

The Gospel of Mark

**Pursuing a “life of fullness”
Daily Study Guide**

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Week 6

Gospel of Mark -- Pursuing a "life of fullness"

Week 6

We are walking together through the entire story of the ministry of Jesus, at least as it is told by Mark. A key underlying premise here at the RiverNYC is that connecting with Jesus will bring us closer to 'life of fullness.' We are studying Mark's gospel with that in mind. Mark is one of the early followers of Jesus. He may or may not have known Jesus himself, but he was a traveling companion of the apostle Simon Peter. Simon Peter never wrote a history of Jesus himself, but Mark collected and wrote down Simon Peter's story. I'm sure that as you read you'll see that Peter's perspective comes out strongly, and that it's a really valuable perspective to have. Mark's gospel (which means 'good news') was the first one written, about 30 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Incidentally, it's also the shortest. To remind you, each day's guide is broken into three sections:

- 1. The story for the day.** For your convenience, we've included the text of the story in the New Living Translation (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996). As I've worked on this guide, I've found this translation to be in fresh, modern language that has really helped me to do what I most want to do: enter into the story myself. As you read the passage, try to read it from the perspective of the disciples and the other people who interact with Jesus. Really get inside the story. What is it like to go through this experience with Jesus?
- 2. Points of Interest.** This section briefly explores aspects of the day's story that might be especially interesting or potentially confusing. It offers some historical notes and references that might help to interpret the story, frames some of the issues or questions addressed, and gives suggestions of ways to look at the story and what it might mean for us.
- 3. Taking it home.** In this section, I offer some suggestions for how the day's reading might apply to you, to "My 5" (this refers to people in our lives who we would like to see grow in their connection to God), and to our church.

Day 36

Mark 14:53 to 72—Jesus and Peter on trial

⁵³Jesus was led to the high priest's home where the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law had gathered. ⁵⁴Meanwhile, Peter followed far behind and then slipped inside the gates of the high priest's courtyard. For a while he sat with the guards, warming himself by the fire. ⁵⁵Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would testify against Jesus, so they could put him to death. But their efforts were in vain. ⁵⁶Many false witnesses spoke against him, but they contradicted each other. ⁵⁷Finally, some men stood up to testify against him with this lie: ⁵⁸"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, made without human hands.'" ⁵⁹But even then they didn't get their stories straight! ⁶⁰Then the high priest stood up before the others and asked Jesus, "Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?" ⁶¹Jesus made no reply. Then the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?" ⁶²Jesus said, "I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven." ⁶³Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, "Why do we need other witnesses? ⁶⁴You have all heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" And they all condemned him to death. ⁶⁵Then some of them began to spit at him, and they blindfolded him and hit his face with their fists. "Who hit you that time, you prophet?" they jeered. And even the guards were hitting him as they led him away. ⁶⁶Meanwhile, Peter was below in the courtyard. One of the servant girls who worked for the high priest ⁶⁷noticed Peter warming himself at the fire. She looked at him closely and then said, "You were one of those with Jesus, the Nazarene." ⁶⁸Peter denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, and he went out into the

entryway. Just then, a rooster crowed ⁶⁹The servant girl saw him standing there and began telling the others, "That man is definitely one of them!" ⁷⁰Peter denied it again. A little later some other bystanders began saying to Peter, "You must be one of them because you are from Galilee." ⁷¹Peter said, "I swear by God, I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷²And immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and cried.

Points of Interest:

- 'to the high priest's home'—Criminal trials were not usually held in the middle of the night. They were also not held in the high priest's home, but in the temple. The high council is indeed the proper authority to judge such a case, but having the trial at night and in the priest's home clearly shows that they are not confident.
- 'many false witnesses'—Falsely testifying is breaking one of the 10 Commandments. They do this so that they can break another, by killing a man. Moses says in Deuteronomy 19:16–19 that if a witness is proven false on cross-examination, the witness should be considered guilty of the crime of which he has accused the defendant. These witnesses fall apart even in front of a friendly cross-examination in a "kangaroo court," but the council merely moves on to the next false witness.
- 'Jesus made no reply'—The high priest asks him to answer 'these charges,' but no coherent charges have been made. No reply is appropriate for a series of contradictions and lies. Jesus is also fulfilling prophecy here. In one of the most famous prophecies about the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah says, 'He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth' (Isaiah 53:7). By the way, Isaiah 53 is worth reading for its accurate description of what the Messiah will accomplish through his suffering.
- 'I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven'—When Jesus finally had a charge to which he could respond, he doesn't hesitate to answer. He answers, 'Yes, Yes, resoundingly Yes.' By saying, 'I am, he is also making an oblique, but clearly recognizable, claim to divinity: when Moses asks God what his name is, God replies, 'Tell them that I AM sent you' (Exodus 3:14). His further words about sitting at the right hand of God and returning on the clouds are references to Messianic prophecies in Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13–14. With these references, he is telling the priest two things:
 1. He is in fact the Messiah;
 2. and there will come a time when Jesus will be the judge.
- 'tore his clothing'—a sign of repentance or mourning, and the usual response to hearing a great blasphemy.
- 'they all condemned him to death'— They never even bother to assess whether or not Jesus' claims are true. The claim itself is enough for them to kill him.
- 'Who hit you that time, you prophet?'—They mock his claims to prophesy by asking him to discern who hit him. Ironically, by doing so, they are actually fulfilling one of his prophecies: in chapter 10, he said, 'When we get to Jerusalem, the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die and hand him over to the Romans. ³⁴ They will mock him, spit on him, beat him with their whips, and kill him, but after three days he will rise again.' They think they are mocking a false prophet, but what they are doing is proving him true.
- 'I swear by God, I don't know this man'—While Jesus is on trial in front of the high priest inside, Peter is on trial in front of a serving girl outside. Jesus speaks the truth even though he knows they will kill him for it. Peter lies in order to save his life. Earlier this evening, Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you.' By the end of the night, he has completely reversed it: 'Even if I have to deny you, I will not die with you.' Remember that Mark was Peter's secretary. This is Peter's telling of the events. And he does not sugarcoat his failures. He looks at his past with unstinting honesty. This is uncommon.

- 'he broke down and cried'— he recognizes that he is not able to do what he wants to do. It is not that Peter was lying earlier in the evening: he did really want to die with Jesus rather than betray him. But by the end of the night, he has gotten in over his head. When Peter hears the rooster crow, he has a flashing insight into his own utter failure to follow Jesus. Jesus had spent the night in preparation for his trial in prayer; Peter fell asleep. Peter had enough guts on his own power to sneak into the courtyard of the high priest, but his courage failed when it came to the real test: he needed the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. There is only so much we can do as human beings.

Taking it Home:

- For you: Have you ever had a heartbreaking recognition of your weakness and failures? Peter is probably disgusted with himself at this moment. The good news is Jesus knew this would happen, and he does not give up on Peter. Jesus will empower him through the Holy Spirit, and turn him into the rock that changed history. So too, Jesus has words for you, promises for you. Bring your failures and weaknesses before Jesus, and pour them all out. The Cross is a great exchange program. He will give you His power to do what you need to do.
- For "My 5": In many ways, Jesus is still on trial. All sorts of false claims are made about Jesus despite their contradictions and flaws. People claim that Jesus never professed to be God (a claim this passage faces head-on). Others claim that he was just a good teacher or that he never rose from the dead. And many more. Ask the Holy Spirit to give your five the insight to see through these false claims.
- For our church: Ask God to make our church a place where the weaknesses are healed and failures are restored. This is what the Spirit of God does. Ask God to make The River a space where the presence of God empowers people.

Day 37

Mark 15: 1 to 20—Jesus before the Romans

¹Very early in the morning the leading priests, other leaders, and teachers of religious law--the entire high council--met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. ²Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say." ³Then the leading priests accused him of many crimes, ⁴and Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to say something? What about all these charges against you?" ⁵But Jesus said nothing, much to Pilate's surprise. ⁶Now it was the governor's custom to release one prisoner each year at Passover time--anyone the people requested. ⁷One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, convicted along with others for murder during an insurrection. ⁸The mob began to crowd in toward Pilate, asking him to release a prisoner as usual. ⁹"Should I give you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked. ¹⁰(For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) ¹¹But at this point the leading priests stirred up the mob to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. ¹²"But if I release Barabbas," Pilate asked them, "what should I do with this man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴"Why?" Pilate demanded. "What crime has he committed?" But the crowd only roared the louder, "Crucify him!" ¹⁵So Pilate, anxious to please the crowd, released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him. ¹⁶The soldiers took him into their headquarters and called out the entire battalion. ¹⁷They dressed him in a purple robe and made a crown of long, sharp thorns and put it on his head. ¹⁸Then they saluted, yelling, "Hail! King of the Jews!" ¹⁹And they beat him on the head with a stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees in mock worship. ²⁰When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

Points of Interest:

- ‘met to discuss their next step’—having condemned him at night, they now discuss how to implement their plan in the clear light of day. One of the big things they have to decide is how to accomplish Jesus’ death. The Jewish council doesn’t have jurisdiction to execute someone; only the Romans can give out the death penalty. But their judgment against Jesus, that he has committed blasphemy will not get the Romans to pass out a death penalty. They could flout Roman authority and kill him themselves, but that will get them in trouble with the Romans. So, instead they decided to change the charges to something that the Romans would be interested in: that Jesus is an insurrectionist, setting himself as a king.
- ‘For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy’—Pilate is no fool. He recognizes that Jesus is not a political agitator. But, the mob has turned against Jesus. Just a few days ago, the whole city was welcoming Jesus on Palm Sunday. They had great hopes for him. Perhaps they were disappointed to see their hopes dashed. Disappointments often turn into anger and cynicism.
- ‘to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus’—This exchange of Jesus for Barabbas is full of irony. First of all, the priests are pretending to be doing Rome a favor by handing Jesus over to them for insurrection; then, they demand the release of a true political insurrectionist, Barabbas. The second level of irony comes from Barabbas’ name, which means, ‘Father’s Son’ in Aramaic. Mark is writing to a Greek-speaking audience, who wouldn’t have known this any more than English-speakers would; but he left us hints within his story so that even non-Aramaic speakers would understand the significance. In the entire story of Mark, there are two words spoken in Aramaic and then translated into Greek (like a dictionary): in 10:46, we learn that the blind man’s name is Bartimaeus, or the son of Timaeus; in the prayer in the garden, (14:36), Jesus says, ‘Abba, Father.’ All we need to do is put ‘bar’ and ‘abba’ together to get ‘son of father.’ So, Mark seems to want his audience to understand that when the priests and mob demand Barabbas be released instead of Jesus, they are choosing which Son of the Father they want. The Messiah they want is Barabbas, the murderous political revolutionary, not Jesus, who is offering life of fullness.

There is further significance to Barabbas’ name. On one hand, we can associate Barabbas and Jesus as two possible ‘Sons of the Father,’ alternate pictures of the Messiah. On the other hand, Barabbas is an everyman, a father’s son. He represents all of us, who are father’s sons or daughters. Jesus dies on the cross on which Barabbas was intended to die; in other words, he dies in place of every father’s child.

- ‘turned him over to the Roman soldiers to crucify him’—another element of Jesus’ prophecy about his future comes true. His death is happening just as he said it would. This accuracy should give us confidence that he will also rise again, just as he said.
- ‘Hail, King of the Jews’—while the temple guards mocked Jesus as a prophet, the Romans mock him as a king.

Taking it Home:

- For you: Jesus died on the cross intended for Barabbas, a father’s child, everyman. Spend a few moments today thanking Jesus for his willingness to die for the ransom of many, including you. Then ask God to help you experience the benefits of the spiritual power on the Cross. Ask God to turn darkness to light, weakness to strength, death to life.
- For “My 5”: Think of the areas of struggle for your five, their weaknesses, their aspirations turned into disappointments. Ask God to help them experience the empowerment of the Cross where they need it.
- For our church: The church is called the body of Christ in the Bible. Perhaps one way to think of it is that the church is supposed to take the struggles of ‘everyman’ and turn it into life. Ask God to make our church a place of exchange, a space where people can come and experience for themselves the turning of their weaknesses and failures into hope of resurrection, of what is coming, of experiences of ‘fullness’ by the Spirit of God.

Day 38

Mark 15: 21-47

²¹A man named Simon, who was from Cyrene was coming in from the country just then, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus.) ²²And they brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha (which means Skull Hill). ²³They offered him wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it. ²⁴Then they nailed him to the cross. They gambled for his clothes, throwing dice to decide who would get them. ²⁵It was nine o'clock in the morning when the crucifixion took place. ²⁶A signboard was fastened to the cross above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "The King of the Jews." ²⁷Two criminals were crucified with him, their crosses on either side of his. ²⁹And the people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You can destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, can you? ³⁰Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!" ³¹The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! ³²Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the two criminals who were being crucified with Jesus ridiculed him. ³³At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. ³⁴Then, at that time Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. ³⁶One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a stick so he could drink. "Leave him alone. Let's see whether Elijah will come and take him down!" he said. ³⁷Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" ⁴⁰Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. ⁴¹They had been followers of Jesus and had cared for him while he was in Galilee. Then they and many other women had come with him to Jerusalem. ⁴²This all happened on Friday, the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath. As evening approached, ⁴³an honored member of the high council, Joseph from Arimathea (who was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come), gathered his courage and went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴Pilate couldn't believe that Jesus was already dead, so he called for the Roman military officer in charge and asked him. ⁴⁵The officer confirmed the fact, and Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. ⁴⁶Joseph bought a long sheet of linen cloth, and taking Jesus' body down from the cross, he wrapped it in the cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a stone in front of the entrance. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where Jesus' body was laid.

Points of Interest:

- 'wine drugged with myrrh, but he refused it'—a painkiller. Jesus refuses to have his senses dulled to the suffering. In the prayer at the garden, Jesus asks the Father to 'take this cup of suffering away.' But here, on the cross, he purposefully takes on the full brunt of the physical suffering. He doesn't seem overly affected by it. Perhaps Jesus is strengthened through prayer. Or perhaps this cup of suffering (that he was agonizing over) goes beyond the physical dimension.
- 'save yourself and come down from the cross'—They assume Jesus is not coming down from the cross because he can't save himself. Actually, if he were to try to save his life by coming down from the cross he would lose it. Remember when Jesus first talked about the Cross? He said everyone who saves his life will lose it, but everyone who loses his life for the Good News (Gospel) will find true life (8:35). Jesus is laying down his life for all the good things that would come from the Cross. And, he will find resurrection. He is living out the dynamic of the Cross Himself. A model others can follow.

It's worth a moment to reflect how the first man (Adam—literally means man) tried to grab Godhood by taking the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And here we see God voluntarily laying aside Godhood to take the place of man on the 'tree of judgment' (the Cross). It is poetic reversal of what happened at the Fall.

- 'Two criminals were crucified with him, their crosses on either side of his'—James and John had asked Jesus if they could be on his right and left in his glory, and Jesus told them that they didn't know what they were asking. This moment is Jesus' glory, and it is two criminals, not two disciples, who are on his right and left. Even though James and John ran away from the suffering and the glory of the Cross, they will be ready later on. They both chose martyrdom rather than deny Jesus.
- 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'—This is a powerful cry of anguish. Jesus and the Father have never been separated. It is one of the oldest teachings in Christianity that the nature of God is Trinity, that God has always existed as Three-in-One. God is an individual and a community at the same time, which gives insight to human nature as to why we always need to express our individuality AND be in relationships at the same time.

Perhaps the best way to think of Trinity is that we too have different components like mind, spirit, and heart. Perhaps in Godhood, the mind of God is so powerful that it can have its own identity. There are hints of this 'eternal communion' even in the Old Testament when the 'Wisdom Personified' speaks of companionship with God: "I was there when he set the heavens in place... I was constantly at his side." (Prov. 8:27, 30).

But on the Cross, this eternal bond is sundered. The very nature of God is marred for a time and a space on the Cross. It would have been easier for God to alter the universe than to suffer such harm to His own nature. Yet here we see God's answer to the problem of evil and suffering. He walks alongside us. He drinks in the worst of human evil. He is rejected by his own people, betrayed by his own disciple, abandoned by his friends, tortured, and crucified. God does not stand aloof in heaven while we suffer down here. God knows in His own nature what it is to suffer.

This cry of anguish is also the first line of Psalm 22. During Jesus' day, the psalms were known by the first line, rather than by numbers; so, Jesus is referencing the entire psalm. It's a psalm that speaks of terrible suffering, astoundingly similar to what Jesus is undergoing: mockery by everyone who passes by, being very thirsty, pierced in hands and feet, and gambling for the clothes of the suffering one. It would be well worth your time to read psalm 22 to see for yourself how profoundly this psalm describes Jesus' pain. Yet, the psalm doesn't end at the suffering. The psalmist goes on to say, 'Snatch me from the lions' jaws, and from the horns of these wild oxen. Then I will declare the wonder of your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among all your people.' There is a full expectation of rescue from the terrible suffering, and a prediction of joy, not just for the sufferer but for future generations: 'Let all mortals—those born to die—bow down in his presence. Future generations will also serve him. Our children will hear about the wonders of the Lord. His righteous acts will be told to those yet unborn. They will hear about everything he has done.' It's as if Psalm 22 was written precisely to be Jesus' guide and comfort on the cross. It accurately describes his unbearable suffering, his unshakeable faith in God's coming rescue, and his anticipation of the glorious future that will be on the other side of the Cross.

- 'Truly, this was the Son of God'—in his death, Jesus fulfills his own prophecies and those of the Old Testament prophets and psalmists concerning the Messiah. Yet almost none of the Jews recognizes him. However, a gentile soldier sees who Jesus is in the moment of his death.
- 'They had been followers of Jesus'—all of the apostles have run away, and now we are able to see that a whole group of women have also been Jesus' disciples. These women remain even when the men have run away. Peter continues to be unsparing in pointing

out where he had fallen short while those considered to be inferior at the time (women, gentiles—unbelievers) show their quality.

Taking it Home:

- **For you:** Meditate on the Cross. There is tremendous spiritual power in the Cross given what took place. If God's nature itself was marred, it had to accomplish some purpose! That purpose is forgiveness and restoration of our soul so that the Fall is reversed. Ask God to help you experience the full benefits of the Cross. Just as God exchanged his place with us on the Cross, ask God to help you exchange your old self with what God is offering. Ask God for an exchange with the nature of Christ.
- **For "My 5":** It is easy as human beings to pretend our suffering isn't there, to try to avoid it, or to fall into despair. But, Jesus took a psalm 22 attitude toward his suffering: he felt its terror, but he trusted in God's rescue and redemption. Ask Jesus to give your five the ability to face their suffering, but hope in God for 'resurrection.'
- **For our church:** At this climactic moment in Jesus' life, all of a sudden his woman disciples come to the forefront. The woman with perfume and the poor widow are exalted as examples of faith and devotion, and when all of the men have run away the women remain with Jesus at the cross. It's a pity that in the history of the church, the faithful, devoted, and courageous women have so often been ignored or suppressed. Pray for our church, that it would be a place where women are consistently called to the front and their gifts, strengths, and contributions are acknowledged and affirmed.

Day 39

Mark 16: 1-8—The resurrection of Jesus

¹The next evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary the mother of James went out and purchased burial spices to put on Jesus' body. ²Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they came to the tomb. ³On the way they were discussing who would roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. ⁴But when they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone—a very large one—had already been rolled aside. ⁵So they entered the tomb, and there on the right sat a young man clothed in a white robe. The women were startled, ⁶but the angel said, "Do not be so surprised. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He isn't here! He has been raised from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. ⁷Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died!" ⁸The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, saying nothing to anyone because they were too frightened to talk.

Points of Interest:

- 'burial spices to put on Jesus' body'—Usually, the spices are added to the body at the time of burial. Because of the coming of the Sabbath and the holiday, they didn't have time to add the spices at the time of Jesus' death; so they go to finish when the Sabbath is over. Jesus predicted that the perfume poured on him by the woman in ch. 14 would be the only anointing he would get, and it proves to be true.
- 'He has been raised from the dead!'—Just as Jesus hoped for, God brought resurrection life to Jesus. God did not let 'holy one see decay.' (Psalm 16:10) This is the critical moment of faith, if we are going to experience fullness of life regardless of circumstances. Without resurrection, we will always be at the mercy of our circumstances here on earth. If something goes wrong, then that's all there is to it. But with the resurrection, we can look beyond the sufferings of today. We can trust, like Jesus did, that God will restore us to life and all will be well in the end.
- 'including Peter'—Peter might be thinking he was disqualified from being a disciple by his denial; so Jesus includes him specifically in the message he leaves with the angel.
- 'just as he told you before he died'—Jesus' followers must have thought that something had gone terribly wrong when he died. The angel here points out that everything has

happened exactly according to plan. He has both died and risen again, just as he told them.

- ‘the women fled from the tomb’—Here is where the faith of the women gets stretched. The women have the same choice that the men did when they were in the boat in the midst of the storm (4:40): are they going to have faith in Jesus’ words and power, or are they going to be overcome by fear? Initially, fear takes the upper hand. The angel tells them not to be surprised and to give the message to the disciples, but they respond with bewilderment and saying nothing. At this moment, they are the only ones who know of Jesus’ resurrection: are they going to believe it and spread the news to others? Are the apostles ever going to know that Jesus is waiting to re-connect with them in Galilee? Whether or not the story of the good news continues depends on the faith of these women. It’s remarkable how much Jesus trusts women (who were considered so unreliable at the time they were not qualified to testify in courts) to lead the way as the Gospel gets spread and the church gets established.

Taking it Home:

- For you: Interestingly, in many of our oldest manuscripts of Mark’s Good News, the story ends here, like a cliff-hanger. What will the women do? Will they overcome their fear and tell the story, so that the good news of the Kingdom can be spread? Now that they know the truth, will they tell it to others or will it get swallowed by their fear? The implication for the reader is clear: now that you have heard the story, what will you do? Will you tell others so that the story of the Kingdom of God can continue, or will it get stuck with you? You have now read Mark’s entire story about Jesus. The big question for you is, what will you do? Ask God to lead you in how to handle this trust that’s been given to you.
- For your five: The women are left trembling and bewildered over the resurrection. The idea that Jesus was physically risen from the dead is—understandably—difficult for them to swallow. Perhaps your five are willing to understand the resurrection as a metaphor of new life, but they can’t accept the reality of a literal resurrection. Ask that the Holy Spirit would give them the faith to believe in the resurrection. Ask God to give you a role to play in helping them experience ‘resurrection’ for themselves.
- For our church: Ask God to make our church a place where ‘resurrection’ takes place. Ask God for His presence so that marriages get healed, sick get better, despair turns to hope, sadness turns to joy. Ask God to give you courage to step up to contribute in creating such a space at The River.

Day 40

Mark 16: 9–20—Jesus’ final instructions

⁹It was early on Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the dead, and the first person who saw him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and found the disciples, who were grieving and weeping. ¹¹But when she told them that Jesus was alive and she had seen him, they didn’t believe her. ¹²Afterward he appeared to two who were walking from Jerusalem into the country, but they didn’t recognize him at first because he had changed his appearance. ¹³When they realized who he was, they rushed back to tell the others, but no one believed them. ¹⁴Still later he appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their unbelief—their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. ¹⁵And then he told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere. ¹⁶Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned. ¹⁷These signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak new languages. ¹⁸They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won’t hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick and heal them.” ¹⁹When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand. ²⁰And the disciples went everywhere and preached, and the Lord worked with them, confirming what they said by many miraculous signs.

Points of Interest:

- As was mentioned, many ancient manuscripts of Mark's good news end with yesterday's passage. Other ancient manuscripts end with what is called the 'shorter ending': 'Then they reported all these instructions briefly to Peter and his companions. Afterward Jesus himself sent them out from east to west with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life. Amen.' Still other manuscripts end with today's passage, 'the longer ending.' (By the way, the ancient manuscripts agree on the content up to yesterday's passage) Most scholars think that the shorter ending and the longer ending are epilogues added shortly after Mark's original story to give people a bit of how the story turns out, i.e. how the story got to them. Even though they are not original to Mark, these things have been left as part of the book of Mark because they fill out the story and because everything said in the longer version is verified in the other gospels or Acts.
- 'she told them Jesus was alive'—Mary, after her initial shock, does gain the faith to tell the disciples. Unfortunately, the men do not believe her. The disciples are again behaving like bad soil: they don't believe what they are told, and they don't remember his words. For this, they gain a rebuke from Jesus later; but in his mercy he continues to appear to them until they believe. This goes to show that Jesus did not count on written accounts or his disciples solely for the Gospel to advance. He counted on Himself, the Spirit of God to continue to speak to people to bring them the truth. This doesn't mean the Bible or our witness is not important. It just means God is active and alive and we (or the Bible) are to play a role.
- 'to everyone, everywhere'—This is not a message that should be given only to the people of faith (Jews). This is for everyone in the world.
- 'They will be able to handle snakes'—some sects have taken this verse to mean they ought to handle poisonous snakes intentionally as a sign to people that they are followers of Jesus. It doesn't seem to me that this is what Jesus has in mind. Rather, he is saying that Jesus' rising from the dead gives his disciples power over death: things that should have the ability to kill them no longer will. Sure enough, there are stories of Jesus' messengers, like the apostle Paul, literally being bitten by a deadly snake without harm. But the bigger point is, even if one does die of poison, the effect is not permanent; they will be raised.
- 'These signs will accompany those who believe'—Most of these signs are simply the ability to do what Jesus did: the experience the twelve had when they went out on their mission is being expanded and widened to all who believe: all of Jesus' followers should be able to cast out demons, heal the sick, and be impervious to death. It is interesting to note that Jesus' disciples are not marked by how well they know the Bible or whether they follow the 'correct traditions' or any such thing. They are important things (as evidenced by how much effort has gone into producing this bible guides :) But, followers of Jesus need to achieve some balance in learning how to experience the power of the Kingdom of God as well.
- 'sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand'—the third reference in Mark to Psalm 110:1: the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. Jesus' ascension to the Father marks the beginning of the church, the new temple built on him. Jesus will watch the Father, through the work of the church, complete the work of establishing his kingdom.

Taking it Home:

- For you: Our final passage tells us that the followers of Jesus are empowered with the power of the Kingdom of God as they give themselves to the purpose of spreading the Good News. That's how we get to experience more of the Kingdom of God for our own life. So, ask Jesus to give you the faith to share in the cause of Christ in spreading the Gospel. Ask God to give you the passion to be a witness for what you've been experiencing in Christ. Ask God for the power to cast out demons and heal. Then, you will experience more of the resurrection life for yourself.
- For "My 5": Even the disciples need repeated appearing of Jesus before they come to believe. Ask God to keep showing Himself to your five until they come to the place of faith so that they can experience more of the life of fullness promised by Jesus.

- For our church: Pray for an increase in the signs that are supposed to accompany those who follow Jesus. Ask God for more healings, for protection, for supernatural joy, for 'fullness of life' in our church. Pray also that God will send people with every background to come to our church and experience life in all its fullness through Jesus Christ.

A final thought:

You did it! Thank you for reading through this Bible Guide. My hope is that this will ground you in the knowledge of who Jesus is, what He does, and what it looks like to follow Jesus. My prayer is that you will experience 'life in all its fullness' promised by Jesus. Keep pursuing Jesus in the context of a local church. Your life will not be the same!

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