

February

2018

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In January to May 2018, we will continue our study of the Gospel of Mark.

4 Feb

Beholding Christ's Glory

Mark 9:2-13

11 Feb

I Believe, Help My Unbelief

Mark 9:14-29

18 Feb

Requirements for Discipleship

Mark 9:33-50

25 Feb

Marriage and Divorce

Mark 10:1-12

Beholding Christ's Glory

MARK 9:2-13

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

After Peter's declaration in Mark 8 that "You are the Messiah", Jesus has taught His disciples that He would have an ordeal of suffering, die and be raised again. Peter did not accept this view of the Messiah and took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking like that. Jesus, in turn, rebuked Peter and then taught what was required to be His disciple. Jesus also taught that in time He would come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels and that the kingdom of God would come with power. Six days have now passed by since Jesus taught about His suffering and His coming in glory. With these things in mind, we study about the transfiguration (the Greek word is "metamorphoomai", which is where we get the English word "metamorphosis").

For Study and Discussion

1. Who needs to behold Christ's Glory?
 - a) Reading the passage (paying particular attention to v2, 4 & 7), what do you think is the main purpose of the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain?

 - b) Why do you think the transfiguration took place at that particular time (i.e. immediately after the teachings in Mark 8)?

2. Response to Beholding Christ's Glory
 - a) Share why you think Peter's suggestion (v5) is appropriate or misguided.

 - b) When Peter suggested building tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, God responded by declaring "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Then the disciples could see only Jesus (v7 & 8).
 - What is the significance of God's declaration?

 - What lessons can we learn from these verses? (Consider Hebrews 1:1-2)

- c) Jesus' transfiguration terrified the disciples because they saw Him in a new light (v6). When you think of Jesus, how do you typically perceive him? Does the account of the transfiguration change that perception?

3. Glory of the Cross

- a) As they were coming down the mountain, what instructions did Jesus give to the disciples (v9)? Why do you think He did that?

- b) Reading v9-13, how do you think the transfiguration is related to the cross? (Refer also to Mark8:31-38; and Hebrews 2:9)

- c) How can the account of the transfiguration help us to take up our cross and follow Him?

- Peter wrote about the transfiguration late in his life. Read 2 Peter 1:16-18 and discuss what gave Peter confidence in Christ's power and second coming.
- Read also 2 Peter 1:3-8. Discuss how this certainty in God's promises for us in Christ should influence the way we live.

Discipleship Pointers

- The Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of the glory of Jesus and of the second coming of Christ.
- We need to see Jesus for who He really is - the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father.
- The more we behold the glory of Jesus, the more we will become like Jesus, the more we can reflect His glory.
- We should fix our eyes on the glory of God's beloved son, who was crucified, died and was buried; and rose again from the dead.
- In anticipation of the return of Jesus in glory and power to judge the living and the dead, we must live by listening to Him and allowing His words to transform us into His image.
- "It is by beholding the glory of Christ that we are first gradually transformed into his image, and then brought into the eternal enjoyment of it, because we shall be 'like him', for we shall 'see him as he is' (2 Cor. 3:18)." – John Owen in The Glory of Christ

Family/Group Moments

- Since beholding the glory of Christ is the key to our transformation, in what ways can we do so today?

I Believe, Help My Unbelief

MARK 9:14-29

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

From the mountain-top, out-of-the-world experience of beholding Jesus' glory, we descend with the disciples back to the hustle and bustle of ordinary, everyday decisions, pressures, problems that demand attention. From dreamy Peter wishing to prolong the extraordinary visitation, we now find ourselves like the helpless disciples faltering in their ministry, or the desperate father on the verge of losing hope. Amongst them stood Jesus – the only help and hope for the disbelieving, desperate and demonized. He doesn't descend from the mountain today such that we could grab hold off to fix a knotty problem. But what He gave us are lessons of how we should relate to Him, to the Father. In faith and prayer, we find the way how disciples are to walk and serve, as our Teacher and Master Himself did.

For Study and Discussion

1. An Unbelieving Generation
 - a) How faithless! How is this generation portrayed as “unbelieving” (NIV), “faithless” (ESV)? Consider the scribes (3:22ff; 8:11-12; 9:14), the masses (5:14-17; 6:6), the disciples (6:52; 8:17; 16:11-14). Which group do you think is the chief culprit of Jesus' lament in this incident? How has Jesus characterized this generation previously (8:12, 38)?

 - b) How long? How (and why) is Jesus feeling at this moment? What is the developing context around this situation (9:12, 31)? Indeed, how much more time does He have to be with His disciples?

2. An Unbelieving Father. Out of a faithless generation, one man in his faithlessness is helped to a place of faith.
 - a) “It is hopeless, impossible!” What is the state of the situation giving rise to his unbelief?

 - b) “With God it is possible, with this man of God there is hope!” How does Jesus lead him to exercise faith and hope?

- c) A confession, a prayer of faith and “un-faith” at the same time! It sounds so contradictory, paradoxical, nonsensical. Do you experience such struggle, tension in your Christian walk? How do we understand such a struggle, tension? Does God accept such “mixed” prayers?
3. The Unbelieving Disciples. Despite being granted authority and succeeding in casting them out (6:7, 13), they failed this time.
- a) What reason does Jesus give (9:19, 29)? In Matthew’s account (Mat 17:20)? What combined picture do they portray of the disciples?
- b) How should they have responded when exorcism of “this kind” of spirit (v.29) prove to be less than straightforward? What were they found doing instead?
- c) By this time, what should they have learned from Jesus’ own life (1:35; 6:46) and the many affirmations and encouragements of faith (2:5; 5:34, 36; 7:29) and rebukes (4:40) along the way?

Discipleship Pointers

The miracle itself and the responses to it take the backseat, while the need and struggle for faith and prayer are the key themes of discipleship that drive this story. But it is more than about believing in miracles and answers to prayer. It is also meant to lead us back to believing the gospel and following Jesus more and more – even right into His suffering, death, and resurrection (1:15, 17; 8:31, 34).

Faith and prayer are dual emphases on a single reality – a life of dependent trust and surrender to God, drawing daily on His power and presence bringing them to bear on the situations of life, be it petitioning our needs, interceding for or ministering to others. Faith prompts prayer; prayer builds faith.

1. Let us bring our struggles of faith, alongside our doubts, fears, unbelief before the Lord. Humbly confess our weakness, and plead for His compassion, power, and grace. Such prayer is itself an act of faith and reliance on Him, which He sympathizes.
 - Faith and prayer draw us to focus on His unlimited wisdom and power, not the impossibilities of our situations and the limitations of our efforts.
 - Faith is not a matter of positive self-talk or self-will, but arises and strengthens from encountering and being encouraged by our Lord addressing us (Rom 10:17; 15:4).
2. Let us bemoan the lack of faith and prayer, which weakens our discipleship and ministry, especially in the face of great spiritual battles with forces that oppose the gospel.
 - It is the great lament of our Lord for our generation, any generation, and aimed at His people.
 - The disciples fulfilled this lament to its climax. They were preoccupied with argument (v.14), personal greatness (v.34) and group exclusiveness (v.38). They could have taken for granted whatever authority given them, perhaps exercising it mechanically, autonomously, without God in the picture. They failed to look to God.

- If by lack of faith and prayer we displace God from His position as the source, power and goal in the ministry, marketplace and family, then this must mean we have unwittingly usurped that position for ourselves.
3. Let us beware misuses in the name of faith. Verses like 9:23; 11:22-24; Jn 16:23-24 can often be misused in a simplistic and mechanical way in relating faith to things, events or results that we desire.
 - “I have faith in faith”. Faith is not a blank cheque to have whatever we pray for, just simply because we have (enough) faith. Faith’s object is not faith but God. We trust Him as our Father who gives good gifts to His children according to His will, wisdom, and sovereignty.
 - “I name and claim it in faith”. Faith is not a currency that allows us to name whatever things or results we want and then claim them.

Family/Group Moments

1. How will Jesus evaluate your faith and prayer life?
2. What preoccupies your heart, and displaces and substitutes faith and prayer? Some suspects:
 - Becoming over-confident in ourselves, gifts, experiences, successes; over-reliant on techniques and methods; or
 - Believing our disbelieving, skeptical culture, our disappointments and doubts more than believing in God to seek Him in prayer
3. We regularly recite the Apostle’s Creed (“I believe...”). The church adopts the Westminster Confession of “Faith”. They crystallize in a very systematic and doctrinal way what we profess to believe individually and corporately.

But often what we believe in our heads do not match what we really believe in our hearts. Experiences of weariness, pain, sorrow, loss, failure, disappointment, unanswered prayer; the temptations and wisdom of a secular worldview, often challenge our faith in God.

What aspects of Christian teaching or practice do you find it hard to believe, or no longer believe, or hard to live out? Are there doubts, distrusts, cynicism that arise within? E.g.

- The full reliability and authority of Scripture vs what science and other religious texts say
- God as Three-in-One; Jesus as both fully man and God; the fact of the resurrection
- Jesus as the only way of salvation vs a range of pathways in the religious marketplace
- God is truly good, wise and sovereign, though this world is filled with evil and suffering (and I am often a victim as well as a perpetrator of them)
- Love our enemies, do good to them, bless them, pray for them

List a Confession of “Un-Faith”. Pray it and ask the Lord to “help my unbelief.”

b) What was Jesus' response? What kind of services will God reward? (39)

3. Attitude towards services/sins that dishonour Christ (42-50)

a) What is the sin Jesus highlighted in verse 42? What tells us this sin is serious? (42-48)

b) Why is one's mistreatment or disregard for another person belonging to Christ such a serious matter? See 1 Jn. 4:19-21.

In 1 Cor 8, Paul provides a practical example from his day: food offered to idols

• What is the underlining assurance for God's people in 1 Cor. 8:3

• But it not enough to just have the right teaching! We also need to love our weaker brothers! What problem can our unloving acts result in? (1 Cor. 8:7-12)

• What is the right underlying motivation for curtailing oneself to avoid stumbling another brother or sister in Christ (1 Cor. 8:11-13).

c) Back to Mark 9, what is the common thread in Mark 9: 37, 39, 41, and 42 that determines whether one's action leads to reward or damnation?

4. Putting it all together:

a) From this passage, what is the underlying factor that determines one's greatness in the sight of God?

b) What will help us combat selfishness, pride, and temptations to sin against God and our brothers/sisters in Christ?

Discipleship Pointers

- The greatest person in the sight of God who ever lived is our Lord Jesus Christ. On Him, the Father has set His seal of approval. From the Mount of Transfiguration, God announced to us in Mark 9:7, “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.” Greatness in the sight of God has everything to do with our attitude towards the Son of God, how we treasure and act for the honour of His Name.
- This regard for His Name flows down to our attitudes and action towards those who are called by His Name.
- As disciples, we are called to serve others not for our own status/name, but for His Name sake. Our prayers are to be uttered in His Name. His Name is our first concern. If there are attitudes in some areas of our lives that need changes, we must first examine if they are caused by our lack of love for the name of Christ. If so we need to repent.
- How do we measure success in ministries? What makes us happy or jealous and upset? Is it when we see Christ’s name being honoured or dishonoured, more than when our own names are lifted up or put down, or vice versa?
- Our church is doing right by emphasizing on correct doctrines as we want to do what is right before God. But in the process, we must also guard against pride - as Paul says: “Knowledge puffs up” (1 Cor. 8:1) - and losing our first love (this was the problem with the Ephesus church in Rev. 2: 1-7). Are we falling into sin because of our lack of love for Christ?
It is not just the church as a whole - we need to ask this question of ourselves!
- How seriously do we treat our sins? Do we seek to remove the things that cause us to sin? Is our underlying motivation our regard for Christ’s name or something else that we care more for?
- In the concluding words of this passage, the Lord uses the imagery of salt to tell his disciples that they will be purified (salted) with fire. He said this in anticipation of the hardship, persecution, and testings they had to face for His Name sake. This purification will purge and bring out in them the characters befitting a disciple, without which they would not be useful for His kingdom. The mark of being His disciples is ultimately the common love they shared among themselves, being at peace with one another as opposed to fighting among themselves.

Family/Group Moments

- How has this passage challenged your idea of what true greatness really is and what it means to be a disciple of Christ? Can you identify the greatest brother or sister (dead or alive) you have ever known? What makes you think this brother or sister is great in the sight of our Lord?
- Can you recall someone whom you have served in the last one year because of your love for the Name of Christ?
- How can you serve another believer in Christ in the coming weeks in ways that build up his/her faith in the Lord?

Marriage and Divorce

MARK 10:1-12

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

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Introduction

Jesus moves ahead with his journey towards Jerusalem and continues to teach the crowds (12:1), reminding them (and us) of His priority to teach and the necessity of listening to God's Word through Him (4:24-25, 9:7). However, the Pharisees reappear on the scene (v2) with the explicit purpose of "testing" Jesus. They had earlier expressed a desire to destroy Jesus (3:6). Their rejection of Jesus (9:37) therefore, puts them in danger of the judgment of 9:42.

For Study and Discussion

1. Matters of the Heart (10:1-5)
 - a) Examine v1 in relation to the preceding chapters. What inklings do we have about the vision and the mission that preoccupies Jesus' heart (8:31; 9:31)? In light of that, what activity takes priority in His work as He embarks on this final journey towards Jerusalem?

 - b) Looking at v2, why do you think the Pharisees want to test Jesus? They already knew that first century Judaism allows for divorce. What then were they trying to prove or disprove?

 - c) Jesus responded by asking the Pharisees about Moses' command (V3-5). Why do you think He did that? What deeper issues and true motives might He be exposing about the Pharisees' hearts?

2. Marriage & Divorce (10:6-12)
 - a) From the words of Jesus in v6-9, what can we understand about God's original design for mankind and His creation purpose for marriage? What biblical principles, therefore, can we draw about marriage and divorce?

- b) Why do you think Jesus' disciples find it so hard to grasp His teaching (v10)? What seemingly radical idea is Jesus introducing to them?
- c) So, is divorce permissible for the believer? If so, on what grounds?
- d) Is divorce necessary if adultery has been committed? Explain why or why not?
- e) Discuss further: Is every divorce a product of sin?
- f) Discuss your perspective from scriptural examples: Is every divorce sinful? Consider the examples of Matthew 1:18-19 & Jer 3:8
- g) If divorce is permissible (i.e. biblically legitimate grounds), is remarriage also permissible? Read also Rom7:3, 1 Cor 7 and share your understanding.

3. As for Me and My Household

- a) What practical examples can you see or think of in the world today, of how the command "Whom God has joined, let not man separate" has been violated in essence?
- b) What do all these teachings mean for you and your family? Where do you stand with regards to the purposes that God has for His people? What will you do to heed His commands for your own good (Deut 10:12-13)?
- c) Before we say too quickly "I thank God that I am not like the Pharisees....", let's examine our own hearts. Are we really living at peace with God and one another? Are we doing all we can to preserve the sanctity of marriage? What deeper heart issues might you and your family be facing? What will you do about it?

Discipleship Pointers

- Marriage is a foundational building block of our human society. What seems to be a digression from Jesus' journey to the cross is actually an important lesson on discipleship. Jesus affirms that the husband and wife remain one flesh, united under all circumstances (except on grounds of adultery as stated in Matt 19:9). Divorce violates God's ordinances. It was permitted under the Mosaic Law as a concession to men's hardened hearts. Hardened hearts in Mark's gospel is the refusal leading to the inability to take in the word of God. It is a rebellious and man-centered heart. It rejects God's declared will. Discipleship, on the other hand, is a restoration of man to God's original creational intent. Christian marriage honours God by honouring God's creation mandate and Christ's commission to the church.
- In asking the Pharisees about what Moses had said regarding marriage and divorce, Jesus was directing them not to man's ideas about the husband-wife relationship, but to God's intent. By citing the creation account, Jesus shows how the Pharisees' understanding of marriage was incomplete, and not reflecting Moses words to them in Genesis. God's words must be understood in totality. We cannot pick and choose to obey what is convenient to us without violating God's intent for our lives. Neither can we understand God's intent for us in His word if our hearts are not in the right place.
- God's intent and design for marriage are not found only in some isolated verses scattered among a few books of the Bible. It is found in the whole counsel of God. The entire Bible is God's manual for husbands and wives, to instruct them how to live their lives before God by how they conduct their relationships.
- Let us not make the same mistake as the Pharisees: to make out our own rules and become so self-satisfied that we have kept God's word just because we know a few verses here and there on a subject matter. Without knowing His word and seeking His face, we will not live out what God has intended for us in our marriages, or in our relationship with others.
- The goal of marriage is to honour God by multiplying His image. To do so, marriage is to reflect the work of the gospel in our lives. Out of this relationship of oneness with one another because of Christ's love and Christ's word in our lives, God intends future generations to come to know His love and plan for them.
- Christian marriage is one of God's design to carry out and fulfill the great commission. It is not the only design. The Lord Jesus and Paul were single. Whether single or married, in Christ, we are called not to ourselves, but to God and His mandate to multiply His image.

Family/Group Moments

- How is Christ's sacrifice on the cross a model for you to conduct your spousal relationship.
- For those who are married, consider how Christ's sacrifice on the cross is a model for you in your marriage, and how your walk with God can be translated into love for your spouse? Consider how you can demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in your relationship with your spouse. Consider how your marriage and home can be base for extending the work of God, and in the lives of others
- For those not in a marriage relationship, consider how you can fulfill the same God-given mandate of reflecting His image and multiplying His image in where and how you relate to those around you.
- Whether we are married or not, consider how we can support healthy God-honouring husband-wife relationships in our small group community, such as through prayers, mutual accountability, sharing of lives, and acts of kindness. Consider how we can be champions for godly marriages characterised by a vision for multi-generational faithfulness to the cause of the gospel.

Daily Prayer Guide

Sunday: The Church

- Church members & families
- Visitors
- Pastor & church leaders
- Sunday School teachers
- Worship leaders
- Small group leaders
- Other churches
- Outreach efforts

Monday: The Workplace

- Supervisor
- Co-workers
- Subordinates
- Customers & suppliers
- Difficult situations
- Work attitude
- Work performance

Tuesday: Acquaintances

- Mentors & mentorees
- Accountability partners
- Friends
- Neighbours
- Merchants
- Public servants
- Teachers & other school Workers
- Children's friends & their families

Wednesday: My Country

- Public officials - executive, legislative, & judicial
- Armed forces
- Public morality
- The media
- The economy

Thursday: The World

- International peace & understanding
- Missions and missionaries
- Persecuted churches
- Hunger, sickness, & disaster relief

Friday: My Spiritual Growth

- Maturity
- Understanding
- Faith
- Love toward God
- Love toward others
- Servanthood

Saturday: My Family

- Spouse
- Children
- Grandchildren
- Parents
- Brothers & sisters
- Extended family
- Unsaved loved ones

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."-Jeremiah 33:3

Little Steps To Great Learning!

Preparation:

- Attempt all questions in the relevant Bible study before your group meeting.
- Expect spiritual growth by thoughtfully working on the Bible study questions (and the suggested reading, if any) throughout the week.
- Seek the Holy Spirit's insight and guidance by praying daily in reflection of what you have learned through the Bible study.

Group Time:

- On the following Sunday, take notes during sermon to assist in focusing your thoughts.
- Be punctual for your group meeting.
- Share the insight gained through the sermon with your group.
- Be frank in sharing your response to the questions in the discipleship pointers.
- Encourage others by attesting to God's goodness and reality by sharing to the group (and others) how the Word has changed your thinking and action in response to your study in the past week.
- Using the front sheet, summarise how the lessons have helped you to understand God's revelation in the Bible through Jesus Christ, and your response to the revelation.

THE BIBLE is to be...

Read through...

Reflected in...

Lived out...

Given away...

