

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE LESSONS MARK



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Cover: Designed by Daniel Webster – Photo is magnification of Acts 17:11

Bible Quotations:

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

RADIO SERIES

DEVELOPED BY: DANIEL WEBSTER (2010)

Torah scroll - on sheepskin dating from 1155-1225



Courtesy of Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna

KEY VERSE:

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA, IN THAT THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND, AND

SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES

DAILY, WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO.

ACTS 17:11

THEME:

AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME,
WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.

JEREMIAH 29:13

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Preface

The lessons from Matthew to Revelation have been prepared through personal study of the New Testament. As an on-going part of our radio ministry in Ghana, it was decided to broadcast a series of teachings that would provide one lesson for each of the two hundred and sixty chapters of the New Testament. This work was completed over a five-year period from 2010 to 2015. These lessons are not intended as a commentary, or as an in-depth exegesis of each chapter. The lessons were written to be a concise, and consecutive teaching of the chapters of the New Testament, while providing practical instructions in Christian living. There is a strong emphasis in these lessons on the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The author's intent is not simply to help people learn the teachings of the New Testament, but more importantly, he desires that all would come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. Each lesson contains a section entitled "Today's Bible Question". This section is designed to address a relevant question, pertaining to the chapter lesson, or with a view to the present spiritual climate. The lessons will serve many purposes for those interested in the teachings of the New Testament. I envision this work helping various bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders who wish to use a consecutive approach to presenting the scriptures to those whom they teach. Each lesson has been kept to a standard of two typed pages, or between 1500 to 2000 words. This will allow the lessons to be easily adapted into a regular teaching schedule. Each lesson, including the bible question section, can be read in less than 15 minutes, leaving time for group discussions, or further commenting, during a 30 to 45 minute bible teaching class.

It is my hope that this work will serve many in the Christian community with a greater appreciation of the teachings of the New Testament, and also be used by God to bring people to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This work is dedicated to the glory of God, and the expansion of His kingdom both now and forevermore.

Daniel Webster
Oct. 2015

LESSONS IN MARK

Full scale 1st century fishing boat, Sea of Galilee, Israel



Image Courtesy of Dr. Carl Rasmussen - [Holy Land Photos](#)

“AND HE WENT UP UNTO THEM AND INTO THE BOAT, AND THE WIND CEASED. AND THEY WERE SORE AMAZED WITHIN THEMSELVES BEYOND MEASURE AND WONDERED.”

MARK 6:51

LESSON 29
Introduction to Jesus
MARK 1

In today's lesson we begin our study in the gospel of Mark. Mark writes of Jesus as the servant of God, with emphasis on the good works of Jesus. In this first chapter we move very rapidly into the works and ministry of Jesus, with no formal introduction to Jesus birth or lineage. We shall learn how Jesus became very popular and busy in His work, and yet still took time to pray and serve the needs of others.

The book begins by telling us about John whom Isaiah and Malachi prophesied about, as the forerunner of the coming Messiah. John's ministry was to prepare the way, for the Lord to come to His people Israel, by turning their hearts away from sin, and back toward God. While many people came to John to be baptized, he kept pointing them towards someone Mightier, who would come after Him. John was an important prophet and servant of the Lord, whose ministry was marked by humility. He lived very simply, with just the poorest of food and clothing, and said he was not even worthy to untie the sandals of the coming Messiah.

Jesus came to be baptized by John, and then was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil for 40 days. This was the commencement of Jesus earthly ministry, and Israel's introduction to their Messiah. A voice came from heaven at Jesus baptism, and said, "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". God was commending Jesus as His righteous servant to minister to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus set about preaching the gospel of the Kingdom around the regions of Galilee. He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave their fishing careers and to follow Him, and they immediately obeyed and followed Him.

When Jesus went into the synagogue in Capernaum and taught with authority, the people were amazed at Him, especially when they witnessed him cast out an unclean spirit from a man. This caused news of Jesus to spread around the region rapidly. While in Peter's home, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, and then in the evening the whole town gathered outside the house, bringing to him all kinds of sick and demon-possessed people, and Jesus healed them. We do well to take notice that the people came to Jesus, because they understood that He had the power to heal them, and teach them God's word with authority. They were attracted to Him; because of the way He freely gave to them, helping them with their needs. Today we find many who preach about God's giving, blessing, and helping. But how often do you find these preachers actually doing good, sharing, and helping the poor and needy. It is one thing to preach, but it is something else to do good and serve the needs of those you preach at. Many preachers perhaps miss this important balance in their work for God, and become preoccupied with their preaching, while neglecting to show personal interest in those they minister to. Someone has wisely said:

"They will not care how much you know, until they know how much you care!"

The work of God is not just a matter of preaching sermons, but must also, and more importantly, involve the good deeds we do in service to others.

After a very busy evening of ministering to the many needy people, Jesus woke very early the next morning, and sought a solitary place to be alone with His Father. He spent those early hours praying. The disciples were out searching for Him, and when they found Him, they reported that the people were looking for Him. Jesus said that they needed to go to other villages also, for this was the purpose of His mission. We can learn some important spiritual lessons from this also, namely that prayer is essential in conducting the work of God, and at times is more important than tending to people who desire our attention. The servant of God needs quiet time alone to listen to the voice of God in prayer, to strengthen and guide him in His work. People will always demand more time with the preacher, or the servant of God, and though it is important to minister to the needs of others, it can also infringe and hinder the needful and important spiritual exercises of prayer and the study of God's word.

Jesus was preaching in the synagogues throughout Galilee and casting out demons, showing himself to be very active and busy in His work. The work of God is a time-consuming occupation, for it seeks not only to bring people to the Lord, but also seeks to help minister to their many and varied needs. There are always plenty of people and plenty of needs, so the work is never finished.

When Jesus healed a certain man with leprosy, he warned the man not to publish the news to others, but to go and offer a sacrifice as Moses prescribed. The man however went about telling others about how Jesus had healed him, and this made it difficult for Jesus to be seen in public places. Jesus had to stay in deserted areas, or the people would give Him too much attention. Again, we see how Jesus differs from many who claim to be God's servants. Jesus does not seek the attention of the crowds, but chooses to do His work quietly without drawing attention. His ministry was to please God, not win popularity with the people. A mark of Christian maturity, and true spirituality, is when you see a servant of God drawing attention away from Himself, and towards the Lord Jesus Christ, as was the case with John the Baptist.

"And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose." Mk 1:7

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus work of ministering to many people, and how He spent quality time in prayer. We also learned about John the Baptist, God's servant who lived very simply and pointed attention towards Jesus rather than himself. Someone might ask the question, shouldn't we expect God's servants to be honored with more money, nice clothes, car, home, and the praise of people?

Actually, when we look at how Jesus, or John the Baptist lived among the people, and served God, we will notice that they did not take comforts to themselves. Jesus never owned a home, at least we do not read of this in the scripture. He did not carry about money with him, was often hungry and thirsty, and weary physically from His constant labors, as he moved about from village to village preaching and ministering to the people. John the Baptist is also a man who lived on the simplest of foods, eating wild honey and locusts, and dressing in crude camels hair garments. He probably looked a bit rough in appearance, as he was not living in a palace, but staying in the wilderness. The main focus of their lives was to preach God's righteousness and salvation, and this meant that they did not look to make their personal circumstances prosperous or comfortable.

Now it is good for us to honor, those who serve God in faith, by enabling them to carry out their good work, but we should not be expecting them to take all their profits from preaching, and build for themselves some little empire, where the people gather to worship them, rather than Jesus. Perhaps this sounds extreme, but in some churches the pastor seems to be exalted to such a high position above the people, and the congregation is completely captured by all his words. We must remember that anyone who serves the Lord is just a mere man, a sinner like the rest of us. We do a great injustice to the kingdom of God, when we exalt men above measure, applauding and honoring them with overflowing praise, filling their pockets with earthly riches. To be honest, there are very few men, who can handle such honor, praise and riches, for these things tend to capture a mans heart, and fill him with pride and false dependency.

It would be refreshing today to see some men serve God in a similar pattern to John the Baptist, choosing rather to live in poverty, separated from the world, and preaching righteousness, and not preaching things that tickle the ears of their listeners. It is not wrong for a man of God to own a car, or a house, if these things are used to serve the people of God. All possessions and money should be thought of as belonging to the Lord, and given to the man of God to aid him in his service for God, and not for personal indulgence, or inflating pride. Too often preachers and pastors are living so far above the standards of the people they serve, and are using their religious service to gain riches and luxury. This is clearly a violation of the principles that Jesus taught and lived before His disciples. May the Lord help us all to see the need to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. Our relationship with Christ is not intended to make us rich in this world, but rather rich in heaven. The sooner we can learn this, the more impact we can make for the gospel in our generation.

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matt 16:24

LESSON 30
Reaction to Jesus
MARK 2

In today's lesson we see Jesus again busy at work, as the servant of God, and laboring in the regions of Galilee. We shall see how the Pharisees and Scribes reacted to Jesus bringing several complaints against Him. Jesus used this occasion to teach about a whole new way in which God would deal with His people. Once they had to obey God under Law, or be cursed, but in the new covenant they would serve under the principle of Grace.

Jesus had returned to Capernaum and was doing some preaching there, and this caused large crowds to gather to hear Him. While in a house preaching, the crowds were so large that many were outside around the house, making it nearly impossible to enter into the house to see Jesus. When four men brought their crippled friend to the house to see Jesus, they could find no way to enter, so they climb up on the roof, and removed some of the loose roofing, and lowered the crippled man into the house for Jesus to heal. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the crippled man, "your sins are forgiven you". Now this may seem a strange thing for Jesus to say, for the man was brought to him to be healed, and yet Jesus is just talking about forgiving His sins. We can learn from this, that a man being forgiven of his sins is of much greater importance than his being healed from sickness or a crippled body. Jesus is much more interested in healing you from sin, so that you can be in heaven, then healing you from some physical sickness, only to make you comfortable for the few days you are in this world.

Some of the scribes were in the room when Jesus said these words, and they thought to themselves that Jesus was blaspheming, because he was forgiving sin, which they knew was something only God could do. It did not occur to them, that Jesus Himself was God, and so assumed that He was blaspheming with these words. Jesus knew their thoughts, and so he said to the crippled man that he should arise, take up his bed, and go his way. The man was instantly healed and all in the room marveled at the power that Jesus just demonstrated. Jesus had asked the people, which is easier to say, "your sins are forgiven", or "Arise, take up your bed and walk". To say to a cripple man to get up and walk, was clearly much more difficult to say, unless you had the power and authority of God to heal. Jesus was demonstrating that he not only had the power to heal the man, but also had the authority to forgive sins.

As Jesus taught again by the Seaside, and the crowds gathered to listen, He called another man to be a follower, Matthew, a tax collector. Matthew had Jesus to his house for dinner, and invited other tax collectors and sinners, and this made the Pharisees and Scribes complain to Jesus. They reacted to this with indignation, thinking how can this man of God, eat and drink with sinners. Jesus said to them, it is not the healthy that need a doctor, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Christians should remember this principle, when trying to share the gospel with others. Sometimes we confine ourselves to our church buildings, and preach to the converted, while there are many lost sinners outside the walls of our churches who need to hear of God's goodness and salvation. We should not be afraid to go into the world and preach the gospel wherever we meet people.

The Pharisees also complained that Jesus disciples did not fast like others. Jesus told them that they did not need to fast while the bridegroom (Jesus) was with them, and when He would be taken from them then they could fast. Fasting is a means of showing repentance, of sorrow before God, and therefore has it's place in our lives when we want to show God that we are sorry about our sin, or seeking for His guidance. Fasting is not meant to be some religious ritual that Christians are obligated to perform, without any apparent reason. It is an individual exercise of demonstrating a repentant heart, or seeking for the Lord's guidance and help in certain circumstances.

Jesus takes this opportunity to teach about a new way in which God will deal with His people. He uses two illustrations to make His point. He says no one will sew un-shrunk cloth on old clothing for it will tear away, and no one will put new wine in old wineskins. What Jesus was trying to say, was that the old way God dealt with His people, which is through Law and obedience, was not compatible with the new way that God would deal with His people, and that was based upon the principle of grace. The Old Testament was a period in which God expected His people to obey the Law, or be cursed. This system of Law failed to make men righteous before God, but only added to their guilt before God, for man is not capable of keeping God's Law. The new covenant, was established when Jesus died upon the cross to pay the penalty for man's sins. All those who accept Jesus as their sin-bearer, and acknowledge Him as Lord, are saved, forgiven, and now live under the principle of grace. That means that they are no longer under condemnation because of sin, but have found forgiveness through Christ. A Christian is motivated to live in holiness and fulfill the righteous standards of God because of God's grace and his personal gratitude towards God for freely saving His soul. These two systems are not compatible with each other, and cannot be mixed; this is what Jesus was trying to teach the Pharisees, who wanted to hold his disciples under Law. They also were complaining about the disciples picking grain to eat on the Sabbath, but Jesus tells them that David ate the showbread, which was not lawful to eat, but under the circumstances we necessary. He teaches from this that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

"When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."" Mark 2:17

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about Jesus work, and how the Pharisees and Scribes reacted to Jesus with complaints about the practice of his disciples. Jesus taught that a whole new system was coming into place, a new covenant, where God would deal with us on the principle of grace, and not Law. We also learned about the Sabbath, & fasting. Someone might ask the question, should a Christian practice fasting?

Fasting should not be thought of as an obligation or a command to follow. The Jews of Jesus time fasted ritualistically because of their traditions, and not because it was commanded in the scriptures. Nowhere are Christians commanded to fast. Having said that, we do recognize that many Jews and Christians did fast, and for various reasons. Fasting is associated with sorrow, repentance, and times of intensive prayer. Fasting has no particular spiritual value to it, as though abstaining from food will bring us more favor from God. Fasting should simply be the result of spending concentrated time in prayer. When we eat we tend to become tired and lose concentration, but when a person is fasting, they can use all their energy and faculties to focus on the important matters of prayer.

There may be times in life, when a person is very seriously concerned about some particular matter, and they really want to seek God earnestly, and so they devote themselves to prayer. Because of the intensity of prayer, they do not bother to take time to eat. There are other times when a persons heart maybe very sorrowful, or deeply concerned about something, and so they simply lose interest in eating.

Fasting should never be thought of as a religious requirement, or something that makes us more spiritual, giving us more power with God. Fasting is simply the result of sorrow, or intensity in prayer, which causes us to neglect eating for a time.

We should also be aware that some people are not able to fast, as it would cause them health concerns. Some people require daily food, or they will compromise their health, and so Christians should be very cautious when advising others about the practice of fasting. There are some health benefits to fasting one day a week, for those who choose to do so for that reason.

Fasting as a spiritual exercise should be done with the understanding that it has no spiritual value of itself, but does afford quality time for prayer. It can also display a humble spirit before God, when we are earnestly appealing in prayer for something that we consider very important. It is completely up to individual Christians, whether they will fast or not, but it should never be expected or forced on anyone, for the scripture never commands Christians to fast. Jesus also warns us not to let people know when we are fasting, but to wash our face, so we do not appear to others to be fasting. The prideful display of supposed spirituality, by letting people know we are fasting, is detestable in God's sight. That makes fasting a mere show in the flesh, and not an exercise of the spirit. Some Christians may choose to fast regularly, either for health reasons, or for aiding them in their prayers, but no Christian should be made to feel bad if they do not, or cannot fast. The fruit of the spirit is joy, not sorrow, and the Christian who is rejoicing in his salvation, and enjoying God's goodness, can eat his food with gladness and praise his God.

"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." Acts 2:46

LESSON 31
Popularity of Jesus
MARK 3

In today's lesson we see how Jesus became very popular with the general public, but despised by the religious authorities in Jerusalem. While the common people flocked to Jesus to be healed and to hear his teaching, the rulers were increasing their plans to oppose Him, and even kill Him. We will learn that Jesus work of casting out Satan was ironically attributed to Satan, and why this false accusation is considered blasphemy, and will not be forgiven.

When Jesus went into a synagogue on the Sabbath day, he miraculously healed a man who had a withered hand. The Pharisees were waiting to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath, so they might have something to accuse Him of. Jesus asked the congregation whether it was lawful to do good or evil on the Sabbath day, to save life or to kill? But the crowd remained quiet. Jesus was angry because of the hardness of their hearts. They only wanted to find some reason to accuse him of doing wrong, and were not at all interested in the man with a withered hand. So instead of praising God for a wonderful miracle, these Pharisees actually plotted how they would kill Jesus. It is sad when our religious devotion becomes more important to us than the people we are supposed to love and serve through our faith. Religious zeal mixed with pride becomes the devils workshop, and results in hypocrisy and spiritual blindness.

Jesus left that area and went to the Sea, and great crowds of people came to him to be healed and to hear him teach. There were so many pressing around Him that He had to tell his disciples to prepare a boat so he could escape the crush of the crowd. Jesus had something to offer that no one else could offer, and that was divine healing. The people were desperate for help, and so they came to Jesus. This shows us how the religious leaders, and their religion were powerless to provide what people needed. So much of religion is just dead. While it offers elaborate rituals, ornate buildings, and appealing music, it still remains empty of divine power. It is the Holy Spirit who gives power to heal people both physically, and more importantly spiritually. Men might try to fake the work of the Spirit, or invoke the powers of demons, in order to attract followers, but it is only God, who in His sovereignty can work miracles and healings through the power of the Holy Spirit. The only man, who has ever been given the Holy Spirit without restriction, was Jesus, and so He was able to heal all that came to Him. Lots of men claim they have the anointing power of the Spirit, and that God uses them to heal. I wish some of these who make such claims would visit the local hospital, and use their divine gift to heal where it is most needed. It seems a bit suspicious that these so-called healers operate at special healing services, where there are plenty of cameras and witnesses, to attract as much publicity as possible, and then ask the supports to send in their gifts and offerings. Jesus never made a show out of his miracles, or charged for His services. In fact, when the demons recognized His identity, and cried out that He was the Son of God, Jesus rebuked them and silenced them.

This leads us to another important discussion in this chapter of Mark's gospel. The scribes had come to Jesus and made an accusation that he had an unclean spirit, and that it was by the power of the prince of demons, that Jesus was casting out demons. This was ridiculous of course, and Jesus explains why this did not make any sense. For if Satan had power over individuals through the demons living inside them, then why would he cast them out. That would be like shooting yourself in the foot. It would not help Satan to destroy his own kingdom. Only one who was stronger than Satan could come and bind him and cast him out. Jesus was demonstrating by His power to cast out demons, that His power was greater than that of Satan. This should have told the scribes and Pharisees who Jesus really was, but they still refused to believe. They made a grave error, when they accused Jesus of having a demon, and casting out demons by the power of Satan. They were attributing the work of God, through Holy Spirit, to the work of the devil. This is what Jesus called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. He further tells them that if anyone blasphemes the Holy Spirit, they will never be forgiven. This is what some have called the unpardonable sin. Christians today sometimes worry that they might have been guilty of committing this sin, and therefore might never be forgiven. We should realize that those who witnessed the miracles of Jesus, and then attributed those works to the devil, rather than to the Holy Spirit committed this sin. By this accusation they were really calling the Holy Spirit the Devil. Most bible scholars would agree that this particular sin against the Holy Spirit was only possible for those who witnessed the miracles that Jesus performed. So Christians today should not worry whether they might have committed this sin. However, we should all be warned to show due respect to the true work of God. In discerning the true work of God, we need only look at the fruit that it produces. In Jesus case, people were being healed, and released from Satan's power, indicating that His works were from the Holy Spirit. Today when we see those who claim to be working for God, exploiting the poor, so they can be rich and live in luxury, then we can discern the Holy Spirit is not conducting their work. If they were true followers of Jesus, they would deny themselves, and not lay up for themselves treasures upon the earth.

"But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation." Mark 3:29

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have seen how Jesus miracles made him very popular, and brought the forces of good and evil into battle. The devil is never happy when God is doing His work. Someone might ask the question should we try to go into battle against Satan?

In churches today there are many Christians trying to bind Satan, rebuke Satan, or cast Satan out, as though they had some power over Satan. We must remember to keep things in proper perspective, for Satan is much stronger than any individual, but He is no match for the Holy Spirit. If we want victory over Satan, we must be utterly and completely surrendered to the control of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is in charge, then He is quite able to protect us from the attacks of Satan. You will not find any place in the scriptures where we are told to go into battle against Satan. We are certainly to wear the whole armor of God, as it says in Ephesians 6, and this is for defense, not for attack. Paul mentions that we wrestle against spiritual powers, but our position is not one of attacking, but arming ourselves against His attacks. The scriptures make it plain that Satan is on the prowl, like a lion, seeking whom he can destroy (1Peter 5:8). While Satan is looking for opportunity to attack those who are weak, our responsibility is to arm ourselves with the word of God, and the shield of faith. The word of God is our best defense against the attacks of Satan, and what our Lord used when he was tempted by Satan.

The bible tells us that greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world (1John 4:4). This means that the Holy Spirit is greater in strength than Satan, and therefore we do not need to fear that Satan will somehow destroy us. Remember the illustration that Jesus gave in John 10 about Satan, who is like a wolf coming to attack the sheep. The sheep are no match for the wolf, and if the sheep are left defend themselves they would be devoured by the wolf. Their protection is from the good shepherd, who saves them from the attacking wolf, and it is our Lord Jesus who protects His own from the attacks of Satan.

Now we must be careful, because Satan is rather clever, and has all kinds of ways to trip us up, and do us harm. He can never snatch us away from our Lord if we are truly God's children, but he can make things rather miserable for us. He can soil our testimony, by tempting us into sin. He can steal away our joy, as he manages to get a foothold upon us, and drag us down in despair and discouragement. He can cast doubts into our minds, or draw us into the lusts and allurements of this world. This is why the bible warns us to resist the devil, and he will flee from us (James 4:7). This is written in the context of being ensnared by friendship with the world, which means to make friends with those who do not love God. We must resist him, by following the Lord faithfully, and purifying our lives from all that displeases the Lord.

Our fight against the devil is not to be a full frontal attack, for you and I are no match for the devil. But we can certainly protect ourselves from his attacks, when we are fully equipped with the armor of God. When the Holy Spirit confirms to us an assurance of salvation, when we walk in righteousness, when we know the word of God, when our faith is solid, when we are ready to share the gospel with others, and when we walk in the truth, then we have put on the whole armor, which will shield us from all the attacks of Satan. Remember the scriptures show us a defensive posture for the believer, when it comes to encountering Satan. The Lord simply wants us to stand our ground, in full armor. Though our enemy is much stronger than we, he can do us no harm, when we are protected by our God. Think of young David going out to battle against the giant Goliath. David had no chance to defeat the giant in his own strength, and no human armor would protect him, but only hinder him. It was only by the power of his God, by his faith in God, and by a life that pleased God, that he was given the victory over his strong enemy. If you think you are any match for Satan, then listen to the warning found in Jude:

"Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Jude 9

LESSON 32
Hearing the Words of Jesus
MARK 4

In today's lesson we learn how Jesus taught the people in parables to reveal truth to those ready to receive it, but to conceal it from others. We shall also witness the power of Jesus to still a storm at Sea with just a word. Many are glad to hear the words of Jesus, yes the demons hear his voice are tremble in fear, the wind and waves listen and obey, even the dead respond to his voice, but are you hearing the words of Jesus?

Jesus told the familiar parable of the sower, sowing his seeds. He says the seed fell on different types of ground; some was along the roadside, some in thorny patches, some in the rocks, and some on good soil. He then tells us how each type of soil reacted to the seed that was spread upon it. The roadside did not allow the seed to even penetrate into the ground, but the seed was snatched away by the birds. The rocky ground allowed the seed to germinate and grow, but because of lack of roots and moisture, it soon withered and died. The thorny patch, also allowed the seed to grow, but choked it, and it was not able to produce anything. The good soil allowed the seed to take root and grow up strong, and produce plenty of fruit. If this was all we were told, we might be left wondering what Jesus meant by this illustration from farming, but then he takes time to privately explain this parable to his disciples. He says the seed is the word of God, and the soil represents different kinds of people and their response to the word of God. Some have a hard heart like the seed on the roadway, and the word cannot even penetrate into their hearts at all. The devil snatches away the word, and they receive no benefit and no life from the word. The rocky ground allows the seed to grow, but the sun comes out and scorches the plant because it has no root. This is like those who hear the word, receive it, but when it begins to cost them some difficulties in the world, they quickly stumble. The seed that grew among the thorns and was choked is like those who hear the word, receive it but the cares and concerns of life, choke it, and make it unfruitful. Lastly the good soil that produced plenty of fruit is like those who hear the word, gladly receive it, and then produce much spiritual fruitfulness in their life. They are glad to shine forth their faith, so that the world can see that they have turned to Jesus, and are bearing fruit for the kingdom of God. The evidence that someone is a child of God is that they produce plenty of fruit in the sense that they are willing to share the good news of God's salvation with many others.

Jesus calls on his audience to hear what he is saying. The phrase, "He who has ears, let him hear", simply means to take in what has been told, understand and obey it, so that it may be to your benefit. Too many people simply do not take God's word seriously. They show up on Sunday, and hear the preacher speaking, but they are not really listening deeply to what the Spirit of God is trying to reveal to them, about themselves, about their sin, and their need to repent. It is a very dangerous position to be in, when we can hear the word of God being spoken, but we are not responding to it as we ought to. Jesus says that the measure, in which we make use of what we have heard, is the measure in which God can provide to us His revelation. As we tune out, and fail to obey, the seed will be snatched away, and we will lose even the things we once thought we possessed. God's word is not to be thought of as trivia, or a suggestion, or controversy to debate, it is to be heard and obeyed, and only then can it produce fruit in our lives.

Jesus provides two other parables in this chapter, and though no explanation of their meaning is given, we can try to discern what Jesus wants to teach us. The first parable is about the mystery of growth. The seed is placed in the ground, and while the farmer is asleep the seed sprouts and later produces fruit, until it is ready to be harvested. It appears that Jesus is telling us that in the kingdom of God, all new spiritual life finds its source in the invisible workings of God. People hear the word, and God speaks into their hearts, and causes them to place their faith in Jesus Christ, for their only hope to reach heaven. As this invisible power is working in the souls of men, bringing forth life, it is not apparent to the unbelieving world, they, like the farmer, are asleep while God is preparing for a great harvest of souls. When at last the time comes for the harvest, God will gather up all of His children to himself.

The second parable Jesus shares is about the mustard seed. He tells us that though this is the smallest of seeds, it grows into a large plant and the birds of the air come to nest in it. In this parable Jesus is making the point, that though the seed seems so very small and insignificant, yet it does produce something of much greater size than one might expect. This is the nature of how the seed of faith planted in a believers heart may seem at first rather small, yet it can grow to become great faith upon which others may find some rest and encouragement. If a young person comes to Christ, at first they are a babe in Christ, and understand little, but in time their spiritual life can grow so that they become a teacher of the word, and help others to find their way to Christ also. This maybe what the Lord had in mind when he spoke of the birds coming to nest in the branches of the tree, and that started out as just a tiny seed.

Jesus calms the wind and waves of a storm on the Sea, when traveling by boat with His disciples, and His disciples were greatly amazed and frightened by the power Jesus displayed. The words of Jesus are not like the words of any other man or writer. Jesus had power in his words not only to control the course of nature, but also to heal and give life. With such power in view, we also ought to have great fear, and listen and obey the words of Jesus.

"And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him'".
Mark 4:41

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have heard how Jesus taught his disciples in parables, and learned how the word of God is like seed that is planted in the heart, and grows and produces fruit. Someone might ask the question, why do some people hear and respond to the word of God, while others do not?

I believe that much of what Jesus has been teaching us in this chapter, has to do with the subject of divine revelation, and divine illumination. Revelation is the truth from the word of God that God has sent forth, like the seed spread upon the ground. Illumination is how the Holy Spirit gives us an understanding of the word of God, so that it can bring forth a response of faith. People do not always receive the revelation of God with joy. Sometimes the devil snatches away the seed, or a person realizes that to accept the word means facing difficulties and persecution, or others simply get so caught up with the affairs of this world, that the word of God is not important to them. Only when a person understands, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the great treasure of life that is hidden inside the seed of God's word, will he receive it gladly. Once the word is received by faith, the seed will produce life, grow and manifest itself, and bring forth fruit.

The bible tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:17). Many people are exposed to the word, but not all are listening to it carefully. We must realize that the word of God is vitally important to us, and listen to it attentively with a desire to learn and obey what God is revealing.

We might consider an example to help us understand this point. Imagine a man who has been given his electricity bill in the mail, but he forgets about it, and does not bother to pay. After some days his lights go off, and he then remembers that he forgot to pay. It maybe inconvenient to have the lights go off at home, and even a bit annoying, but it could have been prevented if he had taken time to pay attention to the bill when it came in the mail. When God sends his word to us, he expects us to pay attention to it, for if we ignore it, or think we will just look at it later, then we are in great danger of missing out on the blessing God has for us, and falling under God's judgment. There are many souls in Hell today, that certainly did not plan to be there, but they just neglected to pay attention to God's word. We all have important things to attend to in life, but does not let anything get in the way of your listening to the word of God. It is the word of God that will lead us safely home to heaven, and if we fail to hear and respond to what God has so carefully sent to us in His word, then we will most certainly be very sorry, when we wake up in the fires of Hell, where there is no escape. By then, it will be much too late to try and listen to God's word.

Remember this, that God does not owe it to you or I to offer us salvation, and He does not owe it to us to keep pleading for us to listen to His voice when He speaks. He, in His grace, will continue to try to get our attention, but sooner or later, he will stop, and leave us to our stubborn rebellion. I hope you will listen to the voice of Jesus today, and give your heart to Him in faith. In the end of your life, nothing will matter more than how you responded to the call of Jesus.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

LESSON 33
Freedom through Jesus
MARK 5

In today's lesson we shall learn how Jesus offered freedom to three different people. Jesus proves that He is the Son of God, by freeing individuals from the grip of Satan, from the plague of disease, and from the power of death. We shall learn that Jesus alone has the power to release us from these enemies, and we should be so grateful that He is willing to offer liberty to all who seek Him.

Our first story of Liberty is about a man who was tormented by demons. He had so many demons living within him, that he was called Legion, which means a large army. This man was living among the tombs, and could not be restrained by chains, and went about naked. He was a wild man, who could not live among others, so he had to live alone and tormented. When Jesus appeared on the shore, the demon-possessed man saw Him coming, and went and worshipped him, and the demons within him recognized who he was, saying, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God". It is interesting to note that demons readily recognized the deity of Jesus, while the religious leaders who witnessed his miracles first hand were blind as to the identity of Jesus. The demons were very fearful in the presence of Jesus, and begged that Jesus would not torment them, but send them into the herd of pigs feeding nearby. Jesus commands the demons to leave the man, and they do enter into the pigs. The pigs run down a steep hill into the lake and drown. When the people of the nearby city heard news of what happened they came to Jesus and begged him to leave their region. The demon possessed man, who now was clothed and in his right mind, begged that he could follow Jesus, but Jesus sent him back to his hometown to tell his friends there what great things God had done for him. He gladly did as Jesus had said, and the people marveled at his testimony. It is often the case that those who have received the greatest deliverance from Satan, turn into the greatest servants and evangelists for God, since their hearts are so full of gratitude.

The second story is of a man named Jairus, who came to Jesus to plead with him to heal his daughter, who was near to death. Jesus agreed to come and heal the girl, but while they were on their way, not only did news come that the girl had already died, but there was another interruption by a woman who also needed Jesus help. Jairus must have felt rather anxious and desperate, and Jesus told him not to fear, but only believe. This second story is interrupted by this woman who comes into the midst of the crowds surrounding Jesus, and reaches out to touch the hem of his garment. She had a terrible bleeding disease, that could not be healed, and in her desperation to be free from the bleeding problems, she thought to herself, that if she could just touch his garment, then she would be healed. She knew that Jesus could heal, and her faith was strong, so she reached out and touched Jesus. Nothing should have seemed strange about this for Jesus was surrounded by people and many of them were pressing near to him, so he was likely touched by many others as they moved along the road towards Jairus' house. Jesus however knew immediately that power had gone out from him to heal, and so asked who touched him. He asked, not because he did not know, but because he wanted to deal with this woman personally and encourage her. Jairus must have been anxious by this delay, but he quietly waits for Jesus to finish speaking with the woman. The woman trembling came and fell at Jesus feet and told him the whole truth. Jesus told her that her faith had made her well, and she should go in peace. With such grace and goodness Jesus healed those who were afflicted. This woman had spent all her money on doctors for the past 12 years, and yet she was only getting worse. Only reaching out in faith to Jesus was able to give her the healing that she needed. It is true for all who are sick with the disease of sin, for we only need to reach out in faith towards Jesus, knowing that through him our souls maybe healed, and made right before God.

Now we return to the story of Jairus. When Jesus arrived at Jairus' house the mourners were there and making much noise and commotion by wailing and flute playing. Jesus asked them why they were making such a commotion when the girl was not dead but only sleeping. The mourners laughed and scorned at Jesus for this, for they knew perfectly well that the girl had died. What Jesus was trying to point out, was that this little girl had not experienced a departure, from which she would not return. Just as when we close our eyes in sleep and wake the next morning, so this girl had departed but Jesus was about to bring her back, and so he likened her death to sleep. This picture of death as sleep is seen elsewhere in the scriptures, when referring to Christians who have died, for they will once again live in the resurrection. Jesus chased away all the mourners from the house, and then took the parents and three disciples into the room where the girl lay. Jesus took the girl by the hand, and said, "Little girl, Arise". Immediately the girl rose from her bed and began to walk. The parents and disciples were filled with great amazement at what they had just witnessed. The power of Jesus to release someone from the grip of death is truly a miracle that testified to His being the author of life. Jesus asked the parents to give the girl something to eat, tending to her needs, and giving the parents something to do to direct their attention. Undoubtedly they would want to tell others of this great miracle, but Jesus strictly forbids them from making it known.

We have seen today how Jesus demonstrates his power to free people from the grip of Satan, from the despair of disease, and the fear and power of death. This demonstrates Jesus to be the Son of God, with all authority over the spiritual realm, over the physical realm, and hold the power of life and death in His hands. You too can be given freedom through Jesus if you will come as these others did and bow at His feet, reach out in faith, and accept His healing touch.

"Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." Mark 5:19

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have learned about how Jesus has power to give people freedom from Satan, disease, and from death itself. We learned about a 12 year old girl that had died and was brought back to life by Jesus. Someone might ask the question, why does God sometimes allow children to die?

It is a very sad that sometimes children die. This brings such heartbreak to the parents who have loved and looked after their child from the time they were born. If children were a gift from God, then why would God take them back, when they have so much life before them? I recall seeing a woman running into the hospital with her young lifeless daughter hanging over her shoulders and screaming and shouting for someone to help her. The pain of losing a child can hardly be compared with any other human tragedy, so why would God allow us to experience such a devastating loss. When older people die, we accept it because we know they have had a chance to live a long and full life, but we think it is so unfair that a child, with their whole life in front of them should tragically be taken away in death.

Of course our difficulty in understanding the death of children, is due to our limited view of things. If we could see things from God's perspective, then we would not see only tragedy in the death of a child, but rather hope as well. Just as Jairus had to suffer great fear and heartache because of his daughter's death, he also had the great joy of seeing her raised up to life again. For Christians, and young children, death is not the end of their life, but just the beginning. Death is a doorway, through which we enter a far better place, where we shall forever be in the presence of Jesus, who gives and sustains all life. For a parent to lose a young child, and know they are now with Jesus brings great comfort. Of course we miss those who have died, but we can be assured that if they are God's children, then he has taken them to their eternal and joyful home in heaven. Someday Christian parents who have lost children will be reunited with them in heaven, and it will be even more joyful then when Jesus brought back Jairus' daughter.

I recall a boy of 7 years being tragically taken in a car accident, and someone who had a close relationship to the boy, was very angry at God for taking the child away at such a tender age. I told that anger person, that we should not expect that when God gives life to a person, he owes it to them to give them a good and long life. God does not owe us anything at all, and everything we have whether great or small is his precious gift, and we should thank him for everything that we do receive. I said we should thank God for those 7 years that he gave, and not be anger for the years we think should have been added. God in His wisdom had better plans for that little boy, which may have spared him much suffering in this world, allowing him the privilege of enjoying heaven sooner then others.

Perhaps another reason why God allows children to be taken from us sometimes is because he is trying to speak to our hearts, about our own need of salvation. There is nothing more sobering then the reality of death, especially when we it is child, who we expect to be healthy and to live on for many more years. When children die, it reminds how frail we all are, and how close to death we are. Any of us may not even see tomorrow. God may use the untimely death of a child, or a tragic illness, or other drastic means to grab our attention and make us think about eternal things, and our need to prepare ourselves for the day of our departure from this world. Have you received Christ as your personal Savior by faith? Perhaps today is the day you will give your heart to Him, and find assurance of life beyond the grave.

"Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near." Isaiah 55:6

LESSON 34
Honoring God's Servant
MARK 6

In today's lesson we shall learn about honoring God's Servant. Although Jesus was not honored in his hometown, he certainly was very popular in other areas, because of his power to heal people. The disciples were sent out as servants of God to preach in the villages. We also will see how King Herod felt pressured to kill John the Baptist, also one of God's servants. In this chapter Jesus feeds the multitude, and walks on the waves of the Sea.

When Jesus entered his home country, and he was teaching, the people became offended because they knew his family and relatives, and did not think he was anyone so special. Jesus said that a prophet is not without honor expect in his home, among his relatives and household. People have a hard time to understand how God can take simple and poor people and do great and might things. God loves to do this, so we will see the work is from God and not from men. The disciples were sent out to preach in the villages, and Jesus said they should not take, money, food, or extra clothes with them, but look to the Lord to provide through those to whom they would preach. He was teaching them to live by faith when serving their God. Realizing that some would not listen to them or provide for them, he said that they should shake the dust off of their feet when leaving a place that did not receive them. This would be a symbolic gesture against them as refusing the kindness of God, and they would one day be judged severely for their unwillingness to honor God's servants. How we treat God's servants is a reflection of how we think about God, and how we treat God, so we should remember that when listening to men preach, or offer to help them in practical ways. By God's help the disciples cast out demons, and healed many people.

Now we have the story of King Herod, who held a birthday party for himself, and his adulterous wife had a daughter who danced before the king and his guests. Herod was very pleased with her dancing, and offered up to half of his kingdom to her. She quickly consulted with her mother to see what she should ask for, and Herodias, who hated John the Baptist, said she should ask for John the Baptist's head on a platter. Now Herod feared and respected John, and was very sorry about this request, because he really did not want to kill John. However he did not want to lose face before all his dinner guests, so he ordered that John be killed and his head brought to the girl. This very sad event seems so unfair and unrighteous. Why did God allow these wicked people to kill a good and innocent man? Well, It might all seem rather tragic to our eyes, but God will have His justice in the end. Far too often people do things to look good in the sight of others, even when they know it is wrong. It may seem good for the immediate circumstances, but know that one day we shall answer to God for all the things that we did. We should always try to build our lives around honoring God, and not other people, or ourselves, and then we will be careful to stay away from sin.

When the disciples returned to Jesus from their preaching campaign, they found it difficult to even eat a meal, because of the many people coming and going. Jesus said they should depart to a deserted place, but even there the crowds saw them going and followed them. When Jesus saw the large crowds coming to meet him, he was not annoyed, because he had no peace or time to himself, but rather had compassion on the multitudes, saying that they were like sheep that had no shepherd. Jesus taught the crowds many things, and also realizing that the people were hungry, Jesus asks his disciples to feed the huge crowd of 1000s of people. The disciples told Jesus even if they had lots of money they could never feed this large crowd, so Jesus asked how much food they had. They told him they had 5 loaves and two fish. Then he asked his disciples to have the people sit in groups of 100s and 50s on the grass. He then blessed and broke the bread and gave to the disciples. Miraculously the food was multiplied and everyone had enough to eat and even plenty of food was left over. This important miracle is recorded in each of the four gospels, and reminds us that God is our great provider, supplying us food to eat. God made us in such a way that we are dependent on His care to feed us. He indeed is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, looking after all of our needs.

After everyone had eaten, then Jesus had sent his disciples in a boat to travel across the lake; he Himself went into the mountain to pray alone. After tending the many needs of the day, and now that it was very late, Jesus resorts to prayer, so he can be alone with His father. Perhaps to speak about the death of John, or to speak of the next steps He must take in His service to mankind. While men failed to honor Jesus, certainly His father in heaven found great delight in His Son, for He always did His will and manifested the love and mercy of God to needy humanity. After sometime in prayer, Jesus sees his disciples struggling against the wind on the lake, and he goes to them walking on the waves of the Sea. Truly everything that we witness Jesus doing, reveals that he is much more than a mere man or prophet. He is truly the Son of God, for he can raise the dead to life, feed 5000 people with a small lunch, and walk on top of the water. The disciples were frightened and thought they were seeing a ghost, but Jesus calms their fears, and said it was He Himself. After Jesus boarded the boat, and they reached the other side of the lake, again many people recognized him and came to him. They brought him many that were sick, and laid them in places where they hoped they could just reach and touch the hem of his garment. As many as touched Jesus were healed.

"But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house". Mark 6:4

Today's Bible Question:

Today we saw that Jesus was not honored in his hometown, but was sought out by many others, who recognized his powers to heal. We learned how his disciples were to trust God for their supplies, while they were serving God. We learned about Jesus power to provide food, and to walk above the waves of the sea; and we saw how John the Baptist was tragically executed for speaking the truth. Someone might ask the question should I serve God, and preach righteousness, if it means I could be hurt, or even killed?

John the Baptist was tragically killed by Herod, because of the request of Herodias' daughter, and because he did not want to look bad in front of all his guests. It did not seem a very good reason to take off the head of a righteous man, and it might make some of us fearful to speak up for God. John had spoken against the adulterous relationship between the king and Herodias. This infuriated the wicked Herodias, for she did not like to be publicly shamed by John's preaching, but John was only speaking the truth. John had to be a brave man to speak so openly and boldly against the king and his sin, for the king certainly had power to do harm John if he wanted to.

When any of us decide we want to be faithful to Jesus, then we must also be willing to stand against what is evil, even if that means standing against those who are higher in authority and power. Yes, this might be very costly. Do not expect that when you speak out against someone's evil behavior, that you will not suffer for it. People who do the right thing, and speak the truth, can expect that the world will hate them, and may even try to kill them in some circumstances. If we weigh out the consequences, then perhaps we might conclude it is not worth it to fight against sin and sinners, if they have power to hurt or kill us. However when we look at it from God's perspective, we shall realize that we do not need to fear what man can do to us, for the worst any man can do to a Christian, is send him to see Jesus a little sooner than expected, and that is not so bad. For the bible says, to be with Christ, is far better than staying in this world. Jesus said that if the world hated him, that it would hate his disciples also. So those who want to follow Jesus should anticipate some suffering and pain also. Jesus went to the cross to wash away the guilt of our sins, and we should also be willing to suffer in order to join in God's fight against evil and sin.

If we serve God in a proper manner, we will find that some of the things we say and do, will not be popular with the people. It is never nice to deal with sin, but the honest servant of God must tell people plainly that their sin is wrong, and will be judged. I recall once having to deal with a situation where I saw someone disobeying the word of God. I was somewhat fearful to confront the individual unless I should offend them. I talked with an older Christian man about it, and he said to me some wise words, which I will always remember; He said, "The word of God offends". Anyone who preaches the truth of God's word will offend some people, especially when it cuts across their pride, their reputation, or their money and security. The word of God is not meant to make us feel good about ourselves, and make us content in an evil sinful world, but it confronts us with sin, and calls us to repent and trust in Jesus to save us.

How about you? Have you admitted to God that you are a sinner? Have you humbled yourself before God, and accepted his remedy for your sin? Call upon Jesus today to save your soul, and you will find forgiveness from God, and a home in heaven.

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2Timothy 3:12

Jesus does all things well!

MARK 7

In today's lesson we shall see how Jesus turns the complaints of the Pharisees back against them, by exposing their hypocrisy. We shall see how the pleas of a woman are answered when Jesus casts a demon from her daughter, and how He wondrously heals a man who was deaf and could not speak properly. The people were right when they said that Jesus did all things well!

The Pharisees had come to Galilee from Jerusalem to see if they could find some fault with Jesus. They noticed that his disciples did not follow the ritual washings that they themselves practiced before they ate, and so they complained to Jesus about this. The Pharisees had developed many customs and rituals that were not given in the bible, and they expected that every faithful Jew should follow their traditions. Jesus did not tolerate their legalism, and used the occasion to point out their own hypocrisy. He explained that it is not what goes into the man that makes him unclean, but that which comes out of him. Now Jesus is not saying that we should not wash our hands before we eat, that is just common sense for maintaining our good health. What he is saying is that if the Pharisees think that all their elaborate ritual washings could make them clean in a ceremonial sense, rather than in a purely hygienic sense, they were grossly mistaken. God has designed our bodies in such a way, that our digestive system absorbs the good nutrients of the food we eat, and discards what is not healthy for us. This is a wonderful provision of the creator in the design of our bodies, and protects us in many ways from things, which could harm us. Of course we still need to be sensible about what we eat or drink, so that we do not abuse the liberties we have in eating and drinking. For instance smoking tobacco, or ingesting alcohol into our systems is clearly not healthy, and eventually will do irreparable damage. Jesus told the Pharisees that they were nullifying the scriptures through their traditions. They had a tradition, which allowed them to say to their parents that all that would be used to help them, had been given to God, and that would excuse them from helping their parents when they were in need. The bible however teaches we are to honor our parents, and that means looking after their needs, should they become unable to look after themselves. Jesus provided a long list of sins, which find their source in the heart of man, including lusts, pride, envy, greed, and hatred. This should remind us not to put the blame on others, or on our circumstances, when we do evil, because Jesus said these things are not inflicted upon us from the outside, but are driven by the sin nature within us. This is why each of us need Jesus to be our savior, because while we may not act out these sins openly, yet their potential is still within our hearts, because at our core we are sinners and condemned.

When Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon, He tried to hide himself from the people, perhaps wanting time to rest, but his fame was such that he could not be hidden. A gentile woman came to Jesus pleading with Him to cast out a demon from her daughter. We always see Jesus willing to offer healing and help to those who come to Him, but in this case, we are surprised to learn that Jesus at first seems reluctant to offer help to the woman. He said to her, that it was not good to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. He meant, by this metaphor, that His present ministry and work were for the benefit of the Jews, and not for the gentiles, so it would be inappropriate for Him to give away the blessings of Israel to the gentiles. In fact this metaphor really was quite demeaning, since it likened gentiles to dogs, which were considered unclean animals. The woman was desperate for help, which made her free from all pride, and so Jesus' reference to dogs did not hinder her, or offend her. She simply replied that even the dogs eat crumbs from the table. She demonstrated great faith in Jesus to heal, and great persistence, knowing that He alone had the power to cast out the demon. Her faith and persistence were rewarded, and the Lord Jesus, said that she could go, for her daughter had been freed from the demon. Perhaps Jesus was not actually reluctant to heal the woman's daughter, but he wanted to test and prove her faith. Sometimes we would like the Lord to provide immediate answers to our requests, but He may delay us, so that our faith will be strengthened. When we come to Jesus in desperation and humility, as this woman did, then we are sure to receive our requests. Jesus never denies sincere faith, and requests made in the will of God.

Jesus traveled back to the Sea of Galilee and some people met him pleading with Him to heal a man who was deaf, and also could not speak properly. Speech is developed through the sense of hearing, and is another wonderful blessing from our creator, to help us manage in life, and communicate effectively with others. To be deaf is a very difficult affliction to have, for it isolates a person from communicating with most people, and makes it very challenging for them to manage in any work or relationship. Try to imagine what it would be like if you could never hear music, or another voice, or any sounds at all, and how this would isolate you from what is going on in the world around you. Jesus is the creator, who gave us ears to hear, and gave to us the ability to speak and know language, and He alone was able to heal this man. In this miracle Jesus chose to heal by touching the man, and spitting and touching his tongue. He commanded the man's ears to "Be Opened", and the man's hearing and speech were restored. Normally it takes years of practice to perfect language skills, but Jesus did it instantaneously for this man. Today we have learned the wonderful care and design that God has built into our bodies to help us manage in this world, and enjoy the blessings he provides. Today it would be good if we all took time to stop for a moment and thank the Lord for our healthy bodies, and all the remarkable gifts that our bodies have been given, such as taste, feeling, hearing, sight, and smell. The abilities to enjoy and digest food, lungs to breathe in air and keep our heart

pumping, and a mind to think and consider the wonders of the God who created us, and sent His son to redeem our souls. Why not surrender your life to Christ today, by calling out to him in faith to save your soul?

"And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." Mark 7:37

Today's Bible Question:

Today we learned how Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who had set aside the words of God, in order to keep their own traditions. We also saw how Jesus answered the pleas of a desperate woman, because of her persistent and humble faith. We learned how Jesus miraculously restored the hearing and speech of man, and how all marveled and said that He did all things well. Someone might ask the question, why are some people born blind, deaf, or with some other defect?

It would seem that if God was loving to all His creatures, and His creation was very good, that all creatures should not have to suffer with crippling diseases, or defects to their bodies, while others enjoy a healthy body. It seems cruel that some have to suffer such horrible afflictions to their bodies. We might think it unfair to see someone blind who has to beg on the roadside, or someone with useless limbs who cannot work. Perhaps you know someone, or have a relative that is incapacitated by some terrible defect to their bodies, and you know first hand how they suffer, and how much others have to do for them. Does it seem God had forgotten these poor souls? Not at all!

Notice, when Jesus walked in this world, those who came to him were poor, desperate, or crippled. They above all others cried out to Jesus, because they desperately sensed their need for healing. Jesus was always ready and willing to help and heal those that came to Him. He felt their pain, and knew their struggles. Of course, God never intended man to suffer with broken and defective bodies. He made Adam and Eve perfect, and wanted them to enjoy fellowship with Himself forever. When sin entered the world through disobedience, a curse came upon all of creation. The curse has affected everything from all animal and plant life, to the stability of the earth and climate. God's creation was perfect, but sin brought defects into the creation. That is why we can contract diseases like Malaria, why vicious storms destroy land and homes. It is why earthquakes, volcanoes happen, and why wild animals attack and kill. It is also why some people are born blind, lame, or deaf. The curses upon creation has affected everything, and although traces of God's original beauty and glory designed into creation are still evident, so much has been destroyed because of sin. We are in a decaying and dying world that is under the judgment of God. We are all suffering the consequences of sin upon the creation, and each visit to the hospital, or the graveside reminds us of this.

You might ask then why does not God just heal everyone, and remove the effects of the curse from this world, so we can live happy and prosperous lives. God does not want us to live happy and prosperous, while the problem of sin has not been addressed in us. As sinners we all are responsible for the curse that God has brought upon the earth. We must confess our sin and responsibility, recognizing the terrible consequences it has not only in our lives, but also in everything and everyone around us. Then we have come to the place of true repentance. The only answer to the devastating affects of sin, in to be found in Jesus. Jesus was the perfect man and sinless, not subject to the curse or corruption. But he came into this cursed world, and actually became a curse for us. The entire curse against creation and against man was transferred to Jesus, when he hung upon the cross. That is why he is able to heal, and why is able to save your soul? Don't be angry with God, when people suffer, be angry about your sin, repent, and trust in Jesus as your Savior.

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree". Gal 3:13

LESSON 36
Identifying Jesus
MARK 8

In today's lesson we shall learn about how the Identity of Jesus is hidden from some, but can be perceived through his miracles. We also see what some people were saying about His identity, and how His own disciples discovered His true identity. When Jesus reveals God's plan for Him to be killed, Peter tries to correct Jesus, but Jesus rebukes Peter, as an agent of Satan. Jesus also teaches us to deny ourselves, be willing to suffer, and about the value of souls.

In the first section of this chapter we have the miraculous feeding of 4000 people by Jesus. He took compassion on the crowds, and knew if they went home hungry they may faint on the way. For all those people who witnessed this miracle, they had plenty of evidence to know who Jesus was. They might have remembered how God miraculously provided bread in the wilderness to the children of Israel, and therefore Identified Jesus accordingly as the same provider for Israel in the wilderness.

When the Pharisees came looking for a sign of Jesus power, He refused to show them a sign. He was not going to perform magic tricks to try and convince them. Had they been there to see him produce enough food to feed thousands, they would have all the signs they needed. In fact Jesus performed so many miracles, that it is hard to imagine how the Pharisees could not clearly identify who He was. Unfortunately even His disciples lacked understanding of his power and miracles, for when he warned them about the Pharisees, they thought he was concerned about their lack of bread. Jesus must remind them of the miraculous provision of food on two previous occasions. Not too many people were able to clearly identify who Jesus was, and even today so many people have a false view of Jesus. Only when we come to know who He really is can we be saved from the penalty of our sins.

A blind man is brought to Jesus, and Jesus takes him away from the crowds and performs a two stage healing, first touching his eyes with spittle, and when the mans eyesight was still fuzzy, he touches him again, and this time he can see perfectly. I am not sure why Jesus did not heal the man instantly, perhaps this story was given to us to illustrate how some people when they first encounter Jesus, cannot clearly identify Him, but with more exposure to Him they come to know His identity clearly. This was the case with the disciples. Jesus had asked them "whom do the people say that I am", and they replied some say, John the Baptist, some say Elijah, or one of the prophets. Clearly most people had some vague ideas about Him being one of God's servants, or a prophet, but did not know clearly who He really was. Then Jesus asked his disciples whom they thought He was, Peter replied, "You are the Christ". This was a much clearer perception of the identity of Jesus, as the Messiah sent from God to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus, hearing Peter's confession, strictly warns his disciples not to speak of this to anyone else. Jesus did not want people to be announcing that He was their long awaited Messiah, for He knew that this would hinder Him from completing His work, before going to the cross. Jesus began to speak of the cross, and how he would be killed, and rise again three days later. It was Jesus plain confession that He was indeed the Christ, which led the Jewish leaders to cry out for His crucifixion, so we can see why Jesus desired to conceal this fact for the time being. When Jesus spoke of his coming death, Peter began to try and correct Him, but Jesus turns to Peter and rebukes Him, calling him Satan, because he was not thinking God's thoughts, but the thoughts of men. When Jesus referred to Peter as Satan, he did so because Peter's words were in agreement with the purposes of Satan to prevent Jesus from being our redeemer. Peter's words may have seemed just and good, but in fact he was defying the Lord's words, and that was not his place to do. When God has revealed something in the bible to us, it is our responsibility to accept it by faith, obey it, and not question it. When we begin to question God's wisdom and His words, we are acting like Satan, and that is a very dangerous place to be.

After rebuking Peter for his foolish words, Jesus calls together the people and his disciples and tells them all that if they want to follow Him, they must be willing to deny themselves and take up their cross, and follow Him. To deny oneself is not an easy choice to make, and must be done in faith, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. This means to give up personal rights, and become a servant to the cause of Christ, putting aside all personal ambitions, goals, and even friends and family. The path to secure our salvation was one of intense suffering and personal denial for our Lord Jesus Christ. If we also want to make an impact with the gospel, and see others saved, we must also be willing to walk in His footsteps, be willing to deny ourselves, and suffer along with Him. True servants of Christ are those who have given up all their personal ambitions, willingly enter into a life of personal sacrifice to further the kingdom of God. Jesus also explains how valuable a soul is. He says that to save our life, we must be willing to lose our life for His sake. This means we must not cling to our own life, as though it belonged to us, and we can do with it as we please, but we must be willing to surrender the rights of our life to Jesus as our Lord and Master. He asks the question, what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Clearly he meant that there is nothing in the entire world that can equal the value of just one soul. For those who will not identify with Jesus in His sufferings, are ashamed of being associated with him, and are unwilling to suffer along with Him, they will be denied any honor when Jesus returns in glory someday.

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" Mark 8:36

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the identity of Jesus, and while some wanted signs to prove his identity, he was only willing to show his power and authority to those who humbly sought His help, and had faith in Him. Jesus often hid His identity from others, by trying to conceal His miracles, and telling His disciples to not report that He was the Christ. Someone might ask the question, why was Jesus so reluctant for people to identify Himself as the true Messiah of Israel?

It is striking to notice when reading through the gospels, how often Jesus tries to remain hidden, and do His miracles without gaining attention. He clearly did not want people to know His true identity as the Messiah of Israel. In fact He strictly warns His disciples not to reveal this fact to anyone else. We might think it would have been wise for Jesus to be more open and public about His true identity, for that would give the nation more opportunity to receive Him, and honor Him. However the opposite was to be true. When the Jewish authorities finally questioned Jesus about His identity and they plainly asked Him if He was the Christ, He affirmed this to be the truth. It was due to His confession that He was their Messiah, that they were incensed, and accused Him of blasphemy. They hauled him off to the Roman governor, and insisted that Jesus be put to death. When we see the hostility of the Jews, and their crying out for His death, we can understand why Jesus was reluctant to share the news of His true identity. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and God the Father had given him certain works to accomplish. This was all a testimony to Israel about who He really was, but many were spiritually blinded by their pride and religious traditions. It was only the poor, and sinners, and those crippled who gladly received Jesus, and did not find any difficulties in believing that He was their Messiah. They were privileged to see His many miracles, and they responded to Him in faith, while the proud Pharisees and religious men of that day rejected and despised Him. Jesus was not interested in the momentary fame and accolades of the people. He wanted to complete the works His Father had given Him, as a testimony to the nation. Only when the time was right would He identify Himself, and thereby give His life as a ransom for many.

It is remarkable when we think of how the Lord Jesus, who was God in the flesh, our creator, came into this world, veiled His glory, walked among men, doing good works, healing and teaching, and all the while concealing His identity, except from those who had a spiritual understanding. Peter knew Jesus identity, not because Jesus told Him, but because it was revealed to Him from heaven. If you are to be saved, and one day go to heaven, then you too must receive this revelation from heaven, that Jesus is God's eternal Son, who came to die to pay for your sins. It is not enough to believe in a Jesus that is less than God. Some want to claim Jesus to be Michael the archangel, some say He is the spirit brother of Lucifer, some say He is no more than a prophet, but all these claims are false, and do not properly identify who He really is. If you do not believe that Jesus is divine, that is God himself, then you will perish in your sins. Identifying Jesus Christ as Lord is required in order to be saved. That is why the scriptures say plainly, if you confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." This points out clearly, that our salvation rests on a correct perception, and faith in who Jesus really is, and that is Lord of all, a title we give to God alone.

Have you ever identified Jesus as Lord? Do you know him as more than a man, more than a prophet, and the only one who can wash away your sin? I hope you will own Him as your Lord and Savior today, for apart from Him, there is no hope for eternal life. If you cannot see this truth clearly yet, then spend some more time with Jesus, by reading through all the gospels and asking in your heart, 'who is this man Jesus?' If you search for Him with a sincere and honest heart, I know God will reveal the identity of Jesus to you.

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart". Jer. 29:13

LESSON 37
Following Jesus
MARK 9

In today's lesson we shall learn about following Jesus. To follow Jesus is a path that leads us to view His glory, observe His power over Satan, and watch as He takes the low place in death to suffer for others. While we observe Jesus, and seek to follow Him we will learn many lessons, about our own inadequacies, lack of faith and power, and our need for humility, grace, self-denial, and a good testimony in the world.

Jesus took 3 of His disciples up into a high mountain, and was transfigured before them, so that He shone as a bright light shines. His clothes became whiter and brighter than anything they had ever seen before. This was an extraordinary opportunity for these men to behold Jesus as uniquely different from all other men, shining forth His glory to some small extent for these men to see. Two other men, Moses and Elijah also Appeared with Jesus. Both these men had long since died, but here they are appearing with Jesus. This helps us to understand that believers continue to live beyond the grave. Jesus warned His disciples not to report what they saw to anyone else, until after He was raised from the dead. It would have been very difficult for these three men to keep this amazing transfiguration a secret, and so it should also be very difficult for Christians to keep quiet about the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The disciples asked Jesus about when they should expect Elijah to come, for this was predicted in the Old Testament, and Jesus answers by telling them Elijah had come already. He was speaking of John the Baptist, who came in the same spirit as Elijah, whose ministry was to turn the people of Israel back to God.

When Jesus tells His disciples of his coming death and resurrection they fail to understand what He meant.

Jesus is then led to a boy possessed of an evil spirit, that made him mute, and often cast him into fire or water to destroy him. His disciples could not cast out the evil Spirit, and so Jesus does so, to everyone's amazement. When his disciples asked why they could not cast out the evil Spirit, Jesus explained that there was a need for fasting and prayer in order to cast out this kind of evil spirit. We learn that spiritual power is not in hands of men, but in the hands of Jesus, and we cannot presume to wield that power, without first seeking God in prayer, and discerning His will, allowing His power to do the work, and not man's efforts.

As they all walked along, some of the disciples were talking among themselves about which of them was to be greatest among them. Jesus knew their conversation, and questioned them about it, but they were afraid to admit that they were talking about who would be greatest. Jesus then takes a young child and places him in the middle of them, and says to them all that the greatest must be the least, and chief must be the servant of all. Jesus takes the child in His arms, helping His disciples to better understand that if they want to be great, they must become like a child, who is humble and takes the low place. Following Jesus requires that we do as He did, and that means thinking of others and serving them, and forgetting about our own status or comfort.

John had seen another man casting out demons in the name of Jesus, and asked Jesus if they should stop the man since He was not with them. Jesus also has to correct this wrong attitude. Jesus explains that those who are not against Him should not be considered enemies, and those who are serving Him will not likely do any harm to His cause. So often Christians put up barriers, where Christ would have us build bridges. Rather than fight against those who are called Christians, we are far better to work together for a common purpose. Now we may have differences in how we do things, or associate with a different group, but if on the fundamental truth of the gospel we can agree, then we can rejoice together and not oppose one another. Division from other professing Christians should only be necessary when their doctrine would lead people to Hell rather than to Heaven. If this is not the case, we should open our hearts wide, and seek to demonstrate the love and fellowship that Christ commands for all of God's children.

Jesus also reminds His disciples that every kind deed, even a cup of water given in His name, shall be rewarded. Rather than look for ways to condemn others, Jesus is teaching His followers to look for ways and means to be a blessing to others. If we cause others to stumble in their faith, because we have been careless or unkind, then we shall find severe judgment. In fact, Jesus said if someone caused a believer to stumble it would be better to be drown in the depth of Sea, with a large stone tied about their neck. A loving attitude, and showing support to those who have faith in Jesus, will merit much reward.

While Jesus talks about judgments for causing others to stumble, he also speaks of cutting off a hand, a foot, or plucking out an eye, if these cause us to sin. He says it would be better to go into heaven maimed, than to go into Hell whole. The point is that we need to take sin very seriously, and make sure we are not guilty of hurting and offending others. To ensure that we do not create offenses that bring about God's judgments, we must be willing to make some self-sacrificing, and self-denial. When Jesus went to the cross He was cut off from the land of the living. This was a sacrifice entirely dedicated to our spiritual welfare, and we should have the same kind of attitude, if we are to be true followers of Jesus. When Jesus calls his disciples to be like salt, he is saying we should maintain a good testimony, promoting good and not evil.

"For He who is not against us is on our side." Mark 9:40

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about following Jesus, and we have seen how Jesus disciples often failed Him, through lack of faith, or a wrong attitude. Instead of encouraging another man who sought to honor the name of Jesus, they wanted to oppose him. Instead of trying to understand why their master was speaking about His coming death, they were too busy arguing about which one of them was the greatest. Someone might ask the question, if being a follower of Jesus is so difficult why should I bother trying?

The disciples of Jesus had left their families and jobs to follow Jesus, and to preach and perform miracles and healings in His name. They were never promised a salary, and they often failed in their duties, in their understanding, and especially in their attitude. Jesus constantly had to be teaching them, correcting them, and helping them to be the type of men that He wanted them to be. We might be lead to think that they could become frustrated and discouraged, and want to leave their calling of following Jesus. In fact many people did leave following Jesus, when they found his words too difficult to accept. When this happened Jesus asked his remaining disciples, those who were closest to Him, if they wanted to leave also. They replied and said to Him, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life". This was a very wise answer to give to the Lord Jesus.

The reason any of us try to follow Jesus, is because He has the answers to eternal life. He is the only way to enter into heaven. Yes, the road might be difficult, filled with challenges, and disappointments, but it is our only option if we hope to reach heaven. To be a disciple means to learn about Jesus, and follow in His footsteps. This will mean a life of self-denial, suffering for the sake of others, doing well, and demonstrating the love of God. It is certainly not a life of fame and fortune, as many false preachers would have you believe. The disciples had some wrong ideas about what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, and while they were jockeying for power and honor, Jesus has to teach them the path of humility and suffering. Even when they had a glimpse of His majestic glory that did not prevent them from faltering in their faith.

One thing we should point out here is that many people want to choose salvation through Christ, but they do not want Him to be Lord of their life. This means they want to go to heaven someday, but they would be happy also if Jesus just left them be, and let them do as they please while living in this world. We must be very clear that when Jesus calls us to salvation, He is also calling us to follow Him. This means He is asking us to surrender our lives to Him as Lord. He must be in charge. If you want to be a Christian, this is not optional. To be a Christian is to acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, not just in a general sense, but also in a very personal sense. Yes He is Lord of all, but is He Lord of you? Have you allowed Jesus to take control of your life? Are you daily seeking to learn from Him, and to faithfully follow Him? As we learn from His word daily, we will constantly find areas in our lives that need correction, but do not be discouraged by these things. Sin has done lots of damage to our lives, and will continue to do so, as long as we live in this world, but we can, by the help of our Lord, learn His ways, and walk in them.

Yes, being a follower of Jesus is difficult, but can you imagine anything more rewarding then being assured of a place in heaven, and to receive from Jesus those wonderful words of approval, "Well done my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord". This is what every Christian can look forward to, if they have chosen the path of discipleship. Do not fool yourself into thinking you are a Christian, when Jesus is not actually Lord of your life. You have to decide for yourself which side you are on. If you want to be with Jesus, then you must let him be the captain of the team, your captain, and take your orders from Him. Why not make today the day when you ask Him to take over as Lord of your life?

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say". Luke 6:46

True Riches are found in Jesus

MARK 10

In today's lesson we will learn about finding the true riches that are found in Jesus alone. We will learn how marriage and children are much more precious to God, then to men. We will meet a man who had plenty of the world's riches, but was still poor, and when offered heaven's riches he turns them down. Jesus promises great riches to those who follow Him, riches that are much different from the world's riches, which are especially rewarded to the humble, and needy.

The Pharisees came to ask Jesus about whether a man could lawfully divorce his wife, and Jesus asked them about what the scriptures had to say. This is where they could have found the answer if that is what they were sincerely seeking. When they told Jesus the scriptures permitted divorce, Jesus has to correct their understanding, and explains that divorce was never God's intention, and that marriage should be honored at possible costs. Jesus further tells his own disciples that those who divorce without just cause, and marry another become an adulterer. Jesus upholds marriage as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, and no one should undermine marriage in anyway, or they will be guilty before God. Also when little children are brought to Jesus for blessing, and the disciples try to chase them away, Jesus is very upset with His disciples, and is happy to take the children in His arms and bless them. Again we see how the view of Jesus, is in sharp contrast with men. God cares much more about marriage and children, much more then we do. If we want to find favor with God w should love and honor what He holds dear.

A rich man comes to Jesus, asking how he could attain eternal life. Perhaps he thought he could purchase it with all of his money. Jesus speaks to him about keeping the 10 commandments, and the young man reported he had done his best to keep those commandments. Jesus then said to him that he was still lacking something, and so he needed to sell all his possession, give them to the poor, and then come and follow Jesus. This was not what the man wanted to hear. He loved his wealth, and found his happiness and security in his money. It was too much for him to give up, and so he went away sad. Jesus then told his disciples it is very difficult, almost impossible for a man with riches to enter the kingdom of God. Men cling to money and will not let it go for anything, not even the gospel. Jesus teaches here that true riches are found in knowing and following Him, not in the passing pleasures of this world. Jesus has the only way to eternal life, but some are not willing to forsake their love of money to follow Christ, and are therefore lost.

As Jesus explains how difficult it is for rich men to be saved, the disciples are astonished, and ask who then can be saved? Jesus says that with men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. This means that man cannot do anything to earn salvation, it must be entirely the work of God, and we can have this salvation when we simply reach our in faith to receive it. Peter was perhaps concerned about their salvation, and so he reminds Jesus of all that they had left to follow Him. Jesus quickly points out to his disciples, that those who have left their friends, family, jobs, and comforts, to follow Him would have much reward in this life, and also eternal life in the age to come. There is no one who truly follows Jesus in faith that will in the end be disappointed, for their reward is eternal and in heaven.

Jesus again speaks to his disciples about his coming trial and execution in Jerusalem. It is remarkable to see how detailed the Lord Jesus is about exactly what was going to take place, and how the Jewish authorities would hand him over to the Romans to be scourged, spit upon, and crucified. He is trying to prepare His disciples for these events, which will prove a great trial to their faith. He mentions also his resurrection, for this would be of great help to them later when trying to understand the events surrounding his crucifixion and resurrection. While Jesus speaks of his being put to death, John and James are looking for positions of honor in His kingdom, and ask Jesus about this. Jesus asked them if they were ready to share in his same sufferings and death, and they said they were ready to do so. Jesus said that indeed they would suffer and die also because of their obedience to God, but that positions of honor would be given to those who were most worthy. The other 10 disciples were rather annoyed at James and John trying to push ahead of them into positions of greater honor. When Jesus sees the envy and lack of love among his disciples, He addresses this, and teaches them that greatness in His kingdom is measured by humility and a willingness to serve others. True riches are not to be found in pushing ahead of others, but are found in humble service to others. God values people, and sent His Son to redeem all people, and when we share the same heart of love to others, we will not look to exalt ourselves, but to serve.

While going along the road near Jericho, a blind man named Bartimaeus called out to Jesus to have mercy upon him. At first the crowds try to silence his shouts, but he persisted because of his desperate need. When Jesus called the man he came and begged him to have his sight restored, and Jesus was glad to give him his sight. Having our eyesight is certainly one of the riches gifts God can give to us, but Jesus can offer even greater riches than physical sight, and that is spiritual sight, when we learn the truth of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. If you have this, you have the greatest riches of all.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Mark 10:45

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the riches that can be found in Jesus alone. We saw how God values marriage and children, and how a rich man could not give up his money to follow Jesus. We also learned that the true riches are not found in being number one, but are found by serving others in humility. It is far better to have eyes to see the riches that are in Christ, than to be spiritually blind, seeking riches that fade away. Someone might ask the question, "Do I have to give up all my possessions to follow Jesus faithfully?"

There is a sense in which we must be willing to give up everything that we hold dear, in order to follow Christ, but that does not necessarily mean we all must sell all of our possessions. Clearly if we all sold everything we had, then we would be left in a position of need, and a burden to others. When Jesus asked the man to sell all of his possessions, he was testing his sincerity and his faith. If he really believed that eternal life was of more value than his money, he would have gladly parted with his money and possessions in order to gain eternal life. The trouble is he loved his money more than he loved God. He did not have faith enough to trust in the Lord for his care. Jesus will not call all of us to give up all of our possessions, but He will most certainly test our hearts to see whether our hope is in our wealth and possession, or in God alone. We should be able to truthfully say, that all that we have belongs to the Lord, and He may take and use whatever He wishes for His purposes. The Lord knows that we have needs, and is glad to supply our needs, but He also wants to teach us not to depend on our money or possessions.

Some people are so anxious about money, and wonder if they will have enough for tomorrow or the next day. They wonder how they can earn enough to finish their schooling, or find enough to get established and get married and raise their own children. Jesus wants us to recognize that money is like the uncertainty of the rain. We cannot always predict when the rain will come, but we know that it will come, because God always does send us His blessings. God is a faithful provider, and we should trust in Him, not for everything we want, but for the basic needs of food and clothing. If we are experiencing a time of financial drought we might become very anxious, but this is the time when we need to trust in the Lord, and call out to Him for help. The Lord knows all about our needs, and we can be assured that He loves us and will care for us for today, tomorrow, and for all our tomorrows. The Lord does not forsake the righteous. Do remember that God does not owe you anything, but He provides for you because he loves you. Just a father or mother loves their children and provides for them, or at least that is what we should expect from loving parents, God also will provide for His own children. God is infinitely more loving and faithful than our own parents, and so we should learn to trust in Him fully. To doubt Him, is an insult to His faithful character, and a denial of His love.

While we speak about giving away our possessions or money for the Lord, we do well to remember that a characteristic of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a believer is when they are led to be generous in their giving. Many Christians give generously of their money and time to help others, or to spread the gospel. Many schools, hospitals, and orphanages have been built by the hard work and sacrifices of God's people. We may not be required to give up our possessions, but the Spirit of God leads Christians to joyfully give, because they delight to manifest God's love towards the needs of those around them. Giving should never be thought of as a dreaded obligation, but rather a joyful privilege. Christians who are fully dedicated to the Lord, will not want to claim anything for their own selfish use, knowing that this is not only contrary to the heart of Christ, but also disappointing to Him who gave Himself entirely for our well-being. I hope you will give to the Lord joyfully, and not claim anything for yourself alone. Everything we have is a gift from God, not just for our selfish pursuits, but intended to be a blessing also to those around us.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9

LESSON 39
Zeal of Jesus
MARK II

In today's lesson we will see Jesus riding as a triumphant king into Jerusalem, and chasing away the thieves from the temple area because of His zeal. Also we learn the power of prayers made in sincere faith. When questioned by the religious authorities, Jesus also questions them, catching them in their own trap.

Jesus sent two of his disciples to Bethany to collect a colt of a donkey, but as they were taking the animal, some questioned them, and so they explained that the Lord had need of it, and so they let them take the animal. Bethany was a place Jesus often stayed, and he had friends in the town, such as the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. These people loved Jesus, and when they heard of his need they were glad to provide whatever He asked for. It is wonderful to belong to a community of believers, where there is such a spirit of love and obedience to Christ that they are glad to serve Him and supply to Him what He asks. Perhaps you are fortunate to belong to such a church, or you are helping to make your church like this.

As Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on the donkey, people laid down their clothes and branches in the way, and shouted out, "Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest". The people were confessing by their shouts, that they recognized Jesus as their king, and their expected Messiah. The word Hosanna means "Save Now", and shows that the people were expecting a triumphant reigning king that would take over the rule of Israel, and cast out the Romans. However their excitement and shouts would soon turn to treachery and betrayal, when their hopes of a reigning Messiah were dashed. It was only a few days later the people would be crying out for His crucifixion. We can see from this, that most people embrace religion for what it gives them. If it promises to make them rich, prosperous and free from tyranny, oppression, and poverty, they are very happy to have it, but when it does not promise these immediate rewards, they are not interested, and even hate religion. This is because our human nature hates to make sacrifices, give, and serve. In our sin nature, we are greedy, and self-centered, wanting immediate satisfaction. True Christianity does not offer immediate relief from our problems, but it does promise us a place in heaven if we are born of God.

When Jesus passed by a fig tree the next morning and was looking for something to eat, He did not find any fruit on the tree, and so he cursed the tree. This is a picture of the nation of Israel, for the Lord had come to this nation, and was looking for some fruit, something that would please God, but instead the Lord found only false religion, greed, hatred, and disobedience. When Jesus entered the temple area and saw all the merchants buying and selling, and moneychangers, he was eaten up with zeal, and began to chase them out of the temple area, and turn over their tables. He told the people that, "My house is to be a house of prayer, but you have made it into a den of thieves". This is one instance where we see the Lord's burning anger against the people of Israel, because they had changed religion into a moneymaking business. Jesus was normally meek and mild, but in this instance He is hot with anger. Because of Jesus zeal, and the respect people gave to Him, the Scribes and Elders were envious and wanted to destroy Him.

Today many churches are following the same pattern of moneymaking. The church should be a place where people can come to worship, pray and fellowship, and not a place where money is solicited from everyone. In many churches it hardly seems possible to have a meeting without a least one or more offerings taken from the congregation. The Lord Jesus is angry with those who use religious service to make money. Please do not be deceived by false teachers and preachers, who make campaigns and special meetings, but cannot hide their love of money. Are they trying to spread the gospel, help the poor, feed hungry children, and pay for the school fees of children who can't afford it? Or is it a nice car and big house they are after. Perhaps they are asking for a bigger church building to do the work of God. How clever they are to convince their congregations of the great work God is doing among them, while the children go without, and they drive in an expensive car. Remember Jesus hates the wickedness of men who love money, more than they love God. When you see that preacher or pastor shouting out the message of God with great zeal, ask yourself the question, how many poor people have been helped by Him? How many children can say that the Pastor has given them some food to eat or clothes to wear? Do not judge by the impressive appearance, or loud preaching, but by their good works, and kindness and grace shown towards the needy.

When Peter saw the fig tree again that had now withered away, he was astonished that it had withered so quickly. Jesus uses this occasion to teach Peter about the power of prayer, telling him that when we have faith in God to answer, we can see God do great things through our prayers.

The next day when they again entered Jerusalem, the scribes and elders questioned by what authority Jesus was doing His works. They were undoubtedly upset by His actions in the temple the previous day, and wanted some occasion to accuse Him or arrest Him. But while they were trying to find some reason to trap Him, He was able to catch them in their own trap, by asking a question about John the Baptist. They did not believe John was a prophet of God, and did not accept His message as being from God. However they also knew that all the people counted John as a prophet, and they did not want to create an uproar among the people, so they simply said they did not know whether John's message was from God. They could not tell Him the truth that was in their hearts, or it would

condemn them before the people, and because they refused to tell Him the truth, He also refused to tell them by what authority He did His work.

"Then He taught, saying to them, is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves." Mark 11:17

Today's Bible Question:

Today we saw how Jesus entered into Jerusalem triumphantly like a king, and was angry when He saw the corruption of religion that had turned it into a moneymaking business. We also learned about the power of prayer, and how those who questioned Jesus authority, were caught in their own trap. Someone might ask the question, "What should the collected offerings of the church be used for?"

It is rather clear to everyone who attends church that churches are fond of collecting money; but what is all that money being used for? The people who contribute generously to the church ought to know what how the money they give is being spent. If any church is not completely transparent with their accounting and expenditures, you have every right to question the sincerity of those in charge of the finances. The bible would teach us to handle money with the greatest of integrity, so as not to compromise the power of the gospel. We do not want anyone to accuse the church of having the wrong motives when it comes to handling money, so it is important for a church to disclose both it's income and expenditures to all those who are making contributions.

But what should the church use money for. Is it for bigger and more beautiful buildings in which to worship? It is for the Pastor and His family to live in luxury, and eat at nice restaurants? Is the money to be used for expensive sounds systems, with massive speakers, and paid musicians, so that the church can make its joyful noise heard throughout the neighborhood and beyond? I hope you are answering "No" to each of these questions. The church collects funds for two main purposes, namely to spread the gospel, and to aid the poor. This is clearly what we see in the New Testament. The money collected most often was a collection to help the poor. Christianity is a charitable religion that cares about the social and economic struggles of the community, and tries to alleviate that suffering where and when it can. Today the church is so often a place where the rich take from the poor, where it should be exactly the opposite. The rich pastors should be giving to their poor congregations. We never see Jesus asking anyone for money. People did supply to Him food, and support, but that was not because anyone asked for it, but rather because they were grateful to Him for His work. They believed He was teaching a message that others needed to hear, and so they were glad to give to support Him and His disciples. We see the same for the apostles who were sent into the world to preach the gospel. These men never pleaded for help, they just trusted in the Lord to provide, and believers who saw the good they were doing supported them.

I hope in the church you attend, there is accountability among the leadership for the stewardship of the Lord's money. I hope the money is being used properly to support the poor, the needy, or most importantly, to help promote the gospel message. When a church invests heavily into buying bibles, gospel tracts, or any other means of sharing the gospel, then we see how they are fulfilling the Lord's desire to spread the good news. As an individual Christian you can chose where and how you spend the money entrusted to your care. Do not feel compelled to give, because others are begging for money, especially when there is some doubt about the integrity of how that money is being used. Helping to feed the poor, or supporting those who spread the gospel message, are always investments that please the Lord.

"He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honours Him has mercy on the needy." Proverbs 14:31

LESSON 40
Jesus is Smarter
MARK 12

In today's lesson we will see why Jesus is smarter than anyone else. Even the wise old Pharisees and Sadducees could not outdo the wisdom of Jesus. Jesus uses a parable to show the treachery of the Jewish authorities for wanting to kill him, but in such a way that they fear to arrest Him. After Jesus demonstrates that no one should challenge His wisdom, He also shows His disciples how the humble and poor can please God much more than the rich and proud.

Jesus tells a parable to the people about a man who planted a vineyard, rented it out to vinedressers, and then traveled to a far country. When the harvest time came, and the man wanted some of his share of the fruit, he sent his servants to collect from his renters, but after 3 attempts the servants were either abused or killed. Finally the man sent his beloved son, thinking that the renters would respect the son and give him his share. Instead of honoring the son and paying the vineyard owner his due, they killed the son, for they reasoned that he was the heir, and when he is gone the vineyard will be theirs. Jesus was speaking about the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who saw themselves as rulers over Israel. They did not respect God's servants, or His Son due to their pride and selfish ambition. The scribes knew Jesus was speaking about them, but they feared the crowds, and so they did not arrest Jesus. They should have reflected carefully upon the words of Jesus, but they were more determined to destroy Him. Such was their blind envy.

Now Jesus faces a series of questions from the religious elite of His day. They all thought they might be able to trip him in his word, and have something to accuse him with, but in the end they all discovered that Jesus was smarter and wiser than all of them. The Pharisees tried to trip him on a question about the legality of paying taxes to Caesar, but Jesus wisely answered that coins with Caesar's image should be rendered to him, and the things that belong to God, should be rendered to God. No one could find any fault in his wise answer, and the Pharisees had to go away ashamed. Next the Sadducees took their turn at trying to trip up Jesus with a question about marriage and resurrections, hoping to make the doctrine of resurrection look rather silly. However Jesus pointed out to them that they did not know the scriptures, and had made a great error. He explains the answer to the question, by asserting that in heaven people will not marry, but will be like the angels, and that the scriptures teach resurrection by inference when God spoke to Moses about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as living and not dead, much after they had all been buried in their graves. Then a scribe came to ask Jesus a question about the greatest of all commandments, and Jesus without hesitation tells him that to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength is the first and greatest commandment, and goes even further to say the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Everyone marveled at Jesus answers and the wisdom He displayed. This should have been a witness to the proud religious leaders that Jesus was indeed their Messiah, but they still would not accept this. Jesus finally asks them all a question, about David referring to his son as his Lord, and asked if he is his son, how can he also be his Lord? This question baffled all of them. We now know the answer, that the Messiah was indeed David's son, but also the Lord of heaven, God incarnate in Jesus. This revelation was something they were not prepared to accept, and would rather kill Jesus than consider that he was more than just men like themselves.

Jesus warns the crowds to beware of these proud religious people, for they like to wear long robes, greetings in the marketplace, the best seats at the synagogue or at feasts. They make long prayers to be seen by men, and they take advantage of poor widows. Jesus said they would have a greater condemnation. This is because they were experts in God's law, and should have known better. Just think of this list of proud religious behavior, and ask yourself if you have seen any of this in churches today. Do we see some men who love to wear their religious robes, so people will identify them as a priest, or man of God? Do we see them looking for special greetings, and privileges because of their religious position? Do we see them looking for the positions of honor in the church, or at special occasions like funerals and weddings? Do we see them make long prayers to impress others, and do we see them taking advantage of those who can hardly fend for themselves? I tell you these same men are still with us today, and I see them frequently. Let's not be deceived by their phony religious mask.

Jesus was watching people put their money into the treasury at the temple, and called the attention of His disciples when he saw a widow put in two small coins. He explained that she had put in more than all the others, for they had given out of their abundance, but she had given everything that she had. Jesus wants His followers to see and understand that it is more often the humble and poor that delight the heart of God through their faith and obedience, than the rich and proud, who may look good on the outside, but inside they are full of corruption and deceit.

"So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury." Mark 12:43

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have learned how Jesus proves to be wiser than all those who tried to oppose Him. We saw how he used a parable to show their wicked intent to destroy Him, and we saw how the many questions posed to him were answered wisely, and how no one was able to answer his question. We also saw how the humble and the poor give more to God than even the rich and proud. Someone might ask the question, "How can a person love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength?"

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment of all, He replied that it was to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. As we think about this, we realize that this is a rather challenging thing for us to do. What did Jesus really mean, when he said these words. Let's think about what it means to love God in the ways Jesus describes.

Firstly we are to love God with our hearts. The heart is the center of our being, our passions, and our emotions. It is that which drives our desires, and transmits love. When we love God with all of our hearts, we will love the things that God loves, and God loves His people, and sent Christ to die for us. Now if we also love God's people, we will find ways to serve them, and also bring people to the Lord, this is how we can love the Lord with all of our hearts.

Secondly we are to love him with all of our soul. Our soul is what defines our character, will, and our spirit. Our soul is what makes us who we are, apart from our physical body. If I love God with all my soul, it will mean that everything about me will be for the pleasure of God. I will give him my will, and conform my character to His perfect character. I will strive for all that He is striving to accomplish.

If I am to love God with my mind, then I must apply my mind to learning about Him through studying of the bible. We often give our minds attention to other trivial pursuits, like TV programs and movies, which do not teach us about God's will, or His ways. If we are to love Him with all of our minds, then we have to give up on all the wasted time pursuing vain and unprofitable things.

Lastly, if we are to love God with all of our strength, it means we must apply all of our energies and interests into the pursuit of God, and those things that are pleasing to Him. This means we will not give God our part time or half-hearted efforts, but when we do something in service for God, we will give Him our very best, according to the abilities which He gives to us. When we pray, we will pray fervently, when we witness we will passionately tell others the gospel message, and we will give generously, just as God gives to us generously.

Yes to love God is a very high calling, but it is the first and greatest commandment, and so we all must take it very seriously, and strive to obey the words of Jesus to love our God. If it seems difficult to love God to such a great amount, then think of the second commandment, which is to love your neighbor as yourself. If you start there, you can think of ways to bless your neighbor and share the love of Christ with them, for then you will also be learning how to love God. For when we love our neighbors, we are also showing our love for God. Remember that in the scriptures love for God is almost always equated with our obedience to the scriptures, therefore to take time to learn the word of God very well, and then obey what we learn, is the way we show our genuine love for God.

"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment." Mark 12:30

LESSON 41
Jesus is Coming Soon!
MARK 13

In today's lesson we will learn about Jesus' predictions concerning the tribulation and His coming again. The disciples were interested to know about the future, and asked Jesus to tell them more about it. Jesus was glad to tell them about the future, teaching and warning them to be alert and watching for His return.

Looking at the beautiful temple, the disciples were admiring it before the Lord Jesus. Jesus wants his disciples to understand that while Jerusalem and the temple might look quite impressive to them, one day it would just be a pile of rubble. Jesus said that their house (that is the nation of Israel) would be left to them desolate. God would judge the nation of Israel for their rejection of Christ. This took place in AD 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, and their beloved temple. While Jesus is speaking about this coming day of judgment, He also tells His disciples about a future time, which we call the tribulation. Jesus wants His disciples to be prepared and know what things will take place not only for their benefit, but also for our benefit through the writings of the apostles in the New Testament. These prophecies are yet to be fulfilled, and are just as relevant to us today, as to any previous generation.

Jesus mentions many things that will characterize the future tribulation, which include all of the following:

- 1. False Messiahs will arise*
- 2. There will be wars and rumors of war*
- 3. There will be earthquakes, famines, & troubles (what Jesus calls the beginning of sorrows)*
- 4. The Disciples will stand before councils, be beaten in synagogues, and stand before kings and rulers.*
- 5. The gospel will be preached in all the nations.*
- 6. There will be persecutions against believers, and family betrayal.*
- 7. Then will be the Abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel,*

This is understood to happen at the halfway point of the 7-year tribulation, and will commence the period known as the great tribulation. Jesus warns those living at that time to flee to the mountains, saying they should make no delay, not stopping to collect their things. He said it would not be good for those who are pregnant or for nursing mothers. This time is described in Revelation as a time of horrific death and destruction upon the earth. Jesus tells us that unless these days are shortened no flesh would be saved.

- 8. False Christ's show signs and wonders to deceive.*
- 9. The sun and moon will be darkened, and stars will appear to be falling, and the powers of heaven are shaken.*
- 10. Then the Son of Man is seen coming in clouds with great power and glory.*
- 11. And the Angels will gather the together the elect.*

Jesus says, that when you see these things happening, it is near, at the door; meaning His coming is near.

- 12. This generation will not pass, until all this is fulfilled.*

When Jesus said this generation will not pass away, he must have meant the generation that will be living during the tribulation, for clearly these events have not taken place yet, and the original apostles have long since left this world. Jesus said that although the heavens and the earth would pass away, His words would never pass away. This was to reinforce in our minds the certainty of these prophecies being fulfilled.

- 13. No one knows the day or the hour, only the Father.*

While we have some details about this coming day of judgment, known as the tribulation, we are not certain of the day or hour that these events will begin to take place. We do know from other scriptures, that the church will be taken out of the world just prior to the tribulation. This is what is commonly called the rapture of the church. Believers today are looking forward to the rapture, and not the day of God's wrath, during the tribulation. Therefore while we may see the beginnings of sorrows today, with increasing wars, famines, earthquakes, etc.; we know that this passage of scripture is largely addressed to the Jewish nation during the tribulation that follows the rapture.

All of this prophecy should be a warning to us, to prepare for the Lord's return. Even if we do not understand all the details of these future events, we can be certain of this one fact, that Christ is coming again, and when He comes He is coming to judge the world in righteousness. That is why we need to heed the warning of Jesus to be on our alert, to watch and pray, and look for His coming. If you are not a believer, and have never taken Jesus as your personal Savior, then please consider that time maybe very short. We do not know when the Lord is coming, but it might be at anytime. If you neglect God's message of salvation through Christ, you might be one of those unfortunate people who will have to face God's wrath in the tribulation. If you are a believer, you have the wonderful hope that at any moment from now the Lord Jesus will call you to Himself, and you will be with Him forever in heaven. I hope all that are listening to this message are preparing themselves for the soon coming of our Lord Jesus. If you have any concerns about your salvation, then please do not hesitate to contact us after this program, so we can help you find assurance of salvation and peace with God.

"Take heed, watch, and pray; for you do not know when the time is." Mark 13:33

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the return of Jesus and the tribulation period. Jesus has given us plenty of details about this coming time, in order to warn us about His coming wrath, and so we might wisely prepare ourselves for the Lord's return. Someone might ask the question, Do we see any signs today of the Lord's soon return?

Based on what we have read in the scriptures today, and comparing also with other scriptures such as 2Timothy 3:1-5 and 2Peter 3, we can be rather confident that we are living in the last days. Of course there has always been wars, since the time of the apostles through to our day, but we certainly have an increase in global warfare, and many nations fighting over the past century. There has been an increase in widespread famine and disease, and there have also been an increasing number of natural disasters including hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes. All these are indicators that the beginning of sorrows is now underway, and the Lord's return is very close.

Perhaps one of the greatest indicators today of the Lord's return has to do with the nation of Israel. The scriptures prophesied the re-gathering of Israel as a nation, in many places in the Old Testament. Since the fall of Israel to the Babylonian empire in 586 BC, Israel has never been it's own sovereign nation until more recently, when in 1948 Israel was recognized by the United Nations as a sovereign state. Israel had returned in measure to their homeland, to rebuild Jerusalem, and the temple, but they always remained under the rule of other nations. Eventually the nation of Israel was again dispersed when the Romans crushed Jerusalem in AD 70. This is what the Lord was referring to when he told His disciples that not one stone would be left on another. Since AD 70 the Jews have been scattered throughout the nations of the world, and yet have still maintained their own unique identity, and amazingly their ancient Hebrew language. Since 1948, neighboring Arab countries, which are opposed to Israel being a nation, have repeatedly attacked Israel. Quite miraculously the small nation of Israel has survived the past 60 years, after repeated attacks from armies, which far out numbered them. Only God could have saved Israel from her enemies in this most amazing way.

When Jesus spoke of the tribulation period, he mentions something called the abomination of desolation, which is spoken of by the prophet Daniel. Some bible commentators understand this to refer to the antichrist standing in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and declaring himself to be God. We know that this takes place at the middle of 7-year tribulation, and requires that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt. Today there is no temple in Jerusalem for the Jews 7-year there has not been any temple since AD 70. However the Jews are definitely trying to make plans to reconstruct the temple. Many of the furnishings of the temple have already been prepared, and are waiting to be used in the new temple. The problem is that the temple location would need to be constructed precisely where the famous "Dome of the Rock" Muslim shrine is located. While the Jews would love to build their sacred temple, the Muslims would never allow it, and it would be cause for a catastrophic war between the Arab nations and the Jews. There are indications in scripture about this tension between Israel and the nations around her. All of these things are clearly pointing to the troubles of the tribulation period and a great war, which is known in the bible as the battle of Armageddon. Although we do not know the day or the hour of Christ's return, we certainly see many signs, which tell us that His return is very near. Are you prepared for His return? Have you been saved from God's judgment against your sin? Why not make today the day you come to Christ and receive salvation.

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2Peter 3:9

LESSON 42
Jesus is arrested!
MARK 14

In today's lesson we will learn about the treachery and betrayal of Jesus by Judas, and Peter's denial of even knowing Jesus. It is sad to see how wickedly man treated Jesus, who only came to share God's love with humanity, especially when we see even his close friends fail him. But even in the midst of such hopeless rebellion and sin, we find one person who honored Jesus.

A woman took some costly oil of spikenard and anointed Jesus with it. This upset some of the disciples, who thought the oil could have been sold, and the money given to the poor, but Jesus defends the actions of the woman. He explains that she had honored him, and done this in preparation for his burial. He also said that what this woman did would be remembered wherever the gospel would be preached. How precious to Jesus are the acts of kindness we do for Him, but how misunderstood by carnal minds.

Jesus and His disciples met to celebrate the Passover meal, and while they were eating together, Jesus informs them that one of them would betray him, and they are all wondering who it could be. Jesus then says it would be better if the betrayer had never been born. They did not know then who the betrayer was, but we now know that it was Judas. Those who so knowingly and openly rebel against Christ can only look forward to God's severe Judgment. Jesus then institutes the Lord Supper, where the bread and wine are to be taken in remembrance of Jesus sacrifice for us. This unique meal is a wonderful way for believers to reflect upon Jesus love for us, and to draw near to Him in worship. A church that wishes to please the Lord will be careful to observe the Lord's Supper regularly and solemnly. Unfortunately today many Christians have not seen the significance of this simply remembrance meal, and it is relegated to a short ritual tagged onto a preaching service. The New Testament would show us that this was the central meeting of the believers, and their regular practice.

After the Lord's Supper was ended the Jesus and His disciples went to the Mount of Olives, and Jesus tells all of His disciples how they would fail Him and scatter. No one wanted to believe this, and Peter tries to promise his loyalty at all costs. Such is the weakness and fear of men, who speak courageous words, but when put to the test, tremble in fear. Many are bold in church to declare that they are Christian, but then around their unbelieving friends they deny they know Christ, through their ungodly behavior. In the garden Jesus prays for the cup of judgment to be taken from Him, but submits to the will of God. Jesus would not try to escape from the cross, and the wrath of God against our sin, and there was no other way but the cross. He surrendered His will to this horrible and shameful death. Judas leads soldiers in the dark of the night to arrest Jesus. When they arrest Jesus, there is some immediate resistance and one of the high priests servants lost his ear. Jesus allowed these men to take Him, but asked that His disciples go free. The disciples then forsook Him and fled into the darkness. It is a remarkable thing to see Jesus allowing men to bind him and lead him away to their mock trial. Jesus had all power, and could have blinded them all, or sent down fire upon them, or had an angel slay them all, but He choose to surrender himself to sinful men, the creatures he had made and given life to. What amazing grace our Lord demonstrates to us.

When questioned by the high priest, Jesus remains silent, but when he is asked directly if He is the Christ, he confirms this to be so. This infuriated the priests, and those gathered, and they spit upon him, mocked him, and blindfolded him and struck him on the face, asking him to identify who had struck him. It is remarkable how these supposed religious, God fearing men, could act with such hatred and viciousness. We can only conclude that Satan who was driving them in their rage against Jesus. While Jesus is undergoing this trial, Peter had try to slip into the courtyard unnoticed, and warmed himself by the fire. However some recognized him as one of the disciples, but Peter kept denying their charges. At last the rooster crowed and Peter remembered the words of Jesus, and in conviction and sorrow he went out and wept bitterly.

As we consider how unjustly and wickedly men treated Jesus, we ought to ask ourselves how we have responded to Jesus. Have we pushed Jesus out of our lives, because we do not want any threat to our enjoyment of sin? Have we denied Him by our actions and words, when we are fearful and want to conform to the world? Have we betrayed Him, by cooperating with God's enemies? We all need to search our hearts, and realize that before God we are all guilty of the sins, that led Jesus to the cross. Although men bound him, arrested him, tried him, and eventually crucified him, it was His will to die for mankind. He would have never been taken be wicked men, unless God allowed it. Jesus loves us that much, that He was willing to be the sacrificial lamb that paid the penalty for all of our sin, even for his friends that left him that night when he was arrested. How often we have failed Jesus, though He never fails us. Trust Him today as your Savior, for that is the reason He submitted Himself to the cross.

"And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Mark 14:62

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the night in which Jesus was betrayed and arrested. On that night Jesus provided a simple meal by which His followers could remember His dying love for them. He also prayed earnestly for an alternate method of salvation, but when none was found He willingly gave himself over to shameful crucifixion. Someone might ask the question why did Jesus pray for His cup of suffering to pass, when He knew that He must go to the cross?

There is a great mystery in trying to understand the human and divine natures as combined in our Lord Jesus Christ. In his human nature we see Him tired, hungry, sleeping, and on this night crying out for deliverance. In his divine nature we see Jesus foretelling the details of His own arrest and crucifixion. We see Him walk on the sea, raise the dead, still a storm, and cast out evil spirits. We know that Jesus was a man, and truly human, but He was also God incarnate. It makes it difficult for us to understand how Jesus could know full well that He would be sentenced to die on a cross in just a few short hours, and that this must be the case to fulfill the scriptures, and secure salvation for mankind, and yet at the same time hear Him pray that the Father would allow this cup to pass away from him. This meant He was praying that if there remained any other possible way to accomplish our salvation, then He was pleading for that option. We may have to accept that we cannot fully fathom the mystery of the dual nature of Christ in both His human and divine natures. Perhaps we can simply understand that while Jesus knew He must go to the cross and suffer, He still was shrinking back in the horrible reality of the shame and suffering He would have to endure. It was his human nature that recoiled at the thought of such a horrible torturous death, and from the wrath that must fall upon Him in order to pay sin's penalty. During the time Jesus was on the cross, we are told that His soul was made an offering for sin, and that He bore in His own body our sins. We just cannot fathom the depth of judgment He went through because of our sins, and His Spirit was horrified and greatly troubled by those dark looming hours upon the cross. It is not that He was unwilling to go, for He asserted, 'not my will, but your will be done.' Although our Lord Jesus had surrendered His will to the cross, and though in His divine nature He knew what must happen, yet there was a holy revulsion to the horrors of the cross. We might think of it this way. Imagine, the policeman has given you a speeding fine. You know for sure you must pay the price because the crime has definitely been committed. You know justice must be served, but you also know paying for the fine is going to hurt you financially, and so you still make your plea to the officer, to see if there is any other way you could pay for the crime, but all the while you know that the Law demands that you must pay the fine. It is not that you are rejecting the Law or it's just payment, but you just dread the weight of the law and it's punishment upon you, and your reaction is to look for anyway out, but in reality you know you will have to pay the price. If I think of this simple analogy perhaps it can help me to understand why Jesus prayed as He did for deliverance from the judgment he knew He must face. The difference of course is that he did not have to pay just a small fine, but he took all the judgment for all of man's sin. He was in great anguish of spirit, when He thought of what He must endure to fully pay our debt.

There are some scenes in the bible, which make us wonder in awe at the marvelous plan of God to redeem lost mankind. Here in the gospels we see How Jesus yielded Himself willingly to be our Savior, even when the men he came to save treated Him so cruelly and unjustly. Yet His purpose was not diminished by the failures and sin of men, and He humbled Himself, even to the point of death on a cross. Have you considered the debt Jesus paid for you sins? Have you considered how much pain and suffering He went through so you could go to heaven? I hope you will appreciate and thank Him for his love and sacrifice, and call upon Him in faith to save your soul.

"For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." Romans 10:13

LESSON 43
Jesus is crucified!
MARK 15

In today's lesson we see Jesus tried, condemned, beaten, mocked, crucified, and buried. The scene is filled with the darkness and depravity of man at his worst. In stark contrast we have the light and hope seen in the voluntary surrender of Jesus to the torture and pain inflicted by both man and God, in order to take away our sin.

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman Governor, he questioned whether Jesus was a king, but was amazed when Jesus remained quiet while all his enemies made accusations against Him. Pilate perceived that the Jews were handing Jesus over, not for any particular crime He had done, but because of envy, and so Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. He offered to release one prisoner to them, as was the custom at the feast time. He offered to them Barabbas who was a notorious murderer, or Jesus, whom they accused of being a self-appointed king. The people cried out for Barabbas, showing Pilate just how much they hated Jesus. When the people were creating an uproar, and shouting for the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate finally gave into their cries, since he wanted to please the crowd. He ordered Jesus to be beaten and then sentenced him to be crucified. The soldiers beat Jesus mercilessly, ripping his flesh open on his back, and putting a crown of thorns on his head, beating him in the face, and striking him with their fists and with a rod. The soldiers also mocked him as they carried out their cruel beating.

When they took Jesus outside the city to Mt. Calvary, they crucified him between two thieves. As He hung on the cross in agony and shame, the people reviled Him; even the thieves who were being crucified also reviled Him. Some of the people were challenging Jesus, to save himself and come down from the cross, and the priests and scribes mocked him saying, "He saved others, but himself he cannot save". The insidious hatred, torture, and mockery is hard to understand, when we see Jesus bleeding in utter agony upon the cross, with nails through his hands and feet. How could people be so utterly wicked, especially when we consider that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and in fact was well known to all as a miracle worker, who healed countless people. It makes no sense at all, except when we understand that Satan was driving these sinners in their made rage against God's son.

From noon to 3pm darkness fell upon the whole land. Then Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". They offered him some sour wine, before He gave a loud cry, and breathed His last. At that moment the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and an earthquake shook the earth. When the centurion, who was standing near the cross, saw the way Jesus died, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God". Some of the women who had ministered to Jesus were standing at a distance watching the horror of this evil execution.

A man named Joseph of Arimathea honored Jesus, by asking permission to take his body and bury it. He collected Jesus body from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen cloths, and put him in a tomb not far from the city. Joseph had made this tomb for Himself and it was cut from stone. He sealed the tomb with a large stone that was rolled over the mouth of the tomb. Again we see some women watching carefully where the body of Jesus was buried.

If the story of the crucifixion of Jesus were to end with his burial, what a sad page in history it would be, how empty of all hope for mankind. Unfortunately man has not changed over the many centuries since that day Jesus was crucified. Men today murder, steal, rape, lie and commit every form of wickedness. The heart of man is desperately wicked. Man was at his worst when Jesus was taken by wicked hands and put to death. Jesus only offered God's love, goodness and His truth and righteousness. Men rejected Jesus, and spat in God's face. With this in mind, we can appreciate that man deserves the most severe judgment from God. If we had what we deserve, we would all end up suffering eternally in the fires of Hell. However God's love is greater and higher than all of our wickedness and sin. God is able to rescue us from our sins, from the judgment we deserve, from the torments of the lake of fire. How can God rescue us? Ironically, God rescues us through the cross. That which was the worst crime ever committed by man against His God, turns into the greatest gift ever given by God to man. Jesus was not simply put to death by wicked men, He was judged by God for our sins. While Jesus hung that day and endured the hatred, scorn, the pain, and vileness of men's cruelty, He was also enduring a judgment that we can hardly comprehend. He was also suffering the wrath of God against all of man's sins. Here was more than courage, more than kindness, and more than benevolence. Here was love beyond comprehension, immeasurable grace, and a gift of infinite value. As you consider what Jesus did on the cross to save your soul, I pray the Holy Spirit will give you understanding, and convict you of your sinful condition before God. I pray today you will surrender your life to Christ in faith, and find the gift of eternal life. Jesus suffered and died to bring you the gift of eternal life, because of His great love for you. Will you receive that gift today?

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We saw how men did their worst to Him by instigating the most tortuous suffering and death. In the midst of this coalition of evil, there are some disciples disillusioned by the sight of their Lord and Master dying on a cross, and one kind man who cares for the body of Jesus, and buries Him in his own tomb. Someone might ask the question, why did Jesus have to die?

I hope you understand that Jesus did have to die upon the cross, but perhaps you do not understand why it was necessary for him die. Let us think about what the bible teaches on this most important subject. Firstly we read that Jesus was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). This verse teaches us that it was God's plan from before the creations of the world to send Jesus as our lamb to die. God knew that man, whom He would create, would sin against Him. Because God loved mankind, and did not want to send man into eternal judgment in Hell, He planned a way to redeem us back to Himself, and that was through the death of Jesus. In the Old Testament we learn that God is not satisfied with any payment for sin, except if an innocent victim is killed to cover the sin, and that is why we read, 'without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin' (Heb. 9:22). God had given the nation of Israel the practice of animal sacrifices to teach them (and us), the need for an innocent victim to die to pay for the penalty of sin. The trouble is that all the blood that was shed from innocent animals never removed any sins (Heb. 10:4). The sacrifice of animals was only a means to teach us about our need to pay for sin, but those sacrifices could never satisfy God, and could not remove any sins. God accepted the offerings made in faith, as an atonement, which means a covering for sin, but that did not remove the sin, just covered it until Christ came. When Jesus, the Lamb of God, died upon the cross, he was the perfect innocent sacrifice that could satisfy all of God's requirements to pay for our sins. Jesus was a sinless man, and that is what God required to put away our sins. Jesus never died for any sins of His own, for He was perfectly sinless, and that is the only way that our sins can be removed. There is no other person, and no other way, that could be found that would remove the guilt of sin from mankind, except for Jesus Christ, the perfect sinless man, to be our sacrificial lamb.

People want to try so many ways to reach God, to have their sins removed, and to make it into heaven, but God has provided only one way of salvation. If you are trying to earn heaven through your own good works, or through your religious efforts, then you are not accepting God's way. Nothing you could ever do would even pay for one sin. The debt must be paid, and the only one with sufficient payment, is Jesus. You must place your trust in His death as the payment God requires for your sin. Apart from this, a person cannot be saved and go to heaven.

So the reason Jesus had to die was so that you and I could have our sins forgiven, we could receive eternal life, and have a home in heaven. This was the only way that God was able to satisfy His own righteous requirements for man to be free from the penalty of sin. If you want to go to heaven, you have to be sure your sins have been dealt with at the cross. Asking Jesus to forgive your sins is to acknowledge by faith that He has paid for the debt of your sins. If you come to Jesus in faith, you should be very grateful that He was willing to die and suffer in your place, and to pay your debt. When a person comes to Jesus in faith, often there is an outpouring of emotions, because they realize how wicked a sinner they are, and how unworthy they are of God's love and salvation. They will feel humble and sad, but then they also realize that God loves them so much, and that He is willing to forgive them, and to accept them as His own child. This gives the person a sense of peace and joy that the world knows nothing about. I am so glad that God saved my soul, when I accepted the death of Jesus upon the cross as payment for my sin, and asked Him to be my Savior. Why not ask Him to save your soul today, and thank Him for dying on the cross for you. Remember, no one will ever get into heaven, without accepting Jesus death as the full payment for their sin.

"And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Hebrews 9:22

LESSON 44
Jesus is raised!
MARK 16

In today's lesson we come to the final chapter in Mark's gospel, and the account of Jesus being raised from death. We will see how the disciples of Jesus, found it difficult to believe the reports that Jesus was raised, and when the Lord appears to them, He rebukes their lack of faith and hardness of heart. Many people today still have hardened hearts, refusing to believe the wonderful truth that Jesus rose, and is alive today.

Early in the morning, as the day was dawning some of the women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. As they were coming to the tomb they were discussing the problem of how to roll the stone away, since it was too heavy for them to move by themselves. But as they approached the tomb they saw that the stone had already been rolled away. At the tomb the women met an angel, Mark describes Him as a young man, but we know from the other gospel writers, that this was an angel. The angel told the women to inform the disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead, and they should make plans to meet Him in Galilee. The women were overcome by amazement and fear, and quickly fled from the tomb back towards the city.

It was Mary Magdalene who was the first person to meet the resurrected Lord Jesus that morning, and after she saw the Lord, she once again returned into the city to report to the other disciples that she had seen Him, but they did not believe her report. There were two others later in the day who were walking to Emmaus a few miles away from Jerusalem, and also met Jesus as they walked along. Luke tells us this story in more detail, and we know that at first they do not recognize who Jesus was, but after he broke bread with them, their eyes were opened, and they knew it was Jesus raised from the dead. They also return back to the city to announce that Jesus is risen, but still the other disciples do not believe the news. Then at last Jesus appears to the 11 disciples as they sat together at the table. Jesus rebukes His disciples for their lack of faith, and for the hardness of their hearts.

Jesus instructs His disciples to go into the entire world and preach the gospel to everyone. Clearly the few disciples that Jesus spoke to would not be able to fulfill this task in their lifetimes, and so today the faithful followers of Jesus are still seeking to preach the gospel message to the whole world. Because Christianity has spread to so many parts of the world, and so many different Christian groups and missionaries are carrying the message around the globe, it seems that the whole world is within reach of the gospel message.

Jesus told His disciples that they could expect certain results as they went out preaching in His name, and these include the salvation of souls. As the word of God was proclaimed to the nations, people would hear, understand, repent, and believe. This is not because of anything in man, but because God would open hearts, and they would believe. Also the apostles were given miraculous signs to authenticate their ministry as coming from God. This gave them power to cast out demons, speak in foreign languages they had not previously learned, not be harmed by the bite of poisonous snakes, and heal those they laid hands on. As Jesus promised this to His apostles, we see that they indeed were given all of these miraculous signs, as seen in the early days of the church and the spread of the gospel in the book of Acts. We must be careful to understand that these signs were given to the apostles and early church, and were not intended by God to be used throughout the church age. Many today want to claim they can do these miraculous things in the name of Jesus. When we understand why God used the apostles to perform miracles, that these were signs, and that today the signs have been replaced with something superior, namely the completed New Testament writings, we see the signs are no longer needed. This is what we can see from the history of the early church, from the teachings of the New Testament, and also from church history following the completion of the New Testament. It has only been in the last 100 years or so, that there has been a renewed fascination with miraculous signs, many claiming the ability to heal, and many churches trying to imitate the gift of tongues of the early church days. We are far better off to not become preoccupied with miracles, as that which we need to support our faith, but to believe God's word, faithfully obey what we learn, and proclaim the gospel message to others.

As we end Mark's gospel and the account of the resurrection of Jesus, Mark tells us that Jesus was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. Jesus is not visible to our physical eyes, but we may see Him and know Him by faith. We may know that He conquered death, and can offer to us eternal life, when we trust in Him as our Savior. But in order to be saved, we have to believe that Jesus is risen and alive today. Some cannot believe because their hearts are hardened, but what about you, do you believe Jesus rose from the dead, and have you trusted in Him as your Savior? Why not trust in Him today.

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:16

Today's Bible Question:

Today we have been learning about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We learned how the woman came early to the tomb, saw, and heard from an angel, but when they reported that Jesus was risen, the other disciples did not believe them. We learned about the miraculous power given to the apostles as signs to confirm the words they spoke as being from God. Someone might ask the question, can some people still speak in tongues today?

We know that many are claiming to speak in tongues, and churches often incorporate lengthy periods of time to the display of what many refer to as praying in tongues. If we just look to the bible and not to what we see happening in churches today, then we shall find some clear guidance to understand God's purpose for using tongues.

The bible will tell us that tongues were manifested on the day of Pentecost. On that occasion the apostles spoke in such a manner that everyone was hearing the wonderful works of God in their own language and dialects. The result was about 3000 souls were saved. God clearly was using this sign to authenticate the words of the apostles, and to draw people to faith in Christ. Please note that the people heard and understood what was said in their own language. The miracle was that the apostles, who were men of Galilee, could suddenly and miraculously be heard in every language represented in Jerusalem that day.

We also find tongues mentioned on two other occasions in the book of Acts. The first was at the house of Cornelius. This was also a sign to the Jews, that God was saving gentiles as well as Jews, and that they would receive the Holy Spirit just as the Jews did on the day of Pentecost. Again we must notice carefully the purpose of speaking in tongues. Not everyone who was saved in the book of Acts spoke in tongues. For instance when the Ethiopian Eunuch was saved, he never spoke in tongues, he simply went away rejoicing after His baptism. When Paul was saved He did not speak in tongues, and many other examples of individuals who were saved but never spoke in tongues could be cited. The only other occurrence of tongues in the book of Acts was in Ephesus, among some disciples of John the Baptist. These men had known the teachings of John, but had not yet heard about Jesus. When Paul gave them the gospel message, they also spoke in tongues. This we believe was to demonstrate that not only was the body of Christ to incorporate Jews and Gentiles, but also the disciples of John, who trusted in Jesus as their Savior. This would prevent any schisms in the body of Christ. Another reason was likely the fact that many Jews living in Ephesus at that time would not believe Paul's gospel message. The Lord provided this miraculous sign to help the unbelieving Jews to know that Paul's gospel was indeed from God. Paul would later write to the church in Corinth, and tell them that tongues was a sign gift for the unbeliever, teaching from the book of Isaiah how God used a foreign language as a sign to convince the unbelieving Jews.

If we clearly understand that God used the gift of tongues, that is speaking in a foreign language, not previously known to the one speaking, as a sign gift to confirm the word of the apostles, then we can discern that what is happening in many churches today is not an authentic gift from God. This view can be clearly supported from a careful study of the New Testament. We also know that God required the early believers to use an interpreter, if someone was to speak in a foreign tongue, and that only two or three were permitted to speak in a tongue during church meetings, and one after the other. This is not what is seen in churches today, where there is no one to interpret; and sometimes more than three people speak in tongues, and all at the same time. Clearly this is not biblical. Also what we hear, coming from people who claim to be speaking in tongues, is very repetitive, and does not resemble any language. Jesus warned us not to use vain repetitions when we pray.

I know that some listening will find this teaching difficult to accept, and will not want to give up on their tongue speaking, because they enjoy the attention, and the appearance of spirituality that it gives them. If you honestly want to follow the teaching of scripture, then I hope you will recognize the falsehood of what so many are claiming to be speaking in tongues. May the Lord grant us all good discernment and wisdom on this subject. The Lord is concerned with the salvation of souls, and that is how He used tongues in the book of Acts, so let's focus our attention on seeing people saved, and not on making meaningless noise that does not edify anyone.

" Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers"; 1Corinthians 14:22