



# Discipleship: According to Mark

## Introduction

### Opening Prayer

#### Getting to Know Each Other

As we begin our small group study, it is important to have an idea who people are and where people are from. This enables everyone involved to understand better the questions expressed and what lies behind the comments made. Even more significantly it helps people begin the process of growing together through the Word. After all that is our goal over these next ten weeks.

#### Getting to Know Mark:

Just as it is important for us to get to know each other, it is also important to get to know the Gospel of Mark. It is important to recognize how the Gospel of Mark has been written so that we can be more adept at hearing its message. This question of how you read the book may sound a little juvenile, but it is essential to reading the text. And so, let us consider a few pointers:

First, when you read, you need to recognize that things are written for a reason. John 20:31 reflects this intentional writing very clearly: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (ESV) The book of John thus should be read with this underlying intent in mind. While other books may not be as overt in their reason for writing, they are also written for a purpose. A book's structure, choice of language, etc. tend to reflect this purpose. As a result, when reading the Gospels one should not see them as just a random collection of stories seeking to function as a modern day history book, rather one should see the Gospels as persuasive writings that are unified wholes.

Second, it is important to recognize that the Gospel of Mark was written in the era in which people were not able to read much. Literacy rates were low and reading material was relatively few and far between. Documents in the church were often written to be read aloud to the entire congregation. Even documents read by an individual, to oneself, were generally read out loud; silent reading was not a common practice. As a result, when you read the Gospel of Mark, it is important to pay attention to matters that helped the hearers hear/present with/for retention. This aural/oral factor plays into understanding the persuasive goal of the book.

What are these marks? Several things play a part in following a narrative. One of the most significant marks is repetition. Repetition of key words, situations, types of information, etc. help the hearer to understand the flow of the narrative and the argument being made by the book. Some examples of this in Mark are: 1. [terms] lake/sea is used at Mark 1:16; 2:13; 3:7; 4:1; 5:1; 5:21 (there are some other uses, but most are not found in places of prominence as these are); 2. [geopolitical locations] 8:27; 9:30, 33; 10:1, 32, 46; etc.; 3. [similar events] 8:22-26 and 10:46-52; 6:30-52 and 8:1-21.

Another thing to consider is the characters of the Gospel of Mark. While the people presented in the Gospel are historical people and the events historical events, they are presented in such a way so to characterize the people in the Gospel of Mark. As a result, the Jewish leaders fit a certain mold, the disciples another, the crowds another, etc. These molds are molds the Gospel of Mark uses to relate to its hearers and teach them.

Finally, much like the note on repetition, we find in the Gospel of Mark several occasions where two stories are sandwiched together. These accounts are intended to be viewed in light of each other and help the hearer make the intended connection.

Third, another thing to look for while reading the Gospel is thematic elements. Since the book is to be heard in one sitting, the themes that carry through should be picked up upon by a good reader and also a good hearer. Some examples of thematic elements in the Gospel of Mark are 'following'/'going before', 'hearing', 'seeing', etc.

Fourth, since the Gospel of Mark is a unified whole, refrain from mixing the details of the accounts from other Gospels. The Gospel of Mark communicates the details it communicates for a reason; it also does not communicate other details for a reason. Letting Mark be Mark is important to reading the Gospel.

Lastly, a basic outline may help your reading. Consider the Gospel of Mark as having four parts: 1:1-6:29; 6:30-8:21; 8:22-10:52; and 11:1-16:8. While these divisions certainly are intertwined, they illustrate the four primary divisions in the book. These divisions highlight various things within themselves and together they highlight the call to discipleship.

It is this call that the present study focuses on. Each week we will look at different issues of discipleship as they come out in the Gospel of Mark and throughout Scriptures. Week 1 we will discover what it means to follow. Week 2 we ask the question 'who do we follow'; what is Jesus all about? Week 3 we look at the followers and see who follows Jesus and who does not. Week 4 we will focus on Jesus' call to 'Hear'. Week 5 we will visit the theme of clean and unclean in Mark. For week 6 we will consider the call to 'take up your cross'. In week 7 we will hear the call to see. In week 8 we will visit the question of who gets it right. Finally, in week 9 we will conclude the study with the simple question 'what's next?'

Through these points of emphases, we will address the entire book of Mark recognizing Mark's structure and emphases. To make this most functional, we will all need to read the Gospel of Mark in its entirety, ideally at one sitting (about an hour of reading); ideally, we each would read it once a week for the next nine weeks. This reading and rereading will improve our familiarity and make the discussion much more accessible.

### **Getting into the Text**

Mark begins with what amounts to a title of the book. At Mark 1:1 we hear that this is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

With what expectations does this title leave you? What does the word 'beginning' entail? What does the word 'gospel' mean? What does it mean that the gospel is 'of Jesus Christ'?

How does this title raise your expectations for what the book holds concerning what it means to be a disciple?

### **This Week**

As you begin your journey and read through the Gospel of Mark this week, consider such things as repetition and the characters of Mark; consider the role of Jesus. Aim to get a feel for the book as a whole and to sense the gospel's message.

### **Closing Prayer**



# Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 1: What does it mean to follow?

## Introduction

The game of Follow the Leader is an old favorite from when you were kids, or at least from when your parents were kids. The game is pretty basic. The leader of the game has the role of being in front of a line of followers who do whatever the leader does. If the leader hops, the followers hop; if the leader flails around wildly, the followers do the same.

This game presents us with a good initial understanding of following. Consider the game. When the game is played, what is revealed about the role of the leader? What about the followers?

The Gospel of Mark has as one of its primary themes the call of Jesus to follow. This call is fairly familiar with many Christians, but it often remains ambiguous. As a result, the question before us today as we study Mark is what does it mean to follow.

## Opening Prayer

### The Text

**Read Mark 1:16-20; 2:14**

What happens in these verses? Describe the situations of these disciples' calls in your own words.

Considering these examples, what do we realize is involved with following? Where do we see these implications most vividly in the world? Where do you see them in your life?

**Read Mark 3:13-19 and 3:31-35.**

The Gospel of Mark calls its hearers to relate to the disciples. It expects people to connect with the disciples' challenges and to some extent with their call. What is involved in discipleship?

What implications do these instructions for the disciples have for understanding our call to follow?

**Read Mark 1:2-15 and 6:14-29.**

Who follows whom in these passages? What do these passages highlight?

Consider 2 Kings 1:8 and Mark 12:1-12. How do these passages add to the understanding of the role of John the Baptist and his connection to Jesus?

**What does it mean to follow?**

How do all of these passages relate to the question of what it means to follow? What do they teach us concerning what is involved in following?

**Relevance**

What does this teach you about the call to follow in your lives?

How have you experienced these implications in your lives?

Are there times when you avoided the call because of the implications? Where do you find struggles with this call?

How does Jesus' relationship to John the Baptist encourage you in the midst of your failure to get up and follow again?

**Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

God has called each of us to follow him. In this call we have seen the fullness of what that means in Jesus; in his fullness he also gives us the power and strength to follow him and to be restored when we fail.

Throughout this week, consider your life. Look at the choices you make and the choices you don't make. How are you doing with following? Pray for guidance that you might be led to follow our Lord and live in the forgiveness he brings. Also take the time to read through Mark and look for some of the other examples of following, going before, coming after, etc. in it. Through it all see Jesus' faithfulness as he followed God's path for his life to the cross and the path he has opened for you as well.



# Discipleship: According to Mark

## Session 2: Looking Up

### Introduction

When kids are little they often are found clinging to their parent's leg in a crowd of people and being sure to go wherever that leg goes. Maybe you remember those days when you used to do that or you have had a kid do that to you. In your experience, how often did you take the opportunity to look up? Did you ever experience the shock to find out that when you finally did look up you found someone other than the one you expected? How did that make you feel as a kid?

Today we look up. Last week we addressed the question of what the task of following calls us to do. Today we ask the question whom do we follow. It is very easy to go about clinging to a leg, but it is important to look up; sometimes the one you see is not your parent..

### Opening Prayer

### The Text

**Read Mark 1:1, 9-11; 6:1-6a; 9:2-13; 15:33-39.**

What do these verses tell you about who Jesus is? What is attributed to him?

What do these titles teach us about who Jesus is? What do they mean? Cf. Ezekiel 12:1-2; 13:1-2, 17 and Psalm 2:6-7.

How does Jesus' true divinity and true humanity encourage you?

### Read Mark 1:14-2:12.

This first portion of Mark teaches us much about who Jesus is. But as it does so, we realize that addressing the question of who Jesus is reveals much more than mere titles and attributes; it reveals to us what Jesus is about and through that, what God's desires are. Consider the parts of this portion of Mark. What does each teach about Jesus and about God?

Mark 1:14-15

Mark 1:16-20

Mark 1:21-28

Mark 1:29-34

Mark 1:35-39

Mark 1:40-45

Mark 2:1-12

How would you summarize what these passages teach us about Jesus? Cf. Mark 3:22-30.

### **Relevance**

What does this mean for following? How does looking up instruct you in following?

How do God's desires revealed in Jesus Christ get expressed in your life? Use real examples, even if they are examples from your 'friend's' perspective.

How should they get expressed? What would true reflection of the one we follow look like in day to day life? Use real examples, even if they are from your 'friend's' perspective.

How do we transition from what we should do to what we do?

### **Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

When we look up we see the one whom we follow. It is Jesus the one who heals us and restores us; the one who cleanses us from our sin and forgives us; the one who proclaims to us the good news he brings and teaches us God's will.

This coming week consider how you reflect this person whom you follow. If you were to look in the mirror at any point and time would you see your reflection as it is clothed in Christ or your old sinful self? Consider then how you can move forward accordingly. As you do so, pray for God's guidance and restoration that in Jesus Christ you would be empowered to reflect our gracious God. Also take the time to read through Mark and look for some of the other examples of opportunities to 'look up' in it. Through them continue to see the grace and forgiveness of the good news Jesus brings.



# Discipleship: According to Mark

## Session 3: That Guy

### Introduction

We all remember that kid in class who always knew the answer; who always knew more than the teacher; who always knew more than the professor; who always knew how to do things better than the boss/manager; who always had the better experience; etc. Sometimes that person would receive a label: 'know it all' or just 'that guy'. Have you ever experienced someone like that? Have you ever been someone like that (others can, but probably should refrain, from answering for you)? What did you think about that person? What did that person think about him/herself? Whose perceptions were accurate?

Today we consider the characters in the Gospel of Mark. As we do so, we want to recognize 'that guy'. Who is it? What makes the person 'that guy'? What makes someone not 'that guy'? As you do so, be attentive and don't forget that often the one labeled 'that guy' is unaware of his/her status...

### Opening Prayer

#### The Text

##### The Jewish leaders

Read Mark 2:14-17, 18-22, 23-28; 3:1-6.

How do the Jewish leaders respond to Jesus' teaching? In what way are they 'that guy'? What attitudes and perspectives lie behind their responses to Jesus?

How does the Jewish leaders' position in society play a part in their attitude?

Have you ever responded to Jesus' teaching like the Jewish leaders did? How? Why?

How does Jesus redirect the leaders of the Jews at these times? How does Jesus redirect our thinking?

#### The disciples

Read Mark 3:13-19; 4:33-41; 9:38-41.

Who are the disciples? What position did they have?

How do the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching? Are they 'that guy'? Why/why not?

What dangers do having an 'in' pose to a proper response to discipleship?

Have you ever responded to Jesus like the disciples? What did that look like?

### **The outsiders**

Read Mark 5:1-43.

In these verses we find a demoniac that is outside the civilized society. In fact, the society he is outside is part of the non-Jewish (and therefore unclean) society; in this way you might say that he is outside outside the Jewish society. In addition he lives among many things that would put him even further outside Jewish society. How does he respond to Jesus' proclamation of the good news? Is he 'that guy'? Why/why not?

In these verses we also find two women. Both women stand outside the ritually clean part of society. The one woman has a flow of blood for twelve years. This flow of blood puts her outside the temple worship. She was ritually unclean. The dead twelve year old also is ritually unclean. How do the women (especially the live one) respond to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom? Are they 'that guy'? Why/why not?

What role did these people have in society? How does this relate to their response to Jesus?

Do you respond as the outsiders? What has that looked like?

### **Relevance**

What does all of this teach us about discipleship? Who follows Jesus?

What challenges are present in following Jesus and avoiding being 'that guy'?

How do we learn from these examples and better rejoice in the good news of the kingdom of God?

### **Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

In life we run into 'that guy' time and again. This coming week consider how you respond to the good news of the kingdom Jesus proclaims. Consider both big matters and little matters in life. Reflect upon your thoughts, words, and deeds; recognize where your response falls. As you do so, continue to grow in Christ's teaching; grow in the good news he proclaims for you and other people who are sometimes 'that guy'.

As you read through Mark this week continue to observe the response of the various characters in Mark. Rejoice in the proper responses; learn from 'that guy' that crops up now and again; and celebrate the teaching our Lord brings to fruition by his death and resurrection.





# Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 4: Listen!

## Introduction

Selective listening is a tool utilized by many children and adults. It enables expectations to be ignored and responsibilities shirked. It reveals that in life we often hear what we want to hear and not what actually is presented.

Consider a time in life when you experienced miscommunication because of selective listening. How did that look? Who misunderstood whom? Why did it happen?

Today as we look at the Gospel of Mark, we find the call "He who has ears, let him hear." As such, we ask the questions: What does it mean for me to hear? How do we do at listening? and What is the message for which we are listening?

## Opening Prayer

### The Text

Consider Mark 4:1-34. As you do so, notice the use of the terms 'listen' and 'hear' (both the same verb in the Greek) and also the joining phrase "And he said" at 4:9, 11, 21, 24, 26, 30. This common language links the parables together into a coherent whole and guides us to 'listen' to it as such.

Read 4:3-20.

What is the parable and what is its explanation?

How do verses 10-12 instruct us in our understanding of the parable? With what are the parables dealing? Who understands the parables? How? Cf. Isaiah 6 and Mark 3:13-19, 31-35.

How does the sandwiching of the parable and its explanation around 4:10-12 instruct you as to what it takes to be good soil? As to what inhibits being good soil?

What example do we have of good soil? How does that look?

Read Mark 4:21-32.

Beyond the parable of the sower, what other parables does Jesus tell? What do they mean? How do they relate to the Kingdom of God?

Given the nature of the Kingdom of God, why are the instructions of Mark 4:3-20 so significant to understanding the parables? Cf. especially Mark 4:10-12.

Read Mark 4:33-34; 4:35-41.

How clear did Jesus make the parables to the disciples?

What does the disciples' response to the storm teach us about how well the disciples understood the parables?

Why did the disciples have difficulty understanding?

Read Mark 7:31-37.

From where does true hearing come?

### **Relevance**

How difficult is the proper hearing of God's word of the Kingdom? What gets in the way of your understanding?

How do we get beyond those obstacles?

Do these parables make sense to us? Why or why not?

How does Jesus open your ears?

### **Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

Selective listening is certainly not a bad thing. The question is a matter of what are we selecting to listen to. Consider your listening this week. How many different words do you hear? To which ones do you listen?

Continue your study of listening in the Gospel of Mark. What examples of listening and not listening do you see in the Gospel of Mark? How do you relate to these characters? What things are difficult for you to hear in the Gospel of Mark? Why? What encourages you to listen in the Gospel of Mark?

In your prayers request open ears to hear God's word throughout the week and for that word to shape your thinking, doing, and speaking that the Kingdom of God might be a present reality in your life.



# Discipleship: According to Mark

## Session 5: Placing Your Confidence

### Introduction

Confidence is a finicky thing. In sports we find great momentum swings. These swings occur because a star player goes down; an unknown player steps up big; someone is seeing the ball really well; etc. There are various reasons for the swings, but almost all of them relate to confidence. What is a source of confidence at one moment becomes a source of concern at another. When confidence is there, momentum is present; when it is gone, so is momentum.

In discipleship, confidence also plays a big role. As we look at Mark 6:30-8:21 we see some common sources of confidence and Jesus' interaction with them.

### Opening Prayer

### The Text

#### Read Mark 6:30-8:21.

It is important to notice a few details in this section:

First, there are two key sequences that begin and end the section. In the beginning, Jesus feeds five thousand plus and the disciples go on a boat trip. In the end, Jesus feeds four thousand plus and the disciples go on a boat trip. In the middle of this unit, we find a Syrophenician woman who is pleading for Jesus' help. Jesus tells her that it is not right to give the children's food to the dogs. The woman rebuts that even the dogs get to eat the crumbs. Jesus feeds the woman as he heals her daughter.

Second, in the middle of this unit there is significant discussion of clean and unclean. This discussion is followed by the account of a Gentile woman, i.e. an unclean woman, who has a daughter with an unclean spirit asking Jesus for help and Jesus commending her for her faith. Furthermore, the two feedings each bear their own distinctive flavors. The first bears the characteristics that distinguish it as a Jewish feeding; the second bears the characteristics that distinguish it as a Gentile feeding.

Third, there is steady movement in the geopolitical settings of Jesus' and the disciples' travel. Two significant points should be noted here: 1. At 6:45 the disciples are sent to go to Bethsaida; at 6:53 they arrive at Gennesaret. They do not arrive at their destination until 8:22. 2. This detour results in a travel pattern that takes them distinctively out of the Jewish territory and into Gentile territory.

Recognizing these details, note in particular what the disciples do in these verses:

How do the disciples begin and end this unit? What are their actions and what are their thoughts?

With what were the disciples having difficulty? Where was their confidence?

What was the discussion at the middle of the unit? What was the problem with the Jewish leaders here? What about the disciples? Where was their confidence?

How is the Syrophenician woman different?

How does Jesus respond to these responses?

### **Relevance**

What does this teach us with respect to discipleship about placing our confidence? What difficulties demonstrated by the disciples can we relate to?

How do these passages free you up to be a better disciple?

How do you get distracted from this freedom? Cf. Mark 8:14-21.

How can you remember the joy of this freedom?

### **Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

Jesus helps the disciples consider their focus. He directs them to look to him for sustenance and strength. As you go into this week consider your focus. Where do you find your confidence? Where do you find your strength? As we have seen the confidence Christ provides, ask God to guide you to this bread as you face challenges in your life.

As you continue to read Mark this week, pay special attention to the disciples as they appear in these chapters and as they appear in the subsequent chapters. How does Jesus respond to the disciples?



# Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 6: Take Up Your Cross

## Introduction

"This is just a cross you have to bear." Have you ever heard that phrase before? What does this phrase mean to you? How do people use it?

This week we look at the 'on the way' section of the Gospel of Mark. In this section we find the stark reality that if anyone is going to follow Jesus he must 'take up his cross'. We also ask what this call means for our discipleship.

## Opening Prayer

### The Text

**Read Mark 8:22-10:52.**

Read Mark 8:27-9:1; 9:30-32; 10:32-34. What do you notice about these passages? What is happening in this section?

For what is Jesus preparing his disciples? Cf. also 9:11-13 and 10:35-45.

Is Jesus' teaching an easy teaching for his disciples? How does Peter respond? How does James and John respond? How do the rest of the disciples respond?

What irony is found in 8:29-30? How do these verses relate to Peter's confusion at 8:32?

With this misunderstanding in mind why does Jesus tell the disciples not to tell anyone about the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ and about the transfiguration? Cf. 9:2-13.

Consider the sections between the passion predictions. What additional failures to understand the call to 'take up your cross' do each of these sections indicate?

Mark 9:14-29

Mark 9:33-10:31

Mark 10:35-45

Through all of these discipleship mishaps, where does Jesus go?

### **Relevance**

Put into your own words the call to 'take up your cross and follow Jesus'. What is the extent of that call?

Are there any teachings you've heard today that seem particularly difficult? Why are they so difficult?

How does taking up our cross look today? What issues get in the way? Do they look similar to the issues the disciples faced?

### **Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

The recognition of the cross 'we just have to bear' is often a missed recognition. Frequently the cross is a matter of lost comfort and rarely involves the death of oneself and one's own pride. The call is to sacrifice your own desires and seek to do God's. As you go about your week, try to evaluate your decision making. How do you do at listening to God's instructions rather than conveniently interpreting them as is comfortable for you?

In the coming week continue your reading of Mark and focus on the relationship of the two units that surround this 'on the way' passage. What does the first healing of a blind man teach us? What does the second?



# Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 7: Seeing Clearly

## Introduction

Some people look at life with rose colored glasses. Others approach life as a great disaster waiting to happen, they see the negative possibilities. Still others don't look beyond their own nose. In life various things often shape our perspective and adjust our taking in of that which stands before us. We do not always see clearly.

Think of a situation in which your perception of reality was substantially different from the actual situation. What caused the discrepancy? How did you not realize it? What eventually brought the reality to your attention?

## Opening Prayer

### Text:

*Read Mark 8:14-21, 22-26, 27-9:1.*

What particulars do you notice about the healing Jesus performs?

How does Jesus' healing parallel the subsequent interchange between Peter and Jesus? Consider also Jesus' words to the disciples in the boat.

Can you relate to Peter's failure to understand? When have you not seen matters of faith and life as clearly as you should?

What lesson is there for your seeing in this interchange? Is this an easy lesson to learn?

What prevents your seeing clearly? What specific things/issues/etc. do you find most challenging?

What does Jesus do in the midst of their failure to see clearly? How does that encourage you?

*Read Mark 10:46-52.*

How does this healing differ from the prior? What message is communicated by this healing?

How does Bartimaeus demonstrate clear vision?

What does clear vision do in your life? What does this look like in your life of discipleship?

*Read Mark 13.*

In Mark 13, the theme of seeing continues; it is highlighted much as hearing is highlighted in chapter 4. The Greek word for seeing is present at 13:2, 5, 9, 23, 33. At 13:35, 37 the Greek word changes to 'watch'.

Why does Jesus tell the disciples to see in chapter 13?

What does Jesus not try to do for the disciples as he instructs them to see? Cf. Mark 13:32-37.

What does that teach us as we live out our days during these last days?

How well do the disciples do at this task? Cf. Mark 14:32-42 (esp. 14:34, 38). What causes difficulty for them?

How well do you do at this task? What causes difficulty for you? What things get in your way of watching? How do you confront these challenges and keep them in check?

How well did Jesus do at this task? What comfort does this provide for you as you face the challenges of seeing today?

**Relevance:**

Does the call to see and perceive hold such an important place in our life of discipleship today? Why or why not? Cf. 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; etc.

What tools do we use to see more clearly? Cf. 2 Timothy 3:10-17.

**Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

Throughout the week look for areas in your life in which you may not be seeing clearly. Continue to search God's word and see what it reveals and how it shapes you for a life of discipleship. Pray God's guidance and direction as you grow in your vision, as he continues to open your eyes to his work and his ways.

For next week continue to read weekly through the Gospel of Mark and in particular focus on the characters found in Mark 11-16. Consider their roles in the story and their relationship to you.





# Discipleship: According to Mark

Session 8: Close and a Cigar

## Introduction

The first week of this study, as this study on discipleship and Mark were introduced, the assignment was given to read through Mark in one sitting, ideally once a week. Each week we were to pay attention to the development of the characters and themes in the Gospel and grow in our knowledge of the text. As we did so we would grow in our understanding of discipleship.

How have you done at this task? What did you find beneficial? What was challenging?

Today as we approach these final chapters of Mark we face a difficult reality of discipleship: no matter how close you get, we all fail at some point and to some extent. Consider how easy it was to fail at a simple exercise aimed at growing in the faith. This assignment is a picture of the reality of discipleship. The call to take up one's cross and follow is much more difficult; we face this reality as we enter Jerusalem and face the real challenges that inconvenience us and call us to sacrifice, that call us even to die for the faith.

## Opening Prayer

### Text:

*Read Mark 11:1-11.*

Consider the call that we heard in Week 1's lesson. In Mark 1:16-20 we hear Jesus calling his disciples to follow him. They are called to follow and Jesus comes after John the Baptist. Recognizing this theme what does Mark 11:1-11 teach us concerning the call to discipleship? How does it communicate that message?

*Read Mark 11:12-25*

Why are the accounts of the fig trees positioned where they are? What does the episode with the fig tree teach us?

What role did the temple play in the lives of the faithful in Judea/Galilee? Consider for example Luke 2:41. How does understanding the role of the temple help us to understand better the significance of the destruction of the temple? How does this theme relate to the call to discipleship, especially as the disciples face Jerusalem?

*Consider Mark 11:27-12:40; 14:10-52; 14:53-72; 15:1-21.*

In week three we looked at three key characters in the Gospel of Mark. We considered the leaders of the Jews, the disciples, and the outsiders. We find those three groups highlighted again in Mark 11-15.

### *Leaders of the Jews:*

How do the leaders of the Jews respond to Jesus and the good news of the kingdom of God? What obstacles do they face? Are they all out to get Jesus?

### *Disciples:*

How do the disciples do? How is 14:10-52 structured to highlight this truth? How do these responses relate to previous responses of the disciples in the Gospel of Mark?

What lesson does the disciples' failure teach us as we follow Jesus and take up our cross?

### *The Outsiders:*

Who are the key outsiders in 15:1-21? How do these Gentiles respond to Jesus as he goes to the cross? How do these responses relate to their previous responses?

In addition to these three characters, it is important to discuss two others:

*The Women: (Consider 12:41-44 and 14:3-9; also 15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8)*

How do the women respond to the call to the good news of the Kingdom of God? How does this relate to their role in the rest of the Gospel?

*Jesus Christ: (Consider especially 15:1-41)*

How does Jesus live out the call of the good news of the Kingdom of God in Mark? What contrast do we find in his perspective and in these other character groups? What connections are present?

In the midst of all of these characters, where does the Gospel of Mark place its emphasis? What does that teach us in our path of discipleship?

### **Relevance:**

Consider your life. When you get to Jerusalem and need to go to the cross, how do you respond? To which characters do you relate? What are the sacrifices you are called to make? What obstacles do you find that make going to the cross difficult? With what areas do you struggle the most?

How does Jesus' faithfulness to us give hope in your discipleship failures and spur you on to continue the path of discipleship through the Holy Spirit? How do you maintain the focus on Jesus' faithfulness and refrain from dwelling on your failure?

How does this humble reality of discipleship free you in life? Do you think this message of humility is something that the people in your life need to hear? How can you share it with them?

### **Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

Throughout the week try to identify times when you are called to take up your cross. As you recognize those opportunities, those calls of discipleship, ask God to strengthen you and remind you of Jesus' faithfulness. If you take up your cross, give thanks in Christ. If you fail, look again to Christ. Continue to be molded and shaped by his faithfulness and his cross.

Continue to read through Mark. This week as you read through the book reflect upon the issue of discipleship and failure; consider especially the lesson of the ending of Mark, i.e. 16:1-8. Begin to consider how these verses encourage us in our call and send us out anew to follow.



# Discipleship: According to Mark

## Session 9: The Apprentice

### Introduction

While apprenticeships are not as popular today, apprenticeships used to be a very functional way of training people for work in a new profession. The apprentice would learn how things work and skills for the practice of the trade. When the time came, the apprentice would become fully certified in the trade and be able to function on his own and at times the apprentice might be trained to take over the business or a facet of it.

Do you feel like you have been an apprentice of anyone in your life? Have you ever felt like you were following in someone's footsteps? How did that look? How did that feel?

Today as we conclude our study of the Gospel of Mark, we recognize the continuing story of discipleship.

### Opening Prayer

#### Text:

*Read Mark 16:1-8.*

Consider last week's lesson. What did we learn from Mark 11-15?

As we saw Jesus' death last week, today we see Jesus' resurrection. How did the women respond to Jesus' death? Were they acting appropriately? Cf. Mark 14:3-9.

How did the women respond following the proclamation of his resurrection? What was the product of this response?

In addition to the women's story, we hear Jesus' story. What message do we hear in the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection? Cf. Mark 14:26-31, 51-52.

How does the message of these verses encourage you in your path of discipleship?

Where do these verses point you?

One final point of significance should be made before we move beyond the Gospel of Mark. The final verse presents a very odd ending. Not only does it end with the women's failure, it ends with a word that does not end sentences. The final sentence would fall under the category of incomplete. Furthermore, when one looks at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, another point comes up: the Gospel of Mark begins in mid sentence as well. Why do you think the author did this? How does this enhance our understanding of the Gospel of Mark? How does this relate to the message of Mark 16:7? How does this relate to the title of the book? How does this address the question of whether the title's inclusion of 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' is an objective or subjective genitive?

**Relevance:**

As you consider the challenges seen through the eyes of the characters in the Gospel of Mark, what challenges do you find most difficult?

What encouragement does your baptism provide as you read today's text? Consider also Galatians 3:27 and Colossians 2:12-13.

How does the resurrection encourage you as you continue the life of faith giving to you in your Baptism?

Where do you go from here? How do you practice a life of discipleship from this day forward through the work of the Holy Spirit? What keys are important in such a practice?

God has incorporated you into his mission, into his story. What does this truth of the Gospel of Mark mean to you?

How can you work with others to encourage each other and to keep the series of following in tact? Who might be your apprentice?

**Concluding Thoughts and Prayer**

As we have worked through the Gospel of Mark we have found a steady call to follow Jesus; a steady failure to follow perfectly; and a steady Lord who continued on the path of discipleship even when it meant death upon a cross. This steady Lord gives us renewal and strength as we continue on our path as his disciples. He goes before us into Galilee!