilate decided to offer mercy to Jesus during the festival and release Him. It was an annual custom.

Instead the crowd demanded the release of a notorious criminal named Barabbas. He was guilty of a Capital crime. And in return, they cried out in unison to crucify Jesus.

We now have a picture of the gospel. The innocent died in the place of the guilty. Jesus died so that Barabbas might live and be set free.

This is a picture of 2 Corinthians 5:21; "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."



But Jesus died in the place of far more people than merely Barabbas. He died for the sins of all humanity. He died for you and for me. He was the “substitute payment” for human sin.

We now have the picture of Jesus as the Passover Lamb fully developed. (John 1:28) Whoever puts saving faith in Jesus are forgiven and set free from their guilt of sin. They are born-again. They become children of God based on faith in Jesus as their substitute payment for sin. (See John 3:16-21)

### **The Scouring of Jesus: Mark 15:15-21**

“15) Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.” 16) The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. 17) They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18) and they began to acclaim Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” 19) They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. 20) After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.”

The rejection by His own Jewish people was shameful, but in these verses the Roman soldiers added their own mockery, insults, and humiliation. These soldiers represented the Gentile world.

First, His bare back was scourged by the soldiers at the whipping post. His back was laid open and bleeding. Numerous verses including 1 Peter 2:24 say; by His wounds or stripes we were healed. It was here at the whipping post our healing was purchased and provided.

You will never have faith in the healing compassion of Jesus Christ until you understand what He paid to triumph over the curse of human sickness and disease. By His stripes we are healed. This was literally His blood transfusion for human healing. Like salvation, healing has to be received by faith.

Then Jesus was stripped of both clothes and dignity. They slapped Him, beat Him, spit upon Him, and mocked Him. They then put a crown of thorns on His head and bowed before Him in jest saying “Hail, King of the Jews.”. As they bowed, they hit the crown with a reed as if striking a piñata. With each blow the thorns pierced deeper into His skull.

The brutality inflicted on Him by the Roman soldiers amplified the hatred of the Jewish people by the Romans soldiers. They despised the Jews.

How many times was Jesus beat, spit upon, or slapped? Mark reports a whole Roman cohort carried out the abuse. A Roman centuria was 100 soldiers. A cohort was 450 soldiers. No matter which number you pick, the abuse was unimaginable.

The wrath of the Roman soldiers was so severe that he was literally beaten and bruised beyond recognition. By the time He reached the site of the crucifixion, exhaustion had consumed Him. He was a bruised and bloody mass of human flesh.

This explains why He could not carry His own cross. His body was starting to shut down! The spikes in His hands and feet added insult to injury. In the process of the events described by Mark and the other gospel writers, all of humanity was guilty of mocking, beating, rejecting, and crucifying the Son of God!

And so the true Passover Lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the world! ““16) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” John 3:16-17

### **A Cross to Carry: Mark 15:21**

“21) They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.”

Details of Simon of Cyrene are limited and sketchy. He is mentioned in Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21 and Luke 23:26. Each account indicates he was a bystander and was pressed into the task of carrying the cross of Jesus. He did not volunteer.

Luke indicates that he had come in from the country. The Roman soldiers placed the cross on him and he followed behind Jesus. The battered, fatigued, and exhausted Jesus was still the focal point of the story.

Possibly, Simon and his family were in Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Mark adds the detail that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It is not clear if they were with their father on this fateful occasion or were commonly known by the early Christians.

The name Rufus is also used in Romans 16:13. It is unknown whether he was the same son of Simon of Cyrene. Rufus and his mother were beloved by Paul and the early church.

Roman soldiers had the authority to compel any man to carry a load for one mile. (Matthew 5:41) This may help explain the compelling force used on Simon for the task of carrying the cross of Jesus.

So now we come to the big question; “Why did God include these details in the biblical narrative?” An equally troubling question is why did not one of the disciples or followers of Jesus dispersed in the crowd step forward and volunteer? Why a random stranger?

We often think in terms of taking up our cross and following Jesus. What a twist in thinking that we need to set aside our plans and ambitions and instead help carry the cross of Jesus.

I will leave you to wrestle with this story and any personal application God may intend for your life. Be flexible enough for God to interrupt your plans and schedule for something of eternal significance.

### **King of the Jews: Mark 15:22-26**

“22) Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. 23) They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. 24) And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take. 25) It was the third hour when they crucified Him. 26) The inscription of the charge against Him read, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.””

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is a confirmed fact of history. It fulfilled multiple Old Testament prophecies. It was recorded in both secular and sacred history. He lived among men and died on a Roman cross.

The place where Jesus was crucified was called "Golgotha." It means: "Place of a Skull." It was a place of death.

Hebrews 2:9 says; "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." He was the true Passover Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

The charge against Him was simply; "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews." (John 19:19-20) It was written in three languages; Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. No matter where the visitors in Jerusalem came from, it is probable they could understand one of those three languages.

Meanwhile, the soldiers cast lots for His garments. (Mark 15:24) This was an exact fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. Let me quote the entire context; "14) I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. 15) My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. 16) For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. 17) I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; 18) They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots." (Psalms 22:14-18) The prophetic fulfillment of the crucifixion now becomes clear.

There is no excuse for anyone willing to do minimal historical digging to deny the birth, life, public ministry, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ as an authentic historical figure. These are based on historical facts and not faith.

The only question that remains: "Was Jesus Christ the Son of God? Another way of asking the same question: "Is John 3:16-17 true?" It says; "16) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

What you do with Jesus Christ becomes a matter of personal faith. You can believe in Him or you can deny Him. You can invite Him into your life by personal saving faith, or you can reject Him.

Either way, because you are a sinner, your sins need to be paid for in full. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) Sin is a crime punishable by death. (Romans 6:23) You can either accept Jesus Christ by faith as the substitute payment for your sin, or spend eternity paying for your own sin.

This turns the story of Jesus Christ into a very personal matter. You cannot remain neutral! Four historical gospels were written to tell the story.

His story has also been told in countless other historical documents, books, sermons, teachings, songs, poetry, and various forms of art. His story has been translated into hundreds of languages and told countless times around the world. He has impacted people from every walk

of life, social status, language, age and gender. He has shaped the course of human history and society more than any other historical figure.

To reject Jesus Christ is either willful ignorance, moral blindness, philosophical bias, demonic deception or plain stupidity. It might be a combination of all of the above.

But some argue that "Faith is a personal matter." I agree. One day you will stand before God and personally give an account for what you have done with Jesus Christ. At that moment, it will be very personal! It will be you standing alone face-to-face with God answering for your life.

The sign over my life and my personal testimony is very similar to the one hanging at Golgotha. It reads: "Jesus Christ; my Savior, Master, Lord, and King." He has changed my life!

*(Golgotha is still visible in Jerusalem and you can still make out the features of a skull. The best place to see it is to visit, "The Garden Tomb," a British owned and operated site with free admission. A Muslim cemetery sits at its top and a bus station operates at its base. —dj)*

### **Mocking the Claims of Jesus: Mark 14:29-32**

"29) Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30) save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31) In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. 32) Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him."

Jesus endured much mocking and insults while hanging on the cross. When the main four lines of reasoning and mocking are synthesized from the four gospels, they can be fit into the following categories.

First, they mocked His claim of being Savior and Messiah. (Matthew 27:40, Mark 15:29-31, Luke 23:35)

Second, they mocked His claim of being the Son of God. (Matthew 27:40 & 43)

Third, they mocked His claim of being the King of Israel and rightful heir to the throne of David. (Mark 15:32; Luke 23:37)

Finally, they mocked His claim of being the Great Physician. (Luke 4:23, Luke 23:35)

These are significant. They represent four key offices that Jesus holds. They were each proclaimed and demonstrated during His public ministry. He wants people to know and trust Him in each area.

All of them were ultimately fulfilled by His willingness to die on the cross for lost humanity. Had Jesus come down from the cross to deliver Himself, He would have forfeited these offices and the characteristics represented by each of them.

Ultimately, Satan mocks and taunts the claims of Jesus in each of these roles. He taunts and targets the power, identity, authority, and compassion of Jesus as expressed in turn by these

four offices. He does not want people to be the beneficiaries of these offices of Jesus in their personal lives.

It was true of the crowd standing around the cross and it is true of humanity today. Satan works hard to mock and obscure the truth about Jesus Christ. He does not want people to know Him as Savior, God, King, and Healer.

Over the years, I have come to know, accept, trust, and depend on Jesus in each of these roles. He is now all of these things to me. I am embracing each office of Jesus in my personal life.

2 Peter 1:2 says; “(2) Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;”. The promises that follow in the next nine verses in the context of 2 Peter 1:3-11 are mind-boggling. I leave you to study and embrace them for yourself.

Your journey to spiritual maturity will lead you to knowing, understanding, and trusting Jesus Christ in each of His offices and in the fullness of His glory. The mockers surrounding the cross had no idea of the fate and curse they were pronouncing on themselves. A person's rejection of Jesus Christ leads to His ultimate rejection of them.

### **Abandoned and Forsaken: Mark 15:33-37**

“33) When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34) At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” 35) When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, “Behold, He is calling for Elijah.” 36) Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.” 37) And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.”

Mark devotes the least space to the words of Jesus uttered from the cross than any gospel writer. The question is “why?”

I have a theory, but it is mere speculation. The simple answer is that “he was not present.”

Notice that earlier I skipped any comment on Mark 14:51-52. The text says, “51) A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. 52) But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.” Many believe this was Mark.

He ran away in utter humiliation. Of the twelve disciples, only Peter and John can be confirmed present for the trial of Jesus. John stuck by His side right through the crucifixion.

Think about this, Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Jesus, and nine others abandoned Jesus. Only John persevered to the end.

If you have ever let Jesus down, you stand among this company. “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” These men were radically transformed after Pentecost. All Christians stumble on their way through sanctification toward maturity. The Christian life exposes our weaknesses. The Christian life is an ongoing cleansing and healing process.

Notice, the one statement from the cross Mark did include; “34) At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”” He most likely borrowed the quote from other witnesses.

Jesus was abandoned even by His Father. He had become sin. The One who is light had to turn away from His only begotten Son who was now clothed with human sin and darkness. (1 John 1:5-7)

Another irony in the story must be noted. In Mark 15:32, His critics taunted Him to come down from the cross to prove He was the Christ, the King of Israel. Watch what happened next very carefully.

He did come down from the cross, but totally dead. By doing so He proved He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. (John 1:29, Revelation 5:5-14) He proved He was the Savior of the world. He died for our sins.

One reason I do not embrace the crucifix is that Jesus is no longer on the cross. He died for sins once for all time. Nor is He still in the grave! He is the resurrection and the life! He is alive!

### **Signs and Wonders Accompanying the Crucifixion. Mark 15:33-39**

“33) When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34) At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”” 35) When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, “Behold, He is calling for Elijah.” 36) Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.” 37) And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. 38) And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39) When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!””

There were four powerful physical signs that accompanied the crucifixion of Jesus. First, darkness fell on the whole land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour.

This was most likely a darkness like that experienced in the land of Egypt years earlier under Moses. (Exodus 10:21-28) The connection to Moses should not escape notice. The Sanhedrin rejected Jesus in favor of Moses. God was profoundly connecting them!

The light of the world was being crucified. Darkness swept over the land. Such is the fate of any nation or generation that suppresses the light of the gospel. The kingdoms of light and darkness collided at the crucifixion.

Second, the very moment Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. It was a hand-breath thick. The order top to bottom is an indication this was a heaven to earth event. As God had promised to Abraham that God would provide for Himself the Lamb for the sacrifice. (Genesis 22:8)

The separation between God and man was removed. Jesus provided a way for man to be reconciled with God. Jesus didn't walk around the veil, He pierced through it! He is the only way to God!

Third, Matthew records there was a great earthquake and rocks were split. (Matthew 27:51) This happened at the exact moment that Jesus died. The created realm was protesting that the One

who holds all things together died. (Colossians 1:17) Jesus Christ momentarily vacated His position as Sustainer.

Finally, Matthew also records that tombs were open and many bodies of the saints were raised. (Matthew 27:52-53) Jesus defeated death. A host of captives were instantaneously set free from death.

Jesus punctuated His claim of being the Resurrection and the Life. (John 11:25-26). He shortly emptied Abraham's bosom and led captive a host of captives when He ascended to heaven. (Ephesians 4:8) His death freed mankind from Satan's grip of death.

The defeat of Satan and death was so immediate and profound that some of the Old Testament saints instantaneously came back to life. Zoe life had come like a lightning bolt.

Some of the Old Testament saints got ahead of God's plan. After His resurrection, Jesus most likely gathered these like straying sheep to accompany Him to His heavenly glorification.

Today when a believer dies, their soul and spirit immediately goes to heaven. (See Corinthians 5:1-9) Jesus will bring them back with Him at His promised return for the great resurrection and instantaneous transformation into our new bodies. (Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:59-58)

These four things accompanied the death of Jesus. They qualified as signs and wonders. They were so profound that we are ushered into Mark 15:39; "When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" He had never witnessed anything like this previously.

But keep in mind, there are three parts to the gospel message. They are; 1) the death, 2) the burial and 3) the resurrection. Each was essential and surpassed the wonder and glory of the previous.

According to Romans 7-8, the born-again believer becomes a progressive recipient of all three parts of the gospel. You have to move past the crucifixion to the resurrection and newness of life imparted by the Holy Spirit. Personal faith in the gospel is essential. (Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 10:8-10)

Don't settle for being religious. Pursue Jesus Christ until you are sealed and filled with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit! Jesus wants you to walk in newness of life. He wants to turn you into a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

### **Women and the Ministry Team: Mark 15:40-41**

"40) There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. 41) When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem."

Mark included these two verses for a reason. A large caravan of people had accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Many were godly women who had been set free from sickness, disease, and demonic bondage.

One of them was Mary Magdalene. Her past was full of sin and bondage. Mark 16:9 records that Jesus had cast seven demons out from her. She became one of His devoted followers.

These women ministered to the whole delegation that came from Galilee. Acts 1:14-15 hints that there may have been as many as 120 people in Jerusalem from the delegation that came from Galilee. The logistics for this size of delegation was huge and was picked up by godly women.

These women were devoted to the point of following Jesus right to Golgotha. They watched the crucifixion and were the first to witness the resurrection and proclaim the good news. They were prayer warriors and ministers to the needs of Jesus and His team.

The way Mark mentions them in these two verses indicates they were held in high respect and honor. Make no mistake, they were a crucial part of the ministry team. Mary herself, the mother of Jesus, was part of this team.

Never minimize the importance of women to ministry. My observation is that they carry much of the load of ministry, missions, and world evangelism in every country around the world.

I see no gender distinction to the distribution of spiritual gifts as mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. They are equally given to the entire body of Christ.

I do see the biblical pattern of men being the lead pastors and shepherds of the church, but women are always included as a crucial part of the overall team.

I celebrate the gifting, leadership, and crucial service of women in ministry. They remained faithful to Jesus to the very end and they were the first to announce His resurrection.

Aquila and Priscilla served together as husband and wife as a ministry team in the early church. (See Acts 18:1-2; 18:23-28) They accompanied Paul on many of his ministry trips. In Romans 16:3, Paul called them; "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus."

In his closing comments in Romans 16, Paul mentioned several women by name who were fellow workers in the spread of the gospel. Phoebe, as a single woman, even fit the description of an itinerant missionary and evangelist. (See Romans 16:1-2)

So what is my take-away from these verses in Mark 15:40-41? Mark was acknowledging, celebrating, and dignifying the crucial contribution and dedication of women to the ministry team. They and John stayed the course at the side of Jesus right up to His last breath, even when the other eleven apostles betrayed, denied, and abandoned Jesus.

This story has been played out countless times in church history and around the world. Women are often the unsung heroes of missions and world evangelization.

### **The Burial: Mark 15:42-47**

"42) When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43) Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. 44) Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. 45) And



ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46) Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47) Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were looking on to see where He was laid."

The burial of the body of Jesus Christ was handled by two members of the council. They had become secret followers of Jesus. The most prominent was Joseph of Arimathea. He gathered his courage and went and asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.

John 19:39-40 records that Nicodemus also joined him in preparing the body for burial. They wrapped the body with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes and bound it with linen wrappings filled with more spices. It was the Jewish version of mummification.

Close to where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden with a newly-hewn tomb. This is where they laid the body of Jesus and sealed it with a stone.

According to Mark, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph's watched from a distance. Some skeptics claim the women were mistaken and came to the wrong tomb early on the first day of the week. They fail to explain why the Roman soldiers were then also guarding the wrong tomb.

Though skipped by Mark, Matthew records the detail that the Pharisees also requested Pilate to secure the tomb with Roman soldiers. It was granted. (Matthew :27:62-66)

The fact of the burial of Jesus Christ is a crucial part of the gospel message. (See 1 Corinthians 15:4 and Romans 6:1-7) He died for our sins and was buried. Pilate even confirmed His death by interviewing the centurion.

As you read the account of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ, at some point you must grapple with the truth that Jesus died for your sins. Love compelled Him.

### **The Resurrection: Mark 16:1-8**

"1) When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. 2) Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3) They were saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?' 4) Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. 5) Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6) And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. 7) But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.' " 8) They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb with more spices to anoint the body of Jesus.

They were preoccupied with the problem of rolling away the huge stone in front of the tomb. To their surprise, it was already done! Such is the case with many of our problems, God has already taken care of them.

They quickly entered the tomb and were welcomed by an angel dressed in white. He promptly told them their business and announced the resurrection of Jesus; "He has risen, He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him."

He then told them to go and tell The disciples and Peter; "He is going before you to Galilee, there you will see Him, just as He said to you." And so began a series of post-resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, He appeared to many on multiple occasions. At one point he appeared to more than five hundred at one time.

Make no mistake, the resurrection is what separates Jesus Christ from every other religious founder and human being that ever lived. He is the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25-26) It was the resurrection that confirmed His claim of Deity. (Romans 1:4) He offers us resurrection life. (Romans 6:4-7)

### **The Problem of Unbelief: Mark 16:9-14**

"9) [Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. 10) She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. 11) When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. 12) After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. 13) They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either. 14) Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen."

The most often repeated phrase in these verses relates to "unbelief." Even though they were confronted with eye witness reports by those who personally saw the resurrected Christ, "they refused to believe."

Two times they were confronted by eye witness reports and they still did not believe. Keep in mind, Jesus had repeatedly told them He was going to rise from the dead.

Finally, in verse 14, Jesus Himself appeared to the eleven as they were reclining at the table. He reproached them because of their unbelief and hardness of heart.

Why was this such a serious problem?

Because the Christian life is based on faith. Look at John 20:19-29. Jesus dealt with Thomas related to his problem of unbelief. He refuses to allow the cancer of unbelief to remain in any of His disciples. They could not embrace what was about to happen at Pentecost apart from faith.

Unbelief will undermine every aspect of the Christian life. Apart from faith, there will be no salvation, unwavering commitment to follow Jesus, or the ability to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Much of His time with the disciples between His resurrection and ascension was focused on building their faith. He poured into their faith walk. Apart from the walk of faith there can be no walk in the Spirit. (Read Galatians 3:1-5; 14)

Hebrews 11 is a profound chapter about faith. Verse 6 says; “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Do you want to please God? Then build your faith!

Romans 10:17 says; “So faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” Every Christian should have a testimony of ever increasing faith. Faith is the basis of salvation. Faith is the key that unlocks the power of God. Faith moves mountains.

You will never understand or experience Mark 16:15-18 apart from faith. Jesus wants His followers to walk in divine power. (Ephesians 3:20) He wants them to become partakers of the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4) He wants your faith to be anchored in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5) He wants us to seek Him and pray like the early church leaders did in Acts 4:28-31.

It is at this point that the naturalism and unbelief of the western church is exposed. If God is not working in extraordinary ways, the problem is within us! God has not changed!

The western church has stuffed God in little theological boxes of unbelief and then falsely labeled them “Bible Doctrine.” The testimony of Mark 16:9-18 is that if your doctrine is not producing supernatural fruit, it is tragically flawed. It amounts to unbelief!

### **The Power of God Accompanying the Spread of the Gospel: Mark 16:15-20**

“15) And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16) He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. 17) These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18) they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” 19) So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20) And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

The gospel of Mark closes with a Great Commission. Jesus promised that those who believed in Him would do signs and wonders in His Name.

This corresponds with the promise made in Acts 1:4-8. A new age was about to begin based on the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Let me quote a few verses from Acts Chapter One; ““7) He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8) but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

And so it happened. The book of Acts confirms that all the signs and wonders of Mark 15:15-18 and many more accompanied the believers after Pentecost. Signs and wonders and amazing miracles accompanied the spread of the Gospel.

In Acts 4:29-31, the persecuted church leaders prayed for a fresh outpouring of signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. And so it happened to an even greater extent. And they

were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness and God showed up in powerful ways.

Hebrews 2:4 says; “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” I call this the “Divine Apologetic.” God confirms our witness with signs that follow.

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-4, Paul pointed out that the gospel he preached included the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. He didn’t want the gospel to be mere empty words. He wanted the faith of new believers to be rooted in the power of God.

The same can be seen in the church at Thessalonica. 1 Thessalonians 1:5 says; “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.” The preaching of the gospel was accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A quick comparison with Galatians 3:1-5 concludes that the power of the Holy Spirit also accompanied the spread of the Gospel in the Galatia region. This was intended to build faith and separate Christianity from mere religion.

When I started studying the words “power” and “signs and wonders” through the Bible, my eyes were opened. I was confronted with a tragic void in my life and in many segments of the modern church. Something was wrong! Something was missing!

The Bible traced it back to a lack of biblical knowledge and a rejection of the power of God. In Matthew 22:29, Jesus told the Sadducees; “29) “... You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.” That basically exposed my problem and the problem with many segments of the modern church.

I started seeking the Holy Spirit with a hungry passion. The problem needed to be fixed. I didn’t want to become a powerless Sadducee or Pharisee. I became increasingly disillusioned with empty religion and “church as usual.”

The Holy Spirit has more than filled the void in my life and ministry. I now have great faith in the promise of God related to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I expect powerful signs and wonders to accompany the spread of the gospel. I can now tell many stories of the mighty works of God.

Don’t put God in a box. Instead, ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit and grow your faith. Then buckle your seat belt.

Extraordinary things will start happening in your life. You will start living on a different level. Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Colossians 1:9-15 and 2 Peter 1:2-4 will start unfolding in your life. Shortly the Bible will come alive and you will start experiencing the power of God. The Holy Spirit will also start washing, sanctifying, and changing you. Be ready for radical changes in your life!

But notice, in Mark 16, Jesus promised that these signs would accompany the spread of the gospel. That means if you want to experience the power of God, you must actively engage in the Great Commission. Start sharing the gospel!

Get out of your comfort chair and show up on the front lines. Become His conduit to reach a lost and dying world. God doesn't waste His power on carnal Christians who are indulging in the pleasures of the world.

### **Confirmation of the Gospel: Mark 16:20**

"16) And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

In most versions of the Bible, Mark 16:9-20 are in brackets. Some older manuscripts do not include these verses. The brackets are there to notify the reader.

However, the truths contained in these verses are taught in many other places in the New Testament. Therefore, I have no problem believing and teaching them.

The fact that they may have been added later only validates the notion that signs and wonders continued beyond the apostles. These signs were intended to confirm the preaching of the gospel. That's what Acts 1:8 promises.

I find no place in the New Testament where this "power" or these signs and confirmation ended. To the contrary, in Matthew 28:18-20 when Jesus gave His authority to His disciples, He promised it would be with them to the end of the age. We are still in the church age! This is still the age of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The harvest is still ripe and plentiful.

And so the Gospel of Mark comes to an end by making the point that believers should live, walk and minister in divine power and authority while God confirms the message with signs that follow. We should expect the power of God to show up as we engage in world evangelism. Seeking this divine confirmation should be foremost in our prayers. (See Acts 4:29-31)