

RODGERS
BAPTIST
CHURCH
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SCHOOL SERIES

THE SERVANT SAVIOR – VOL. 3



A study in Mark 9 – 12 | prepared by Bro. Travis Gilbert

TO

THE RBC SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

FOR FAITHFULLY TEACHING THIS MATERIAL FOR THREE YEARS NOW! AS
PASTOR THOMAS SAYS, “WITH PERSEVERANCE THE SNAIL ENTERED THE ARK.”
AFTER THIS, ONE MORE YEAR TO GO (ALMOST THERE)!

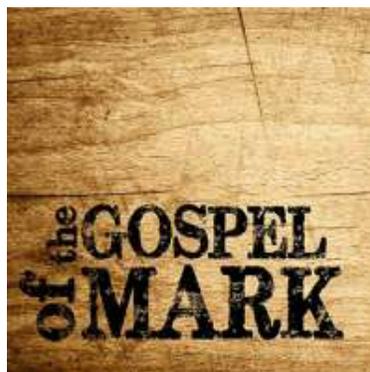


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#1 – Glimpse of Eternity – Mark 9:1-13

Peter and the other apostles were discouraged. You would be too if Jesus Christ called you “Satan.” Six days had passed since Jesus had asked them a point blank question: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter, speaking for the whole group, answered, “You are the Christ!” That was a true and wonderful confession. Unlike nearly everyone else they recognized what the evidence plainly revealed. Jesus of Nazareth was more than a carpenter. He was, and is, the Son of the Living God, the Christ, and the long-awaited Messiah. The Twelve had left everything to follow Jesus, and it must have been exhilarating to hear Him confirm their confession.

Likewise, it must have been disorienting to hear Jesus teach that He *must* suffer, *must* be rejected, and *must* be killed. When Peter balked at this news, he was soundly rebuked by Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Surely such a rebuke stung even after six days.

That was disheartening enough, but Jesus was not finished. He said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” That did not seem especially pleasant (it still doesn’t today), but those are the conditions of discipleship for all who will follow Christ. This was not unfolding according to *their* plan. This is not what the Apostles had expected. It was not at all in step with their Messianic expectations. They were discouraged, disoriented, and disheartened.

They needed to be encouraged, and Jesus was about to provide that encouragement. There are two sides to discipleship. The end of Mark 8 introduced the first side: sacrificial, self-denying, loyal obedience. In Mark 9:1-13 the Lord spectacularly reveals the second side of discipleship. The hard realities of serving Christ are here balanced with the gloriously positive realities of following the Lord.

The last section of chapter eight hints at this when we read, “*Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.*” And even though there is a chapter break following verse 38, do not think that verse one of chapter 9 is a different

discussion. While detailing the cost of discipleship, Jesus continues, in the same breath, to speak of His future kingdom and glory. He said to them: *“Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”* (Mark 9:1)

Yes, the follower of Christ, like his Lord, *must* suffer many things, be rejected, and maybe even killed, but, like his Lord, the follower of Christ *must* rise again! The life of discipleship ultimately looks forward to sharing in the glory of the Messiah.

This was not a promise that some of the Twelve would escape death, but was instead a tantalizingly brief glimpse of glory and the encouragement they needed. It was a preview of the Second Coming; a foretaste of the glory which Christ will have and will share with His people in His kingdom. Oh, what a day that will be!

The Demonstration

The Lord led the three disciples on a hike of Mt. Hermon, a majestic mountain not far from Caesarea Philippi. We know from Luke’s account¹ that He led them up there *“to pray.”* We also know from Luke that these men *“were heavy with sleep.”* This seems to always be the case when Jesus organizes a prayer meeting with these guys.

A Confirmation

Imagine the eye-opener that Peter, James, and John had when they were roused from their slumber to see the transfigured Christ. The body and clothes of the Lord Jesus were shining a brilliant white, brighter than any cleaner could possible bleach them. The word *“transfigured”* is *“metamorphoo”*² in the Greek; it mean to change into another form, and it is from this word that the English *“metamorphosis”* is derived. These men witnessed a miraculous confirmation of their earlier confession. The Transfiguration authenticated that Jesus was the Christ.

The Christmas carol *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing* has a line in the second stanza which states: *“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,”* and for a fleeting moment on Mt.

¹ Luke 9:28-36

² [G3339](#)

Hermon the veil was pulled back and Peter, James, and John “*beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father.*”³

What is this “glory”? In Mark 8:38 Jesus said that He would return “*in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*” And here at the Transfiguration Jesus is in His glory. What is that? “Glory” is another way to express the attributes, nature, and character of God.⁴

To witness God’s attributes is to have a glimpse of His glory, all that the fullness of His name implies. In His humanity Jesus traveled incognito. He purposefully veiled His glory,⁵ but here on Mt. Hermon was Jesus in His pre-Bethlehem glory. Do not think that Jesus was *reflecting* the glory of God. The transfiguration means that His inner glory was unveiled. Christ was not *reflecting* but *radiating* glory! Momentarily, the true essence of God the Son radiantly shone through His body, and the disciples were given a glimpse.

A Promise

This demonstration not only confirmed that Jesus was the Christ, but it also promised His return. Both of Peter’s letters are filled with talk of the Second Coming.⁶ There is little doubt that seeing the glorified Christ filled Peter with an expectant hope of the Lord’s return. You could easily summarize Peter’s two letters as: “Fellow believers don’t worry about your pain, your hardship, your testing, your persecution, or your sacrifice. Jesus will return!”

JC Ryle wrote:

*The transfiguration...was meant to teach the disciples that though their Lord was lowly in appearance now, He would one day appear in...royal majesty...The vision of the holy mount is a gracious pledge that glorious things are in store for the people of God. Their crucified Savior shall come again in power and great glory.*⁷

³ John 1:14

⁴ Exodus 33:18

⁵ Philippians 2:6-8

⁶ 1 Peter 1:7, 13; 4:13; 5:4; 2 Peter 1:16-18; 3:3-4

⁷ JC Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, (Banner of Truth), p. 174-175.

A Preview

Jesus' transfiguration confirmed His deity, promised His return, and previewed the glory that awaits believers. There is coming a time when believers will be clothed in the shimmering beauty of Christ's glory. The New Testament has much to say about the believers' glorified bodies at Christ's return. Here is just a sample:

📖 Philippians 3:20-21 – *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”*

📖 Romans 8:29 – *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”*

📖 1 John 3:2 – *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”*

By this transformation the believer will be made perfectly holy and righteous, with a pure capacity to worship and glorify God in a totally satisfying, joyful, and undiminished fashion forever.⁸ Therefore, this glimpse of eternity reveals not only what Christ will be like when He returns, but is also a preview of what all believers are going to be like in glory. We shall be like Him!⁹

The Discussion

As the unveiled glory of Jesus shimmered before them Moses and Elijah appeared. These men were representative of the Law and the Prophets, and Peter, James, and John were privileged to eavesdrop on their discussion with the One who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.¹⁰ Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of everything

⁸ Revelation 5:11-14

⁹ 1 John 3:2

¹⁰ Matthew 5:17

that the Law and Prophets testified. Everything that was spoken, accomplished, and hoped for by the Law and Prophets is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Mark tells us that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus, but he does not mention the topic. Luke does. *“There talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.”* (Luke 9:30-31)

Moses and Elijah were not filling Jesus in on the happenings of heaven while He had been away. They were talking about His imminent crucifixion. They were talking about the Cross and Christ’s death. The Greek word translated “decease” is “exodus”¹¹ and it simply means going out or departure. Just as the exodus from Egypt delivered God’s people from the bondage of slavery, Jesus’ exodus on the cross and from the grave would deliver believers from the bondage of sin and death.¹²

Of course, if ever there was a man who did not know when to keep quiet, that man was Peter. Some people are *gifted* with always having something to say when there is nothing to be said. Peter exhibited this quality in verse 5. Mark writes that *“Peter answered,”* but no one had asked Peter anything. No matter. He was nervous and afraid (see verse 6). Some people eat when they are frightened. Peter talked.

It is likely that the Transfiguration occurred during or near the time of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri – October). This was a weeklong feast that commemorated the Exodus, and during that week the people were to build and live in tabernacles – booths or tents. It is conceivable that Peter picked up on this talk of exodus, and he wanted to observe the feast on the mountaintop with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Whether or not this is the case we do not know. We do know, however, that Peter was afraid; probably excited as well, but that is no excuse for what he said; which was either ignorant or forgetful or both. Once again he was setting his mind on the things of man instead of the things of God. It had only been a week since Jesus plainly taught them that He *must* go to the cross. Perhaps Peter wanted Jesus to hold on to the

¹¹ [G1841](#)

¹² Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 2:14-15

glory apart from the suffering, but this was not God's plan. Plus, Moses and Elijah are not on equal footing with Jesus. They were representatives of the Law and Prophets and witnesses that Jesus was indeed He of whom they had prophesied.

Peter needed then, much like we need today, to focus his attention on Jesus. That's not just my opinion. It is the testimony of God the Father, which He makes crystal clear in verse seven.

The Declaration

The cloud spoken of is the shekinah¹³ glory of God, the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites in wilderness,¹⁴ the cloud that covered the Tent of Meeting,¹⁵ the cloud that filled the Temple in Jerusalem on the day of its dedication,¹⁶ the cloud which Ezekiel saw departing from the Temple because of Israel's apostasy.¹⁷ This was the presence of Almighty God, and Peter, James, and John beheld God's presence, and then they heard God's voice declare, *"This is my beloved Son: hear him."*

- ✓ Jesus is the one of whom David prophesied in **Psalm 2:7**, *"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."*
- ✓ Jesus is the One of whom Moses prophesied in **Deuteronomy 18:15**, *"The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."*

Now God speaks directly to these witnesses and declares *"This is my beloved Son: hear him."* Listen to Him! The Law and the Prophets are partial expressions. He is the final statement and fulfillment of all that they announced. *The Lord Jesus is the ultimate expression of truth.*

¹³ The word means "to dwell," "reside" and signifies the visible sign of God's presence. It is not found in the Bible, but there are allusions to it, Exodus 25:22; Leviticus 16:2; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:14, 15; Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16; Ezekiel 9:3; 10:18; Hebrews 9:5.

¹⁴ Exodus 13:21; Numbers 9:17

¹⁵ Exodus 40:35

¹⁶ 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chronicles 7:1

¹⁷ Ezekiel 11:22-25

Listen to Jesus! When He says that He must go to Jerusalem to die on the cross, hear Him! When he says that He will rise again on the third day, hear Him! When He tells you to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him, hear Him. When He says that He will come again in glory, hear Him. Hear Him! Trust Him! Obey Him! Follow Him!

Matthew says that when the disciples heard the voice from the cloud *“they fell on their face.”* Jesus touched them, and said, *“Arise, be not afraid.”*¹⁸ When they looked up at a no longer glowing Jesus, Moses and Elijah were gone, as was the cloud of God’s presence. All that remained was the Word.

It is critical for us to pay attention to what God said from the cloud. He said, *“Hear Him!”* Not...

- ✓ *“Don’t forget this vision.”*
- ✓ *“Pray for more spectacular visions.”*
- ✓ *“Remember what you’ve witnessed.”*

None of that! He said, *“Hear Him!”* Years later Peter, who still remembered this unforgettable experience, said:

*“For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have **a more sure word of prophecy**; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”*¹⁹ (emphasis mine)

Peter has taught us with these words that if we would see the glory of Jesus Christ now, we must read and live Scripture just as eagerly as Peter would have lingered on that mountain. The same voice speaks in both places. The memory of visions will fade, but the unchanging Word abides forever. The glorious vision was not an end in itself; it was God’s way of confirming Christ, the Living Word. *“Hear Him!”*

¹⁸ Matthew 17:6-7

¹⁹ 2 Peter 1:17-19

#2 – The Power of Faith (in Christ) – Mark 9:14-29

Mountain top experiences are fantastic. Whether one has gained a victory, earned an achievement, or accomplished a task, enjoying mountain top experiences is pure pleasure. Since that is true with everyday pursuits, the experience of Peter, James, and John on Mt. Hermon was exponentially more magnificent because they witnessed their Lord glorified, speaking with Moses and Elijah, they were enveloped by the Shekinah glory of God in the cloud, and they heard God speak. The only experience that could ever top this preview of the Second Coming is the actual return of the Lord. No doubt the climb up Mt. Hermon was wearisome, but surely the descent was not only joyous but packed with excited conversation about what they had witnessed and the wonder of it all.

That glorious vision is the focus of Mark 9:1-13. The next sixteen verses in that chapter talk about what transpired at the foot of the mountain, and that will be this lesson's focus.

For every mountain top experience there is also a valley of Baca²⁰ – of weeping and sorrow – to follow. Coming down from the holy mount Jesus and the three witnesses were confronted with an unholy terror. The glories of Christ shone brilliantly on the mountain, but the gloom of sin's curse mucked up the view in the valley. From a foretaste of heaven to the reality of this present darkness is what Peter, James, and John now experienced. This is often the case. Revival and renewal are closely followed by the destructive and ugly realities of sin in this world. Nowhere is that more evident than in Mark 9:14-22a.

The Boy's Condition

At the conclusion of their descent Jesus, James, John, and Peter come upon a massive crowd, and at the center of this multitude are the remaining nine apostles. They are not alone. The scribes are there, and they are arguing with, perhaps even taunting

²⁰ Psalm 84:6

the nine disciples. Someone in that throng of people noticed the approach of Jesus and as the crowd's focus shifted to the Lord, the argument was silenced. With all eyes fixed on the Lord, He asked the scribes, "What are you arguing about with them?" But a distressed voice from the crowd speaks up before they or even one of the disciples could answer.

The troubled voice belonged to a father who had brought his son, his only child (Luke 9:38), to the apostles in hopes that they would cast out the demon that had possessed him. Do not allow yourself to think that this narrative is just a story. Here was a real father whose only child was possessed by an actual demon. This is an historical narrative, not fiction or fantasy, and the Lord used this real life situation to illustrate and communicate spiritual truths. Remember, the miracles that Jesus performed were never intended as stand-alone events. They were parables of spiritual truth. Jesus was the master of taking life situations and from them teaching spiritual truths that would be indelibly buried into people's minds.

What a sorry, gut-wrenching situation this was. In a word, this boy's condition was pathetic. The foul spirit had made the boy deaf and mute, and when it seized him the boy would be thrown to the ground, become rigid, foam at the mouth, grinding his teeth. That was not the worst of it. This demon was not content to only torment the boy; as the father said, "It has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him."

This is a pathetic picture and a perfect example of Satan's lust to destroy. The enemy hates God, and hates man – not just believers but all mankind – because man is made in the image of God. This is why the devil seeks to pervert all aspects of humanity. In this text we vividly witness physical disfigurement, but this most often takes place in the mental and moral aspect of humanity. Satan loves to reduce people to the lowest common denominator, and this most often is accomplished through subtle even respectable seductions. It is easy to ignore examples like this boy or the demoniac because they are so brutal and so obviously supernatural; whereas the more refined methods of perversion are not given equal attention. The image of this boy falling to the ground and rolling around in the dirt while foaming at the mouth and grinding his teeth, or flinging himself into a fire or pool of water is disturbing. It shocks us and

rightfully so. It is a perversion of the dignity of one who is fashioned in the image of Almighty God, but is no different, however, from the more respectable, in some cases legal perversions with which men and women routinely delight. As one pastor has written, "We daily rub shoulders with people who privately indulge in gross, even macabre, spiritual and sensual practices."²¹ Satan delights in distorting God's design for men and women in all areas of life.

The reality is that all of us are just as messed up as this kid was, and we don't have to do anything to be in that condition. This had been the boy's condition since he was a young child, but we are all sinners from birth. All are born under Satan's thumb. We have only one hope.

The Father's Petition

Yet again in Mark we find a desperate person who is driven to Jesus by a great need and the inability of anyone else to satisfy that need. While Jesus was on Mt. Hermon this father had approached the disciples in hopes that they could help. They should have been able, but they failed (more on that later.) The disciples' lack of success must have caused the man to despair, and it certainly presented the critics of Jesus with an opportunity to crow.

The image of this father is nearly as pathetic as that of his son, but for altogether different reasons. Imagine the task of trying to keep this boy from harming himself as the unclean spirit is ever trying to harm him. The boy is helpless to save himself. His father is helpless to save him, and as a father I cannot imagine anything more painful than watching one of my children suffer terribly yet be not only helpless but useless in improving his condition.

Do not think that this father had not, in the past, tried a whole host of remedies. Like the diseased woman from chapter 6 who had spent all that she had on treatments to cure her disorder but with no success, this father would have done all that he could to fix his only child.

²¹ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior volume 2*, (Crossway) p. 23.

Nothing had worked. He was desperate, and his desperation drove him to Jesus. This is as it should be! Only those who recognize their utter need will be drawn to Jesus. Just as healthy people do not seek a cure, proud people, those who believe they are in need of nothing, do not seek out Jesus. The problem with that line of thought is that, spiritually speaking, we are all, apart from Christ, in the same condition as that boy. The only hope for this child, the only hope for any of us, is found in this desperate father's appeal to Jesus: "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

The Savior's Solution

In commenting on this passage Spurgeon says:

"From some persons we could not ask compassion or fellow-feeling, because they do not appear to have any; they wear a harsh look, and a chill air surrounds them; but the Savior was not so; the man felt that Jesus was full of compassion his suit was that this compassion would show itself to him and his son."²²

The divine compassion of Jesus drew out this man's impassioned and desperate plea. The boy's father could see the compassion in Jesus' face, and we can hear the compassion in Jesus' words. Here is yet another reminder to believers that we must represent Christ with *clarity* and *charity*. If what we proclaim is clear but uncharitable, then we've dropped the ball and harmed the gospel. If what we proclaim is charitable but not clear or just flat wrong, then we've dropped the ball and harmed the gospel.

Having heard this father's desperate plea, the Lord Jesus, who knows all things, asked the man to review his son's seemingly helpless situation. Why? What was the purpose of having painful realities rehearsed?

This man needed to believe in Christ's power in reference to his own case. It is very easy to say, "I believe" when you have no sense of your sin, and no consciousness of your own danger. The easiest thing in the world is to say, "I have faith" when the sun is shining and the band is playing. To quote Spurgeon once again, "Faith, where there is

²² From the sermon "Where the 'If' Lies" - <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1744.htm>

no present sense of need, is but the image of faith, and not the grace, which saves the soul."²³

This man clearly understood his great need, but his faith had been shaken a little by the apostle's failure. So he said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

It is crucial that we understand Jesus' answer, because that will enable us to understand the Savior. "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*" (Mark 9:23) The father's petition was, "If you can do anything, help us." The Savior's solution is this: "I can but do you believe? Do you trust that I can?" The question is never "Can Jesus do it?" The question is always "Do you believe and trust in Christ to do it?" The issue was not Jesus' lack of power but this man's lack of faith!

I must say that this is often an abused passage. People will say that "If you just believe *hard enough* you'll get what you want." Or they'll say, "If you *really believe* down deep in your heart of hearts." That is only subjective and not at all helpful. We cannot manipulate God with faith or anything else for that matter, and this passage is not teaching us to believe *more*. We are being taught to *just plain believe!* We are being taught that instead of the amount of faith it is the object of faith which is the issue. ***Faith is man in his weakness trusting God's promises in His Word.***

This particular father is called to believe because Christ told him that faith was the condition to his son's being healed. "I can," Jesus said, "Do you believe? All things are possible for one who believes."

That prompted from this broken man what I think is one of the greatest and most glorious responses of scripture. "*The father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*" This is an honest confession of a trembling and weak faith. Weak faith is still faith. The trembling hand does still touch. Here is beginning faith in action; weak and imperfect in and of itself but because its object is Jesus Christ it is sufficient to save.

²³ Ibid.

Jesus called for the boy to be brought before Him, and once again the multitude witnessed Christ's power over darkness. No one and nothing is able to resist Jesus Christ. This foul spirit may have given the disciples a fit, but at the authoritative word of the Son he was compelled to flee. As with all the servants of darkness, he did not obey willfully or joyfully, and as he departed the boy he *"rent him sore."* It means he made the boy violently convulse, to the point that the crowd thought he had died. The boy had not died. Satan had been defeated. We are given yet another glimpse of the Resurrection when we read that Jesus took him by the hand, lifted him up, and he arose.²⁴

What an amazing sight this would have been. Are you able to see the elated father joyfully and enthusiastically cradling his son, who for the first time in a long time is sane and responsive? Do you hear the shouts and "hurrahs" of the crowd (and probably the scowls and the "bahs" of the scribes)? I love how Luke concluded this real life story. He wrote in Luke 9:43, *"And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God."* "Mighty power" could also be translated "majesty." All people were amazed by the majestic and mighty power of God as seen in the Son. Only Christ can deliver us from our sins! Only God can save!

This is not where Mark's story ends. He has a brief epilogue, because there is yet more to learn. For those who have already come to faith in Christ this is an especially important lesson.

The Disciples' Question

When the disciples were alone with Jesus they had a question for Him, "Why could we not cast it out?" Notice that they didn't ask "How can we do that," but "Why couldn't we do it?" Under the authority given to them by Jesus they had already done many miracles.²⁵

²⁴ The word translated "he arose" – [G450](#) – is the same word used to describe Christ's resurrection in Mark 8:31; 9:31 just to name a couple of references.

²⁵ Mark 6:7, 13

They had done this before, and that may have been part of the problem. Their past victories may have caused them to trust in themselves instead of the One from whom the power flowed. *They could not* cast out demons, but *Jesus could*. They were only able to do this mighty work through the power granted them by Jesus. So the Lord instructs them and reminds them that *“This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”* *They forgot to pray!* Or it may be that they purposefully neglected to pray. No reason to bother God, after all, it’s just another exorcism. Been there and done that.

The disciples’ failure was not due to unbelief. They believed, or they would not have tried. Their problem was in believing *they could cast out* the unclean spirit. Only Jesus can save, and His servants may only be effective in His service as we *completely AND only lean* ON HIM. The disciples failed because they were depending on themselves rather than the Lord. When we fail it is for the same reason.

Instead of relying on our own strength, skill, talents, or past successes we must humbly and regularly call upon the power of God. That is what *faith in action is*. *Remember, faith is man in his weakness trusting God’s promises in His Word*. Only through such weakness is the strength of God displayed. God uses the weak things of this world to destroy that which is mighty, and in this way the glory is always His.

As the hymn says, Jesus is coming again.²⁶ We have seen the preview of His glorious appearing, but until that time when faith becomes sight we must develop our faith through the power of His Spirit, the truth of His Word, persistent prayer and fasting.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the One who was transfigured on the mount? Do you believe in the One whom Moses and Elijah affirmed is the fulfillment of all that the Law and the Prophets proclaim? Do you believe God the Father who said, *“This is my beloved son, hear him”*?

If so, then you believe in Jesus the Christ, the one who can fulfill His word to and will do so, if you believe. Believe Christ. Take up your cross, and follow Him.

²⁶ *Jesus is Coming Again*, words and music by John W. Peterson

#3 – True Greatness – Mark 9:30-37

How should greatness be measured? One may think it obvious that greatness is measured by: achievement, advancement, and recognition. Therefore, a corporate type defines greatness as promotion and a corner office. Craftsmen are considered great when their work is highly valued, appreciated, and coveted (not to mention expensive). Artists measure greatness by being displayed in the finest and most fashionable galleries. Athletes are considered great if they break records and win championships. Greatness is often defined in terms of achievement, advancement, and recognition.

This lesson's text – Mark 9:30-37 – offers a different valuation. Let's read and understand how the Bible defines greatness.

At this point in His ministry the Lord Jesus' face is set for Jerusalem and the cross that awaits Him there. Once again He taught His followers about the cross, but this time He said that He would be betrayed. Mark 9:31, "*The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day.*"

They were shocked enough just to hear about the cross, now to be told that Jesus would be betrayed by one of them was sensory overload. According to Mark 9:32 this revelation confused the Twelve. Even worse, they would not ask for a clarification. Why? Most likely, they failed to ask a question because they feared to hear the answer.

They needed to hear it, because these guys were arguing about who would be considered as the greatest in the coming kingdom. There are three wrong motives for Christian service:

1. **Desire for Prestige**
2. **Desire for Place**
3. **Desire for Prominence**

I have heard told the story of a nurse who worked in the wilds of Scotland. For twenty years one nurse served a rural district making home visits and follow-ups after emergencies, and was really the first point of call in the community before the doctor.

The doctor who served this district, having watched the nurse patiently, faithfully, and cheerfully serve his patients, always ready when needed, never agitated about the lateness of the call, or the nastiness of the work, on one particularly ugly situation in the early hours of the morning asked the woman, "Nurse, why don't you make them pay you more? God knows you're worth it!"

To which she replied, "If God knows I'm worth it, that's all that matters to me." This is the true test of Christian service.²⁷

The Path to True Greatness

Jesus asked the Twelve why they had been arguing (Mark 9:33). They did not answer because the reason was shameful (Mark 9:34). The Lord Jesus already knew the reason. He simply wanted them to think on it. Having achieved that purpose, He began to teach: "*And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*"

He Doesn't Destroy the Pursuit of Greatness

This is profound. Our Lord acknowledged that the disciples' quest for greatness was a good thing that had become ugly and distorted by sin. We know this because instead of rebuking their desire He began to correct their understanding of that desire.

Nowhere does Jesus criticize a person for pursuing *true* greatness or *true* significance. That is because we were created to be great and to be significant, but that God-given longing for greatness has been corrupted by sin in at least three ways:

1. Corrupted into a longing not to be great, but to be *known as great*.
2. Corrupted into a longing not to be great, but to be *greater than someone else*.
3. Corrupted into thinking that greatness is *about me being recognized by others*.

Therefore, the joy of true greatness has been sinfully perverted into the carnal pleasure we sinners get when others praise us, and when we think we are greater than others are. Jesus saw this in His disciples and instead of destroying the whole distorted

²⁷ [Lessons for the Twelve](#) – a sermon by Alistair Begg

thing, He described a pathway on which that right desire would be radically transformed into its original purpose.

Radical Transformation

The Lord stipulates that true greatness does not want to be first in line but is the willingness to be last. True greatness is not positioning one's self to receive others' praise, but true greatness is deliberately placing one's self in a position to serve others, and to be a blessing to as many people as possible.

Go ahead and pursue greatness. Just understand that the path is *down* not *up*!

Beware how you measure greatness in the servants of the Lord. Paul said,

- **1 Corinthians 4:5** – *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”*
- **Romans 2:29** – *“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”*

To what degree has the impulse for self-exaltation been crucified in my life? How much heartfelt desire to serve others is there? Am I ready and willing to decrease while others increase? These questions provide the Biblical metrics for measuring true greatness.

In our text, the first statement our Lord made about true greatness was: *“If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.”* Before He makes the second statement the Lord Jesus takes a child and places him on His lap in the midst of the apostles (Mark 9:36).

What's up with that? What does this action have to do with teaching about the measure of true greatness?

The point is so clear, especially to His original audience, that Jesus does not have to say anything. The point is that children are among the *“all”* of verse 35: *“...the servant*

of all..." The child illustrated that if one would be great, if one would be first, one must be the servant of children, take time for children, not look down on or despise children, and not say something like, "Children are women's work."

In a church setting, if you would be great, you will not rule out nursery duty. You will pray earnestly about teaching Sunday school classes for children. You will think hard about serving in ministries for young people. You will pray and care for children.

Why bring children into the picture? Why does Jesus illustrate His point about serving with a child? The answer is that there is no political payback in serving children. There is no such thing as "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" with children. They do not vote. They do not give speeches about how great is your helpfulness. They do not make a big deal out of the fact that you pour your life out for them. In fact, many times your care for them is taken for granted. Children prove, more clearly than any other kind of people, whether one is truly great or not; whether one lives *to serve* or lives *to be praised*.²⁸

Receive Children (or anyone) in Jesus' Name

Now comes the second thing Jesus said (Mark 9:37), and it is utterly unexpected. We might have expected the Lord to pick up on His point from verse 35 and apply it to children. Something like: "Now here's a child; the person in our society that men don't serve. The person you might not think is worth your time, but I am showing you that children are worth your time. They are significant."

But that is not what Jesus said. In Mark 9:37 Jesus turned the whole discussion *away from* the value of the child *to the value of the Godhead*. This is what is so different about Jesus and about the Bible; even from much of our Christian literature and preaching today. Jesus says: "*Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*"

²⁸ Cf. Luke 14:13–14 for how the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind also prove this. "*But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*"

This means there are two things that are utterly crucial in our pursuit of true greatness (which is synonymous with caring for others):

1. **Is it done in Jesus' name?** *“Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name...”* Ministering to others in any way but in the name of Jesus, does not fulfill the will of Jesus.
2. **Is it done with a desire to make much of God and declare His glory?** *“Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”*

Maybe you are thinking, “Aren't we supposed to serve others, whether they are children, refugees from terrorism, or people in the community, for their own sake and needs?”

The answer our text presents is this: we serve others best when we receive them and care for them and spend time with them **not** in their name, or for their sake, or in the name of mankind or in the name of mercy or in the name of political gain, but in the name of Jesus, the Son of the living God, and our joy is not first of all in the service we render or the good we do. Joy is ultimately found in obedience to God.

Now let's tie this together. If you will be first, you must be last of all and servant of all; especially to those who are not powerful or influential (Mark 9:35), and if you receive a child – or anyone – in Jesus' name, you receive God (Mark 9:37). Second, don't aim to receive praise in the service of men, instead aim for God to be glorified as you serve others, whether you are noticed or not.

What do you want? Do you want the fleeting praise of mortal men, or do you want God glorified? True greatness is found in joyfully and faithfully following the One who is great.

#4 – This is Serious – Mark 9:38-50

This lesson's text is Mark 9:38-50, and the first word of that passage is the conjunction "and," which immediately connects what had just been said – verses 33-37 – with what is now being said. Jesus was in the middle of a lesson in understanding true greatness; a lesson the Twelve desperately needed to learn. We are no different. Jesus used a child to illustrate His lesson, and the child demonstrated two things. First, all genuine believers are those who have humbled themselves before Christ and become like trusting children. Second, as followers of Christ, we do not serve others motivated by a desire for prestige, place, or prominence. Instead, we serve *everyone*, the powerful, the helpless, and all those in-between motivated by a desire to make much of God and declare His glory.

At this point in the lesson we read, "*And John answered him.*" This block of instruction prompted a comment from John, but before we dive into John's comment let's profile him. John was inspired by God to pen the Gospel account bearing his name, the three general epistles which also carry his name, and the book of the Revelation. He was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, and then began to follow the One of whom the Baptist gave testimony (John 1:35-37). John never names himself in his gospel account, but referred to himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*" Indeed, John is identified by many writers as the "apostle of love" because that theme is so interwoven in his writings.²⁹

The lessons of Christ's love and humility were lessons well learned by the apostle, but they were *learned* and *developed* characteristics, not ones which were innate to him. Do not forget that Jesus tagged John and his older brother James with the nickname "*sons of thunder.*" These were men of fiery temperament, much of it misplaced; especially early in their discipleship. That is made evident in today's text.

²⁹ John 3:16; 13:35; 1 John 3:1, 16, 18; 4:10; 19-20 are just a sampling

Misplaced Zeal

The teaching on true greatness by serving all people in the name of Jesus got John to thinking, and he said to Jesus, “*Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.*” (Mark 9:38)

Some people have nerve. They go around and minister in Jesus’ name but are not part of the clique. Not on John’s watch! He told this man, in no uncertain terms, to stop helping people.

Zeal is a good thing, but unless it is governed by Biblical discernment and a consuming love for the glory of God it will do more harm than good.

Sectarianism is one of the easiest “isms” to follow, and this is coming from the pen of an Independent Baptist pastor. How easy it is for servants of Christ to think that no good can be done in the world, unless it is done by their own group. We are quick to condemn and silence those that differ from us, as if they did not follow Christ *because they do not follow Him with us or like us*. Read the 19th century Anglican Bishop JC Ryle’s comments on this passage:

We may think our fellow Christians mistaken in some points. We may fancy that more would be done for Christ, if they would join us, and if all worked in the same way. But all this must not prevent us [from] rejoicing if the works of the devil are destroyed and souls are saved. Is our neighbor warring against Satan? Is he really trying to labor for Christ? This is the grand question. Better a thousand times that the work should be done by other hands than not done at all. Happy is he who knows the spirit of Paul when he says, “If Christ is preached, I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”³⁰

We do not know anything about this anonymous exorcist except that what he accomplished was done in the name of Jesus. We also know that Jesus, by His response to John, gave at least an implied commendation of this man – “*Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.*” (Mark 9:39-40).

³⁰ JC Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, (Banner of Truth), p. 191.

Biblical ministry (that is the only kind that may be accomplished “in Jesus’ name”) is not the prerogative of those who are “just like us,” but the privilege of all who belong to the kingdom, regardless of whether or not we may be able to serve in the same kind of local church or not. It is the height of foolishness to believe that God only works within your own circle.

Does this mean that all people who name the name of Jesus are genuine disciples? Not at all! The issue here is not acceptance of any and all positions, no matter how aberrant or heretical they may be. The issue here is the glory of and primacy of the Lord Jesus.

Notice that John did not say, “We stopped him because he does not follow *You*.” His words were, “We stopped him because he does not follow *us*.” The “us” is a reference to the Twelve. John’s concern was not primarily for Christ’s honor and kingdom. He was more concerned with safeguarding his own role.

Forget casting out demons – something which the Twelve had recently struggled to do anyway – in the final analysis, it is more important that the servants of God are devoted to Christ *first* than to groups, movements, or ideologies. Indeed, to cause a believer in Christ to stumble and sin is to bring upon one’s self severe judgment. How severe? It would be better to have a millstone hung around your neck and thrown into the sea (Mark 9:42). This is serious. Christianity is serious. Do you take this seriously?

Pride was one sin with which the apostles mightily struggled. Again, we are no different. Pride will not only cause one to personally sin, but it may easily cause other believers to stumble and sin, and as Jesus teaches in the remaining verses of this chapter, that is serious business.

There is a somber tone in Mark 9:42-50 as the Lord used graphic, stunning language to emphasize the seriousness of sin; as well as the seriousness of discipleship. If we are serious about following Christ, about spiritual growth, then we must deal drastically with ourselves; not only for our own sake but for the sake of others as well.

Seriousness of Discipleship

Mark 9:42 is not an exclusive reference to actual children, but an allusion to all believers. Personal sin is serious, and just as serious, if not more so (if that's possible), is to cause someone else to sin.

The Danger of Leading Others to Sin

There may have been twelve jaws on the floor as the Lord Jesus made this statement, because the disciples had been provoking each other to jealousy, envy, and resentment. They had been proud, self-seeking, and causing each other, and maybe even others such as the unnamed exorcist, to sin.

How do we cause people to sin?

- ☠ **Directly** – This is the most obvious form. Purposefully seducing and leading others to do what we know is wrong. We directly lead others into sin when we lead them to follow a path that glorifies anything or anyone other than the Lord, and when we use others for our own pleasure instead of leading them to praise and glorify God. Jeroboam is the prime OT example of one who caused God's people to sin. Beginning in **1 Kings 14** and continuing all the way through **2 Kings 23** we find the sentence "*Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.*" In his letter to the church at Thyatira³¹ the glorified Christ warned them to repent from the false teaching of "*that woman Jezebel*" who was teaching and seducing "*my servants to commit fornication.*"
- ☠ **Indirectly** – We indirectly cause others to sin when we set a bad example for them to follow. We may not openly seduce them towards sinful patterns, but by a negative or careless example we indirectly lead them to sin. D.L. Moody used to tell the story of a little boy who one night snuck out of his house in the middle of a heavy snowfall to follow his dad. His dad was going to a bar, and as he was walking he began to hear snow crunching behind him. He turned and saw his little boy hopping from one footstep to the next, literally following in his daddy's footsteps. The father said, "Son, where are you going?" The boy said, "I'm just

³¹ Revelation 3:18-29

following your footsteps, Daddy.” The story goes that that was the last time the man ever took a drink.³² In regards to parents, specifically fathers, we are guilty of this when we provoke our children to wrath (Ephesians 6:4) by being overprotective, never affirming, never pleased with their effort, expecting perfection, playing favorites, neglecting them, being physically and/or verbally abusive. Let us be examples of holiness rather than sinfulness (1 Timothy 4:12).

☠ **Indifferently** – We also cause people to sin through indifference. You may say, “I don’t try to lead people to do sinful things, and I don’t set bad examples. In fact, I don’t get involved at all.” Wrong answer. Christianity is not a religion of isolation. Christianity is supposed to be lived out in community. Believers must be engaged with one another, stirring one another up to love and good works; not neglecting the assembly; encouraging one another to faithfully follow Christ all the way to the end (Hebrews 10:22-25). Instead of provoking others to sin, we are to provoke one another to be joyful, committed disciples of Christ.

It is better to suffer the agonizing death of drowning than to cause another believer to sin. I did not say that. The Lord Jesus Christ did.

Deal Drastically with Your Sin

Sin is serious. Jesus did not and does not take it lightly, and you will never find cheap remedies for sin in the Bible. In order for anyone to be ultimately saved from the penalty of sin, which is death and eternal punishment in a literal hell, Jesus Christ had to die on the cross. He died as our substitute. Jesus Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and those who believe have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Sin is serious and hell is real. Mark 9:43-48 read like a horrific song, and the dreadful phrase: “*Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*” (vv. 44, 46, 48) is the chorus.³³

³²1100 Illustrations from D.L. Moody, John W. Reed, editor, p. 109.

³³ That repeated refrain is actually a quote of Isaiah 66:24, which is a vivid description of what awaits those who rebel against God.

The word Jesus uses for “hell” is *gehenna*.³⁴ Gehenna refers to the valley of Hinnom just south Jerusalem. It was the place where some of the wicked kings of Israel had burned alive their children as an offering to the Moabite god Molech. Hinnom was a defiled place, and it became the garbage dump of Jerusalem where fires continuously smoldered and repulsive worms fed on the garbage. To Jews, Gehenna fittingly symbolized the eternal fire of hell.

Jesus spoke of hell more than any other person in the New Testament, and He spoke of hell more often than He did heaven. When we read these somber and serious words of Jesus about hell, we must understand that when they are applied to an unbeliever who has resisted and rejected the good news of Jesus Christ, it means that the person's whole life is like something tossed on a burning garbage dump; a waste, a total loss. An unbeliever may have won the approval of other people, may have lived comfortably, but at the end of life ends up on the trash heap for eternity for rejecting God's only begotten Son. This is a warning to unbelievers. Deal drastically with your sin, by turning in repentance and faith from the path that you are on and to the Lord Jesus Christ who has already paid the penalty that a righteous God demands. Remember 1 John 4:10: *“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”*

That is one application of this text, but the primary application, in the context of this passage, is to those who have already believed. Jesus is addressing His disciples not unbelievers.³⁵ Here is an example of Jesus using hyperbole to demonstrate the seriousness of sin, and to teach us to take drastic measures in our own lives regarding...

- ✓ *what we do* – our hands
- ✓ *where we go* – our feet
- ✓ *what we see* and look at – our eyes

Drastic measures are required so that we avoid sinful behavior and keep away from leading others – directly, indirectly, or indifferently – to sin. Nothing is so precious

³⁴ [G1067](#)

³⁵ This in no way implies that believers are able to lose their salvation. Just as it in no way teaches that one should literally maim one's self as a means of avoiding sin and gaining eternal life.

that it should be maintained if it leads us to sin. Just as sin leads men to eternal punishment in hell, sin will lead the believer to the depths of discipline from our Lord and lead another Christian into sin. This is why Paul says to the Corinthian church, *“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”* (1 Corinthians 9:27)

Take drastic measures to deal with your own sin; to avoid the chastening rod of God; to keep from leading another believer into sin, and to avoid leading an unbeliever away from Christ. Our lives are like signposts pointing others towards a certain direction and as Christians we must be certain that we are pointing others always to Jesus. To quote Paul’s letter to the Corinthians once again, *“Be ye followers of me, even as I also [am] of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Salty – instead of Sinful – Christians

We are called to be salty rather than sinful Christians. This is not a reference to being angry but to being holy. Old Testament sacrifices were seasoned with salt. Leviticus 2:13 says, *“And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.”*

Believers are to offer their lives to Christ as *“a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* (Romans 12:1-2)

Instead of being literal with salt the disciples of Jesus Christ will be seasoned with the fire of trials³⁶ If we will be disciples of Christ we must willingly be *“salted with fire.”* Through fiery trials a disciple’s faith will emerge tested and purified for his own good and God’s own glory!

Salt was a crucial commodity in the ancient world. Roman soldiers would sometimes be paid in salt, and the Jews had a maxim which stated, *“The world cannot*

³⁶ 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4; Acts 14:22

survive without salt.”³⁷ We primarily use salt today as a seasoning, but salt was so important in antiquity because it was used as a preservative. Salt preserved food from rotting. Jesus’ call for Christians to *“have salt in yourselves”* is a call for His disciples – then and now – to be a preserving influence in a decaying world.

“Our Lord’s point is that unless we maintain the purity of our own lives and are purified by the flames of testing, and remain faithful to Christ, our lives will have no preserving influence on this corrupt world. If we begin to fall into the same patterns of life as those which are characteristic of the world, we will never be able to point men and women to another world.”³⁸

Let’s not overlook or downplay Christ’s final admonition in this passage. Our Lord says, *“And have peace one with another.”* This is not an anti-climatic phrase clumsily tacked on at the end, but a beautiful summation of His point. When the Christian community in general and the local church in specific is able to *“have peace one with another”* we are clearly distinguished from a world of back-biters and back-scratchers.³⁹

Being at peace with one another is a reflection of the God-given peace we have received from Jesus Christ. True Christian fellowship and cooperation is a powerful witness to a divided, loveless, violent world. Jesus leaves us here with some heart-searching questions:

- *Am I seeking supremacy for myself and my group, or I am I seeking to glorify and promote the cause of Christ?*
- *Am I treating sin casually? Do I deal drastically with sin in my life?*
- *Am I willing to be cleansed through fiery trials?*
- *Am I living as a preservative on society, or am I contributing – through action or inaction – to the decay?*
- *Am I living and serving with my fellow church members peaceably?*

³⁷ From William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* as quoted by Kent Hughes in *Jesus, Servant and Savior* volume 2, (Crossway Books), p. 241

³⁸ Sinclair Ferguson, *Let’s Study Mark*, (Banner of Truth), p. 155.

³⁹ John 13:35

#5 – Jesus and Divorce – Mark 10:1-12

“In our parents' generation, marriage was still the most powerful social force. In ours, it was divorce. My 44-year-old classmates and I have watched divorce morph from something shocking, even shameful, into a routine fact of American life.”

So wrote David J. Jefferson in his article “The Divorce Generation Grows Up” which was the cover story for *Newsweek* magazine in the issue dated April 21, 2008. The article is a candid look at the lingering effects of the divorce revolution as experienced in Jefferson's own 1982 graduating class at Grant High School in California's San Fernando Valley. The article lists the up to date and discouraging divorce statistics.

- ✓ Each year, about 1 million children watch their parents split; triple the number of the '50s.
- ✓ twice as likely as their peers to get divorced themselves
- ✓ more likely to have mental-health problems
- ✓ the divorce rate has increased to 3.6 per 1,000
- ✓ while marriage has sharply decreased to 7.3 per 1,000 people in 2006⁴⁰

While the number of marriages is decreasing, divorces are maintaining a relatively high percentage, and the number of opposite-sex couples (a sign of the times is that we must make this distinction) co-habiting is at an all time high.⁴¹

I want to call your attention again to David Jefferson who was only 44 years old when he penned the following: “I have watched divorce morph from something shocking, even shameful, into a routine fact of American life.” That is a depressing but true statement, and the numbers back up his assertion.

⁴⁰“[The Divorce Generation Grows Up](#)” by David Jefferson *Newsweek*, April 2008. This statement made in the cover article of a major national magazine illustrates the ubiquity of divorce in the U.S. Nevertheless, here is another disturbing statistic, during a 10-month period in 2005 an estimated 1.8 million couples got married in the United States. During the same period, nearly 800,000 couples divorced. “[Putting Asunder](#)” by Jamie Dean *World*, June 2006

⁴¹ The number of opposite-sex couples who lived together was less than a million just 30 years ago, but in 2007 that number was 6.4 million. Cohabiting couples now make up almost 10% of all opposite-sex U.S. couples, married and unmarried. [USAToday 28 July 2008](#)

Sadly, his observation is not only true of “secular” couples, but many couples who identify as Christian have similarly dismal records. Within the past thirty years, divorce has become a routine fact of American Christian life.

We refer to ourselves as the people who stand for traditional, Biblical marriage. I fear this has predominantly come to mean marriage between a man and a woman as opposed to state sanctioned same-gender couplings. While marriage is meant to be between *one man* and *one woman*, let us not lightly pass over the fact that the greatest enemy of marriage is divorce *not* legally recognized same sex “marriages.”

If that statement comes as a shock, it is only because we have all experienced divorce on some level. Either you have walked through one and are now single or remarried, or one or more of your immediate family – parent(s) or sibling(s) – have been or are getting divorced. Divorce has become routine.

But the regularity of divorce has not lessened the pain it causes. This wound cuts deep. The mere mention of the word carries a huge weight of sorrow and loss. No matter how one looks at divorce it is a tragic disappointment, and it causes anger, regret, and guilt for all involved. Emotionally, it is just as, if not more, heart-wrenching than the death of a spouse. That is because the enormous loss of a spouse in death is compounded in divorce by the ugliness of sin and the moral outrage at being wronged.

Of course, there are many who disagree. While they are not happy with the failure of their marriage, they are happy to be done with it, and there has arisen an industry that helps the recently divorced to celebrate their marriage’s dissolution. One example is Los Angeles entrepreneur Christine Gallagher who has established a business to meet the growing demand for post-divorce celebrations, and regularly writes articles that catalog the benefits of divorce celebrations.⁴²

This is not a good thing, but is instead a troubling trend, not because of the celebrations per se, but because of *what* is being celebrated. Gallagher has been quoted

⁴² [“The Divorce Party Planner,”](#) [“10 Liberating Reasons to Celebrate Your Divorce With a Party”](#)
See also this *Time* article [“The Booming Business of ‘Divorce Parties.’”](#)

as saying: “[Divorce is] part of life, and yet it's the only major event for which we have no ritual. A celebration communicates that divorce is OK -- life affirming, even.”⁴³

Actually it is neither. The reason this “major event” had no (until recently) celebration ritual is because it has never before been viewed as a celebratory occasion. The dissolution of what was supposed to be a life-long relationship should be mourned, not exalted like the wedding itself.

Now at this point it is important to state that neither this lesson nor this writer is against divorced people, nor is the argument being made that divorced people should live in abject misery until their dying day. What is being asserted in this lesson, on the strength of scripture in general and Mark 10:1-12 in particular, is that the new cultural norm viewing divorce as just another life event to be celebrated and accepted is not a biblical norm.

Our culture and statistical data have had their say regarding marriage, or rather the dissolution of it, but what does Jesus have to say? Mark 10:1-12 provides a clear answer from our Lord.

As the passage begins, Jesus has moved from Galilee to the Trans-Jordan, drawing ever nearer to Jerusalem and the cross that awaits Him there. As always, along the road He taught His disciples. As always, the Pharisees are on the Lord's heels, ostensibly to learn from Him but actually to tempt Him. The word translated “tempting”⁴⁴ in Mark 10:2 is first used in Mark 1:13 where we read that “*And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan.*”

These men had no desire to learn from Jesus. Their only motivation for asking questions was an attempt to incriminate Him. It was also no coincidence that the Pharisees waited until Jesus returned to the territory of Herod Antipas before asking Him about divorce and remarriage. After all, John the Baptist's adherence to the biblical position on that subject got him beheaded.⁴⁵

⁴³ [“Divorce Ceremonies for Healing...maybe a toaster”](#) by Elizabeth Bougerol, CNN.com

⁴⁴ [G3985](#)

⁴⁵ Mark 6:14-29; c.f. Matthew 14:1-12

More than politics was involved in their trick question. Divorce was a controversial subject among the Jewish rabbis. In that day there were two conflicting views, and the difference between these views hinged on how one interpreted the phrase “*some uncleanness*” from **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. According to Kent Hughes in his commentary, liberal proponents were outrageously lenient in their interpretation, and permitted a man to divorce his wife for any reason, even burning his food. It gets worse, because some rabbis took the phrase “*and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes*” to mean that a man could divorce his wife if he found another woman who he considered more attractive.⁴⁶

The conservative school of thought taught that the critical words “*some uncleanness*” referred only to marital sin short of adultery. I say short of adultery because that sin was punishable by death.

Here is the point, no matter what answer Jesus gave, He would be sure to displease somebody. The verbs indicate⁴⁷ that the Pharisees kept asking Him as though they hoped to provoke Him to say something incriminating. Of course, Jesus knew the wicked and manipulative hearts of these men. He ignored their foolish man-centered arguments and took them to the scriptures.

“What did Moses command you?”

In this context the Lord Jesus was plainly asked if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. He puts the question back to them in **verse 3** to draw out a point about Moses' teaching on divorce. They say in **verse 4** that Moses permitted divorce if a man would write a certificate of divorce. To which Jesus responds in **verse 5**, “*For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.*” In other words, the law that you use to justify your divorce and remarriage, testifies not to the desire of God's heart, but to the hardness of your own. God has tolerated and regulated the hardness of your heart in His law. Jesus explained that Moses gave the divorce law because of the sinfulness of the human heart. The law protected the wife by restraining the husband from impulsively divorcing her and abusing her like an unwanted piece of chattel. By giving

⁴⁶ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior volume 2*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books), 1989, p. 46.

⁴⁷ [G1905](#) – *eperōtaō* – “to accost one with an enquiry, interrogate”

this commandment to Israel, God was not encouraging or putting His approval on divorce. Rather, He restrained divorce, making it more difficult for men to dismiss their wives. The Lord put sufficient regulations around divorce so that the wives would not become victims of their husbands' whims.

Who Made Marriage?

But then Jesus calls for a new standard of faithfulness by pointing back to an old design of God. In **verse 6** He said, *"But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female."* Then He quoted **Genesis 1:27** and traced the meaning of marriage back to the very first design of God in creation. The issue of divorce and remarriage, He said, is not mainly about the way God regulated the hardness of heart in the law; it is mainly about the meaning of marriage as designed by God in creation. This takes us back *behind the law* and teaches us that the basis of marriage is God's action, that marriage is *God's design*. Marriage is not man's idea, it is God's idea and God's design is what is at stake with divorce.

Then in **vv. 7-8**, Jesus makes the explicit connection between God's creation of male and female on the one hand, and marriage on the other hand by quoting Genesis 2:24: *"For this cause [because God created man male and female with a design for marriage] shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh."*

Do you see? Leaving father and mother and cleaving to each other to form a new family unit, *is God's idea rooted in the way He created and designed mankind as male and female*. Then Jesus gave an important and powerful declaration followed by an important and powerful command in **verse 9**: *"What therefore God hath joined together, [the declaration], let not man put asunder [the command]."*

The declaration is that marriage is the work of God. *"What God has joined together..."* It is not just a human tradition, and this is true even for people who do not believe in God. Marriage is God's, not man's, because God is the Creator of man and marriage. God *designed it* in **Genesis 1:27**. God *described it* in **Genesis 2:24**. Marriage is a work of God and gets its meaning from God.

Therefore, Jesus ends his answer to the Pharisees, with the powerful command, “What God has joined let no man separate.” The joining is God's, the separating is to be God's – by death.

But...

“But is it lawful?” That is what the Pharisees had asked, and evidently the disciples, having heard Jesus plainly shut the Pharisees’ collective mouth, needed to ask the question again (**Verse 10**). Is it lawful to divorce and remarry? Jesus answered them in **verses 11-12**. First he addresses the man who is thinking about leaving his wife to marry another woman: *“Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.”* Then He turns it around and focuses on the woman who is thinking about leaving her husband for another man: *“And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”*

What is the point of these two verses? Why does Jesus say this? Does He not know that people who are divorced and remarried; parents of people who are divorced and remarried; that children of people who are divorced and remarried are going to read this? Does He not know that this will hurt?

Yes, He does know that, and He cares about that. There are few things that hurt more than the break-up of a marriage. As has been already stated, divorce may be just painful, more so in some cases, than the death of a spouse, and certainly does more damage to all concerned. Jesus knows that. But unlike our day, where not hurting feelings is the essence of love, Jesus demonstrates that the essence of love is helping people to live in sync with biblical reality. Sometimes it hurts, sometimes it does not, but it is always meant for our good, the benefit of others, and the glory of God.

I think the aim of Jesus here is prevention, not destruction. He is talking to those who can still turn back, and He is saying: marriage is God's idea: He designed it, He described it, and He does it. It is one of the deepest realities in the world; deeper than any of us knows. What God joins together He joins deeply together; deeper than feelings, deeper than promises made and broken, deeper than intimacy, and deeper than hurt. “One flesh” is a deep, deep mystery. That is exactly what Paul calls it in **Ephesians 5:32**. And he says it is an image of Christ and the church. The union of

husband and wife in marriage is like the union of God and His people. It is an ocean of deep, deep unseen wonders. Yet many people today treat it like a backyard swimming pool for lounging around as long as we feel like it.

Jesus says: *God joined this!* The charge of adultery (in vv. 11-12) is a serious charge. Marriage is an image of the covenant commitment between Christ and the church for which He died. To walk away from marriage for another relationship is not just about marriage, but about Christ and about God. What God has joined together in man and woman, in Christ and church, do not separate. God will never separate Christ and His church. *Let your marriage tell the truth about that.* Do not lie to the world about the covenant between Christ and His church. God joined this. Do not separate it; even an image of it.⁴⁸

Marriage is a work of God and gets its meaning from God, and its meaning is mainly the portrayal of the covenant love between Christ and His Church. Therefore do not separate what God has joined. Tough it out, talk it out, pray it out, fast it out, cry it out, wait it out, and when you are at the end of your resources, remember: like a child, like a helpless, insufficient, needy, trusting child, receive the kingdom; receive the King's help.

He comes to us all and says, "I am an all-providing, all-loving King. If you will receive my kingly design for your marriage (even if you must do it by yourself), I will be there to help you. With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible (hence the command not to put asunder what God has joined)."

⁴⁸ Let your marriage tell the truth about the covenant between Christ and His church. Even though this thought will not be developed here, this is one of the reasons why I would not counsel one to end their second (or third, etc.) marriage. Repent if you should. Start where you are to honor the vows you have made and whatever the cost fulfill your calling to live out the rock-solid relationship of Christ and His church within your marriage. No marriage is perfect, including the ones that last a lifetime. In your marriage now, whether it is the first or the fifth, resolve by the Spirit's power and the truth of God's Word to honor the Lord in your marriage, for your good, others' benefit, and His glory.

#6 – Jesus and Children – Mark 10:13-16

In this passage, Jesus has just finished teaching about the very serious matter of marriage and divorce. It is not surprising that from the teaching on the intended permanency of marriage, the discussion naturally turned to children. The statement “*and they twain shall be one flesh*”⁴⁹ is literally fulfilled when a married couple come together to produce a child. Their children are to be raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In this particular instance, as soon as Jesus finished, a group of parents brought their little children to Him. It was customary for Jewish parents to bring their children to the rabbis for a blessing. Some were infants in parents’ arms⁵⁰ while others were young children able to walk. Jesus welcomed them all.

The beautiful picture of children being brought before to Jesus is marred by the Twelve’s reaction. The disciples had a hard time being in tune with Jesus. Before He fed the 5,000 they told Jesus “send them away.” He said, “You feed them.” When He warned them, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod,” they thought He was talking about no bread on the boat galley. In this situation, parents were bringing their children to Jesus. The disciples were trying to run them off, but Jesus said “Don’t you dare!”⁵¹

Before we shake our heads in derision at the disciples, it would do us well to bear in mind that we are not always in step with Jesus. Let’s not mock these men as if we would not have been right there messing up just as they did. Instead, learn from this humbling event in their lives, and pray for the heart of Jesus Christ.

And, let’s face it; children are not always cute and cuddly. They are noisy and disorderly, require a ton of special attention, are a financial burden, and oftentimes stink. Still, while the above might be true some of the time, it is all of the time a joy and a blessing to minister to children because *children are not a curse to be endured but instead are a blessing to be enjoyed!*

⁴⁹ Matthew 19:15

⁵⁰ Luke 18:15

⁵¹ Mark 10:14; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17

Psalm 127:3 says, “*Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*” Every family is blessed when they have children, and the same is true of every church.

Mark 10:13-16 has something to say about children, and by extension, the Savior’s kingdom. As we walk through this passage, hopefully we will learn how Jesus related to children, and observe some lessons about gospel-centered parenting.

A Lesson about Service

This passage clearly reveals certain responsibilities that both parents and the church have toward their children. Fulfilling these responsibilities is a form of service to our kids. Here is how we serve them.

We Serve Our Children by Evangelizing Them

This passage nowhere implies that Jesus was saving these children. He was merely praying for them and pronouncing a blessing on their young lives. This scene teaches us that these parents cared enough about the spiritual condition of their children to bring them to the Lord so that they might be blessed through Him.

Bible believers are challenged from the Old and New Testaments⁵² to share the things of God with their children. Parents should do everything in their power to ensure that their children are exposed to the Gospel. That means bringing them to church on a consistent basis. It means praying *for* them and *with* them. It means opening the Bible with them at home, and being open about your own faith. It means being consistent in your walk with Christ; teaching them that nothing in this world is more important than the Lord and His work. Yes, the Gospel should be preached from our church’s pulpit, but the primary responsibility for evangelizing the children of this congregation rests on the shoulders of Mom and Dad. Studies have consistently shown that the majority of people come to faith while they are under the age of 18. Better yet, the Bible instructs us to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

⁵² Deuteronomy 6:1-8; Ephesians 6:4 are two examples

We Serve Our Children by Educating Them

By bringing their children to Jesus, these parents were telling their children that they saw something special in Him. Like those ancient parents, believers in our day have the responsibility of modeling our faith in Jesus so that the younger generation can see that He is worth knowing. If I have a “faith” which does not result in a changed life, a life marked by following Christ, my children will pick up on that. I can *talk* about my faith, but if I do not *live* my faith, my children will not see Christ, they will see hypocrisy.

We are responsible for educating our children about the things of God. The words translated as “*nurture*”⁵³ in **Ephesians 6:4** refers to “the whole training and education” of a child. The public or private school teacher does not carry the primary responsibility to teach our children morality, let alone bringing our children to Jesus. It is our joyful duty to bring our kids face to face with a saving Lord. If we make much of Jesus in front of them, they will be far more likely to come to Him at an early age and remain faithful to Him as they mature.

We Serve Our Children by Encouraging Them

When these parents came to Jesus with their children they were encouraging them to approach Him as well. Looking again to **Ephesians 6:4**, the word “*admonition*”⁵⁴ carries the idea of encouragement. We ought to encourage our children to seek the things of God, and that exhortation must be modeled not merely spoken. Teach them to pray at an early age by being a person of prayer. Make the Bible a big part of their daily life by demonstrating that it is a big part of your life. Do not send them but bring them to church, and involve them in church ministry as you minister.

One of the best things a mature believer can do for children is for them to be in love with Jesus Christ. When mature adults love Jesus with a sincere devotion, it encourages children to love Him too. Children want to love what their parents love.⁵⁵

⁵³ [G3809](#)

⁵⁴ [G3559](#)

⁵⁵ This temporarily vanishes during the teen years, but will usually return!

There is no greater blessing than for a child to be saved and for them to live their whole lives for Jesus. D. L. Moody once returned from a meeting and reported two and a half conversions. *“Two adults and a child, I suppose?”* asked his host. *“No,”* said Moody, *“two children and an adult. The children have their whole lives to give in service to Christ. The adult has only half of his left to give.”*

A Lesson about Salvation

While this text certainly highlights every adult’s responsibility to serve our children by helping them form a spiritual foundation, it also speaks about the matter of salvation.

What It Implies

The fact that children are invited to come to the Savior implies that children need a Savior. Now, some folks do not like to hear this, but children are sinners too.⁵⁶ While children may possess a kind of innocence, they still stand in need of salvation.

That is why parents and other concerned adults must do all they can to bring children face to face with the claims of the Gospel. And I do mean *the entire Gospel*. We must not shield children from the truth of the cross. Half of a Gospel is of no value. It is not our duty to save them, but it is our duty to expose them to the Word of God. When children hear the Gospel preached, taught and lived out, they are far more likely to come to Jesus at an early age.⁵⁷

What It Involves

Whenever a discussion about childhood salvation comes up, someone always mentions the age of accountability. Some have designated that age to be twelve. When a child reached the age of twelve, it was time for them to get saved, join the church and be baptized.

It surprises some people when they find out that the Bible does not mention a specific age of accountability. A child becomes accountable for his or her sins when they

⁵⁶ Psalm 58:3; 51:5; Job 15:14; Proverbs 22:15; Isaiah 48:8; Ephesians 2:3

⁵⁷ Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:15

come to place where they can understand the difference between right and wrong; to understand that they are sinners.⁵⁸ When a person reaches a level of mental understanding regarding the nature of sin and its consequences and are able to make a decision for or against Jesus Christ, they have reached the age of accountability, or maybe even a better term, the age of decision. As Pastor Thomas is wont to say, “Love must make a choice.”

So, when is that age? Is it twelve? Perhaps for some children it is, but not all of them. That age will be different for every child, just as every child is different in nearly every way. Some people, such as those with severe mental handicaps, may never come to that place.

Wise parents will consistently tell and model the Gospel for their children, but they will not attempt to force a decision from them. It is not uncommon for young kids to ask their parents about salvation. That is a good thing! You should never put them off, but you should definitely take the time to ask them some pointed questions like:

- *What does it mean to be saved?*
- *Why do you feel that you need to be saved?*
- *Can you explain to me how a person gets saved?*
- *Can you explain to me what sin is?*
- *Who is Jesus? Why did He have to die? Is He still dead?*

There are other questions, but you get the idea. If they do not understand, keep doing what you are doing. Keep praying. In such a case your child is interested but not quite ready. Trust the Holy Spirit to do His work, and have confidence in the power of the Gospel. It is mighty to save! Carefully and consistently point them to the Lord Jesus, but never not put words in their mouths.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Isaiah 7:16

⁵⁹ Consider this serious question: What happens to the children who die before they reach the age of accountability or decision? The short answer is *instant heaven*. That is not sentimentally stated but is a biblically based conviction. David lost an infant son, and he was convinced that boy had gone to be with the Lord (2 Samuel 12:23). Children and others who cannot choose for themselves are not *saved*, but they are *safe*. When they die in that safe condition they are taken to Heaven! What a gracious Savior we serve!

What It Illustrates

This whole matter of children coming to Jesus was used by our Lord to illustrate the way all believers must come to Him. All who come to Him must come as a little child. Children are trusting, humble and dependent. They are so trusting, that they have to be warned not to talk to strangers. They are so humble, that they will readily accept what they are told. They are so dependent, that they simply rest in the ability and willingness of those around them to meet their needs. They do not worry over food, clothing, shelter, or paying the bills. Children do not naturally doubt that their family members love them. Children simply accept profound things by faith. They do not look beyond the obvious. They just believe.

Those are the requirements for a person to come to Jesus. For a person to be saved, regardless of their age, they must humble themselves before God. They must lay down their pride, and not trust in their achievements but in the Lord. They must humble themselves by acknowledging their sins before God. They must be willing to admit that their works and religious activity can never save them. They must come to the place where they, like a little child, simply look to Jesus in pure faith, trusting that He will do everything He has promised to do.⁶⁰ This requires the childlike qualities of trust, humility and dependence.

Regardless of whether you are saved or lost, young or old, Jesus cares about you. While this message has been about children, it is not only for children. If you have never been saved, regardless of your age, you need to come to Jesus today. He died on the cross and rose from the grave to save you.

Believer, if your life has gotten complicated and you need some help from God today, you can get it. If sin has crept into your relationship with the Lord Jesus and is hindering your walk with Him, He can forgive that today. If you will come to Him, you will find that His grace will be sufficient for you. If there are needs in your life, you can come to Him like those little children did two thousand years ago and you can find the help you need.

⁶⁰ This will be clearly contrasted in Mark 10:17-22 with the rich, young ruler

#7 – Jesus and Eternal Life – Mark 10:13-31

This passage is about eternal life. The text is chock full of the subject. Jesus' declaration in verses 13-14 was not intended to make much of the children, but to teach that helpless dependence – like that of a child – is required for citizenship in the kingdom of God. That phrase – “kingdom of God” – is synonymous with eternal life. Throughout this text the “kingdom of God” phrase is used by Jesus five times (**vv. 14, 15, 23, 24, 25**). The young man used it in **verse 17**. The fact that they mean the same thing is vividly clear when one considers his question: “what must I do to inherit *eternal life*?” and then notice Jesus' remark when the man sorrowfully trundles off: “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the *kingdom of God*!”

“Kingdom of God” and “eternal life” mean the same thing, and for anyone to enter into the kingdom of God, for anyone to gain eternal life, they must come helplessly dependent on Jesus Christ. As the hymn writer so eloquently stated:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling:
Naked, come to Thee for dress:
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.*⁶¹

How to obtain eternal life is the underlying framework of this entire section and the necessary helpless dependence of a little child is juxtaposed with the man who in **verse 17** runs up to Jesus and asks, “*Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*” Before we delve into his question, let's take a moment to fashion a portrait of the questioner. What do we know about this man? We know that...

- 1) **He was eager.** Mark says he “*came...running.*”
- 2) **He was humble.** Mark says he “*kneeled to him.*” Not only that, but remember his question. To ask how to obtain eternal life is to admit that you do not have it. He publicly admitted as much.

⁶¹ Augustus Toplady, *Rock of Ages*

- 3) *He was respectful.* He addressed Jesus as “*Good master.*” There is nothing of the Pharisaical spirit about this guy.
- 4) *He was sincere.* His question was genuine, not one engineered to entrap Jesus as witnessed earlier in chapter ten.
- 5) *He was rich.* Evident not only by Christ’s comment in v. 23, but by Mark’s admission that “*he had great possessions*” v. 22. Luke flatly states, “*He was very rich*” (Luke 18:23).
- 6) *He was a ruler.*⁶² Probably a reference to leadership of a local synagogue, or that he was simply a respected religious teacher in the community. This is all very impressive, but it is even more so when you consider that...
- 7) *He was young.* Twice Matthew described him as young (Matthew 19:20, 22)

You may have heard of this guy before. He is often described as the *rich, young ruler*; even though, as we have seen, he was much more than rich, young, and a ruler. Perhaps we have always narrowed him down to those three characteristics because they are the three most appealing to us, but I digress.

Now let’s consider the question asked: “*Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” There is certainly nothing wrong with that question. Do not take issue with the “*What shall I do?*” The truth is that you must *do* something to be saved. You must repent and believe. Repentance and faith are necessary for one to gain eternal life. As Jesus said from the beginning of His ministry: “*Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*”⁶³ That is not works salvation, but is true, biblical salvation and it is all of grace.

Not only did this man ask the right question, he asked the right Person. Too many people chase the right things down the wrong paths. There are so many counterfeit religions and so many devout followers of the same. This is because all of

⁶² Luke 18:18

⁶³ Mark 1:14-15

humanity, as beings made in God's image, are hard-wired with an innate longing for that which is beyond us; that which is transcendent. A vast variety of methods (religious, moral, professional, carnal, even criminal) are employed in an attempt to satisfy that intrinsic longing apart from God. In spite of his status, wealth, and youth this man was unfulfilled. His was an anxious, restless heart. He knew that something was missing, and he understood that something was eternal life.

Please understand that eternal life is not just living forever, because all of us will spend *somewhere* forever. Eternal life is a quality of existence which allows us to be alive to God; to possess the very Spirit of God. It is a new birth⁶⁴ unaffected by physical death. Indeed, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!⁶⁵

This young man recognized that he did not have eternal life, and he knew that he wanted eternal life. This made him the opposite of the Pharisees who were content with their own useless and hypocritical religious system. At first glance this appears to be the easiest evangelistic encounter ever. How would we respond to a genuinely interested and enthusiastic prospect?

We might say, "Just believe" or "Say this prayer from your heart" or something along those lines. But Jesus did not. Let's learn how to share with others the way to obtain eternal life from the One who was life incarnate. Jesus led this earnest young man along a series of soul piercing lessons which were (and are) vital for anyone who would enter into the kingdom of God.

Knowledge of God

The first lesson is a right understanding of God. No one said a *complete* understanding, which is not even possible, but a *right* understanding of God. Recall how this fellow addressed Jesus? He called Him "*Good* master," and Jesus answered, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Our Lord was not being rude. He was making a point. The Greek word translated "good" is *agathos*⁶⁶ and it

⁶⁴ John 3:1-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-24

⁶⁶ [G18](#)

refers not just to that which is outwardly good but also inwardly, morally, naturally, and essentially good. There is only one Being who is good like that, and that person is God. By asking the young man, “Why are you calling me good?” Jesus was not denying His deity. He was directing attention to His deity. The young man was right in calling Jesus good, but Jesus was calling him on this: “Do you realize that I am God?”

No one will be granted eternal life without understanding that Jesus is the God-Man; not half-god and half-man, but God incarnate; in the flesh.⁶⁷ The essence of eternal life is to know the Father through the Son by the work of the Spirit. As Christ said in His High Priestly prayer, “*This is eternal life, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*” **John 17:3**

Jesus is good, because Jesus is God. This must be understood for one to enter into the kingdom of God.

Knowledge of Yourself

To gain eternal life, not only must you understand who Jesus is, but you must understand who you are. That is the point behind the *seemingly* contradictory statement of Jesus in **verse 19**: “*Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.*”

Christ’s statement is *seemingly* contradictory because you may be counted righteous by perfectly keeping the Law. The problem is (and it is a significant problem) no one of us is able to perfectly keep the Law!⁶⁸

Then why does Jesus answer the question “What must I do to inherit eternal life” with “keep the commandments”? *So the young man would realize that he could not, had not, and would never be able to keep the commandments.* All evangelism must take the imperfect sinner and place him up against the perfect Law of God so that he can see his sinfulness and then see the Savior. Eternal life comes to those who recognize their sinfulness, Christ’s sinlessness, and who through repentance and faith turn from their

⁶⁷ John 1:1-4

⁶⁸ Psalm 14:3; Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12

wickedness to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Salvation is for people who want to turn away from the things of this life and turn to God for eternal life.

Jesus nailed this young man with the Law so that he could understand himself; understand that he lived in violation and rebellion against a holy God. This man felt a personal need, but he had no sense of remorse over his sin. There was zero indication that his sinfulness was an offense to God. He did not recognize that he was a sinner whose sin separated him from God and made him worthy of eternal punishment. Our Lord takes the focus off of his felt need and puts it on God.

We cannot proclaim the grace of God *without also* proclaiming the Law of God, because no one understands what grace means unless he understands what the law requires. No one understands mercy unless they understand guilt. We cannot preach a gospel of grace without also preaching a message of law.

The real question is not “Why did Jesus tell him that?” The question is, “Will the man now understand his sinfulness?”

“*Master,*” he replied (dropping the “good” this time) “*all these have I observed from my youth up.*” Sadly, this guy was not honest with himself about himself. Like Paul before his conversion, he believed his legalistic righteousness to be righteous enough.⁶⁹ Like Paul before him, it was not.

Knowledge of the Cost

The Lord is teaching this man, and us, vital lessons concerning who may enter into the kingdom of God. If we would enter the kingdom, which is to gain eternal life, we must have a right knowledge of God. Specifically that God is intrinsically and only good; perfect and sinless altogether, and that Jesus *is* God. Second, you must know yourself. Particularly that we are none of those things which God is. We must understand that we are sinners who cannot perfectly keep the Law and meet God’s holy standard. Understanding this should drive us to the fact that we need a Savior. Jesus is that Savior.

⁶⁹ Philippians 3:9; Romans 7:9

Admittedly, the manner in which Jesus taught these lessons seems unorthodox. His question: “Why do you call me good?” and His statement “Keep the commandments” throw us off guard. Jesus’ next declaration does not disappoint either, but before we examine it, let’s linger a moment on Mark’s commentary from **verse 21**, *“Then Jesus beholding him loved him.”*

Jesus loved and was soon to die for the sins of this man. Our Lord is not willing that any should perish. Whosoever will may come to Jesus and gain eternal life, but whosoever comes may not come on his own terms. All may come, but all who do will come on Christ’s terms.

This sincere young man was taught a lesson on the cost of following the Lord when Jesus said: *“One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”*

Mark 10:21

This fellow’s life was centered on himself rather than the kingdom. Jesus understood this, and that is why He told him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor. It is not because philanthropy is the key to the kingdom. Jesus Christ is the key, but this question revealed that the man loved his wealth more than the Messiah. He may not have looked like an idolater, but he was. The surgical comment from Jesus revealed a false god in his life. Money was his idol, and he was unwilling to forsake his false god for the one true God.⁷⁰

Which is why he went away sad. He lacked the helpless, childlike faith necessary for entrance into the kingdom. He would not repent of his sin. He would not even admit them. He was unwilling to forsake all things and all others for Christ. Eternal life is what he wanted, not the cross. He refused to turn from his sin and follow the Savior. He loved his little god too much to forsake it and follow the real God. He walked away with all his possessions but without Jesus. In essence, he left with nothing.

⁷⁰ Do you have to give everything away to be a Christian? No. The Lord did not say this to others. The Lord knew this man’s heart. He loved money more than the Messiah. What Jesus said in **Luke 14:33** applies here: *“whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”*

Do you know why this man went away sorrowful? For this reason, he understood the cost of eternal life, but he was unwilling to pay the price. He made the most crucial decision of his life based on the here and now rather than the hereafter. He must have forgotten the story of Moses who, "*Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*" (**Hebrews 11:26**) He vividly proved that if we have everything but Christ then we have nothing.

Jesus had one more jaw-dropping statement to make, because He had one more lesson to teach. As the young man walked away sorrowful because of his great possessions, Jesus looked round about, and said to His disciples:

"How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure..."

Once again the Twelve were standing slack jawed and staring bug-eyed at their Lord, and were left thinking, "What did He say?"

Knowledge of God's Grace

Are camels easily threaded through a needle's eye? This is not a trick question. It is impossible for a camel to go through a needle's eye. Impossible. This begs the obvious question then, and the Twelve asked it, "Who then can be saved?" Does this mean redemption is only available to the poor? Is salvation even possible?

The answer to the former is "no" and the answer to the latter is this. Salvation is impossible – *for man*. Salvation is *only possible by God's grace*. What man cannot do only God is able to do, and praise His holy name that He is willing to do it! To enter the kingdom of God you must have knowledge of God and yourself. You must count the cost, and you must know that it is *all* and *only by God's grace*. Eternal life not only has God as its goal, it has God as its source and beginning. Were it not for grace there

would be no salvation. *“With men [it is] impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”*

Peter had watched and heard this entire encounter. He watched the man slip away. He was surely dumbstruck by Jesus’ comment. But only for a moment! More than any of the other Twelve, Peter had the amazing ability to regain his speaking faculties at a quick pace. He blurted out, *“Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.”*

Jesus’ response is a magnificent bit of encouragement. Following Jesus involves sacrifice, but Jesus promised that whatever is sacrificed for His sake and for the spread of the Gospel will be given back hundredfold; not just in this time, but especially in the age to come. This is a staggering promise, and not one that should be seen as a get rich quick scheme. Consider this: Jesus Christ is never a debtor. He *always* supplies our *every* need. Even when following Christ results in the loss of family, wealth, or health, He will abundantly supply the needs of His people.

The call goes out for all who will hear to forsake all that you have, take up the cross, and follow Christ. Do that and you will inherit eternal life, you will share in Christ’s triumph, and receive far more than you have lost or will ever lose!

#8 – Sacrificial Service – Mark 10:32-45

As a child I visited Clifty Falls State Park in Madison, IN. As the Clifty Creek runs into the Ohio River there are several waterfalls along its stretch. The two I remember are not cleverly named – Big Clifty and Little Clifty. Both are basically the same size, being right around 60', but they compensated for their lack of cleverness with beauty. The Clifty Falls are a sight, especially in the spring. Beyond their beauty lies one more characteristic I clearly remember. The velocity of Clifty Creek accelerated on its approach to the falls.

Likewise, as the earthly ministry of Jesus nears its climatic conclusion (the Passion Week is just around the corner) there is a frightening resolution about Jesus. Unique to Mark's account is the vividly detailed snapshot of this event. **Mark 10:32** does not simply tell us that Jesus and the Twelve went up to Jerusalem. Instead we read that *"Jesus went before them."*

This is no leisurely stroll up to the holy city. Jesus purposefully strides before His followers with an unwavering determination. His resolve intimidated the disciples; not because Jesus normally vacillated. Not at all! His followers were *"amazed"* and *"afraid"* because, to quote Sinclair Ferguson,

"the degree of commitment which Jesus manifested was something they had never before encountered. They could not fully understand it, but it unnerved them just because it drew them into its own orbit. They sensed that His commitment required their commitment!"⁷¹

Jesus came down from heaven to do the will of the Father that sent Him. The "hour" that had been appointed in eternity past was fast approaching, and Jesus had set His face like a flint⁷² towards Jerusalem so that He might accomplish His Father's will.⁷³ As Jesus marched towards Jerusalem *"he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him."* He described for them, now for the third time, exactly what it meant for the Son of Man to be lifted up.

⁷¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, (Banner of Truth), 1999, p. 172

⁷² Isaiah 50:7; Luke 9:51

⁷³ John 3:14-18; 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 15:10; Hebrews 5:8; 10:9

Selfless Sufferings Predicted

Do you know what a polysyndeton is? It is a rhetorical device where conjunctions are repeated in close succession for effect, as in the phrase “*neither rain nor snow nor sleet nor hail.*” A better example is **Mark 10:33-34**. Each grisly aspect of Jesus’ soon and severe suffering is stressed with an “and.” “*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem...*”

- ! *AND* the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests...
- ! *AND* the scribes...
- ! *AND* they will condemn him to death...
- ! *AND* deliver Him over to the Gentiles...
- ! *AND* they will mock Him...
- ! *AND* scourge Him...
- ! *AND* spit on Him...
- ! *AND* kill Him...
- ! *AND* after three days *He will rise again!*

Remember, this was the third time Christ had openly taught the Twelve that He would suffer, die, and be resurrected.⁷⁴ The instruction was not well received either time, and, true to form, this third and most comprehensive instruction of the coming crucifixion and Resurrection was followed by a foolish, proud, and ridiculous request from the sons of Thunder.

Selfish Pride Revealed

We know from Matthew’s account⁷⁵ that not only James and John but their mother also approached Jesus with a request that reeked of pride and selfishness. Speaking in private with Jesus the family wanted a favor. “*Master, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.*” Their approach is not unlike a child who wants his parent to agree *before* the request is made because he is certain that it will otherwise be denied. “Dad, before I ask you this I want you to promise to say ‘yes.’”

⁷⁴ Mark 8:31-33 was the first time, and Mark 9:31-32 was the second.

⁷⁵ Matthew 20:20-28

Listen to their desire: “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” These close followers of Jesus had still not grasped His ministry or their place in it. This must serve as a warning to those who are faithful to church and regularly in the Bible. *Familiarity with Jesus does not always equal singularity with His purpose.* James and John recognize that Jesus is the Christ. Three times He had plainly and painfully described the suffering that awaited Him, and still they tried to maneuver themselves for the chief seats in the kingdom.

The arrogance of their request is staggering. Next to the king, the highest positions of authority and prestige belonged to those who were on the right and the left hand of the sovereign. In effect, they were claiming that of all the great people of God who had ever lived, they deserved to have the two highest places of honor.

Clearly Clueless

I am simultaneously impressed and convicted that Jesus did not scold the brothers, but He does correct them by asking a question: “Do you even know what you’re asking?” The cup and the baptism that Jesus spoke of were clear allusions to His impending sufferings and death. Commentator John Phillips writes, “The cup spoke of His inward sufferings; the baptism spoke of His outward sufferings.”⁷⁶

These sufferings far exceeded the physical agony of crucifixion and the emotional anguish of abandonment. The full measure of this cup was taking the world’s sin upon Himself. This was an agony so horrible that we read in **John 12:27-28**,

“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

On the cross Jesus would drink the bitter cup of God’s wrath against sin, and He would be baptized (overwhelmed, immersed) in God’s judgment on the same. “*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?*” The proper answer was “no,” but James and John did not understand the question. They answered, “Yes, we can.”

⁷⁶ John Phillips, *Exploring Mark*, p. 225.

Remember, these were faithful men who loved Jesus. They had walked away from the family fishing business to follow Him, leaving their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants in order to be made fishers of men by Jesus. But with all of their passionate zeal for the Lord they neither knew their own hearts nor the nature of their Lord's. They were over-confident in their own strength, and were focused on temporal rather than eternal rewards.

In whom do I trust? For whom do I live? We are apt to forget the cross; thinking only of a crown, but it is the way of the cross that leads home.

Wrongly Desiring Greatness

Now it must be said that there is nothing wrong with desiring a crown. We are right to desire greatness, honor, and rewards. We are right to long for the day when Jesus will reign on this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, and we shall reign with Him. Seeking greatness is right, but only the right kind of greatness pursued in the right manner. It is right to seek eternal glory because that kind of glory is God-given.⁷⁷

Paul spoke of a "*crown of righteousness*" that was laid up for him in glory which Christ the righteous judge would award to him.⁷⁸ Nowhere does Jesus rebuke His followers for **desiring** greatness or rewards. What He always rebuked was the **worldly pursuit** of such things.

That was the problem with the "*desire*" of James and John, and that is also what stirred the other ten "*to be much displeased.*" We are not told how the rest of the apostles discovered what James and John had requested. Surely, such a thing could not be kept secret for long, and perhaps the brothers had sheepishly rehearsed the conversation to their fellow laborers. However they learned about the discussion, when they learned of it they were not happy.

⁷⁷ Three passages from the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5:11-12; 6:5-6, 16-18 – prove as much

⁷⁸ 2 Timothy 4:8; Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Sacrificial Service Required

Do not be fooled by the displeasure of the other ten. Theirs was not a righteous indignation. They were aggravated that James and John beat them to the punch. They resented James and John using their familial relationship to Jesus as a means to curry favor. We know this because Jesus gathered the Twelve together and reinforced a lesson that He had taught and demonstrated time and again: true greatness requires sacrificial service, humbly and joyfully offered. In other words, the truly great do not sit on the backs of others, but bear others on their own back.

Serving Others

This is a simple truth that is not difficult to understand, just difficult to apply. The way of the disciple is different from the way of the world. According to God's standard of measure true greatness is determined by sacrificial service not by the number of servants. It is seen, not in how high up the ladder we have climbed, but how far down the ladder we are prepared to climb for the sake of others. A genuine follower of Christ will let go of a desire for honoring himself or seeking to be honored, and will instead give honor to others. To walk in Christ's steps is to be *useful* to others. Not *users* of others. Not *useless*. Not *used* to getting your way all the time. Rather, it is to be useful to others by submitting ourselves as an instrument of God whereby our fellow man are made more holy and happy.

Modeling Christ-likeness

A life spent in this fashion is truly Christ-like, and brings its own glorious reward. To be this type of sacrificial servant is to be like Christ. He came to serve others not to be served by them. He came to give His life for others.

Mark 10:45 is the key verse, not only of this lesson but this gospel, "*For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*" What a blessed truth it is. This is the atonement: ***the work Christ accomplished by His living and dying and being risen again to earn our salvation.***

Christ died *for us* to remove us from the wrath of God that we deserved. This means that He is the *propitiation* for our sins, as the aged apostle John, years after his

selfishly motivated request, would write, “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 4:10).

Here is Bishop JC Ryle’s comment on this glorious truth...

“[Christ’s] death was no common death, like the death of a martyr, or of other holy men. It was the public payment by an Almighty Representative of the debts of sinful man to a holy God. It was the ransom which a Divine Surety undertook in order to procure liberty for sinners, tied and bound by the chain of their sins. When He died, he died for us. When He suffered, He suffered in our stead. When He hung on the cross, He hung there as our Substitute. When His blood flowed, it was the price of our souls.”⁷⁹

This is what Christ has done for us, and we are to model ourselves after His example. Not seeking our own honor but desiring to honor others, and, most of all, to honor and glorify the Father in Heaven.

Instead of desiring to lord over all others we should desire to serve all others. We should be willing to joyfully serve in the hard, uncomfortable, lonely, and demanding places. Time is short and eternity is long, so be willing to spend and be spent. Be zealous unto good works, but do so without becoming proud. Withstand criticism without becoming bitter. When you are misjudged do not become defensive. Endure suffering without succumbing to self-pity.

This is Christ’s example to follow. His steps may only be traced by the spirit that is totally surrendered to Him.

⁷⁹ JC Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Mark*, (Banner of Truth), 2000, p. 220.

#9 – Believing is Seeing – Mark 10:46-52

Jesus is set to go up to Jerusalem. Waiting for Him there are the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees, all who seek to destroy Him. Waiting for Him there are the physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings of the Cross. He knowingly and purposefully strides towards it all, because this was the Father's will. For this hour He had come. To give His life as a ransom for many was the reason He had come.

Along the way He taught His closest disciples – the Twelve – what would transpire in just over a week's time. He had steadily prepared them for this hour, but they still had not grasped the lessons. They just could not (or would not) see it. In light of the disciples' dim sight they bump into a man who is completely blind. We are told of this encounter in **Mark 10:46-52**.

The Man

The man's name was Bartimaeus, which simply means "son of Timaeus." He lived in the city of Jericho.

His City

Jericho was the first city which faced the Israelites as they entered the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership.⁸⁰ The Israelites marched seven times around that walled city, and after the seventh trip round God knocked the city walls down. Jericho was the city of Rahab the prostitute. Because of her faith in God she and her family were the only ones spared in the city's overthrow. Rahab was graciously saved by God, married an Israelite from the tribe of Judah, and their firstborn son was a boy named Boaz. He was the great-granddaddy of David, and from the line of David would eventually come the Messiah, who now strode through 'New' Jericho on His way to Jerusalem.

⁸⁰ Joshua 2

His Condition

Bartimaeus could not have described the sight of the city in which he lived. He was blind. Because he was blind he was a beggar. Every day it was the same. Wake up, grab your little bowl, feel and tap your way to the familiar begging spot along the highway side, and beg. This man lived a sorry existence.

The condition of this man was pathetic and desperate, but that is not an unusual sight in Mark's gospel. Jesus did not come to receive ministry but to minister. He came to go to and meet the needs of the pathetically desperate and hopeless. Blind Bartimaeus proves yet again that Jesus calls and cares for the *least*, the *last*, and the *left out*.⁸¹ This is a stumbling block for those people who count themselves among the most, the first, and the insiders. The only thing that Jesus has to say to such people is, *"They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Mark 2:17).

Bartimaeus was blind, but he knew he was blind. Moreover, he knew he needed Jesus.

His Cry

It is commonly reported that people who are deprived of one sense are stronger in their other senses. If that is true it stands to reason that while blind Bartimaeus could not see what was going on in Jericho, he certainly sensed the commotion. And in the last three years there had been plenty of that, because a fellow named Jesus had created quite a stir in the whole region. Just imagine what Bartimaeus would have overheard as he sat on the highway side in the bustling city of Jericho.

- ✓ He would have heard about a man named John the Baptist. This character was preaching repentance of sins, warning of judgment, and announcing the coming of the Messiah. He baptized those who did repent in the Jordan not far from Jericho, and this John said that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

⁸¹ The alliterated phrase was lifted from the Alistair Begg sermon "[I Want to See](#)"

- ✓ Of course, talk on the street about Jesus would have dwarfed any other news. This man constantly preached marvelous messages, and performed mighty miracles. Bartimaeus would have heard that at Jesus' touch the lame walked, lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised, demons were cast out, and the blind received their sight.

Take a mental picture of blind, begging Bartimaeus, sitting along the main road, soaking up all of this fantastic news day after day, and no doubt the glorious fact that *the blind received their sight* reverberated through Bartimaeus' mind. Perhaps, as he laid his blind head down at night, he mumbled to himself, "Jesus restores sight to the blind. That's what the prophets said the Messiah would do!"⁸²

Bartimaeus was sitting in his usual place. The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was near. During that time of year the road up to Jerusalem was always crowded with pilgrims. With the travelers in a more festive mood, he might be able to earn some extra food scraps or money. There was always a buzz surrounding the feast times. That is to be expected with great multitudes of people making their way up to the holy city, singing the songs of degrees,⁸³ but this time the energy in the air was excitedly intensified. Blind Bart could hear and feel the charge in the air.

When he learned that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by "...he began to cry out...Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The word translated "cry" is *krazo*⁸⁴ and it means to scream. Bartimaeus was desperate for Jesus to hear him. He could not see Jesus. He could not go to where Jesus was. He had to have Jesus come to him, and He did not want the Lord to pass him by. So he screamed above the din of the massive multitude. "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*"

This grabbed the Lord's attention, not just because Bartimaeus was yelling for all he was worth. Remember, Bart was told that "Jesus of Nazareth" was passing by, but he did not scream, "Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on me!" Oh, no. He called out to Jesus,

⁸² Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; Psalm 146:8

⁸³ Psalms 120 - 134

⁸⁴ [G2896](#)

Son of David. His choice of name indicates an insight that many in the multitude lacked.

The title “Jesus, Son of David” is a lot different than “Jesus of Nazareth.” “Son of David” is a Messianic title. In **2 Samuel 7:12-17** God promised David that one of his offspring would be established on the throne forever. God promised David, “*I will be his father, and he shall be my son.*” One of the songs of degrees – **Psalms 132** – that the pilgrims would be singing as they made their way to Jerusalem states, “*The LORD hath sworn [in] truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.*” (v. 11)

In **Luke 1:31-33** when the angel Gabriel appeared unto Mary and explained what was about to happen to her he said,

“Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”

Bartimaeus was blind, but he could see better than most. He clearly saw that only the promised Messiah; the greater Son of David could do all of these miraculous works. And even though he had not witnessed one miracle, he had heard the report of Jesus’ mighty works and marvelous words – the *good news* of Jesus – and hearing he had believed.

How do we know that he believed? That will be answered in just a moment, but first let’s take inventory of the multitude surrounding the man.

The Multitude

They were a fickle bunch, and they had no use for the marginalized of society. “Shut up, beggar!” Is what they said (**verse 48**). They rebuked Bartimaeus, and told him to be silent.

It did not work! He ignored their scorn. He refused to allow the criticism and the condemnation of others to prevent him from calling out to Jesus. Mark said he cried out

all the more. Second verse same as the first, a little bit louder and a little bit worse! *"Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

Be delighted that Bartimaeus did not wither under that harsh, uncaring criticism. Praise God that he did not grab his bowl, wrap his cloak tight around his stooped shoulders and slither away because of the crowd's opinion. Learn the lesson that lives here. JC Ryle states it:

"Like [Bartimaeus] we must care nothing what others think and say of us when we seek the healing of our souls. Like Bartimaeus we must cry out the more, 'Jesus, have mercy on us.'"

The crowd is always fickle. It would be during Passion Week. It still is today, and that vacillation is witnessed here. One minute they shout Bartimaeus down, but after Jesus *"commanded him to be called"* their tone is softened. *"Cheer up and get up, Bart. He's calling you."*

Despite the capriciousness of the crowd, verse 49 is beautiful. *"And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee."*

The Master

This is not in Mark's record, but it was while in Jericho that Jesus said, *"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (**Luke 19:10**). Praise God that Jesus calls! Praise God that Jesus came for the *least*, and the *last*, and the *left out!* He did not come for the "Big Man on Campus" or the beauty queen or "Dr. Smarter-than-everyone-here." This does not suggest that they cannot come, but it certainly means that no one comes before Christ thinking that they are deserving or worthy of coming.

The fact of the matter is that *all of us* are the least, the last, and the left out. One may be prosperous, popular, or professionally proficient, but spiritually and eternally the playing field is leveled. All are in desperate need of Jesus, but only the humble heart will come to Christ, crying out to Him in their desperation. *Bartimaeus brought nothing to Christ except his need.* "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Rock of ages, cleft for me; Let me hide myself in Thee."

The Lord was not being naïve when He asked the blind man, *“What wilt thou that I should do for you?”* Here Bartimaeus is put to the test. How much – or how little – did he think Jesus could do for him?

The answer was immediate and to the point! *“Lord, that I might receive my sight!”* His request for it was evidence that he believed Jesus could provide it. He knew what he needed. He knew to whom he must go to receive what he needed. He believed and trusted Jesus. *“Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”* Bart’s faith did not create the cure. His faith was the means by which he received the cure.

Despite all the noise, ruckus, and pandemonium the Master heard Bartimaeus’ cry, and He had time. He still does. Jesus Christ, the Lord of all creation, stood still and called for this marginalized man who was pitied by some, but considered by most as nothing but a nuisance.

Do not forget the subject matter that Jesus had recently finished discussing with His disciples. He had just reminded them that in Jerusalem He would be delivered to His enemies to be mocked, abused, and killed. He was set to give His life as a ransom for many. Here is our Lord Jesus under the shadow of the cross. In just over a week He will be crucified for our sins. He is painfully aware of all that is about to transpire, but he heard Bartimaeus cry out for mercy. He heard. He stopped. He called. He healed, and He saved.

Seeing is not believing. How many people on that day saw Jesus restore sight to a blind man? They were impressed, but they were blind. Bartimaeus had not witnessed one miracle. He had not seen one supernatural display. He had heard of Jesus, and He believed that only the Messiah, the promised Son of David could do such things. So when he heard that Jesus was passing by he shouted, *“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”* Jesus called him. Jesus served him. Christ made him whole. On that day Bartimaeus proved that believing is seeing.

#10 – Here Comes the King! – Mark 11:1-11a

Jerusalem was jumping. It always was at Passover as people from all across the region and beyond journeyed to the city on a hill to observe the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But this was no ordinary year. Jesus of Nazareth, a man who spoke like no one had ever spoken and who did things that no one had ever done was on His way. Just a while back He had been in nearby Bethany and had called Lazarus, a man who had been dead for four days, back to life. More recently, in Jericho, He had given sight to blind Bartimaeus. But the people of Jericho did not know what was more amazing: blind Bartimaeus seeing or tax collector Zacchaeus repaying four-fold all the people whom he had cheated, and also giving half his goods to the poor. After Jesus had gone to this traitorous extortionist's house, Zacchaeus was never the same. People were also aware that the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to arrest Jesus. All of this conspired together to create a sensation as people watched the road, wondered to themselves and asked one another: "Do you think He will show?"⁸⁵

The Lord Jesus did show, and His public arrival not only frustrated the chief priests and Pharisees who wanted to stealthily nab Jesus so as to destroy Him after the feast, but it also fulfilled messianic prophecies.⁸⁶ While nothing was transpiring according to *their* plan, all of it *was according to God's plan*. Everything about Jesus, from His birth to His death to His resurrection and all points in between, all happened according to the divine timetable. Obviously, that includes everything from His coming on the colt, to His cursing the fig tree, and to His cleansing the temple.

His Coming

For some time now Jesus had earnestly prepared His disciples for the week that this momentous ride inaugurated. Likewise, He was well aware that the religious and political leaders had been feverishly plotting His destruction. Their murderous intentions were first revealed in **Mark 3:6**. Still, Jesus resolutely journeyed to Jerusalem.

⁸⁵ John 11:55-57

⁸⁶ Jeremiah 9:9; Psalm 113-118

He did so in accordance with the Father's will⁸⁷ and in fulfillment of OT prophecies.⁸⁸ He had come to save His people from their sins, and that salvation could only be earned by His death (because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, **Hebrews 9:22**), burial, and resurrection. This is why Jesus came, and that is why He now entered Jerusalem.

As has been already mentioned, there the Lord Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was prophetic and public.

Prophetically

As far as we know Jesus had walked everywhere up to this point. Why now is He riding instead of walking? Was He just tired and stressed? No doubt He was both, but Jesus did not triumphantly ride into Jerusalem by accident, coincidence, or for convenience. His entry was a fulfillment of **Zechariah 9:9**, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*"

The crowd would not have known that Jesus was riding an animal that had never before been ridden, but the Twelve knew. The significance of that fact would have been obvious to an ancient culture, while easily overlooked by our own. Any animal devoted to a sacred task must be one which had not been employed in any secular duty. This was a deliberate claim to being the prophesied Messiah.

Publicly

Mark reports that the people strawed the road with their garments and palm branches. As they surrounded and escorted Jesus into the city they cried out in praise. This may indicate an antiphonal aspect to their praise, with one group shouting, "*Hosanna!*"⁸⁹ and the second group responding with **Psalm 118:26**, "*Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.*" Then the first group would answer, "*Hosanna in the highest.*"

⁸⁷ John 4:34; 5:30;

⁸⁸ Luke 24:25-27; Psalm 16:9-11; Isaiah 52:14-53:12; Genesis 3:15; Numbers 21:6-9; Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁸⁹ A Hebrew term of praise that means "Save; save us!" – [G5614](#)

This caused Pharisees to protest. *“Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:39-40).* And this marked a departure from past public proclamations of His divinity. Often we read that when the Lord Jesus performed some mighty work, even when Peter confessed that He was the Christ, Jesus would then command that it not be publicly repeated.⁹⁰ Why? Again, He was operating on a divine timetable. Until this point it was not the time to publicly proclaim the King’s coming. But now the time had come (and still is)! That is why our Lord said, *“Everybody can shout as loud as they like, and if the people are silent then the rocks will begin to sing.”*

Not Pompously

King Jesus publicly and prophetically rode into Jerusalem but not pompously. By any other standard in the world this Monarch’s entrance was not impressive. Consider this comparison. On October 26, 1775 His Royal Majesty King George III addressed Parliament regarding the “rebellion in America.” Here is a description of the King’s procession from St. James’ Palace to the Palace of Westminster:

Two Horse Grenadiers with swords drawn rode in the lead to clear the way, followed by gleaming coaches filled with nobility, then a clattering of Horse Guards...in red and gold livery, and a rank of footmen, also in red and gold. Finally came the King in his colossal golden chariot pulled by eight magnificent...Hanoverian Creams, a single postillion riding the left lead horse, and six footmen at the side.

No mortal on earth rode in such style as their King, the English knew. Twenty-four feet in length and thirteen feet high, the royal coach weighed nearly four tons, enough to make the ground tremble when under way. Three gilded cherubs on top – symbols of England, Scotland, and Ireland – held high a gilded crown, while over the heavy spoked wheels, front and back, loomed four gilded sea gods, formidable reminders that Britannia ruled the waves.

It was as if the very grandeur, wealth, and weight of the British Empire were rolling past.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Mark 1:24-25; 40-44; 5:40-43; 8:27-30; Matthew 12:15-21, c.f. Isaiah 42:1-3

⁹¹ David McCullough, 1776, p 4.

Jesus, Son of David, King of kings and Lord of lords rode into the Holy City on little more than a borrowed burro, but no amount of pomposity could match the glory of Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Servant. Jesus did not come in earthly majesty or to reign in earthly power. The nature of Jesus' kingship and of His kingdom always perplexed the people, even the disciples for a time. The kingdom of Jesus was and is not of this world, not yet.

He came in poverty not prosperity. He came humbly and meekly not pompously. He came to save all mankind, not to slay Israel's enemies. He came to conquer sin and death not the Romans. He did not come to guarantee external peace in the world but to offer the greater blessing of internal peace with God. This He would do by offering His life as a ransom for many. He came to establish His kingdom, but by way of the cross before the crown.

The message of Christ's kingdom is the cross. The focus of Christ's kingdom is a regime change of the soul not a particular nation, and Christ's kingdom has grown and will continue to grow among *all* peoples until His Second Coming. The kingdom was not for the Jews only. The kingdom is not for us only. The kingdom will not be the domain of one little sub-group of humanity, but individuals from every kindred, tongue, and people group. Be encouraged and perhaps admonished that throughout the world today men, women, and children are hearing the Gospel and being brought to King Jesus. His kingdom reaches to the very ends of the earth.

How pathetic Jesus must have looked to the high and mighty as He rode into town on that donkey. How pathetic He must have looked a week later as...

*"Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood –
Sealed my pardon with His blood:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!"*

Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. He was betrayed, abandoned, falsely accused, unjustly condemned, mocked, scourged, and crucified. He was buried in a borrowed tomb. Praise God! He only needed it for three days. It may have looked weak and pathetic, but it was anything but that. What Jesus did in Jerusalem

established a kingdom which will outlast all the kingdoms of this world and break in pieces every man-centered kingdom which sets itself against Him.

*“When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we’ll sing:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!”*

At His first coming Jesus came not to be crowned but to be crucified. His coronation will occur at His Second Coming, then *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*⁹² His first coming was in order to save His people from their sin. His second coming will be to display His sovereignty.⁹³

Do you know this King? Is He *your* King? Have you bowed before this King and given your life to serve Him? This is why life is worth living; not only this life, but especially the next. Is your life about His kingdom or your own? If you have been made a child of the Kingdom you exist to live for it, to herald the Good News about your King to all those who have not heard and all those who are not listening. Give up small ambitions and serve the awesome King. Bury yourself in service to Him. This is eternal business, not temporal matters. Whatever we are going to do with our lives, let us do it to and for the glory of the King.

*“Jesus shall reign where ’er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.
Let every creature rise and bring
Honors peculiar to our King,
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud amen!”*⁹⁴

⁹² Philippians 2:10-11

⁹³ Revelation 5:6-14

⁹⁴ Isaac Watts, *Jesus Shall Reign*

#11 – Lessons from a Cursed Fig and a Cleansed Temple – Mark 11:11-26

The King had entered Jerusalem. Without doubt, His procession was the lowliest and meekest of any monarch in history, but just as the timing of His coming was according to the Divine plan, so too was the manner of His coming. Do not confuse the meekness of Christ with weakness. Jesus was the master, not only of Himself but of every situation. Today's text reveals His awesome authority and His burning zeal for the things of God.

Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple and had a look around. What He would have witnessed there was nothing less than an overcrowded bazaar. The outer most section of the temple was the Court of Gentiles. This was the only section of the temple that allowed access to everyone. The purpose of that access was for worship, but it had come to be used as a religious marketplace. The chief priests would allow merchants to sell items which were used in worship.⁹⁵ The Jews were required to pay an annual temple tax, but it was unacceptable to pay that tax with Gentile currency. This required that monies be exchanged so that the taxes could be paid. Therefore, the chief priests also allowed moneychangers to operate in the Temple.

These services were appropriately needed by the worshippers but inappropriately provided in the temple area. This selling and exchanging was not being done out of concern for pilgrims and a desire to serve the hundreds of thousands of worshippers. Greed was the motivating factor. According to the Jewish-Christian historian Alfred Edersheim, people would sometimes be forced to pay ten times what the animal was worth. The same types of exorbitant rates were applied to the money exchange.⁹⁶ The animals used for sacrifice had to meet certain standards. They could not be used for sacrifice unless they had been "approved." No surprise that the only approved animals were the ones sold at the temple.

The merchants and the religious leaders were getting rich at the expense of the people whom they were supposed to serve, all under the pretense of worshipping God.

⁹⁵ sacrificial animals, along with wine, oil, and salt

⁹⁶ Alfred Edersheim, [*Life & Times of Jesus the Messiah*](#),

This is what Jesus saw when He entered the Temple and looked around. He turned around and left for Bethany. In the morning He returned with His disciples. Along the way He did what He always did, and taught the Twelve a lesson vividly illustrated with a common object.

A Cursed Tree

Jesus was hungry. There is nothing amazing about hunger pangs. Everyone gets them. (Some of us give in to them more than others.) But that is exactly what makes them so amazing in this case. *Jesus* was hungry! How easy it is to read over such a statement and miss it. He was hungry because He was human, and humans get hungry. Jesus was (and is) the Son of God,⁹⁷ but in His incarnation He was also 100% man. He had all the normal characteristics and physical limitations common to man, yet without sin.

God the Son became flesh so that He might identify with us. This is a marvelous truth, without which no man would have any hope, and the apostle Paul stated it best:

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”...“For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” **(2 Corinthians 8:9; 5:21)**

Jesus in His incarnation had all the normal characteristics and physical limitations common to man, yet without sin.⁹⁸ This means that He never behaved in an ill-tempered manner, that He never flippantly or spitefully used His power, and that when He cursed the fig tree it was not a quick-tempered tantrum.

This was not the case of the pouting prophet who cursed the fig tree because it had the audacity to be fruitless when He was hungry. That may seem obvious to some, but others have been critical of this story. Kent Hughes refers to the commentator

⁹⁷ John 1:1-18

⁹⁸ Hebrews 4:14-15

William Barclay who wrote, "The story does not seem worthy of Jesus. There seems to be petulance in it."⁹⁹

Other commentators, in an attempt to exonerate Jesus from all charges of arbor cruelty, over-analyze the phrase, "*for the time of figs was not yet.*" Their line of argument suggests that since figs were not in season Jesus had no grounds for cursing the tree. Therefore, we must engage in a fig tree lesson: the variables of the growing season, the condition of the soil, the amount of rainfall, and the types of figs that blossom and when.

But none of that is necessary. Here is what we need to know: Jesus was hungry. This fig tree gave an *appearance* of bearing fruit, but when the hungry Jesus approached the tree He noticed that it only *looked* fruitful but was actually *barren*. In Scripture the fig tree commonly symbolized the nation of Israel.¹⁰⁰ The prophets also used it as a symbol of prosperity and blessing,¹⁰¹ and as a symbol of judgment.¹⁰²

Now that is a versatile fruit! On this occasion, this particular fruit tree was given another use. It was forever made into a visual parable which portrayed the spiritually degenerated nation of Israel. This particular fig tree looked good from afar, but upon closer inspection it was far from good. The same was true of Israel. The nation, like the fig tree, showed the outward signs of bearing fruit, but the spiritually hungered found no fruit; nothing but leaves, "*they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*" (**Romans 10:2**). Israel looked alive, but was spiritually barren.

She had no reason to be. Indeed, Israel had been given every advantage. They had received the personal attention and redemption of Almighty God. They had been planted in a good land. They had the Word of God, the prophets of God and the Temple of God. They had everything they needed for a spiritual bumper crop, but they remained fruitless.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, as quoted in Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior vol. 2*.

¹⁰⁰ Hosea 9:10

¹⁰¹ Deuteronomy 8:8; Zechariah 3:9-10

¹⁰² Jeremiah 29:17; Hosea 2:12

¹⁰³ Isaiah 5:1-7

The symbolic judgment on the leafy but barren fig-tree was immediately set forth still more clearly when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the second time of Passion Week, went up to the Temple, and did not just look around but cleaned it up.

A Cleansed Temple

The beauty and grandeur of the Temple was nothing but amazing. Along with its adjunct buildings, the Temple stood on a mount, and was arranged in terrace form; one court being higher than another with the Temple proper being the highest of all. The ancient historian Josephus wrote that the temple's wall "reached up 450 feet from the valley...at its lowest...in other places it was higher." He also wrote that, "Nine of the temple gates were covered on every side with gold and silver, as were the doorjambs and lintels, but one gate...was made entirely of Corinthian brass and excelled the others."¹⁰⁴ This is most likely the Beautiful gate that we read about in **Acts 3:2**. It was roughly speaking, 90' high and 73' wide¹⁰⁵ and more richly adorned with precious metals than the other gates.

The Temple was magnificent and awe-inspiring by any standards. *It was also all leaves and no fruit*. The purpose for which the stunning and spectacular Temple had been built had been perverted, so that the Temple was an architectural splendor seeped in spiritual squalor.¹⁰⁶ This place was dedicated to the worship of the One True God, but it had been desecrated by the very ones who were charged to lead in and safeguard that worship. Instead of being a place of worship, prayer, and even missionary activity it had been converted into a combination stockyard, market, and bank. The prophet perfectly described the religious leadership of Jesus' day: "*Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock*" (**Ezekiel 34:2-3**).

The religious leaders purposefully and greedily consumed the people with their outrageous marketplace, and they sacrilegiously operated that marketplace in the outer

¹⁰⁴ Josephus – *Thrones of Blood*, pp. 198-199

¹⁰⁵ The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, (Moody), 1988, p. 1263. Ungers lists the gates dimensions as being 50 cubits by 40 cubits. My measurement conversion is based on 1 cubit = 22 inches.

¹⁰⁶ That beautiful little phrase was lifted from John Phillips, *Exploring Mark*, p. 238

court of the Temple. This outer most court was commonly referred to as the Court of the Gentiles because this was the only section of the Temple which allowed their presence. Instead of being a house of prayer for all nations the Temple had become “*a den of thieves.*” This is something that Jesus would not tolerate. Upon entering this area He took swift and violent action. There were no deliberations or negotiations:

“Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry *any* vessel through the temple. **(Mark 11:15-16)**

The holy wrath of Jesus burned with a white-hot intensity and a frightening purity. Everyone and everything fled, and no one dared move against Him; not any of the merchants or any of the priests or any of the temple guards or any of the customers. He put an immediate halt to this contemptuous behavior in and against His Father’s house. No one raised a hand or a voice against Him. Like the lions whose mouths were shut when Daniel was thrown in their den, these wolves were silent before Jesus.

“*Meek and lowly in heart*” is how Jesus described Himself.¹⁰⁷ He taught, “*Blessed [are] the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*”¹⁰⁸ He here demonstrated that meekness is strength under control. This was not fit of rage. This was righteous judgment poured out on greedy hypocrites who had profaned the place of worship and the worship itself. Jesus had not come to destroy the Law and the prophets or the Temple worship. He had come to fulfill them all, and at the end of this week He would.

Lessons for a Church

So what? We are not national Israel. We were not the ones buying and selling in the Temple’s outer courts. So what do the cursed fig tree and the cleansed Temple have to do with us? Two words: *fruitfulness* and *faithfulness*.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 11:29

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 5:5

Bearing Fruit

Living things bear fruit. Dead things are barren. Saved people will bear the fruit of the Spirit.¹⁰⁹ Fruit is always an indication of salvation, the manifestation of a transformed life in which God's power is in operation. When a person is saved by God's grace, they will bear fruit for His glory!

📖 **Matthew 7:15-20** – In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, specifically speaking of false prophets but the principle is applicable to all people, that we will know them *“by their fruits.”*

📖 **Mark 4:3-20** – Jesus taught the parable of the four soils. The soils represented men's hearts. Only one of the soils was good, and that ground was proven to be good because it yielded a crop. Jesus explained that the good soil is the person in whom the seed of God's Word takes root; *“such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred”* but always a crop!

📖 **John 15:5** – Jesus also said, during the Passion Week, *“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”*

Think about your life and understand that being leafy will not do. We must be fruity! Do not forget Christ's words to the church at Sardis:

“I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent” **(Revelation 3:1b-3a)**.

Religious profession without spiritual reality is an abomination to God and is cursed. Of course, there will be no fruit if there is not first faith. The person who is lost and in their sins will never bear fruit that is pleasing unto God until they place their faith in God to save. The believer bears fruit as he faithfully follows wherever his Lord leads and that is the lesson Jesus teaches the Twelve in the final section of this text.

¹⁰⁹ Galatians 5:22-26

Being Faithful

The power of faith coupled to God's will and His purposes will overcome any and every obstacle. Passing back by the cursed fig tree, now withered from the roots, Peter commented on the tree's condition. Jesus' answer was, "Have faith in God," and then He taught them to pray with a believing mind and with a forgiving heart.

Mountain moving faith is a figurative principle. By this I mean that God will not empower you to physically move Mt. McKinley. Just like Jesus did not petulantly curse the fig tree, He will not empower you to pretentiously move mountains. The idea of moving mountains is simply to maneuver through immense problems and overcome massive obstacles. And the key to it all is "Have faith IN GOD." Not faith in faith or faith in your dreams or faith in your education or faith in your ideas or faith in America. The foundation is faith in God. As John MacArthur writes:

"Mountain moving faith is unselfish, undoubting, and unqualified confidence in God. It is believing in God's truth and God's power while seeking to do God's will. The measure of such faith is the sincere and single desire that, as Jesus said, 'the Father may be glorified in the Son.'"¹¹⁰

Having faith in God is trusting in the revelation of God – the Bible. Jesus taught the Twelve and us that when we seek that which is consistent with God's Word, and trust in God's goodness to provide it, our request will be honored because our request honors Him. To do what God says is to do what God wants and to receive what God promises.

This type of faith is activated by persistent prayer. To persistently pray is to pray believing God and to pray forgiving others. If you want what God wants then ask God and receive it. If we want what God wants for our lives we will receive it. But understand that not every aspect of God's will for His children involve pleasant things. It is also God's will for His children to sacrifice, suffer, and sometimes die in service to Him. Finding satisfaction and joy in Christ is not a matter of being prosperous, famous, problem-less, or successful. It is about being faithful and fruitful (**1 Corinthians 4:2**).

¹¹⁰ John MacArthur, *Matthew 16-23*, p. 281.

#12 - Another Appeal - Mark 11:27-12:12

The parable in this text, and the reaction to it, teaches us that to hear the gospel routinely preached is simultaneously a blessed and a dangerous thing. Dangerous because there is no neutrality with the gospel and regular exposure to it will either soften or harden one's heart. Blessed because only the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation!¹¹¹

The hearts of the people to whom this parable was originally told were hard as stone. These hard-hearted religious rulers rejected their Messiah, and would have arrested Him but for their fear of the fickle crowd's reaction (**Mark 11:18**). Instead, they left him and went their way.

By now, their hatred for the Lord Jesus was palpable. Their contempt was no longer concealed. While some men were drawn to Jesus, these men were repulsed at Him. They heard the same marvelous words. They witnessed the same miraculous works, but there was no broken-hearted, joyful acceptance of their Lord for them. Instead there was only anger fueled by arrogance. He had not sought *their* approval. He did not toe *their* line. He did not behave according to *their* code. He ignored *their* traditions. He disrupted *their* domination of all things religious. He had ended *their* lucrative business enterprises in the Temple. Follow this Man? Not hardly. They wanted Him destroyed. They would not honestly compare His words and actions with the scriptures. They would present an accusation masqueraded as a question.

His Authority Questioned – 11:27-33

All the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching (**Mark 11:18**); excluding, of course, the religious rulers who were not astonished but angry. As Jesus entered the Temple the day following His cleansing of it a delegation from the Sanhedrin¹¹² assaulted Him.

¹¹¹ Romans 1:16

¹¹² The ruling council of the Jews mostly comprised of Sadducees and Pharisees.

We know from **Luke 20:1** that the Lord Jesus was teaching and preaching the gospel at this moment. No surprise there. From the beginning and through to the end He proclaimed the Good News. He trained the Twelve to do likewise¹¹³, and He commissioned His church to do the same.¹¹⁴

The group that haughtily descended on Jesus had heard that before. They cared nothing about His good news, because they would not believe the bad news of their own condition. They refused to believe that they needed a Savior, and that He was the Savior they needed. What they wanted to know was, “Who do you think you are, Jesus? Who gave you the authority to do these things?”

The emphasis is on “these things” and those two words are critical to understanding their consternation. “These things” were very specific: His riding into town on a donkey as per the prophecy of **Zechariah 9:9**. His cleansing the Temple as if it were His. These men may have been hypocrites, but they were not stupid. They understood the significance of His entry into the city. They recognized that He claimed to be the Messiah. They recognized that the authority by which He taught, and the authority that He demonstrated over death, demons, and disease declared that He was the Messiah. They also recognized that He had nothing but contempt for their system of religious practices.

“Who gives you this authority?” They struggled with this. It was at the heart of their problem with Jesus. *They wanted to be the authority*. For them to accept what Jesus was doing and preaching would demand for them to get off their religious thrones and kneel before Him. Some people (think they) know everything. Of course, no one you know is like that, right?

Jesus promised to answer their question if they would first answer His question. He asked, “Was John’s baptism of heaven or of men?” Here is one of those instances where it would be nice to have pictures in the Bible. I would love to see the expression on their faces. If they said “of heaven” they would be exposed for the hypocrites they were, because they paid no more heed to John’s message than they did Jesus’ message.

¹¹³ Mark 3:13-19; Mark 6:7-12

¹¹⁴ Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8

(They preached the same thing – repentance of sins.¹¹⁵) They would not humble themselves before Jesus; the One whom John testified was the Lamb of God. They also could not publicly answer “of men” because the people took John for a prophet, and they were afraid of the public reaction. This does not mean that all the people had accepted John’s message, but it does mean he was recognized as a prophet.

The best these rulers could answer was, “*We cannot tell.*” Jesus had already demonstrated by His words, His works, and His fulfillment of prophecy that His authority came from God because He is the Son of God. These men had repeatedly witnessed that evidence, still they refused to believe. Remember, to hear the gospel routinely preached is simultaneously a blessed and a dangerous thing.

His Parable Proclaimed – 12:1-12

The corrupt cadre of chief priests, scribes, and elders had come to interrogate Jesus, but He had shut their mouths. Once their nonsense was silenced our Lord proclaimed to them a parable. Unlike with previous parables, the meaning of this one was immediately understood by the listeners. As Mark writes in **verse 12**, “*for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them.*”

Parables employ natural elements to teach a spiritual truth. With this particular parable our Lord marries two subjects that would have been familiar to His original hearers. First, the normal practice of absentee landlords renting their vineyards to tenant farmers (“*husbandmen*” in the KJV) was well known to the Pharisees. Second, they would have immediately recognized the unmistakable hint of **Isaiah 5:1-7**¹¹⁶ as this parable was told.

Even the rebellious behavior of the parable’s tenant farmers, while perhaps not the norm, would not have been far-fetched. The Pharisees may have been surprised that the Landowner would have continually dispatched servants, despite their being

¹¹⁵ Mark 1:4-5; 14-15; Luke 1:7-9; 5:27-32 are just a few examples

¹¹⁶ That passage pictures Israel as the Lord’s vineyard. God had done everything possible for His vineyard to be fruitful, but instead of bearing good fruit, sweet to smell and taste, they brought forth stink-berries, worthless things and poisonous. One may also think of **Mark 12:1-12** as **Mark 11:13-14** in story form.

shamefully treated, even murdered, by the tenant farmers. The final messenger was the Landowner's Son. He was recognized for who he was, but was murdered nonetheless.

Our Lord Jesus is awesome. As He is telling this parable to these religious elites, these hypocrites, they knew He was speaking of them. They also knew that He knew what they planned to do. Their wicked desire had just been laid bare. Jesus was aware of their murderous intentions, but unlike the Lord Jesus these men lacked the courage of their convictions. They wanted His mouth stopped and His life destroyed right now, but they *"feared the people...and went their way."*

In many respects this was one last appeal to these hard-hearted, religious hypocrites. One last appeal to acknowledge the obvious fact that they were sinners and that He was their Savior. In essence, the Lord Jesus held up a mirror to them and asked, "Do you see yourselves?" Consider what Sinclair Ferguson writes:

"When God's word searches out men's motives and exposes their hearts, two reactions are always possible. Men may see themselves as they really are, repent from their sin, and turn to the Lord...[or] we can harden our hearts against the One who exposes our need, and resolve with unmitigated bitterness to be rid of His influence."¹¹⁷

The word of God is a mirror¹¹⁸ which allows the reader/hearer to see himself as he really is, as God sees Him, and to change accordingly. Make no mistake about it. These religious leaders knew exactly who Jesus claimed to be, as in the parable so to in reality. The tenant farmers murdered the son not because it was a case of mistaken identity, but because they unmistakably recognized who He was. They failed to believe Him, not because they lacked evidence. They simply disregarded the facts since they did not like where the facts led them.¹¹⁹

That is why our Lord quoted **Psalm 118:22-23** to these men. Jesus Christ is the stone which the expert builders rejected, and He is the only foundation stone sufficient to hold everything together.

¹¹⁷ Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, p. 189

¹¹⁸ James 1:23-25

¹¹⁹ Mark 1:15; 2:5-11, 17; 8:34-38 detail just some basic truths which were rejected, not because they were misunderstood, but instead because they were understood and found unpalatable. The same is true today.

We know how many of these religious leaders responded to this one last appeal from the Lord Jesus. Most hardened their hearts rather than repent of their sin. This parable is not only for them, however.

*“God continues to send servants **to us**, to remind us of our debt to Him. In a multitude of ways He reminds us that He looks for the fruit of grace in our lives. His servants may be preachers and teachers of His word; they may be those who remind us personally that we are to live for Christ; they may be the joys and sorrows of life, which encourage us to seek our only ultimate joy and strength in God and His grace. **Do you welcome them, or do you seek to silence the voice of God in them?**”¹²⁰ (emphasis mine)*

How will we respond today to what the Word of God has shown us?

¹²⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, p. 190

#13 – Responsibilities to God and Country – Mark 12:13-17

Any debate for public office will be littered with “gotcha” questions. These are questions engineered to present a problem for the opponent regardless of how they are answered. Beginning in **verse 13** and running through **verse 34** the Lord is assaulted with a series of “gotcha” questions by all those who sought to silence Him for good.

The growing opposition to the Lord Jesus had already sought to entrap Him (**Mark 8:11; 10:2; 11:15-18, 27-33**). Nothing had worked. At this point they were especially incensed with Him because He had disrupted their Temple profits, and because they well understood that the parable of the vineyard was not only an allusion to Isaiah 5, but had specifically been told against them.¹²¹

Their Approach

The opposition to Jesus had prompted an unholy alliance between groups (like the Pharisees and Herodians) which generally disliked one another but mutually hated Jesus and wanted Him destroyed.¹²² This curious coalition united the politically motivated Herodians with the religiously obsessed Pharisees.

The combining of political forces with religion – particularly false religion – is not a perspective unique to antiquity, but is very much contemporary. Politics and false religion are common allies in assaulting biblical truth. In this instance, both groups found the truth of Jesus Christ’s exclusivity¹²³ to be a repulsive doctrine. They routinely attacked, derided, ignored, and always sought to silence the Lord Jesus, because no one could legitimately deny His marvelous words or His miraculous works.

The Greek word “didasko,” which is the verb “to teach,” is found seventeen times in Mark. Fifteen of those references are directly related to Jesus’ teaching, one to

¹²¹ Mark 12:1-12

¹²² Mark 3:1-6; Psalm 2:1-3

¹²³ The Pharisees were not opposed to the idea of exclusivity. They just didn’t like the fact that *their* religion was excluded. Jesus did not honor their traditions and teaching. He said that no one – not even the self important and self-righteous Pharisees – would enter the Kingdom of God unless they had been born again (see John 3:1-21).

the apostles teaching what Jesus had taught them to teach, and the other reference is to false teaching of man-made traditions opposed to biblical truth. The noun form “didaskalos” is used twelve times in Mark, and all are references to Jesus.

The point here is that the opposition’s designation was right, but they were not “good students.” They were not asking questions to learn but to ensnare the Teacher. They were playing games with Jesus. Their approach was insincere, all falsity and flattery, saying the best things from the worst of motivations. We know this because if they had been sincere they would have believed Him and followed Him

Lip service only is also a characteristic that is not unique to antiquity. Many today claim to be interested in “following Jesus,” but just so long as that means receiving heavenly benefits. Taking up one’s cross daily and following Jesus is another story, and most are not interested in that.

Their Question

Paying taxes was then, is now, and always has presented a dilemma. No one likes it. No one ever has or ever will, regardless of their era or the nation. Paying taxes revealed their subjugation to the Roman Empire. Some Israelites were radically opposed to this. The Zealots (and to a certain degree the Pharisees) were against the corrupt regime in Rome, and wanted nothing to do with them. Some Israelites benefitted from taxes. The Publicans (and to a certain degree the Herodians) were willing to compromise. “When conquered by the Romans, do as the Romans do” may have been their motto.

The opposition’s most recent attempt to trip up Jesus had ended poorly for them.¹²⁴ This time they want to corner Jesus with a question that demanded a “yes or no” answer.¹²⁵

Their approach was insincere. They asked an illegitimate question, made so not because of the question’s merit but because of the petitioners’ motivation.

¹²⁴ John 11:27-33

¹²⁵ It is worth noting that before Pilate – in Luke 23:2 – the opposition will lie about the answer that Jesus provides here. That is because their motivations were evil, so too then were their words and actions.

The Lord's Response

The Lord Jesus' response has three parts: two questions and then a statement.

Rhetorical Question

"Why put me to the test?" In other words, "How much more of this are you going to try?"¹²⁶ Jesus had no time for religious hypocrisy, no patience for their insincerity, because He saw through the smoke and mirrors and recognized the fingerprints of the enemy.¹²⁷ His rhetorical question highlighted the futility of their attack strategy.

Practical Question

"Whose likeness and inscription is this?" A denarius was perhaps a day's wage, and would also be the acceptable currency for payment of one's taxes. The answer was obvious: "Caesar's." Tiberius Augustus to be specific, and one side of the coin pictured Caesar's face and had this designation: "Son of the divine Augustus." On the back was the image of Tiberius seated on a throne, wearing a crown, clothed as a priest, and the inscription read: "The high priest" (Pontifex Maximus – greatest pontiff).



¹²⁶ Mark 8:11-12; 10:2

¹²⁷ Matthew 4:1-11;

They asked “Should we pay taxes?” He reminded them how futile it was to tempt Him. He asked whose image and inscription were on the Roman currency. Then our Lord responded.

Consistent Statement

“Yes! Pay your taxes.” That is what “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s” means, in this context. Caesar’s image and inscription are on the currency because he had the money minted. There are privileges that go along with being in the Roman Empire, but there are also responsibilities involved, like paying taxes.

This must have excited His opposition. GOTCHA! They finally had Him.¹²⁸ But before they could get too excited Jesus said “AND render to God the things that are God’s.”

What does that mean? Remember the framework of this conversation. Caesar’s image is stamped onto the Roman coins. He minted them and put them into currency. Render to Caesar what’s Caesar’s.

But on each human life is stamped the very image of God in whose image each of us is made. Therefore, our responsibility, in our context, to our local, state, and federal authorities is set within the framework of our ultimate responsibility to the living God who made us.

In essence, Jesus put politics in its place, and that position is secondary, at best, to the greater responsibility we all have before God. Political freedom and personal liberty are not the preeminent issues of this life. If they were, Christians in oppressed regions of the world would be of all men most miserable. As dear as those issues are to me as an American, they are not primary. They are important, but they are not the main and the plain thing.

The kingdoms of this world – the democratic republics of this world – are not primary. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the main thing and the plain thing. That’s true for all of us, not just a few of us.

¹²⁸ In their thinking a “yes” meant the people would hate Him, and a “no” meant they could pin Him with treason, either way they would win and He would lose. They thought.

Their (and our) Response

“They marveled at Him.” Down the drain goes this particular group’s “gotcha” moment as they just stand in slacked-jawed surprise at the Lord.

How about us? We know how they responded, but the book is still out on us.

1. *Do you marvel at Him?* In other words, are you reading/listening only to find fault? Do not play games with Jesus. Do not play games with the gospel. To such people Jesus says the same thing now as He did centuries ago: Why are you putting me to the test? There is no refuge *from* Him. Praise God there is refuge *in* Him. Christ is the solid rock, upon which you may have your feet firmly planted. He is the ultimate and only firm foundation, BUT that same solid rock will eventually crush those who reject and refuse His good news. Let’s not play games with the gospel.
2. *Political agendas are not the main and the plain thing.* Matthew was an apostle, before that he was a Publican, a big government guy. Simon the Zealot was the ultimate small government guy. His chariot’s bumper sticker said “You can have my sword when you pry it from my cold dead fingers.” He was disgusted with how his nation had been perverted by the Roman ruling elites and their Jewish lap dogs. These guys could only be united in the gospel, following after the cause of Christ, within the context of the local church. For either one of them to make their political agenda the issue of fellowship and friendship would guarantee separation. Whatever one’s view of government, economic theories, role of the military, stance on the second amendment, all of that cannot be the main thing and the plain thing, but the secondary thing in relation to the gospel.
3. *There are limits to my allegiance to the state.*¹²⁹ Taxes were due Caesar. Worship was not. In being called to render unto Caesar what is justifiably his, we are not called upon to render to him what is solely God’s.
4. *The cause of Christ takes precedence over all others.*¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Romans 13: Acts 5

¹³⁰ Revelation 11:15

#14 – From the Sublime to the Absurd – Mark 12:18-27

The Lord's enemies organized an attack strategy that consisted of wave after wave of fresh assaults. This battle had begun in earnest not long after Jesus had cleansed the Temple. The chief priests, scribes, and elders asked the Lord, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?"¹³¹ The second wave hit on the following day and was led by a squad of Pharisees and Herodians. Their unholy alliance was likewise sent packing. The troops that formed the next assault wave were Sadducees, and their futile effort is recorded in this lesson's text.

The Sad Sacks

There was a quintuplet of religious/political sects prevalent in Jewish life during the time of Christ. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes (an ascetic, monastic group out in the wilderness) Herodians (a political group sympathetic to Roman rule), and the Zealots (political revolutionaries committed to the overthrow of Roman rule). Of the five sects, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were the most religiously and socially influential.

In verse eighteen Mark described the fundamental distinction of the Sadducees with just six words: "which say there is no resurrection."¹³² This faction only held the first five books of the Bible¹³³ as inspired by God and therefore authoritative in religious observance and practical living. They viewed the historical, wisdom, and prophetic books as subordinate to the Torah, and nothing more than a commentary on it.

Naturally, when a person does not believe in a future life, they will live in the present like there is no tomorrow. Basically, the Sadducees were theistic humanists who used their position as chief priests and high priests to take advantage of the populace in order to indulge themselves.

¹³¹ Mark 11:27-12:12

¹³² Paul made the same observation in Acts 23:8

¹³³ Christians refer to that section of scripture as the Pentateuch. Jews often call it the Torah. Both will refer to them as the Law or Books of Moses.

The Old Testament teaching found in **Deuteronomy 25:5-10** is elemental to their question for Jesus. In that passage God made provision for a widow by allowing marriage with the deceased's brother or a near relative. The first child from this union would be counted as the dead man's. This kept the deceased brother's name alive in Israel, and provided for the widow.¹³⁴

Whereas the Pharisees and Herodians queried Jesus from a political perspective, the Sadducees' "GOTCHA" question was fired from a theological angle.

Seven Brothers for One Bride

Suppose a man married a woman but died childless. According to the Law the man's brother married his widow, but then he died childless. This sad cycle was repeated five more times as the woman was eventually married to seven brothers, and none of those marriages produced a child. Finally, the woman died. Whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

The Latin term for this line of argument is "reductio ad absurdum," which is translated in English as "reduction to the absurd." The goal is to demonstrate that the opponent's viewpoint cannot be true because its implications seem absurd. This hypothetical, yet entirely possible, question was meant to show that if God had outlined Levirate marriage in the law (they all agreed He had), then the resurrection could not possibly be true because look what might happen.

Can you picture with your imagination the winking and chortling as the old reliable standard used against all resurrection believers was trotted out once again? Their question had most likely never been satisfactorily answered, but then they tried it on Jesus. Instead of revealing their theological precision, this old chestnut illuminated their ignorance of God's Word, including the part they claimed to cherish and obey.

¹³⁴ This arrangement is often referred to as a Levirate marriage from the Latin word for brother-in-law "levir." An ugly example of levirate marriage, and one that predates the Law, is found in Genesis 38, but a beautiful illustration may be read in the story of Ruth. This system should not be judged by modern standards but within the context of its time. For all its limitations the practice benevolently provided for the widow, unlike the practice of many pagan cultures, some of which are still seen today, as in Hindu immolation for example.

One commentator wrote, “On such a flimsy foundation these ‘intellectuals’ rejected and ridiculed the great biblical truth of resurrection. Likewise, most arguments of agnostics are based on distortion, ignorance, and self-willed conceit.”¹³⁵

Like the previous comment, Jesus’ response to these men could not be classified as politically correct. The Lord was direct, incisive, and unanswerable. He said:

1. **You’re wrong** – “*Do ye not therefore err...*” To deny the resurrection is to be in error. Period. Some truths are non-negotiable and set in stone. With all truth claims we both might be wrong but we both cannot be right. They were wrong.
2. **You’re wrong because you’re ignorant** – “*...because ye know not the scriptures...*” They had a small view of God’s Word, not only because they excised the majority of it, but because they would not see what was plainly presented in the part they did hold as genuine. The Old Testament in general and the Torah in particular, teaches the truth of the resurrection.¹³⁶ They denied and rejected that truth, not for a lack of evidence but in spite of it all. Ignorance of the Bible is the foundation of all unbelief.
3. **You’re wrong because you distrust God’s power** – “*...neither the power of God?*” They invented a god who was no bigger than they were. That’s the case with most all idols. Supposedly they believed that God created man, but they denied that the Creator of man had the power to raise the dead.

Here is the Truth

In verses 25-28 Jesus took them to the very scriptures they claimed to reverence and to the actual passage where God reaffirmed His covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as He spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Jesus highlighted that the present not the past tense¹³⁷ was used in that encounter. From the burning bush He said, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” God has an eternal relationship with the living. God is not dead, and His people will enjoy and worship Him forever, not just while they walk the earth.

¹³⁵ John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Mark*, p. 257

¹³⁶ Genesis 22:1-5; Exodus 3:1-6, 13-17; 1 Kings 17:10-24; 2 Kings 4:16-37; 13:20-21; Job 19:23-27; Daniel 12:2

¹³⁷ Jesus affirmed the inerrancy and accuracy of scripture by making His point based on verb tense.

The Sadducees thought the reality of the resurrection was absurd, when in reality their question was ridiculous. In glory our relationships to one another, just like our bodies, will be transformed. There will be no need for procreation because there will be no death.

“There will be no need for marriage and family relationships to pass truth from generation to generation, since everyone will be in perfect holy union with the triune God and each other. Because of the eternal perfection of every person, there will be no need for marriage partners to complement and complete each other, as husbands and wives do in this life.”¹³⁸

The desire to know what heaven will be like, and what believers will be like in heaven is common. Here are three things of which we may be certain.¹³⁹

1. *Our bodies will be resurrected.* God is the God of the whole person: body, soul, and spirit. Paul said it like this “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:” **1 Corinthians 15:42.**
2. *Our individuality will be preserved.* Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remain who they were, only now they are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob perfected.
3. *In glory we will be more recognizable and more lovable than ever before.* We will be more capable of love in glory because we will be glorified into our eternal potential. We will not be androgynous, homogenized robots, but perfected after the manner of our Lord and Savior (**1 John 3:2**).

All sad sacks – even religious ones – live like there is no tomorrow, and that often causes them to be selfishly indulgent and cruel. It is critical to understand that hope in God is not for this life only. It is critical to realize that knowledge of the Bible is the gateway to awareness of God’s truth and power. This is the only way to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that lies within every believer.¹⁴⁰ Finally, we must arm ourselves with the truth of scripture. Never put on the whole armor of God without arming yourself with the sword of the Lord.

¹³⁸ John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, pp. 191-192

¹³⁹ This list is modified from Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior vol. 2*, p. 111

¹⁴⁰ 1 Peter 3:15

#15 – All You Need is Love – Mark 12:28-34

The Lord Jesus was not feeling the love. Indeed, He had just received two consecutive salvos of questions intended to entrap Him and give the authorities just cause for an arrest. The Pharisees and Herodians had linked arms in an attempt to knock Jesus down with a political question (verses 13-17). They failed. Next up were the Sadducees, who were smugly confident that their theological query, unanswerable by all others, would likewise stymie the Lord. Jesus shut their mouths. The final shot is fired by a lone scribe.

Lawyers and Laws

Verse 28 introduces us to a particular scribe and his question. Scribes as a group appear throughout the scriptures.¹⁴¹ They have prominently appeared in Mark's gospel, and were persistently opposed to nearly everything Jesus did. The scribes mostly belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and were professional scholars of the Old Testament. They had given themselves to careful study of the biblical text, and had developed strict rules for transcribing it.¹⁴² Sadly, their extra-biblical traditions and commentary on the biblical text came to take precedence over the actual scriptures.¹⁴³

An alternative title for scribes is lawyer, and that is the title Matthew used for this gentleman.¹⁴⁴ As one might imagine, questions about which laws are most important are of special interest to lawyers. This man's question was most likely sincere but certainly not original. Lawyers regularly argued over which laws were weightier than others, and therefore more necessary for adherence. The problem was not so much with their argument.¹⁴⁵ The real challenge was that they could never reach a consensus as to which laws were heavy (and in their opinion must be obeyed) and which were light (and in their opinion might be ignored).

¹⁴¹ Some OT examples: 2 Samuel 8:17; 20:25; 1 Kings 4:3; 1 Chronicles 2:55; Ezra 7:6; Jeremiah 8:8

¹⁴² We owe a great debt of gratitude to scribes who fastidiously copied biblical manuscripts, and were thereby used of God to preserve His inspired Word.

¹⁴³ Mark 7:1-23 dealt with that issue.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 22:35; and Luke referred to scribes as "doctors of the law," Luke 5:17.

¹⁴⁵ See Jesus' own comment on this matter in Matthew 23:23

This is the conundrum of every legalist. Recognizing that the law – heavy or light – cannot be kept, the legalist creates his own standard. That measuring stick is insufficient, and yet, the legalist cannot keep even his own laws. Whenever we honestly measure ourselves against God’s standard we soon realize that we will never meet the requirements. Whenever we measure ourselves against man-laws we are using an inadequate standard, and the result will always be deficient.

The back and forth between Jesus and the scribe is not contentious, like the previous two encounters had been. Based on the tenor of their interaction, I believe that the scribe’s question was sincere, just as an earlier legalist’s had been.¹⁴⁶

Single-Minded and Whole-Hearted Love

The Lord was asked, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” His answer in verses 29-31 was as powerful and comprehensive as it was plainly and succinctly stated. Just as the Ten Commandments¹⁴⁷ summarized the entire Law, Jesus condensed the Ten into two commands:

Loving God – vv. 29-30

With this answer the Lord quoted Moses from **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**. This command is known as the “Shema,” because of the Hebrew word translated “hear” in Deuteronomy 6:4. The point of this passage, both in the Old and New Testaments, is that God is to be the single-minded, whole-hearted focus and pursuit of life. Obviously, this means that we are to obey God, not to earn His grace but because He has been gracious. We are to obey God, not to earn His love, but because He first loved us and we are grateful for and motivated by that love.

We are to love God with every fiber of our being. That means loving God...

- ✓ *with all our heart* – the heart is not emotions but the core of our identity,¹⁴⁸ the source of every thought, word, action, and behavior.

¹⁴⁶ Mark 10:17-22

¹⁴⁷ Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21

¹⁴⁸ Proverbs 4:23

- ✓ *with all our soul* – flowing from the deepest part of our being, and this includes our emotions.¹⁴⁹
- ✓ *with all our mind* – the will, intentions, and deliberate designs that we have.
- ✓ *with all our strength* – our physical energy and function

“The intellectual, emotional, volitional, and physical elements of personhood are involved in loving God. Genuine love for God is an intelligent love, and emotional love, a willing love, and an active love. In short, it is a comprehensive, all-consuming love and singular adoration. God’s wholehearted love for believers must not be reciprocated with halfhearted devotion.”¹⁵⁰

Loving Others – v. 31

The scribe had asked for the greatest commandment, but Jesus provided a dual answer. With the second part of His answer Jesus quoted Moses again, this time from **Leviticus 19:18**. Here Jesus fused together the understanding of loving God with loving mankind, and the latter flows from the former. The first part of Jesus’ answer summarizes the first four of the Ten Commandments, which all have to do with our love for God. While the second parts summarizes the final six of the Ten Commandments, which all have to do with our love for mankind. This is why loving others as we should is impossible unless one loves God, and if one hates his brother he proves that he does not love God.¹⁵¹

The entire Law hinges on these two commands.¹⁵² This means that God desires and commands total devotion, not simply the external observance of rituals and ceremonies, but an internal passion for Him and compassion for others.

*“What powerful teaching this was! This marvelous symmetry of devotion – loving God **and** loving man – could not be gainsaid. The way Jesus said it had never been put so well, or so scripturally, as now! It was brilliant! It was perfect! It truly encompassed the whole Law. And the obvious ethos of Christ’s person (he was living it!) made it all so compelling.”¹⁵³*

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 26:38

¹⁵⁰ John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, pp. 201-202

¹⁵¹ Matthew 5:43-47; Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 4:20; Romans 13:8-9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8

¹⁵² Matthew 22:40

¹⁵³ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior vol. 2*, p. 116

Not Far from the Kingdom

Once again the scribe was impressed with the Lord's answer, and he said as much. We know that his response to Jesus was genuine, because the Lord was pleased with his comment,¹⁵⁴ and just as He had given the scribe a dual answer to a single question, now his reply – “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” – was at the same time a compliment and a warning.

Jesus complimented the scribe for thinking for himself, as opposed to the groupthink which characterized the majority of his peers. This scribe understood that the Law was essentially spiritual, not just a system to be mindlessly and heartlessly followed.

Jesus warned the scribe in the sense that being “not far” is far from being “inside.” There is a pathway to hell right outside the gates of glory. It is just as easy to be headed for hell from a bar stool as it is from a church pew. Spirituality is not an end to itself. Every spiritual journey will end somewhere forever. There is only one pathway to eternal life with God, and that is the narrow way carved out by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the gate to that narrow path, and it stands open for all who will repent of their sins and trust Him as Savior. That is the only way to be in the kingdom, but there are many ways to be not far from it. None of them will lead anywhere good. Consider the following:

- ✓ *Being raised in church and/or with godly parents is a great advantage but no guarantee. Do not bank on your church attendance or your family's faith.*
- ✓ *Being well versed in the scriptures and not being born again is possible. Have you personally repented of your sins and trusted in Christ alone?*
- ✓ *Becoming hardened to the gospel message is possible. It is possible to regularly hear the gospel and still cling to your self-righteousness. That is the way of death. Do not become inoculated to the Good News by hardening your heart to its message.*
- ✓ *Commit yourself now to a single-minded, whole-hearted devotion to God!*

¹⁵⁴ The word translated “discreetly” in verse 34 ([G3562](#)) means “wisely, prudently”

#16 – The Most Important Question – Mark 12:35-37

The Lord's questioners had all been silenced, as Mark made clear at the end of verse 34, "And no man after that durst ask him *any questions*." Until that point they had dared plenty. Wave after wave after wave of questions His enemies thought were unanswerable had been superbly answered every time, and now His interrogators stood still with their mouths shut, and their hearts in their throats because Jesus had just asked them a question.

"And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he *then* his son? And the common people heard him gladly."

The Lord Jesus had used the Old Testament scriptures to refute the Sadducees' erroneous theology concerning the resurrection. In answering the scribe He also quoted from the Law to demonstrate that the entire Law hinged on the command to love God with a whole-hearted devotion, and that in so doing one would also love his neighbor as himself. Here again Jesus refers to the Old Testament, only this time He used it to ask a question rather than answer one: How can the Messiah be David's son *and* David's Lord? How they would answer – how anyone answers – this question is of the utmost importance for this life and the life to come.

Doctrinal Importance

Doctrine simply means teaching, and everything Jesus taught was important because everything He taught is true. Understanding true doctrine is important so that we are not fooled by false doctrine, and so that we may live our lives for God's glory, the good of others, and for our own good. The enemies of Jesus were livid with Him because He always refuted their false doctrine with His marvelous words and miraculous works. It is important that we believe the right stuff, and that we hold those beliefs the right way. The Lord Jesus is our model.

Doctrine of Inspiration

Jesus quoted scripture. That is an important observation, and not one which should be lazily overlooked. The Lord Jesus Christ knew, believed, and used the Bible. Truth incarnate regularly employed the revealed Word of God in His ministry. When Jesus reminded the people, “For David himself said *by the Holy Ghost*” Mark 12:36a, He declared His confidence in the doctrine of inspiration, specifically the verbal, plenary inspiration of the scriptures. These were David’s words that were inspired – breathed out – by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16a says, “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God.” Inspiration here means “God-breathed.” To say that the scriptures are inspired is to say that God breathed out the very words through the human authors. As **2 Peter 1:21b** says, “holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.”

This is not the same kind of inspiration that we ascribe to men and women who create beautiful, powerful, or exemplary music, art, or written works. One would be accurate to say that Thomas Jefferson’s work on the *Declaration of Independence* was a truly inspired piece of writing. One would be wrong to attribute that inspiration to the Holy Spirit, as we see with the Scriptures. The *Declaration of Independence* is not the breathed-out words of God like the words in Genesis through Revelation are.

Jesus affirmed what Paul and Peter proclaimed, that is the verbal, plenary inspiration of scripture. “Verbal” refers to the words. God inspired the very words of Scripture. “Plenary” means full. Every part of the Bible is fully inspired, but the biblical authors were not stenographers taking dictation.¹⁵⁵ The doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of scripture means that the Biblical authors used their own writing styles, expressions, and personalities but God providentially guided them so that the words they chose were His words conveying His truth.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Luke 1:1–4. Luke had meticulously researched his material before writing his gospel account. No need to research anything if he was just taking dictation.

¹⁵⁶ Here are a few cross references to help drive home this point: 2 Samuel 2:1-2; Acts 1:15-16. David was doubly aware of what he was writing and Who was inspiring what he wrote. Peter concurred with that understanding.

The scribes believed this about the Bible, which is why Jesus was able to ask them the question He did. They should be commended for that, but believing that the scriptures are inspired means we should actually trust and obey the inspired scriptures.

Doctrine of Incarnation

The scribes correctly believed that the coming Christ¹⁵⁷ would be a son – a descendant – of King David. “Son of David” was a commonly held title for the Christ, and many people had used it for Jesus,¹⁵⁸ and both His adopted father Joseph and His mother Mary were direct descendants of David.¹⁵⁹ But the enemies of Jesus wrongly believed that the Messiah would simply be a political powerhouse and national hero.

“Historically, the Jewish people viewed the messiah as nothing more than a man. They expected him to be an earthly ruler of unparalleled power and influence. The messiah would be a son of David, and, like him, defeat Israel’s foes and usher in the glorious kingdom. The Jewish people viewed the messiah as the savior of the nation as a whole, but not of individual souls. They did not (and still do not) believe the messiah would be God in human flesh.”¹⁶⁰

So when Jesus quoted the Bible, which the scribes trusted as inspired by God, and when He specifically quoted a messianic psalm, a psalm which ultimately pointed to the coming Christ, He exposed their incomplete understanding of the Messiah. They were correct in calling the Christ David’s son, but what father calls his son “Lord”? Psalm 110:1 proves that the messiah could not *only* be a man, since David – speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – called him “Lord.”

Therefore, the Old Testament plainly reveals not just the Messiah’s humanity as David’s son, but also His deity as the Son of God, David’s Lord, who is exalted at the right hand of God the Father. The truth of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that Jesus is fully God and fully man is not only a New Testament doctrine, but a biblical doctrine.

¹⁵⁷ “Christ” means anointed and is the Greek term for the Hebrew “Messiah.” OT references to the Davidic sonship of the Messiah are abundant: 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Psalm 89:3-4; 35-37; 132:11; Isaiah 9:7; 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 30:9; 33:15, 17, 22; Ezekiel 23:13; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11; Micah 5:2.

¹⁵⁸ Used in Mark 9:46-52; Matthew 12:22-30; 15:21-28; 21:9

¹⁵⁹ Matthew 1:1-17 for Jesus’ genealogy Joseph, and Luke 3:23-38 through Mary. That none of the Lord’s opponents ever challenged His Davidic ancestry is convincing evidence of its legitimacy.

¹⁶⁰ John MacArthur, *Mark 9-16*, pp. 205-206

That makes plain sense because the Bible is one book, authored by one person, the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and in the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. So we read at the start of **Romans 1:1-4**:

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:”

David affirmed that one of his sons – one of his descendants – *would also be his Lord*. That is only possible because of the incarnation of Christ. David’s son existed before him and after him, because David’s son is David’s Lord, the eternal Son of God! David’s Lord became his “son” when He was supernaturally conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and born in Bethlehem, the city of David.

Eternal Consequence

This question asked by Jesus reinforces the importance of sound doctrine, and it reminds us of the massive personal consequence for each person in regards to our view of Jesus. What would the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, all the crowd gathered in the outer court of the Temple, what would they do with Jesus? On this question hangs each individual’s eternity, because the identity of Jesus actually matters.

Despite the fact that most of the people surrounding Jesus either hated Him or were indifferent towards Him and were just enjoying the show, the Lord, as always, resonated with the compassionate heart of an evangelist. After stopping the mouths of His critics, He asked this final question, not to demonstrate His superiority but as one more appeal to those who might be open to the gospel.

Moments before He had told the scribe who appeared sincere with his question that he was not far from the kingdom of God. How does one go from not far to being in the kingdom? By repenting of his sins and trusting that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior we all so desperately need.

What will you do with Jesus? Your answer will bear an eternal consequence.

#17 – Beware and Be Aware! – Mark 12:38-44

As He concludes His public ministry, Jesus warns the people about religious hucksters. A huckster is a person who aggressively promotes a product with annoying persistence. The product that religious hucksters hawk is their own self-righteousness. In our text Jesus is specifically referencing the scribes and Pharisees,¹⁶¹ but this warning is not limited to just those two groups. Religious hucksters are most exposed in their practice, rather than in their preaching, although it may be observed there also. These types have a variety of doctrinal beliefs. Many are legalists but not all of them. Where they are all alike is in their lack of humility, generosity, and sincerity. Religious hucksters are preoccupied with themselves and their selfish ambitions.

Jesus is still in the outer courts of the Temple, and a massive crowd has been gathered around Him, watching as He faced down three successive waves of questions, and that was followed with a question of His own for the interrogators. Then in the audience of all the people He said to His disciples:¹⁶²

“And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and *love* salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.” **Mark 12:38-40**

Beware of the Danger Posed

With His final public teaching Jesus instructs His nascent church, and all those listening, to beware of the danger posed by religious hucksters, and He lists three identifying characteristics of such people.

Beware of Pride

Jesus is not concerned with the scribes' stylistic choices because He preferred short robes to long robes. The issue here is the motivation of the scribes. They dressed in full length, expensive, and ornate robes with fringes and tassels so as be

¹⁶¹ Read Matthew 23 for an expanded version of this warning against and denunciation of false religion.

¹⁶² Luke 20:45

pretentiously separated from the regular folks. The whole point was to impress others with their showy robes. Their ostentatious wardrobe displayed their piety. At least, that is what they wanted you to think.

Not only did these religious hucksters dress in such a way as to draw attention their way, but they expected and were envious of respectful greetings out in public. They were commonly called “Rabbi” which means “great one,” and that was an honorific after which they lusted.¹⁶³

They dressed to be noticed. They craved to be honored, with titles and the best seats in the house, any and all houses, to be exact. Whether it was the chief seats in the synagogue which would have been prominent positions on an elevated platform facing the congregation, or seated closest to the host at some banquet, the religious hucksters wanted to see and be seen, to know and be known.

These types are obsessively proud, and we should beware of them.

Beware of Greed

Religious hucksters prey on the vulnerable. Whether they be wealthy widows, poor ones too, or widowers, a huckster is not biased about which gender he or she fleeces. The sick, the disabled, the desperate, all are potential victims to self important, self righteous windbags who peddle religion for what they may gain, never for what they may give.¹⁶⁴ Masquerading as servants of God, these wolves blatantly disregarded the repeated teaching of the Old Testament,¹⁶⁵ and devoured the resources of others under any and every pretense.

A hireling does not care for the sheep like the shepherd. A hireling is only among the sheep for the payday. When trouble comes, the hireling runs like a scalded dog, but the shepherd loves the sheep, and sacrifices for them.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Matthew 23:7-8

¹⁶⁴ The dear woman from Mark 5 comes to mind. She had spent all that she had to find a cure for her illness, and we should not assume that her money went only to physicians. She no doubt tried any and everything to fix her flux, and the religious hucksters would have been all too willing to take her money.

¹⁶⁵ Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 24:17-21; 27:19; Psalm 68:5; 146:9; Pro. 15:25; Is. 1:17; Jer. 22:3; Zech. 7:10

¹⁶⁶ John 10:11-15

Beware of Hypocrisy

Having preyed on the vulnerable, these hypocrites attempted to conceal their real motives by praying for them. (Vowels are important.) They were smooth with their words, slick with their actions, and full of hypocrisy in their hearts. Their motivation was not to serve others but to advance their own interests. While they line their own pockets, people suffer, and the Lord takes notice.

We would be fools to miss the warning given by Jesus, and we would be especially numb to ignore the potential for these traits in our own lives. While we must beware of religious hucksters who would seek to take advantage of us and our loved ones, we must be ever vigilant to not allow a little huckster's development in our own hearts. Beware of pride, greed, and hypocrisy, and beware of this: we become like the people with whom we spend time.

Be Aware of the Example Demonstrated

After delivering His warning, Jesus sits down. Who can blame Him? He has had a long and exhausting day on His feet, and He is human after all. (Thankfully, He is not only human, but that is the previous chapter's lesson.) Having set down Jesus begins to do what I do in the mall. He watches people.

The treasury was located in the Court of Women, one of the outer courts of the Temple, and against the wall there stood thirteen brass receptacles in the shape of trumpets. Tithes and offerings were to be deposited in one of these receptacles. Remember, in Jesus' time the faithful could not make online donations, use a credit or debit card, write checks, or pay with cash for that matter. The only currency was cold hard coins, and every offering deposited in the receptacles may not have been seen, but would most certainly be heard clinking down the brazen, trumpet looking receptacles which fed into the money chests. It was possible to deduce how much individuals were given by the sound the offering made.

Please notice that Jesus does not condemn the rich for giving much, nor does He explicitly commend the poor widow for giving all she had. He does say her two mites was more than the rich had given. What does Jesus mean?

He means to challenge the manner in which we evaluate things. It would have been easy to hear the loud clunking of the rich person's offering – given from their abundance – and then the barely audible sound of the widow's two copper coins – all that she had – and think, "Why did that poor lady even bother?"

That would be easy to think, and it would be wrong to think. Sinclair Ferguson writes:

"Jesus explains that the divine accountancy works on different principles from the human, and in doing so teaches us several important lessons about Christian giving.

God does not need your money. He requires no benefactors to help Him establish His kingdom. Nothing you can do or give will add to His riches. He owns the entire universe, and can employ everything in it for His own purposes. Furthermore, He owns your money too! He is able to give it to you and withdraw it from you at a moment's notice. You are simply a steward. Anything you give to Him He has first given to you, like a father giving pocket money to his children to help them buy his birthday present!

God chooses to use whatever gifts He wants to further His kingdom. He can use a small gift for a great purpose and a great gift for a small purpose. Jesus is underlining this in what He says. If we grasped it, we would never be proud of the amount we give."¹⁶⁷

Lessons on How to Give

1. *Motivation matters* – I pay taxes, but not because I want to pay them or enjoy paying them. I grudgingly render unto the United States what is the United States'. My giving to my church must not be offered with the same heart.¹⁶⁸ One commentator make a solid observation followed by a sobering question: "God weighs our motivations. This truth is at the same time a terror and a comfort. Which way does it strike you?"¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Sinclair Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, p. 209

¹⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:3; 2 Corinthians 9:7-8

¹⁶⁹ Kent Hughes, *Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, p. 132

2. *Size matters not* – God commands that we give, and desires that we give consistently, cheerfully, generously, and sacrificially. You know how much that is for you, and so does the Lord. What other people know or think is irrelevant. Our giving is always in the sight of the Lord Jesus. His valuation is all that matters, not the estimate of others.

God wants us, not our money, but we cannot give ourselves to Him while reserving some things – particularly our money – for ourselves. Money talks, there is no doubt about that. What does it say about us?¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ I have great respect for theologian and pastor John MacArthur. His understanding of Mark 12:41-44 is quite different from the one presented in this lesson. Instead of a positive example to follow, MacArthur views it as an example of the vulnerable being duped by religious leaders. You may listen to his sermon on this passage – “Religion and its Victims – and/or read the sermon transcript [by following this link](#). While I do not agree with MacArthur’s interpretation, I do believe it is worthwhile to examine the passage through a different lens. By prayer and the Spirit’s leadership each reader should diligently search the scriptures and decide for themselves on the meaning of the text.