

# MARK Bible Reading Schedule

## 5 Weeks

### WEEK 1

Listen to this scholar's assessment: "Mark is a master of the unexpected. The medium of irony is important to the Second Evangelist, who throughout the Gospel portrays Jesus as the one who challenges, confounds, and sometimes breaks conventional stereotypes, whether religious, social, or political." (James R. Edwards)

It is generally agreed that Mark was the first of the four canonical Gospels to be written. Before the writing of Mark, there were no Gospels as such. The gospel traditions were circulated or "delivered" orally under the supervision of the eyewitnesses and ministers of the word of God. As these eyewitnesses began to die, it became important to record the gospel traditions in writing. According to church tradition, after the martyrdom of Peter in the mid-60s AD, the church in Rome asked John Mark to put into writing the accounts of Jesus' life and teachings that Peter had delivered to them orally. Mark's Gospel includes references to Peter that suggest a personal connection with Mark. Mark is the John Mark, Barnabas's cousin, of Acts 13.

I think of this Gospel as the most thorough collection of what Jesus did and taught. We will learn about the personality of Jesus, his purpose as Messiah, his concern for discipleship, and the extended version of his passion. I am sure you are eager to jump into chapter one. This is sure to be a special way of beginning this new school year.

#### DAY 1 – Mark 1:1-20

I think of these 20 verses as an introduction of Jesus the Messiah which is obviously the purpose of Mark as he begins the story. Mark's approach in this section is very similar to how he compiled the rest of his record of Christ in this Gospel. We have John the Baptist, the Lord's baptism, a summary of his temptation in the wilderness, the recognition of his emphasis on the Kingdom, and the calling of the first disciples. Isn't that amazing; all within 20 verses! Which section grabbed your attention the most? Why? I could share several thoughts and impressions on each of these topics but the one that caught my eye the most was his announcement that the Kingdom of God is near! (Verses 14-15) Several scholars have pointed to this topic as our Lord's greatest concern. The arrival of God's Kingdom was central to Jesus' proclamation. People are to repent and believe the gospel because God's Kingdom has arrived in the person of Jesus. The number of references to the Kingdom in Jesus' teaching are surprising in Mark but also in Matthew and Luke as well. I will highlight these from time to time as we read through Mark. Something from my seminary days comes to mind. God's Kingdom has two dimensions: the already and not-yet. The Spirit is active in Jesus' life and ministry with miracles, profound teaching, and a sacrificial death to seal the deal. The Kingdom is here! But there is more, much more to come. We await Christ's return. The ultimate judgment of evil, the final establishment of justice, and the eternal fellowship with

Christ as the one who reigns are still yet to come. How has the Spirit stirred your heart as you read and reread these first twenty verses?

#### DAY 2 – Mark 1:21-45

The ministry of Jesus appears to begin in Capernaum (V21). I have walked through the ruins of this village and the sign as my group entered says, “The City of Jesus.” There are a number of reasons for that. He taught there, did miracles there, and Peter & Andrew lived there. It is right next to the Sea of Galilee. I felt the most inspiration there as our tour to the Holy Land visited many places in Galilee. Jerusalem became even more special to me but Capernaum was a place where God touched my heart as the Lord touched so many hearts there 2000 years ago as well. The teaching ministry of Jesus is mentioned in verse 22 as he spoke with “real authority.” But the emphasis is on the Lord’s miracles in these verses, of course. Time and again, we see Jesus showing his identity as Messiah and then proclaiming it. As I have referenced before, “show and tell.” In fact, Jesus doesn’t want them to speak about what he is doing until the proper time. It seems that the reason for “don’t tell,” has to do with people misunderstanding the mission and identity of Jesus. Although miracles attest to the authority of his message (he is showing it first) concerning the Kingdom, he does not want to draw crowds who come simply for the miracles, as if this was just a “show.” So much more is at stake. How does Jesus’ launch into the lives of people inspire you? What verse or statement caught your attention? I am wanting to dwell on this simple phrase that describes Jesus, “Moved with compassion...” (V41). Jesus’ willingness to touch a ceremonially unclean leper reflects the new order of the Kingdom of God. You probably understand the significance of Jesus caring for and touching a person with leprosy. After just two days in Mark, you easily observe his approach to relaying the life of Jesus. In 16 short chapters, Mark will tell us more about the journey of Christ on earth than any other Gospel writer. How are you responding to our launch into this Gospel? What caught your eye today in our reading? Why?

#### DAY 3 – Mark 2

Jesus returns to his favorite city, Capernaum, and with it, one of the most illuminating stories is recorded about forgiveness, already knowing what people are thinking, the authority to forgive based on the Lord’s healing power, and the set up for his invitation to Matthew (Levi) to follow him. Matthew would end up being the author of Matthew’s amazing and unique book. From here we read about the powerful example of Matthew inviting people he knows to meet Jesus. This has always been a great way to make an impact for Christ. We courageously invite people to our homes we know for dinner or a party. A possible connection could lead to something life-changing as the aroma of Christ draws people to be interested and maybe even find faith in the Lord. After this Jesus gives an analogy that I have used in the jail time and again. Jesus introduces the idea of new faith in Jesus being like new wine which needs new wine skins. Many inmates see their need for Christ while incarcerated but after they are released, they go right back to the old wine skin and their faith too often bursts and spills out to become useless. The final topic gives insights into the Sabbath. The religious people of Jesus’ day had so many requirements and stipulations that no one enjoyed the Sabbath because they always fell short of what was demanded. Jesus gives us the most freeing statement about the Sabbath in verse 27, “The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath.” (NLT) We will read more about the Sabbath in the days ahead but this statement is the clearest to me. How do you respond

to our readings today? Doesn't this chapter give us such a full and insightful record of the ways of Jesus?! The people were very confused about a true and gracious relationship with God. Jesus brought clarity and new freedom. Which of these amazing topics caught your eye? Why?

#### DAY 4 – Mark 3

Even though Jesus was attracting large crowds, it surely wasn't about them knowing his identity. The only ones who perceive who he truly was would be the people possessed by an evil spirit (Verses 11 -12). Even his own family did not understand, as we read in verse 21. We aren't sure why his family wanted to seize him. It seems to be motivated by misguided concern or even hostility. Jesus' brothers and sisters were not among his followers until after his resurrection. The secret of Jesus being the Messiah is an important aspect of the Gospel of Mark until Jesus is in Jerusalem after chapter 11. I mentioned the possibility of misunderstanding the identity of Jesus on Day 2, but here I add the challenge of the Roman authorities. They might respond negatively to an extremely popular preacher who proclaimed the arrival of God's kingdom, also performing marvelous healings, and having his followers recognize him as the chosen one. Roman authorities would not tolerate such a situation and would immediately seek to suppress such a movement. It was essential for our Lord to teach the timeless principles of God's Kingdom preparing his followers to understand the truth, as well as interpret his sacrificial death correctly. This would take some time to sink in. We know Jesus ministered for three years. God orchestrated his plan in such a way that the people would know Jesus' identity when all was said and done on the cross and after the empty tomb. In this chapter, Jesus addresses their misunderstanding about the Sabbath and about the source of his power. Each step we take through Mark adds to our understanding of Jesus and why we love to follow him. What caught your eye in this chapter?

#### DAY 5 – Mark 4:1-20

Our focus on this one parable is on purpose. This parable is always the first recorded in the other Gospels and is especially illuminating. I find it very helpful knowing that people throughout history will respond to the message of Christ in a variety of ways. It is then not surprising that a smaller percentage of Christians genuinely pursue the Lord wholeheartedly. The fourth soil describes the fruitfulness of a heart that is fertile. In between the parable and its explanation, Jesus tells his disciples why he will teach through parables. Unless people are eager for the truth and willing to embrace Christ, the parables might have no meaning to them. The hidden nature of parables makes them an especially powerful tool in separating those who truly want to know from those who are jazzed by the miracles and the crowds. There's no question that soil number three gets my attention; "...the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things." (V19) Isn't it fascinating that the issues in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century are still the issues we have today?! The "desire of other things," reminds me of the first commandment from Mt Sinai. "You shall have no other gods before me." (Ex 20:3) Love and loyalty are the primary concerns of our covenant God who desires an exclusive relationship with us. We downplay the importance of this posture. It doesn't fit our independent approach to life. But when it says, "love the Lord your God with all your heart...", it reveals the priority of love and loyalty toward God. I felt the conviction as I read this familiar passage again. What stood out to you from the longest parable recorded by Mark?

## WEEK 2

It may appear that Mark does not have much organization in this script about the life of Jesus but I think he actually groups certain themes together very well, always trying to keep it in chronological order. He places several parables back-to-back. He highlights a few of the more inspiring events together. He tackles the problem of people misunderstanding Jesus and who he is. These themes will be the focus of our readings this week. I only give you 5 days of readings for one week so that if you need a day or two to catch up, you can. Don't be in a hurry; please meditate on the significance of these events in the Life of Christ. In fact, reading the passage over twice can really help to "take it in."

### DAY 6 – Mark 4:21-41

After recording one of the most profound and insightful parables with four soils, Mark continues with three more parables that are not nearly as easy to understand. But that is why Jesus spoke in parables so that people who wanted to know more would pursue more or the opposite, they might give up too easily. In verses 24 & 25, the comparison is listening or not listening. Jesus says that those who "really" listen will be eager for more. But others will listen only as long as their ears are tickled. Literally, Jesus says, "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more." (V24) This refers to the attitude with which the word of Jesus is being received. A receptive heart pleases God and he delights in revealing even more to the earnest disciple. The next parable returns to the analogy of a seed. The fourth soil in 4:20 produced thirty, sixty, and even a hundred-fold. In verses 26 to 29, Jesus teaches the crowds about the mystery of a seed growing in fertile soil. If the soil of the heart is fertile, God's seed (His Word) will grow in you. One day all will be revealed and those with good soil, a heart redeemed by Jesus, are ready for the final judgment. Verse 29 points to the time of the harvest which most scholars associate with the final judgment and the inauguration of God's Kingdom. A "sickle" is a frequent symbol of the final judgment. This section ends with Jesus calming the storm in verses 35 to 41. There's an aspect of this story that I haven't noticed before. "There were also other boats with them." (V36) We might think that the only people adversely affected by the storm were the disciples in the same boat with Jesus. It is interesting to me that the Lord blessed the other boats as well, as the storm was causing havoc in those boats also. I imagine that the Jewish people in the other boats were asking God to help them. The Lord heard their prayers too. Verse 41 ends with the question that Mark desires to answer the most, "Who is this man?" His Gospel is dedicated to making the answer very clear. I thought this was a rich collection of parables along with a relevant story of how the Lord can intervene in the storms of our lives. What caught your eye?

### DAY 7 – Mark 5:1-20

This is one event that Mark elaborates on because it is such a significant story that answers the question from 4:41 about the real identity of Jesus and also reveals the reason for God's goodness in a person's life. If you looked at a map of the Sea of Galilee, this region would be located on the east side which was fairly remote, and the villages were spread out. Most maps will give an approximate location for the place where Jesus delivered this demon-possessed man. The courage and authority of Jesus are on display as his disciples apparently stay in the boat. As we have previously noticed, the demon is the one

who identified Jesus as the Son of God. This was still not clear to the disciples and absolutely opposed by the religious leaders. Jesus was not in danger even though the man had caused great harm to others. The people did not know what to do with Jesus and I am quite sure they didn't know how to deal with this liberated man either. So, in verse 17, they asked Jesus to leave. This was a gentile territory and the presence of Jesus was a first for them. That means that their first response was skepticism and even rejection. However, the man obeyed the Lord's command and told people throughout that region about what Jesus did for him. They might not know who Jesus is, but they know who this guy used to be. "Everyone was amazed at what he told them." (V20) The healed man shared his story just like God calls us to share our story. Now something happens that will not be evident until the end of chapter 7. Verse 31 tells us that Jesus is again in the region of the Ten Towns (Decapolis). As Chapter 8 begins it says, "About this time another large crowd had gathered..." (8:1) This crowd was saying, "Everything he does is wonderful. He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak." The people previously told Jesus to go away but now they rejoice in what he is doing. The testimony of the liberated man spread as he shared the message about Jesus and when he arrived again in the region of the Ten Towns, this time they received him with joy. I think that is a fascinating development as the message of Jesus spreads to this gentile region and people believe in him. How might you share your story about what Jesus has done for you with others?

#### DAY 8 – Mark 5:21-43

Mark spends another longer section explaining the story of two miraculous healings. These are both insightful and inspirational. Most likely Jairus was a Pharisee or worked closely with the Pharisees, but his humble gesture made him unique as "he fell at his feet." Jairus must have had some previous experience with Jesus. He had to touch the heart of our Lord since so many of the religious leaders were questioning him; Jairus was seeking him. Jairus' village was a bit of a walk and could have possibly seemed longer because there were so many people crowding the road that they were probably moving slower than normal. This had to be upsetting to Jairus since he has a dying daughter and it is taking longer. Add to that, the interruption of the bleeding woman, so Jairus' hope is dwindling. The story quickly shifts to the unclean woman who had to be especially determined to get to Jesus. We can understand her as an outsider. Her condition would make it impossible to participate in the normal life of a community. She had been isolated for 12 years which makes her determination even more impressive. She was afraid because of the people's view of her, but fear could also be awe of what Jesus had done for her. (V33) We learn something from her faith as she completely believed that Jesus was the answer to her problems. Jesus addresses her as "Daughter," which had to sound marvelous for a woman rejected by society. The statement from Jesus is also very promising, "Your faith has made you well (healed/saved)." The word is "sozo" and is usually translated as "saved." The woman's faith in Jesus for physical healing at the same time became faith in him for salvation from sin. As they approach Jairus' home, they are told that his daughter has died. Jesus' words must have been enough for him, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith." So, Jesus and Jairus continue to his house; otherwise, Jesus would have turned around and left. The fact that the crowd laughed seems quite inappropriate since the girl has died. But there was the custom of having professional mourners in that day. Jesus left those mourners behind and revealed the power of God over death in verses 41 & 42. These two stories help us see Jesus in action and can be used by the Spirit to increase our faith. How does this reading today inspire your faith?

## DAY 9 – Mark 6:1-29

The very first section gets my attention. Jesus could only do a few miracles in Nazareth because of unbelief. That truth is especially interesting to me and challenges me to remember that. A lack of faith now will have the same results still today. (V5) Also, I noticed that Jesus referred to himself as a prophet which is a bit of a change as he had been downplaying his identity because of the potential of misunderstanding. But he is beginning to open the door to his true identity. The next event is fairly familiar to me because both Matthew and Luke include the sending of his disciples to share the good news as well. Mark is much more concise compared to the other Gospel authors, however, he shares the same principle about looking for receptivity versus moving on if people aren't interested or won't listen. Mission work around the world applies this principle as those on mission look for a "person of peace." (Luke 10:6) Especially in Muslim parts of the world, finding a person of peace is essential to establishing a connection with the people there. Also, Mark often summarizes certain events and at the same time will elaborate on others. The next section is about John's beheading and the story is explained very thoroughly. Herod, the King, was very interested in Jesus and well-acquainted with John the Baptist. The identity of Jesus is the forerunner to John's demise. The transfer from John's ministry to Jesus is fully realized in this story. John said of Jesus in John 3:30, "He must become greater; I must become less." (NIV) Jesus affirms John more than once in his ministry which is interesting because John only lived a short life. Sometimes we think the duration of our lives means God is pleased with us. But John was as significant as any prophet proclaiming the way. But God allowed John to be executed and yet John was elevated as one who served God well. I want us to think about that. John's death was unjust but he received is just reward in heaven. Amen?! The culmination of John's life has caused some consternation in me but I have come to accept the truth that this life is not the long life I long for. The long life is fast approaching when all will be clear in eternity. The Lord has impressed on me the importance of keeping an eternal perspective when so much of our everyday lives is so earthbound. How do you respond to the tragic story of John? How are you sharing the good news with others?

## DAY 10 – Mark 6:30-56

These verses represent a 24-hour period in the life of Christ. One of the most familiar miracles of Jesus is found in this section as he feeds +5000 people since 5000 represented just the number of men present. I try to put myself in the shoes of the disciples or even just being one person in the crowd. I think I would get it but the disciples and the people are still blind to who Jesus really is. After Jesus walks on water, verse 52 says, "They still didn't understand the significance of the loaves. Their hearts were too hard to take it in." Mark records the words of Jesus in 8:18-21 challenging the disciples about their lack of understanding. Jesus said, "You have eyes—can't you see? You have ears—can't you hear? Don't you remember anything at all? When I fed the 5000 with five loaves..." It is Mark's purpose to reveal Jesus because he knows how confused and hard-hearted even the disciples were. He tells the story because it is actually very clear that Jesus is the Messiah but the people then and the people now often miss it. Enough happened in this one day to precisely prove Jesus was/is God. But the key factor is having a soft heart through faith. The author of Hebrews often admonishes his readers not to harden their hearts. The common problem with human beings is unbelief as well as solely looking at life through their own human lenses. Hebrews 4 compares our response to the response of people in the wilderness who lacked faith. "God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to

enter because they disobeyed God. So, God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today!" (4:6-7) The writer then quotes David, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts." Our heart's response to God is a daily issue of concern. Soft hearts are hearts full of faith so that we may see more clearly. Recently I read Psalm 37:3-5. I want to add these words to our thoughts today. This represents the right heart response: "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will... (help you.)" (NIV) The disciples did not yet have eyes of faith. How about you?

## WEEK 3

This is the most thoughtful and reflective journey through Mark I have ever taken. First, I have read the Gospel of Mark the least compared to the other three Gospels. Second, many other times I have gone through Mark, I have read one chapter a day which made Mark the shortest but also the quickest. However, I now know that Mark gives us the most thorough record of Jesus and I am loving that. Our readings this week are a mixture of miracles and teaching that is especially meaningful. Jesus is the real deal and he is worth following.

### DAY 11 – Mark 7:1-23

As I read through these 23 verses, I have to admit that they remind me of what I have been reading in Galatians. This past Sunday Tyler began his series on Galatians entitled, “Free at Last.” Religious Jews were pushing the people with the law telling them they needed to obey the laws and believe in Jesus to be saved. Both were necessary. Religious requirements have been emphasized since the beginning. This causes leaders/pastors/teachers to focus on how things look on the outside. You may say the right things but your hearts are full of pretense. “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (V6) Originally, this is from Isaiah 29:13, which was obviously true in Isaiah’s day as well. Jesus is emphasizing the same idea when he tells them that what comes out of the heart is the most crucial. The dietary laws of the Jews are ancient and strictly enforced. But Jesus says that how you eat (with ceremonially clean hands) or what you eat (clean or unclean foods) only pertains to the human digestive system and has little consequence to the morality of a person. But the things of the heart are what really matter to God. The list of internal vices is quite convicting with greed, lust, pride, sexual sin, envy... any of which can creep into our hearts and defile us from within. These are the issues that trouble our Lord and too often are ignored by us as long as we keep up the good show. Again, Galatians will challenge our propensity to think of religion over holiness. In fact, Galatians will be the first letter from Paul to contrast the flesh with the Spirit. These both are issues of the heart. “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.) have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” (Romans 8:5) Jesus demonstrates a major concern over what is true on the inside. And the facts are, the Lord knows what is true on the inside in your life and mine. How does this topic touch your life?

### DAY 12 – Mark 7:24 to 8:13

The final verses of chapter 7 connect to the first event in chapter 8, the feeding of the 4000. I have already made reference to the Ten Towns (5:20; 7:31) and the region called the Decapolis which means ten cities/towns. Chapter 5 brought Jesus to this area for the first time. It was a Gentile region with pigs, extreme demon activity, and little to no knowledge of Jesus. Jesus frightened them when he delivered the demon-possessed man and cast the demons into the herd of pigs. They asked him to leave the area. But now, in our reading today, the people are amazed and spreading the news about Jesus. A large crowd gathers and the Lord miraculously feeds all of them (8:9). As I said a few days ago, the people have been intrigued by the man who testified that Jesus delivered him from demon bondage (5:19-20). Now they are pursuing Jesus out of curiosity and spiritual emptiness. It reminds me of the story in John 4 of a woman who met Jesus at the community well. He shared with her the truth and she was liberated by the



Lord. You can read it for yourself (John 4:1-42). “Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, ‘He told me everything I ever did!’” (V39) Jesus helped one woman in John 4 and one man in Mark 5 who both told many others what he had done. Many people believed because of the testimony of another which caused them to seek after the Lord for themselves. Listen to these words from John 4:42, “Then they (the people) said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.’” Your testimony can stir someone’s heart to seek after Jesus so that they might personally encounter him and be saved. Don’t minimize the power of your story about Jesus. God has been using a believer’s testimony since Jesus walked the earth. And he will continue to do so as Revelation 12:11 clearly states, “And they (believers) have defeated him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die.” Our genuine testimony about Jesus and what he means to us has the potential to soften hearts toward him and at the same time defeat the evil one. How might you share your testimony as you journey through life today or this week?

#### DAY 13 – Mark 8:14 to 9:1

As always, there is a lot to think about from this reading today. This section begins with how they don’t get it; Jesus has fed 5000 people and they are worried about having bread to eat. But before we finish this section, Peter is declaring that Jesus is the Messiah. So, it is not surprising to me that our Lord would begin to open their eyes to the future and what will happen to him. Of course, this is all within God’s plan. In Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, he said, “This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” (Acts 2:23) When Peter first heard Jesus talking about his suffering and death (V31), Peter rebuked the Lord but by Pentecost, he understands the purpose and plan of God for the cross. As the identity of Jesus is revealed to the disciples, the stakes go up. “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.” (V34) Jesus is meant to be in the driver’s seat. This means he is the Lord of your life. As his follower, your next step is to let him lead your life. Also, the last verse of our reading has been confusing for people. “I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God arrive in great power!” (9:1) The meaning of this verse has been debated. It might suggest that some of the disciples will (1) witness Jesus’ resurrection, (2) experience the coming of the Spirit upon the church, (3) see the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, or (4) witness Jesus’ transfiguration as a foretaste of God’s coming Kingdom. I think of the birth of the church through the Spirit. 3000 people believing and being baptized in Acts 2. The Book of Acts tells the story of God’s Kingdom arriving and it is still progressing even now. I told you that a repeated theme for Mark is the Kingdom of God. So, quite frankly, it could be any of these possibilities I have listed. What do you think? And, how do you see the Kingdom advancing still today?

#### DAY 14 – Mark 9:2-29

Let’s begin with the last first. The statement that the Lord ends with is interesting. Hadn’t the disciples prayed already? This story begins in verse 14 but doesn’t conclude until verse 27. Mark thought that the Lord’s authority over the invisible realm was worth emphasizing. Jesus chose to emphasize prayer as faith in action. The greatness of Jesus and the significance of prayer get my attention. What do you think

Jesus meant by “This kind can only be cast out by prayer?” (V29) You might not realize that this is the fourth exorcism performed by Jesus in Mark’s Gospel. You might be critical of the disciples and their lack of faith, or maybe you are sympathetic, but the truth is Mark continues to elevate Christ and his authority. Jesus pointed to faith as the key in verse 23 but concluded with the necessity of prayer. As I said, faith and prayer go together. As interesting and significant as this part of the reading is to me, the first is even more memorable. In fact, Peter writes about it in his second letter (2 Peter 1:16-18), when he says that he witnessed the glory of God envelop Jesus with majestic splendor and God’s voice was heard from heaven. The transfiguration of Christ clearly revealed the pre-incarnate glory of the Son of God in a human body. This affirms Peter’s profession that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), declared six days previously. The thought behind the presence of Moses and Elijah is twofold: they represent the law and the prophets; and, there is no evidence of their dead bodies as Elijah was taken in the air and Moses was no more. No wonder the befuddled Peter wants to build altars for all of them. One more point, Elijah was present in the person of John the Baptist because he prepared the way for the Lord, our Savior, Jesus. That is the message of verses 11 to 13. As I read this through a second time, the phrase “listen to him,” (V7) caught my eye. Jesus said in John’s Gospel, if you love me, you will obey me. Listening is more than hearing; it is obeying. Having Jesus as my Lord, the One who directs my life, means that obedience is the only genuine response that I want to have. I felt that this was God’s message to me for today. What phrase or statement caught your attention? Why?

#### DAY 15 – Mark 9:30-50

As I read through these verses, I noticed several interesting statements that caught my attention. To begin with, Jesus wants to spend more time with his disciples. He had big plans for them but they were far from ready. These verses seem to be especially given to the disciples for their growth and preparation but they are slow to get it as verse 32 says. Jesus knew that just speaking to the crowds would not really multiply because the crowds were observers and not doers. His disciples were especially important to him and to the mission. I take that thought in, as I might have many acquaintances but miss out on the close connection of discipleship and mentoring. Jesus poured into a few even though they were slow to take it in. As I said, Capernaum (V33) was thought of as Jesus’ home in Galilee even though he was from Nazareth. The disciples felt special and chosen by Jesus but their concern for a pecking order was rebuked by the Lord. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. That was true then and continues to be true today. We might be like John who was concerned about someone using the name of Jesus but the Lord wasn’t bothered by it. The disciples might also have wanted to control things along with being the greatest. You might be surprised by verses 39 to 41. However, it is a foreshadowing, in my opinion, of how the Gospel will spread, and no person is called to control it, package it, or own it. But no other words are more troubling than the call to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye. These sayings were not meant to be interpreted literally because cutting off a hand never stopped one from sinning. What Jesus conveys by these warnings is that no sin is worth going to hell for. It is better to repent—even if repenting is painful like cutting off a hand—than to suffer the punishment of hell. The word Jesus uses for hell is “Gehenna.” Gehenna means “valley of Hinnom,” which bordered Jerusalem on the southwest. It was a garbage dump for the city, and the continual burning of refuse there became a metaphor for the final place of judgment for the wicked. As you read through these words again, what caught your eye?

Why?

## WEEK 4

This week launches us toward Jerusalem and the rest of Mark's Gospel pertains to Jesus and his final days on earth. As the crucifixion nears, Jesus will raise the stakes for his disciples. Discipleship, serving, clearing the temple, topics of eternity, etc. will fill these next three chapters. I am impressed with how organized Mark actually is through this Book. We will continue to take it slowly and soak it in.

### DAY 16 – Mark 10:1-27

This section begins with the controversial topic of marriage and divorce which the Pharisees were trying to use to trap the Lord. John the Baptist had been imprisoned for what he said about divorce and remarriage. If Jesus answered in agreement with John, maybe the Pharisees could get him in trouble with Herod. Obviously, Jesus presented a very high view of marriage and the necessary commitment to it. The demise of many marriages stems from what Jesus called "hard hearts." (V5) Jesus has begun his journey to Jerusalem as is mentioned four different times in this chapter. As Jesus went, he continued to teach and minister to people. Sometimes I get so focused on where I am going and what is on the schedule next, that I don't include the God-ordained interruptions on my way there. This quality is easy to see in Jesus' life as he responds to people and opportunities with an unhurried approach to life. He slows down to bless the children even when the disciples would want him to ignore their presence. The Pharisees were an unwanted interruption but the children are obviously special to the Lord. Because the qualities of the Kingdom were always on the mind of the Lord, he uses children to illustrate how one enters the Kingdom. The idea is that children display humility, curiosity, and simple belief. The next interruption is the question from a rich man. You get the impression that Jesus is showing this man, and us, how to earn eternal life. That was the biggest error in this man's thinking, that it was possible to earn eternal life. Jesus knew the thoughts of this rich man already; riches were his idol. He could do all the other things listed but he could not give up his earthly treasures. No one can earn salvation because no one has ever fulfilled the law by obeying it 100% of the time. We all fall short just like this rich man. Without repentance and faith, we are condemned by the law. To close this section, Jesus reverses their perspective on material wealth. The popular idea was that riches were a sign of God's favor. Jesus taught, that more often than not, riches are an obstacle to entering the Kingdom and surrendering to Christ. Do you think that is true? In fact, the disciples asked how anyone could be saved. Verse 27 probably means that although salvation by one's efforts is impossible, however, by God's grace people can be saved through faith and faith alone. Human nature is so often based on earning and climbing the ladder compared to the Kingdom of God based on faith, humility, and surrender. How do you respond to the Lord's teaching in our reading today?

### DAY 17 – Mark 10:28-52

As with every reading in Mark, we learn insightful truth from Jesus and he backs it up with authority. Yesterday, we read about a rich man who was unwilling to give up riches for the Lord and went away sad. But now Jesus affirms his disciples with the assurance that they will be blessed by God for their sacrifice (Verses 29-30). It seems to me that the greatest blessings promised are reserved in heaven, "But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be

the greatest then.” (V31) This idea spills over to James and John who are wanting to be seated at the right and left of Christ’s throne. A timeless principle for God’s Kingdom is clearly presented by Jesus with him serving as the prime example. Being the least now, as a servant, points to honor later in heaven. But right now, the call for God’s children is that of a servant. The idea is to follow Jesus and do what he has done. Do you remember the WWJD bracelets? “What would Jesus do?” The push and pull of this world can trick us into thinking that flaunting our accomplishments and pushing our way around are necessary and admirable. But the Lord says, “But among you it will be different.” (V43) The mission of Jesus is portrayed in verse 45 as clearly as any other statement, in my opinion. “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” One more thought about our reading: Bartimaeus believed and cried out to Jesus as the Son of David. This is no small thing. It actually seems as if Bartimaeus knew of Jesus’ Davidic ancestry. The point is that Bartimaeus had a high view of the Lord. He didn’t ask Jesus for money which would have been the normal request. He believed Jesus for healing. I love the simplicity and depth of his faith. I enjoyed reading these verses which affirm what I know about Jesus. He came to serve and sacrifice willingly. May I have that same ambition!

#### DAY 18 – Mark 11:1-33

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem and stays in a village named Bethany at night but makes his way into the city each day. All of these events in this chapter are repeated in the other Gospels especially the triumphal entry into the city on what we call Palm Sunday. It seems evident that Jesus knew about Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt.” Jesus intentionally planned to enter Jerusalem on a donkey to fulfill this prophecy. Is there anything that stands out to you from this familiar story? Something else caught my attention and I have referenced it before. “My temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (V17) The inclusive nature of the ministry of Jesus reminds us that he came for all people. The temple was a symbol of God’s presence and the commerce in the outer court would especially hinder the Gentiles from participating. Prayer seems to be on the mind of the Lord as he connects prayer to the withering fig tree. The obstacles of prayer in verses 23 to 25 would be the lack of faith, the lack of praying, and any blockage from unforgiveness. There are many things in life that keep us from praying. We are busy people; we are so distracted; we can often lack faith... what’s the use of praying? But of all the things that disturbed Jesus about the activity in the temple, the absence of prayer bothered him the most. In a few days, Jesus will long for his disciples to pray with him and they will fall asleep. “Simon, are you asleep? Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour?” (14:37) As I get older, I realize that some aspects of life will slow down but prayer does not have to be one of those things. To converse with God, combined with faith, has to be one of the greatest gifts and privileges for the believer. Please, do not minimize prayer. The Lord delights in our prayers and promises to listen. “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” (1 John 5:14-15, NIV) How’s that for a promise?!

#### DAY 19 – Mark 12:1-17

Obviously, this is a shorter reading but the implications are many and the insights are especially important. You might question Mark regarding Jesus teaching in parables for the first time (V1) because

we have actually read several parables previously. But you realize that Jesus is now in Jerusalem which is the stronghold of the religious leaders so his teaching will have a creative rebuke challenging their hard-heartedness. This is clear in the only parable that Mark actually records during these days before Jesus' death. Matthew includes several parables (6 stories to be exact), that Jesus taught during his final week after the triumphal entry. But this parable is the most illuminating and confrontational. It is interesting to know that Isaiah shared a very similar analogy in 5:1-7. You would do well to check Isaiah's prophecy because I am quite sure Jesus was retelling that story to the condemnation of the religious leaders (V12). The story seems quite straightforward to us but I'm not sure if the people understood that Jesus was the beloved son (V6). However, the religious leaders realized that they were the tenant farmers who were accused of mistreating the servants of God and it will be blatantly clear in a few days that they "grabbed him (the son) and murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard." (V8) Verse 11 uses words that don't immediately seem right. "This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see." Literally, it is marvelous in our eyes. But the rejection of Jesus and his gruesome death on the cross neither seems marvelous nor wonderful. However, it declares that God's plan has been accomplished so that Jesus is the satisfactory atonement for our sins on the cross, right? That is wonderful for us. This leads to further conflict as the religious leaders try to trap Jesus with flattery and a deceptive question to get him in trouble. (Verses 13-17) But Jesus can't be tricked, not by them or by you. Jesus' response is very inspiring to me because it is so wise as the Lord remains calm even though he knows they are up to no good. The leaders had carefully thought out their line of questioning and Jesus prevailed with a steady posture and an incredibly insightful response. Don't you just love the Lord! He is our example on so many fronts. How does Jesus impress you and what impresses you from the reading today?

#### DAY 20 – Mark 12:18-44

Remember that Jesus is in Jerusalem now and his teaching is more specific to the misunderstanding and erroneous doctrines of the religious leaders. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and the afterlife. With religious pride, they approach Jesus with a tricky question about marriage in heaven. Obviously, Jesus knew they didn't believe in heaven and easily realized their deception. The Sadducees focused all their doctrine on the Torah, from Genesis to Deuteronomy. So, Jesus answered them from Exodus 3 about the eternal life of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. On the other hand, most everyone we know believes in an afterlife so this issue isn't quite as concerning to the people we know. But the idea of what life will be like in heaven is a relevant question. Jesus said, "In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven." (V25) There's no doubt that the message of the Bible promises us a resurrected body. The question is when? All of the references I have studied point to Christ's return and then all believers in heaven and on earth will be changed with a new body. But the blessing of what Jesus says affirms the fact that we will be in heaven, as believers, when we die. No delay! The next subject is very familiar to us and to the audience in Jesus' day. There's no question that the Bible elevates the "Shema." Deuteronomy 6:4 was recited by faithful Jews every day. Jesus brings focus to our relationship with God compared to the religious leaders who complicated it so that they would have more control. Jesus affirms the man who has a focused faith in verse 34. An often-repeated concern in the Bible is hypocrisy. Verses 38 to 40 summarize the Lord's rebuke of the pretentious religious leaders. The Lord is not impressed with outward religiosity but rather private sincere devotion as demonstrated by the poor widow (V42). These are crucial issues because they confront religion and how easily false piety can become the focus. There was very little in the religious environment of Jerusalem that pleased our Lord.

Please do not think you (we) are exempt from having more of a show than genuine faith. How do you respond to the confrontations and conversations in these verses? Also, praying the “Shema” every day is not a shallow practice if it is sincere, right?!

## WEEK 5

This is the finale with Jesus in Jerusalem and the authorities set to arrest him. After our first reading this week, we will read Mark's account in chapters 14 through 16, telling us about events leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. These events might be fairly familiar to you with bad guys like Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and the soldiers. But these events are clearly planned by God to accomplish the redemption of the world. These four chapters are the hallmark of our faith. This is the culmination of Mark's thoughtful Gospel about Jesus the Messiah.

### DAY 21 – Mark 13:1-37

This is Jesus telling us about the future and his second coming. This topic is usually fascinating to most believers. I think Jesus's words about his certain return are the most significant on the subject. The Bible is filled with revelation about the end times and his return, but no other place (besides Matthew 24) gives such a complete record of what we can expect. The outline that Jesus uses begins with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. The Temple in Jesus' day was an amazing sight, quite a complex. Nothing was like it in the known world at that time. King Herod had it built to look good to the Jews. Herod was known for all his building projects. The massive destruction of the Temple in 70AD points to the ultimate devastation that will accompany the end times. Wars, natural disasters, persecution of believers, and the intensity of life in Judea and Jerusalem will increase leading up to the end. Two decisive events are mentioned in verses 11 and 14: everyone will have a chance to hear the Good News and the abomination of desecration will be set up in the Temple; at least that is the specifics from Matthew's record even though Mark does not get that specific in verse 14. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 are often thought of as what Jesus is referring to in verse 14. But what this means for us as believers jumps off the page in verses 24 to 27 with the coming of the Son of Man. This will be the greatest event in history as Christ comes in victory and justice will prevail then and forevermore. Jesus shared these words to assure his disciples of the final outcome but also to encourage them to remain strong in the face of persecution. Obviously, the disciples faced intense persecution as the Lord launched his church. Just read the Book of Acts. History tells us that all the disciples were martyred except John who was imprisoned on an island until he died. This is definitely an important chapter for us as believers who are always anticipating the return of Christ. Amen! How has God spoken to you through the words of Jesus about his second coming?

### DAY 22 – Mark 14:1-42

There are three especially inspiring events in our reading for today: the anointing of Jesus, the last supper with the disciples, and praying in the garden. But these are colored by Judas's betrayal. It always gets me thinking about how a guy like Judas could do what he did and be so close to Jesus for three years. Jesus indicates that the devil had a grip on him, especially in the Gospel of John. We get inklings of his nature as he was known to be greedy, had a reputation for stealing, and the betrayal pertained to money. Tomorrow's reading will be the culmination of the betrayal, as Judas will kiss Jesus to identify him to the soldiers he came with. His tragic end is recorded in Matthew 27:3-10. Judas's fate soberly warns people who follow along with Jesus but never commit themselves to him personally. Which of these heartfelt events gets your attention the most? (The Anointing of Jesus, 14:3-9; The Last Supper,

14:12-26; Jesus praying in the Garden, 14:32-42) You probably have a few questions for each of these events. But the event that has always jumped off the page for me is the Garden. I think of myself as a disciple of Jesus and this story highlights his call for me to be a praying companion with him. He asked all the disciples to pray. I think of his request to the disciples as one that transcends time. I believe Jesus wants us to be people that pray to him and with him. At the same time, I see the Lord's example of praying. He is incredibly honest and is obviously wrestling in prayer. In some ways, he doesn't want to go to the cross. The "cup" is sure to be the most difficult part as a poisonous cup of sin that he would ever drink. He is struggling in prayer. I prefer prayer time to be relaxed and calm. I prefer prayer time to be predictable and calculated. But that could keep me from being changed and from hearing God's voice. Jesus experienced both as he displayed a resolve from this point on to face the cross. And, he was changed as he shared a profound prayer, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." (V36) Over the years, the significance of prayer has multiplied in my life because God is changing me to perceive things more in line with what he cares about. Prayer is becoming a way of life. This event in the life of Jesus gives us a powerful example and a huge call for prayer. One more thought to consider: did you know that Jesus most likely prayed out loud? I have found praying out loud, not loud, per se, but with words expressing my heart to the Lord as a helpful way to be engaged in prayer. It also helps me to stay focused with a progressive connection to the Lord. What does this event reveal to you about prayer; about our Lord?

#### DAY 23 – Mark 14:43-72

These verses all take place in the middle of the night. This situation had to be quite intense with a troop of soldiers carrying swords and clubs, the weapons of the day. The retaliation is not what Jesus wanted as one of the men wielded a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's slave. In John 18:10, the person with the sword is Peter. But his courage would fade by the end of our reading today, of course. The disciples were overwhelmed and ran away. Jesus highlights the fact that this is just how the Scriptures predicted people would treat the Messiah. Isaiah 53:7-9 clearly declares this is how it will be for the Lord's Suffering Servant. How does Isaiah's record match this scene so precisely? Mark is known for telling people not to reveal what Jesus had done or who he was. But in verse 62 the identity of Christ is announced with, "I am!" But again, the story of Peter is most relevant to me. What situations have I been in that have caused me to shrink back from speaking forthrightly for the Lord? We don't see much humility in Peter until this crisis of faith in his life. He is ashamed and wept bitterly. From this point on, Peter is not noticed until the report from the women of an empty tomb Sunday morning. Plus, he doesn't play a strong role until Jesus meets him at the shore of the Sea of Galilee in John 21. His heart is broken and he is grieved about his sin. But he will repent, unlike Judas who gave up and took his own life. If you read Peter's two letters carefully, you will notice his genuine humility and gratitude for the restoration of his life. What do you think of when you picture Peter? I think you might have it wrong. This coming Sunday we will see another incident of Peter's human weakness and need for human approval. But he would repent again and be an instrument in God's hands until he is martyred for proclaiming the Gospel. How do these familiar verses speak to you today?

#### DAY 24 – Mark 15:1-20

Sometimes people think of Pilate as an innocent ruler who only did what the Jews wanted him to do. But he always had choices because he was the one in charge. In fact, there are other stories that describe



him as abusive and ruthless. His willingness to allow Joseph of Arimathea to have the dead body of our Lord might be solely about convenience. Pilate deduced that Jesus was no threat to the Roman government, so he had no reason to sentence him to death by crucifixion. He was a selfish, narcissistic leader who made impulsive choices that he thought served him best. In Matthew's account, Pilate's wife had a dream of the Lord's innocence which he ignored and also Matthew includes the fact that Pilate washed his hands before the crowd, "I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours." (Mt 27:19, 24) Easy for him to say, but he is the only one who could permit this execution. His sin equals Judas's sin, for example. In fact, I would suggest to you that Pilate was more heartless compared to Judas who demonstrated remorse over what he had done. Pilate had Jesus flogged "with a lead-tipped whip" (V15) before he was led to be crucified. I am pretty sure Jesus could have skipped that brutal beating but Pilate didn't care. Plus, it was the Roman soldiers who tormented Jesus as recorded in verses 16 to 20. Have you ever been surrounded by a mob of +20 villains? In the movies, the hero overcomes the mob but in real life, the victim gets pummeled. The thorns were imbedded in his head and the robe was ripped off his bloody skin. The ordeal could have lasted over an hour and Jesus just took it. They obviously knew something of his story as they pretended to worship him as a king. This scene is one of the most upsetting scenes to me. On the cross, he suffered alone but during this episode, he is getting direct blows, spit, beatings, and ridicule from human beings. How could people be so cruel? The suffering of Jesus has been depicted graphically in the movie "The Passion of the Christ." I have watched that movie twice but can't bring myself to watch it again. How does the suffering of Jesus for you (and me) touch your heart?

DAY 25 – Mark 15:21-47

The cross of Christ means so much to us. John Stott wrote a 300-page book on the meaning and significance of the cross. But as I read the Scripture today, I noticed that Mark only records these words of Jesus from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (V34) (Psalm 22:1) You might realize that these words are prophetic and come from a Psalm of David. Psalm 22 says as much about the cross as any Old Testament prophecy. Of course, Isaiah 53 is the most quoted about our Lord's suffering. But listen to these statements from the Psalm. Verse 1 has already been noted but here are several more: "Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads..." (22:7) Then, read verses 12 to 18 and you will be blown away by the precise description of the passion of our Lord. "My enemies surround me..." "My life is poured out like water..." "My strength has dried up..." "My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth." "They have pierced my hands and my feet." "They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing." Do you see what I mean? Mark 15:24 says just that, "Then the soldiers nailed him to the cross. They divided his clothes and threw dice to decide who would get each piece." Psalm 22 was written 1000 years before Jesus. The earliest mention of crucifixion goes back to only 600 BC during the Medes and Persians. However, it wasn't until the Roman Empire that the dominant form of capital punishment was crucifixion. It was slow, shameful, and torturous. The victims sometimes lived for days, and crows and dogs would feed on the victims even before they died. The six hours on the cross are mentioned without detail but every time the person on the cross wanted to breathe, they would have to push up on the nails to take air in. I am sure you know these facts and others, but the brutal death of Christ points to the possibility of suffering in this life because Jesus suffered for us. One of the most telling parts of this event records the curtain in the Temple being torn

from top to bottom when Jesus died. For me, this means that the way has been opened by Jesus to have access to God through his death. (Hebrews 10: 19-20) How has this event impacted you this time?

#### DAY 26 – Mark 16

Mark's Gospel definitely culminates with the resurrection but in a rather unique way. Most reliable Bible scholars agree that Mark did not write the "shorter" or "longer" endings in verses 9 to 20. But that does not mean that Mark's account ends there; it most likely means that his ending has been lost. I once spoke on this text for Easter and encouraged everyone to write their own ending. There's no doubt we are missing Mark's conclusion and so others were inspired to share a true ending with the disciples learning about the empty tomb and being commissioned by the Lord to preach this good news everywhere to everyone. We have been reading the words of Mark who often recorded Jesus's prediction of suffering, death, and then raising on the third day. Mark knew that was true and so did everyone else close to Christ. Mark is thought of as the first Gospel and the one that other writers referred to, like Luke, as a resource in writing their own Gospel account. Luke gives the most thorough record of Jesus after he rose from the dead and continued it with the Book of Acts. If he followed Mark precisely, it wouldn't make sense for him to include such a convincing argument for the resurrection and the appearance of Jesus to so many. I say all of that to support the idea that the last portion of Mark's Gospel has been lost so that well-meaning believers wrote a proper conclusion probably only a few years after Mark wrote his story of Jesus. Verses 19 & 20 definitely summarize what we know to be true. Jesus ascended into heaven and the apostles spread the message everywhere they went. The proper response to our readings this month in the Book of Mark should be the same. Let us spread the message of Jesus everywhere we go. How has God touched your heart through this last chapter; through the Book of Mark?