

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

February 2013

THEME: The Gospel According to Mark (Part 2)

Series Introduction

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

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

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

| Date | Topic | Passage |
|--------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 3 Feb | Lord of the Sabbath | Mark 2:23 – 3:6 |
| 10 Feb | Jesus’ New Family | Mark 3:13-35 |
| 17 Feb | Storm-Calmer, Demon-Master | Mark 4:35 – 5:20 |
| 24 Feb | Lord over Disease and Death | Mark 5:21-43 |

3 February

Lord of the Sabbath

Mark 2:23 – 3:6

Introduction

The importance of the Sabbath needs to be appreciated. It is a key identity marker distinguishing Jews as God's people (circumcision is another). However, by Jesus' time, Jewish traditions have introduced a myriad of regulations to avoid working on the Sabbath. Thus an act of plucking is deemed a 'work' prohibited on the Sabbath, though plucking in and of itself is permitted by the law (Deuteronomy 23:25). Healing is also deemed a 'work' forbidden on the Sabbath unless the situation is life-threatening. In this passage, the identity and authority of Jesus was once again demonstrated through his acts of 'plucking' and 'healing' on the Sabbath.

For Study and Discussion

1. Observing the Law of the Sabbath

- a. Who instituted the Sabbath and its purpose? To whose honour is it observed? (Ex 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15; Isa 58:13-14)
- b. The Pharisees were quick to object to any form of 'work' on the Sabbath (2:24 & 3:2). What legitimate concerns from their national history may have motivated such strict observance? (Ex 31:14-17; Jer 17:21-27; Neh 13:15-22).
- c. What did Jesus say and do to defend his assertion that "the Sabbath was made for man"? (2:25-26; 3:4-5; see how Matt 2:7 expresses it differently). Did Jesus validate or dismiss the OT's teaching on Sabbath observance as a result? Discuss.
- d. How does Jesus' way of interpreting the Sabbath-law contrast with that of the Pharisees? What surprising irony did Mark introduce to deepen that contrast (3:2, 4, 6)? Who is really the unlawful Sabbath-breaker?

2. Obeying the Lord of the Sabbath

- a. David and his actions was a precedent which Scripture gives no hint of disapproval (1 Samuel 21:1-6). What was David's status in Israel at the time when he came to Nob (c.f. 1 Sa 16:1-13)? Overall, how was he regarded in Jewish national history?
- b. Read Mark 12:36-37. Apart from David's dire need, what comparison did Jesus draw between himself and David? (Matt 12:6 provides hints to Jesus' line of reasoning).
- c. What does Jesus' claim to be 'Lord of the Sabbath' say about:
 - i. His relationship to the divine (c.f. Q.1a);

- ii. The basis for which he asserts the principle in 2:27;
- iii. The reason/s he deliberately provokes opened confrontation by healing the man?

3. Summary

These are the fourth and last episodes in a series of five controversies between Jesus and the religious establishment recorded in Mk 2:1–3:6. By way of summary, complete the blanks below.

| Mark | Jesus' word & deed | Jesus' authority to | Jesus viewed as | Mounting Hostility |
|---------|-------------------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2:1-12 | Heals the paralytic | Forgive sin | Blasphemer | Accuses silently |
| 2:13-17 | Welcomes the outcasts | Call sinners to repentance | Unclean | Questions disciples openly |
| 2:18-22 | Not the time to fast | Dispense with fasting while he is present | Disrespectful of tradition | Questions Jesus openly |
| 2:23-28 | Plucking on the Sabbath | ? | ? | ? |
| 3:1-6 | Healing on the Sabbath | ? | ? | ? |

Discipleship Pointers

1. Jesus, the one greater than David, extends his Messianic lordship *even / also* (note this little qualifier in 2:28) to the Sabbath institution, and by implication, the entire Law. Hence He stamps his divine prerogative and authority to *interpret* and *restore* that institution to its true intention, and to *enforce* it, despite man-made obstacles. Do we yield to his lordship over every public and private sphere of life, every institution and vocation?
2. Jesus came to restore the Sabbath to its true purpose of blessing God's people, not enslaving them. It expresses God's love and mercy in giving rest and liberation, and models how they should treat others likewise. Ultimately, full experience of Sabbath-rest and divine mercy is found in Jesus. Furthermore, by word and deed Jesus shows that putting *God over all* and *others before self* is how one rightly fulfills the Law. Let us follow Jesus' Sabbath spirit to do good and show mercy to others, and those in need or marginalized.
3. The Pharisees represent those who seek to get everything right outwardly but "neglected ... justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matt 23:23). They pursue the *letter* but miss the *spirit* of the law. Do you find yourself or others behavior likewise?
4. Jesus' early ministry gains mass popularity, but also hostility. The magisterial and compassionate authority of Jesus shines through it all. But already the ominous shadow of the cross looms (2:20; 3:6). Mark prepares us to see that Jesus' identity and authority is not only manifested in power and truth, but also in weakness and suffering, culminating at the cross. We are hence to take that to heart seriously in our daily discipleship.

Family/Group Moment

1. Amidst a busy culture and work ethic, even the Lord's Day can be hectic like any other day. Share what your Lord's Day is like:
 - What occupies your time, energy and thoughts? What is your pace during this day like?
 - How do you incorporate worship, fellowship, leisure, and rest for yourself and for others under your charge? Which tends to be sacrifice?
 - For those with children to manage and parents to visit, how do you keep your focus on God amidst the other responsibilities? What are the priorities? What can be relegated?
2. The Sabbath spirit of Jesus carries over to every day. Seek out intentionally this week to exercise God's mercy and kindness to someone in need ("to do good, to save life, 3:4), whether he is stranger or not, whether you will be appreciated or not.

10 February

Jesus' New Family

Mark 3:13-35

Introduction

The calling of the Twelve from amongst his disciples (3:13-21) and the wider definition of those who belong to Jesus' spiritual family (3:31-35) establishes the profile and purpose of Jesus' new family. At no point did Jesus deny his biological family. The injection of 3:22-30 concerning the eternal unforgiveable sin of the scribes is significant to Jesus' definition of his new family. Who is inside and who is outside? Let's investigate the passage.

For Study and Discussion

1. Jesus called his Apostles (3:13-19)

Having publicly demonstrated his power and authority as the Son of God in teaching, healing, and exorcising, Jesus now had a regular band of good followers. The time had come for him to expand his public ministry by commissioning twelve key missionaries, chosen from amongst his followers (v13).

- a. Examine verse 14a – What was the best preparation that Jesus had for the appointed twelve in order that they might go on to serve? Why was such a preparation necessary? Cf. Acts 1:21-22.
- b. What would be their primary ministry and their primary target region? (vv14b&15; 6:7-13 cf. Matt 10:1, 5-8; Lk 6:13-16) How would the latter change after Jesus' resurrection? (Acts 1:8)
- c. Read verses 16-19 – “The number twelve has a clear redemptive-historical significance... represent[ing] in a new form the people of the twelve tribes, Israel. In the calling of the Twelve Jesus orders his work and theirs in accordance with the structure of redemptive history and its goal, the creation of the community of God” – William Lane.

In view of 1(b), who would eventually constitute this new community of God? (Rom 9:6-8, 24-26) How should we respond in view of the scope of God's Kingdom vision?

2. Jesus' condemned his Accusers (3:20-30)

Having just returned home, people again gathered to Jesus such that he could not even break for a meal (v20).

- a. Why did Jesus' family members come to “take charge” (NIV; literally ‘to seize’ in Greek) of him? What did they say of him? (v21)
- b. Some scribes amongst the crowd were sent from Jerusalem to challenge Jesus' public ministry. What did they accuse him of? How did they justify their accusation? (v22)

- c. What was the point of Jesus' counter-argument (vv23-26)? More importantly, what was Jesus implying about himself in the analogy of robbing a "strong man" (v27)?
- d. What were the scribes saying about Jesus that made them guilty of an eternal sin? (v30) Why should their punishment be so severe? (v29) Consider John 3:18; 5:24.

3. Jesus announced his New Family (3:31-35)

Verses 31 links back to verse 21 where Jesus' mother and brothers came to take custody of him. When words were sent to Jesus that his family members were waiting outside, his response was alarming.

- a. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (v33) Reading this rhetoric question in context, what is decisive in determining kinship with Jesus?
- b. Read Mark 10:28-30. How does this passage further clarify the character and commitment of those who belong to Jesus' new family?
- c. Following Jesus may require radical and momentary severance of family ties (Ex 32:25-29; Deut 33:8-9). What are some circumstances when this is necessary?

Discipleship Pointers

Jesus' new family members are those who receive God's saving power in Christ and so do the will of God.

1. The Twelve were appointed by Jesus to be with him and to serve him by proclaiming the Gospel under his authority. Knowing Jesus personally and making him known publicly is vital to Christian discipleship.
2. People must be warned of the severe consequence of "eternal sin" – the profaning of God's name by attributing Jesus' saving power and work in the Holy Spirit to demonic origin. Let us beware and be warned of such defiant hostility to God ourselves, even as we warn others of it.
3. Jesus' new family comprises those who trust and so obey God. Doing the will of God demonstrates real and living relationship with him. Conversely, standing in the way of God by passive or active opposition of his will suggests a rejection of that relationship. Who is inside and who is outside of Jesus' new family become clearer as Christ is preached and people respond either positively or negatively to him. Evangelism is vital.

Family/Group Moment

- How do you cultivate your relationship with God? Take time to share and encourage one another to keep this priority.
- How have people profane God's name today? How can we guard against this sin?
- What can you do to grow in your characteristic as member of Jesus' new family?

17 February

Storm-Calmer, Demon-Master

Mark 4:35 – 5:20

Introduction

What happened when a powerful wind-wave storm and a terrifyingly demonized man encountered Jesus? The disciples were frightful of the storm and doubtful of him. The herdsmen were fearful of the demonized man but even more wary of Jesus. Yet Jesus rose above the natural forces and the supernatural principality to demonstrate his identity and authority as the Son of God. Can we trust him or do we reject him?

For Study and Discussion

1. Storm-Calmer (Mark 4:35-41; cf. Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25)

After a day of preaching, Jesus decided to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

- a. Which boat did they use? Did Jesus prepare for the trip? (v36 – see 4:1 for the boat)
- b. “A *squall came up*” (v37)
 - i. What happened to their boats and how did the disciples react?
 - ii. Let us remember that at least 4 of the disciples were professional fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. What do their reactions suggest about the magnitude of the storm?
- c. As for Jesus – what was he doing in the stern? (v38) Why?
- d. Having been with Jesus for a while and seeing them miracles he had done, what should have been the disciples’ reaction during the storm? What were their reactions instead? Why? (vv40-41)

Discipleship Pointer: “*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!*” (4:41)

Why were the disciples surprised and shocked by what Jesus had done? Simple – this was something that only God could do. This is another growth in the disciples’ understanding that Jesus is both God and man, Master of the universe. Is this the Jesus you know?

2. Demon-Master (Mark 5:1-20; Matthew 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39)

They arrived in the “*region of the Gerasenes*” - part of the Decapolis (Ten Cities) (v20) – which is a non-Jewish area on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

- a. On arrival, Jesus and his disciples were met by a man:

- i. Where was this man living? (v3)
 - ii. Could anybody control him? Why? (v4)
 - iii. What would he do day and night? (v5)
- b. What was this man's problem? (vv2, 9) (note: Legion – for Roman Legion – each of which number about 5,000 men)
- c. Who did the *Legion* recognise and profess Jesus to be? (v7)
- d. What did they asked Jesus to do? What then happen? (vv10-13)
- e. What was the reaction of the people of the region when they found out what had happened? Why did they react this way? (vv15-17)
- f. What happen to the formerly demon-processed man? (vv18-20)
 - i. What did he want to do?
 - ii. Instead what did Jesus tell him to do?

Discipleship Pointers

1. “*Jesus, Son of the Most High God*” - This is what *Legion* called Jesus – another indication of the deity of Jesus. Jesus was a demon-master because he was the Son of the Most High God who has authority over all principalities and powers (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6). Do you submit to Jesus who has authority over your life as well?
2. The demon-processed man was most likely not a Jew. Most people would not consider him a person suitable to receive God's mercy. There was nothing he could do about his situation or for himself. He was a person with no hope and no power to liberate himself. Yet – by God's mercy – he was delivered. A “gone case” now had new life.

This is a warning for us – never consider anybody unsuitable for God's salvation. We are to be God's witnesses to the world – including the most hopeless case. Are we?

The formerly demon-processed man was told to return home and tell the people around him what God had done for him. This is what most of us are called to do. We are called to be God's witnesses to those around us. The problem is that many of us are not doing the witnessing part. Are we God's witnesses to those around us?

24 February
Lord over Disease and Death
Mark 5:21-43

Introduction

In this passage, Jesus continued to demonstrate his power and authority as the Son of God over disease and death. Mindfully observe what Jesus says to different individual and groups; recognise who he is and consider the thoughts and responses of the different individuals and group(s).

For Study and Discussion

1. Understand the People and their problems

| Consider: | The woman (v25) | Jairus | Possibly you? |
|--|------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| What is troubling this person? | | | |
| Who does he/she turn to in trouble? | | | |
| How does he/she deal with his/her problem? | | | |
| Who is Jesus to this person? | | | |
| What causes Jesus to attend to him/her? | | | |
| What can be said of his/her faith in Jesus? | | | |
| What does Jesus say to each individual? | (v34) | (v36) | |
| What does this imply about his/her thinking about Jesus? | (v28) | | |

2. A (un)timely interruption?

While Jesus was commending on the woman's faith, some men from Jairus' house came to inform him of his daughter's death (v35).

- a. What could possibly be said about the timeliness and relevance of Jesus' message to the woman for Jairus?

- b. What could the great multitude (of Jews) possibly say about Jairus' as a synagogue ruler for seeking Jesus at the eleventh hour to save his daughter's life?
- c. Compare the thoughts of the woman (v28) with Jairus and yours. What is true faith? Have you truly trusted Jesus?

3. Observe what the crowd, peers or others can do to individuals.

- a. What did the crowd tell Jairus to do (v35c)? Compare this with the centurion's remark, "Lord, don't trouble yourself..." (Luke 7:7-8). What does "bothering" or "troubling Jesus" show about one's perspective about Jesus?
- b. Observe how the crowd turned their wailing for the dead girl to laughing at Jesus' words of assurance (vv39&40). There was a drastic change of emotion. How can the human mind-set impede spiritual receptivity?
- c. Compare the resuscitation of Jairus' daughter with Lazarus (John 11:14, 21-27). What do these demonstrations of Jesus' power over physical death confirm about the identity and character of Jesus?

Discipleship Pointers

In times of despair and doubt, how should we trust the Son of God?

Extracted from: Nick Harrison, *Magnificent Prayer – 366 Devotions to deepen Prayer Experience* (Zondervan, 2001), pp274-5.

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say..." (Gen 3:1)

"Often (when we pray) there is a wrestle. A thousand invisible enemies will seem to fill the air and crowd between you and your Lord. Each of them has a stinging or depressing word. We shall be reminded of prayers to which no answers have come yet (or what we call answers), and told that it will make no difference whether we pray or not. We shall be shown our own dreadful nothingness so clearly that we shall hardly be able to bring ourselves to believe that such prayers as we can offer will rise to God at all. Our wrestling is with these whispering or shouting spiritual foes. We must press through, fight through, and the sword with which to fight is the blessed word of God." – AMY CARMICHAEL

Pray About It: When we pray, the accusations of the enemy are endless. Either we're not worthy to have our prayers answered, or God isn't listening or can't do what we want, or worse yet, hears us but won't give us what we need.

It's the Word of God that we must use in such times to rout the enemy from our prayer closets. At the first hint of doubt or accusation, find a relevant Bible verse and stand

unflinchingly on it. Don't let Satan respond. He has no standing when the Sword of the Spirit pierces him. Know your Bible; learn to wield the Sword with effectiveness. Destroy the enemy!

“It is the sword of the Spirit, because He is the great Master in the use of it. Oh, that He would come and show us how He can thrust and cleave with it! In this house of prayer we have often seen Him at His work. Here the slain of the Lord have been many. We have seen this sword take off the head of many a Goliath doubt, and slay a horde of cares and unbeliefs.” – CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

Family/Group Moment

- Whose advice and assurance do you tend to listen to when you are faced with despairs and doubts?
- How does knowing that Jesus has power and authority over disease and death because he is the Son of God help you in times of despairs and doubts?
- When and why is it a bad application from this passage to invoke Jesus' name when praying for those with serious or terminal illnesses?

Bible-For-All (BFA) Team: Chief Editor: Rev Benson Goh | Contributors: Mr Paul Johnson, Mr Daniel Ng, Mr Peter Ng, Mr Ong Whee Teck, Eld Harold Or, Mr Stephen Rapkin, Mr Simon Ting | Proof-reader: Mr Gordon Robinson | Layout & Typeset: Mr Pang Siok Sen