

Term 4, 2023



Member Guide

Introduction

If we want to know the truth about Jesus, there is only one place to turn. We must read and study the gospels, for they are the only reliable source of detailed information about him.

The Gospel of Mark is probably the earliest of the four gospels and was written while many of those who were involved in the events (as participants or eye-witnesses) were still alive. It is a remarkable book, and not only because of its subject matter. The more we read Mark's account of Jesus, the more we are enthralled by what a great story it is, and by how well it is told.

Mark is a fast-paced and vivid read moving quickly from one episode in the life of Christ to another. Mark's account of the life of Jesus is not just a collection of stories, it is a unified narrative revealing Jesus as the Christ, not only for the Jews but Gentiles as well.

These studies are a continuation of our time in Mark last year. We now turn our attention to a major shift in the focus of Mark's narrative (chapters 9-12). Jesus begins to teach the disciples how he must suffer and die for the sins of the world.

The Lord be with you as you study His word together.

Study Timetable

Feel free to use these studies as necessary. I hope they're helpful for guiding your group discussions.

Sunday Sermon Date	Topic	Mid-week (small group)	What?
		11 Oct	Leader Training
15/10	Mark 9:2-13	16-20 Oct	Study 1: Seeing Jesus for who He is
22/10	Mark 9:14-29	23-27 Oct	Study 2: A Compassionate Touch
29/10	Mark 9:33-37	30-3 Nov	Study 3: Greatness in the Kingdom
5/11	Mark 9:38-50	6-10 Nov	Study 4: For or Against Jesus?
Celebration Dinner Wed 8 November			
12/11	Mark 10:1-12	13-17 Nov	Study 5: Marriage & Divorce
19/11	Mark 10:17-31	20-24 Nov	Study 6: The Rich Young Ruler
26/11	Mark 10:32-45	27-1 Dec	Study 7: Servant Leadership
3/12	Mark 11:1-33	4-8 Dec	Study 8: Here Comes the King
10/12	Mark 12:1-27	SOCIAL	SOCIAL WEEK
17/12	Mark 12:28-44	BREAK	BREAK

Study 1 – Seeing Jesus for who He is

Passage – *Mark 9:2-13*

To kick off:

It's maybe been a few weeks since you've all been together. Start by sharing how you're going in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

- If you could go back and witness any event in human history firsthand, what would it be and why?
- If you could go back and witness any event in the Bible firsthand, what would it be and why?

In our passage today Peter, James and John witness one of the most extraordinary events in the bible, the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus

Read

Read Mark 8:27-9:13

1. v.31 is significant in the overall flow of Mark's gospel. What do you think is significant about it?
2. In 8:34-9:1 Jesus teaches his disciples what their lives should look like as his followers and representatives in the world. Why is it significant that the transfiguration story immediately follows Jesus' teaching about costly discipleship?
3. In v.2 we're told that Jesus took Peter, James and John with him up the mountain. Why do you think he took these guys with him?
4. v.2 mentions a mountain. Can you think of any other significant moments in the Bible that mention mountains? Why were they significant? What link, if any, do you think that history has with this moment in Mark?

5. Moses and Elijah received special revelation from God on a mountain – they represented the law and prophets respectively in the Old Testament. How do you think this scene with Jesus might differ from God’s historical interactions with Moses and Elijah?

6. Read Exodus 34:29-35. How does Moses’ reflection of the divine glory differ from that of Jesus in v.3?

7. What do you think is the significance of v.8?

Personal Application

- What might it look like for us to apply v.7? Be as specific as you can and consider a plan to do it this week.
- In what ways can the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus encourage you in your Christian walk?

Give thanks and pray

Study 2 – A Compassionate Touch

Passage – *Mark 9:14-29*

To kick off:

Share any progress, obstacles, or setbacks in your Christian walk since your last meeting.

Have some chats about the talk on Sunday. What stood out for you in the message?

Read

Read Mark 9:14-29.

Sometimes as we read, God reveals things to us we've never seen before. Did anything stand out to you in this passage?

1. There appears to be at least 3 major problems in this passage. See if you can nutshell what they are.
2. There are some beautiful moments in this passage. Have a go at listing them and explaining why you think those moments are special.
3. What strikes you about what was just happening on the mountain compared to what is happening down on the ground?
4. In v.19 Jesus seems pretty upset. He's lamenting. What do you think the core issue is here?
5. Read John 14:18-19, 25 and Acts 1:4. In light of the disciples doubt, how might these passages be helpful for God's people as we navigate life and do Christ's work in the world today?

6. Read v.21-24 again. This is a powerful little interaction between Jesus and this man. What would you say is the key take away message here?

7. Have you ever experienced v.23 being applied unhelpfully in life? How so?

8. Read Mark 3:13-15 and 6:7 and 6:13. Jesus commissions the disciples and they even have some success in their ministry (6:13). What do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to learn through this current experience (c.f 9:29)?

Personal Application

- The father's statement, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" highlights a tension we often feel in life. How might we apply this humble recognition in our own lives?
- In solid practical ways how might this passage help you be more dependent on God? What might that look like exactly?

Give thanks and pray

Study 3 – Greatness in the Kingdom

Passage – *Mark 9:30-37*

To kick off:

How was church on Sunday? Was there anything in the sermon that you wanted to comment on or seek clarification about?

The **Will to Power** is a philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. It describes what he says is a desire for greatness that beats in the heart of every human being.

Do you think humans have an innate desire for significance and power? Have a crack at explaining your thoughts.

Read

Read Mark 9:33-37

God is always good and always actively ministering to our hearts. How did he do that for you in the reading? Did the Holy Spirit reveal anything to you, you might like to share?

1. Read Acts 2:22-24. How can the reading from Acts help us understand the context of what Jesus says in 9:31, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”
2. According to Mark 9:33-34 the disciples had been bickering about who would be the greatest in God’s kingdom. When Jesus asks them about their argument they remain silent (v.34). Why do you think they were silent?
3. What does Jesus immediately do in response to their silence? What might this indicate about Jesus’ intent?
4. In v.35 Jesus calls his followers to make a decision. What is it and how does it differ from the philosophy of Nietzsche and the general beat of our culture?

5. This next one is a simple question but much harder to answer. Are you able to say with complete confidence that you, a follower of Jesus, put your own self, your own desires, your own needs and aspirations behind that of others? Can you confidently say you are a servant of all?

6. What is Jesus doing, what has he been doing and what is he going to do that totally breaks down a human understanding of personal glory?

7. In vv.39-40 Jesus takes a child to teach an objective lesson. How would you nutshell the lesson here considering what Jesus has just been teaching?

8. Sometimes people say they love Jesus but they don't like the teaching of the other Apostles – guys like Paul would be an example. How does v.37 help us keep things in right Christian perspective?

Give thanks and pray

- Perhaps you could spend some time praying specifically about how your life could more closely reflect the life of Jesus.

Study 4 – For or Against Jesus?

Passage – *Mark 9:38-50*

To kick off:

Churches come in many different shapes and sizes. In Sydney you can almost throw a stone in any direction and hit a good church, a church that loves and worships the Lord Jesus. However, the way we do church might look different.

Maybe you've been part of a church that looks quite different to St Matthews. What were the difference? What did you like/struggle with? Do you think it's ok for churches to look different? At what point do you think it becomes an issue?

Read Mark 9:38-50

1. In v.38 we are told that there was someone (obviously not part of the 12 disciples) driving out demons in Jesus' name. In the context of chapter 9 what is interesting about this piece of information?
2. In v.38 the disciples admit they told this person to stop driving out demons in Jesus' name because they were not part of the inner 12. How do you feel about this? Is it an understandable request? What do you think is at the heart of their attitude?
3. Have a crack at summarising Jesus' response to the disciples' attitude in vv.39-41.
4. Let's do a quick (silent) survey:

Consider the following questions and answer yes or no (it might be more helpful to just do it quietly).

- Should babies be baptised? Yes or No?
- Should everyone who is saved be able to speak in tongues? Yes or No?
- Should we read the whole book of Revelation literally? Yes or No?
- Is the creation account in Genesis meant to be read poetically? Yes or No?
- Can Christians believe in Evolution? Yes or No?
- Should the church have bishops? Yes or No?

Now answer the following question out loud.

- Do you think everyone agreed on everything above? Yes or No?
5. How can this little exercise help us understand the point Jesus is trying to make to his disciples?
6. Why do you think Jesus is pressing this point with his disciples at this stage of his ministry?

To finish

- Is there anything you feel you need prayer for?
- Has God revealed anything in your heart today that you'd like to confess and find healing for?

Study 5 – Marriage and Divorce

Passage – *Mark 10:1-12*

This passage could be difficult for some people. Please be gracious to one another as you seek to understand God’s word together.

To kick off

- In your opinion what does it take to make a marriage work? What are the key ingredients of a healthy marriage?
- Was there anything in Sunday’s message that you found helpful/challenging?
- This might be a wonderful day/night to kick your time off in extended prayer. Things you could pray for:
 - o God’s wisdom and guidance for your time together
 - o Soft hearts, clear minds and humility as you read and study together today
 - o Perhaps people might like to share things that are on their hearts

Intro thoughts

Jewish rabbis were seriously divided on the topic of divorce. In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the Mosaic law says that if a man has “found something improper” in his wife, a divorce can proceed through the writing of a bill of divorce. So God, through the Mosaic law, granted and regulated divorce.

The big question however, was what does “something improper” actually mean? Rabbi Hillel took the view that it was anything that displeased the husband. However, another guy, Rabbi Shammai taught that “something improper” referred to gross sexual infidelity.

As Tim Keller says, “In other words, one school took a very liberal view of marriage — that it was a relationship for pleasure and convenience which could be dissolved when it failed to produce that happiness. The other school took a very conservative view of marriage — that it was a binding relationship for commitment and protection which could only be dissolved

under the most severe circumstances. Most of the Pharisees took the very liberal view. The debate was over which grounds were valid for divorce, and over the deeper issue of the nature and purpose of marriage.”

With that context in mind . . .

Read

Read Mark 10:1-12

1. Why do you think the Pharisees consulted Jesus about divorce?

2. Does Jesus take a liberal or conservative view of divorce?

3. In v.5 Jesus says, “it was because your hearts where hard that Moses wrote you this law”. Why do you think our Lord says this?

4. In vv.6-9 Jesus goes back to creation and quotes a couple of epic passages (Gen 1:27 and 2:24). Why do you think he does this?

5. Read verses 10-12.
 - a) Is Jesus over-ruling Moses and now changing the Old Testament allowance for divorce?

 - b) How do we then understand his seemingly categorical statement against divorce?

Give thanks and pray

Study 6 – The Rich Young Ruler

Passage – *Mark 10:17-31*

1. Looking at the verbs in v.17 what strikes you about the posture of this man? What do we immediately learn about him?
2. In verse 18 Jesus answers the man's question "what can I do to inherit eternal life?" with a question, "why do you call me good? . . . No one is good – except God alone." Why do you think Jesus responds like this?
3. Try and explain how Jesus manages to gently teach this man that he is not good in the eyes of God and therefore, unworthy of attaining eternal life by himself.
4. What can we learn from verse 21?
5. In verse 22 the man's face fell. Is this understandable? How do you think you'd respond if Jesus said the same thing to you?
6. If someone asked you what this man asks Jesus, "what can I do to inherit eternal life?" how would you answer?
7. There is a major warning in this passage. What is it?

8. There is a major encouragement in this passage. What is it?

To Finish

- Maybe finish by reading Ephesian 2:8-9 and praising God that he has made a way for all people to be saved.
- Is there anything you feel God has put on your heart that you need to confess to him?
- Because we know God can do anything and save anyone - are there people the Lord has put on your heart to pray for?

Study 7 – Servant Leadership

Passage – *Mark 10:32-45*

Read Mark 10:32-45

To kick off

Has anyone been to Jerusalem? How was it? Is there anything you can share with the group that might help them understand the geography of the bible a little more?

Can you explain to the group why we're often told in the Gospels (as we are in v.32), "they were on their way UP to Jerusalem"?

1. We're told in v.32 that Jesus was walking out in front of the disciples, and they were "astonished". Why is that?
2. In vv.33-34 we're told that Jesus once again (for the third time in Mark) took his disciples aside and told them what was going to happen to him. But in this section he's more specific. Have another read.

Just sit with it for a minute. Sit with the detail of what future awaited Jesus in vv.33-34. Now sit with the resoluteness Jesus showed in v.32 to go to his destiny

How does this make you feel about Jesus? How does this help you understand your worth to him?

3. The detail Jesus gives vv.33-34 is so specific that many Liberal critics say that this is an account that is written after the fact. How would you respond to them?

4. Read vv.35-37 again. What do you think about the request of James and John? Can you relate? What is it exactly, that they're asking for?

5. Jesus tells James and John they have no idea what they're asking and he challenges them, "can you drink the cup I drink", they respond with a resolute "yes!". What are we learning about the disciples here?

6. From verse 39-45 Jesus teaches two major lessons. Can you nutshell what they are?

To finish

- In what ways do you reflect the service of Jesus in your own life? Is this something that comes easily to you, or is it something you're constantly needing to work on?

Study 8 – Here Comes the King

Passage – *Mark 11:1-33*

To kick off

We're looking at **Mark 11:1-11**, but the message this week centred on the second part of Mark 11. For those of you that have heard last weeks message, what were your main takeaways? Did anything in your life change? Do you have any questions? Your leader can take them on notice.

Mark 11:1-11

Imagine the Oscars or the BAFTA's. Red carpets and pomp and ceremony and cheering crowds. It was not uncommon in ancient times for conquerors and victorious military leaders to ride into cities on large, powerful horses in similar circumstances of pomp and ceremony (minus the red carpet, of course.) As we begin chapter 11, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. There are cheering crowds, but that's where the similarity to the Oscars finishes.

The Gospel of Mark is distinct from the other gospel accounts in that it focuses more on where Jesus went and what He did, rather than what He taught, and it does it in a narrative that feels very immediate and urgent. The chapters just before chapter 11 are sometimes called "the way to Jerusalem" because of the way Jesus talks about the journey they are on. Commentators often say "Jesus set His face to Jerusalem". In Mark 10:32 it says "They were on their way up to Jerusalem." He was resolute about going there, even though He knew what would happen when He got there. Read Mark 8:31 and Mark 9:31 to establish the background to the coming event.

Read the passage Mark 11:1-11

1. What stood out for you as you listened to the passage? Is there something that you haven't noticed before?

Read Zechariah 9:9

2. What explanation do you think there is for Jesus knowing that there'd be a colt ready to go round the corner, and even that they may be questioned and how to answer if they were?

3. In what ways was Jesus arrival in Jerusalem different from the arrival of military leaders and conquerors of the time?

4. What is the significance of Jesus fulfilling this prophecy?

Read Psalm 118:24-25

5. When you sing or read the word "Hosanna", what do you think it means?

6. What did the people need help with? Why were they hopeful? What did they have to celebrate? When did they think their hope would be fulfilled?

Reflect for a minute ... in your life now, if you were seeing Jesus on a donkey, riding into town, what would your "Hosanna" be? A hopeful cry? A desperate request for help? A joyful celebration? A recognition of Jesus as the Messiah? A bit of each? Why? When do you think your hope will be fulfilled?

To finish up

Use your reflections to pray for each other.

Thank God for the things that are joyful and pray for those things that are causing desperation.

Consider using Ephesians 1:15-23 to pray, which highlights both the hope to which we have been called, and the power we have in the Holy Spirit to live out that hope, even as Jesus lived it in His journey to Jerusalem.

