

AUGUST 2015

TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Anyone who
wants to be first
must be the very
last, and the
servant of all.

Mark 9:35



The Gospel of Mark:
The Messiah and Discipleship

TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Following Jesus



The Gospel of Mark is the second book in the New Testament. Many scholars once thought the book was a summary of the Gospel of Matthew, but now most think it

may have been the earliest of the four Gospel accounts. Traditionally, the authorship of this gospel is attributed to John Mark, who traveled and ministered with Barnabas and Paul.

Imagine what it must have been like to be one of Jesus' disciples. Many of us today would be filled with awe at getting to walk and talk with our Savior in person, but the disciples did not know at first who this remarkable person was. To them, Jesus seemed at first like an ordinary man with an extraordinary ability to speak the words of God, words the disciples often struggled to understand fully. Yet they chose to follow Him at great personal cost and sacrifice.

We know that the disciples did the ordinary activities of daily life as they followed Christ. They sailed boats, ate meals, and walked on hot, dusty roads. His disciples were ordinary people. They were not notable leaders in their community. They were regular working men—fishermen and tax collectors. They had calloused hands and human tempers. They were an unlikely group to be chosen as disciples.

Jesus gave these ordinary men a simple command: "Follow me" (Mark 1:14–18; 2:14). Jesus asked them to give up everything—their homes, routines, careers, and even their relationships. They were to set it all aside in order to focus on one goal: becoming His disciples.

The Greek word for disciple (*mathetes*) could be literally translated as "learner." A disciple is someone who follows a teacher (Mark 8:34). In that broad sense, Jesus has many "disciples," including you and me. Jesus identified several qualities of a true disciple.

First, true disciples of Jesus listened carefully to His teaching: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:13). Second, His disciples observed and imitated His actions (see John 8:1; 15:8). Finally, His disciples were required to obey His commands: "Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, yet do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

This month, throughout our study of the Gospel of Mark, we will look at what it means to be a disciple of the Messiah, Jesus: the glory, the cost, the suffering, and the victory. As we study the life of Christ this month and consider the role of His disciples, may we be encouraged by His great love, mercy, and forgiveness when we struggle and have doubts, and may we be inspired to follow Him more diligently—to listen, to observe, and to obey.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



Jesus' Surprising Use of Parables

Most readers of the Bible know that Jesus used parables in His teaching. But His reasons for doing so might come as a surprise. Some have said that Jesus spoke in parables because He was a master teacher. They argue that Jesus told stories in order to capture the attention of His listeners and make difficult matters plain. But when the disciples asked Him privately to explain His parables, Jesus said: "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" (Mark 4:11-12). Jesus acknowledged that the parables hid the truth from some and revealed it to others.

In His reply to the disciples, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10 to emphasize the prophetic intent of His parables. Jesus' use of parables was prophetic on three levels. First, He used these stories to reveal truth to His own disciples. They had a responsibility to listen carefully and understand what Jesus said. The disciples' insider status allowed them to ask Jesus to explain His sayings. This privilege made them stewards of the things that had been revealed to them. Jesus revealed the meaning of His

parables to them in secret so that they could teach it to others later.

Second, Jesus used parables to hide the true nature of His ministry from "those on the outside" until everything that had been predicted about Him was fulfilled. Jesus came not only to proclaim redemption but to accomplish it. In order for this to take place, some aspects of His mission could not be revealed in full until after His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus had to be rejected, betrayed, and slain as a sacrifice for sin.

Third, Jesus' use of parables was a kind of judgment on those who rejected Him. New Testament commentator C. F. D. Moule explains that the mystery Jesus spoke of in these verses was the secret that the kingdom of God had come in the person of Christ. During His ministry Jesus revealed Himself, but He did so in a veiled manner. "The incarnate Word is not obvious," Moule explains. "Only faith could recognize the Son of God in the lowly figure of Jesus of Nazareth. The secret of the kingdom of God is the secret of the person of Jesus." The parables became a kind of litmus test that revealed those who had ears to hear and those who did not.

For Further Study

To learn more about Jesus' use of parables, read *The Parables of Jesus* by James Boice (Moody Publishers).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Mafter

Approved unto God



August is here. Leaves turn color, the weather gets cooler, sweet corn is everywhere—and the new school year begins! I look at the students who arrive on Moody's Chicago campus (who are, by the way, somehow getting younger and younger every year) and I can't help envying them. I love to learn, and in my dreams sometimes, I would like to come back to my student days and study full time. I know it won't happen, but to be a student, and especially a student of the Bible, would fill my heart with joy.

If your full-time student years disappeared long ago in the distance of years but you long to study and to become a student again, my suggestion to you: How about enrolling in the "school of *Today in the Word*"? If you receive *Today in the Word* every month and use it as your Bible study guide, you are already a student—you are studying the Word of God. You learn something new every day, with fresh insights and perhaps even revelations. Not only does your knowledge increase, but your life is changing too. (Additional benefit—no student loans!)

With the beginning of the new school year, let's resolve to study the Bible diligently

every day and to go to "classes" whether we feel like it or not. Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord with passion and enthusiasm. Let us follow the apostle Paul's words carved in stone in The Arch, the main entrance to Moody's Chicago campus: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV).

We would like to give you an opportunity to invite your friends to "the classroom." In the next issue of *Today in the Word*, in October, which will come in an envelope, you'll find a reply card. On the back of the card we reserved a space for you to write the addresses of one or several of your friends who would like to receive our devotional.

In addition to the print version of *Today in the Word*, you and your friends can read it online at www.todayintheword.com or receive a daily portion by email. Join the global *Today in the Word* community and let the power of God's Word change you. Because, after all, "the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1:25).

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

The Gospel of Mark: The Messiah and Discipleship

The road of discipleship is risky, and often the risk lies in our flawed human nature. Many of us feel that somewhere on that road we may stumble and suffer defeat.

That's exactly what happened to Mark. As a young convert to Christianity, he had the rare privilege of going on the first evangelistic journey with a well-known missionary. And Mark failed miserably! He abandoned the team before the mission was over; he let down his fellow missionaries. As a result, the famous missionary refused to include Mark in the next trip.

But Mark's story is also an encouraging one. He did become a real evangelist, and traditionally he is believed to be the writer of the Gospel of Mark. Despite the initial fiasco, he later earned the trust of the apostle Paul (2 Tim. 4:11) and developed a close friendship with him (Col. 4:10). Mark's story shows that defeats in life don't mean the end of the discipleship road.

As we study the Gospel of Mark this month, we'll learn from someone who knew firsthand the ups and downs, the costs and the victories of following Jesus, as well as the glory of persevering to the end. We hope this month's study will inspire you, as you follow Jesus on your own road of discipleship. Thank you for your generosity to *Today in the Word*—it enables us to send this devotional around the world and help others to embark on their discipleship road.

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The Messiah Has Come

Many first-century Jews living under Roman rule thought that the long-awaited Messiah would come one day to kick the Romans out of the land, set up an earthly kingdom, and give national victory to God's people. What a surprise it must have been when the Messiah whom God sent wasn't the one they expected!

The Gospel of Mark opens with the proclamation of "good news": the Messiah, the Son of God has come, and His name is Jesus. Just as God had promised "good news" through the prophet Isaiah (see chapters 40 through 55), the Lord also had sent ahead a messenger to prepare the way. In the verses to follow, we begin to learn both what kind of Messiah God sent and what it means to be a disciple of this Messiah.

First, we begin to see what kind of Messiah Jesus was. He was not a kingly, military figure but one who humbly submitted to

John's baptism in the Jordan. Then Scripture reveals His identity, without great fanfare or trumpet blast: He is the beloved Son of God, in a unique relationship with the Father and the Spirit.

After His baptism, Messiah Jesus was immediately driven into the wilderness for a forty-day trial of temptation with Satan. None of this is the picture of a kingly, majestic Messiah expected by most first-century Jews. Instead, we discover a quiet, humble, and obedient Jesus who submits to the Spirit's leading.

Second, we begin to see what being a disciple of this Messiah looks like. The central theme of John the Baptist's preparation for Messiah is repentance. Turning from sin, confessing it before the Lord, and committing to a new way of life—these are the marks of one who is beginning to follow God's Messiah, Jesus.

The beginning of
the good news
about Jesus the
Messiah, the Son
of God.

Mark 1:1

Apply the Word

The themes of who Jesus is (Messiahship) and how we should follow Him (discipleship) will dominate the rest of the Gospel of Mark. Take time this weekend to examine your own life. Then repent, confess your sin, and ask God to use this month's study to give you a new understanding of what genuine discipleship of the Messiah looks like.

Pray with Us

We would like to start by praying for the Engineering Systems staff who maintain the heating and air conditioning systems on Moody's Chicago campus. We are grateful for the faithful service of Alfredo Rios, Paul Siebold, and Roger Vinlasaca.

Discipleship Begins

Many things in the world can amaze us: picturesque mountain ranges, telescopic views of faraway galaxies, or the birth of a new child. How often do these moments of wonder move us to a closer relationship with God?

Today's reading is also full of wonder, amazement, and crowds gathering around Jesus. The crowds in the synagogue marveled at Jesus' authoritative teaching and His ability to cast out demons. Crowds gathered around the house where Jesus was staying in order to receive healing from illness, disease, and demon-possession. Scripture tells us that Jesus' fame "spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee" (v. 28) so that people "came to him from everywhere" (v. 45) to see his powers.

Wonder and amazement suffuses today's reading, but notice the absence of faith. The only one who even correctly identifies

Jesus as "the Holy One of God" (v. 24) is the demon in the synagogue! Most of these early crowds were more interested in what Jesus could do for them rather than how they might become followers of the Messiah.

On the other hand, Scripture does give us a glimpse of true discipleship in the figures of Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Called by Jesus while busy with their work as fishermen, these two pairs of brothers left their boats "at once," and "without delay" (v. 18, 20) followed Jesus as He went on His way.

At once they left
their nets and
followed him.

Mark 1:18

These disciples didn't just follow at a distance or look only for ways they could benefit. They invited Jesus into their home, and sought Jesus out in His place of early-morning prayer. This is a picture of genuine discipleship—a willingness to be with Jesus and to follow where He leads.

Apply the Word

Two pictures of discipleship: one of convenience and personal gain; the other of genuine following. Which picture describes you? This Sunday as you enter into worship, ask God to show you the ways He wants you to follow Him and what it means to be His disciple. Thank Him for the many blessings and wonders of your life; then commit yourself to true discipleship.

Pray with Us

We ask that you pray for Facilities Management's James Miedema and Erik Hultquist, as they lead several teams that take care of the Chicago campus infrastructure. Their work may be behind the scenes, but its fruits are evident to everybody at Moody.

A Discipleship of Forgiveness

In our culture of glitzy fashion magazines, Hollywood red carpets, and Facebook profiles, Americans are continually encouraged to think that the people with polished faces and “perfect” lives have more value and worth than the rest of us. And often we transfer that mentality to our relationship with God.

Today’s reading shows us that nothing could be further from the truth. In the first episode, a paralyzed man is brought to Jesus when his friends lowered him through the roof of the house. Notice Jesus’ first response upon seeing their faith. Rather than address the most apparent need of physical healing, Jesus proclaimed: “Son, your sins are forgiven” (v. 5)!

Some of the religious leaders of the town took exception to this pronouncement, rightly recognizing Jesus’ implicit claim to divine authority. Jesus responded not by qualifying His action but by healing the man physically as further proof of His divine authority to forgive sins.

In the next scene, Jesus called Levi, the tax collector—a vocation notoriously connected with the sins of greed and extortion. Not only did Levi quickly follow Jesus, later that evening, Jesus was found having dinner with Levi and “many tax collectors and sinners” (v. 15).

Again, the religious leadership was bothered and began questioning Jesus’ actions. In response, Jesus proclaimed the purpose for His coming: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (v. 17).

Jesus did not come looking for perfect, sinless people to call as His disciples. Rather, He came to find the spiritually sick and sinful and to call them to healing and forgiveness. The disciple Jesus looks for is the sinner who seeks forgiveness. Only the disciple who knows that forgiveness can become a true follower of Christ.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Mark 2:17

Apply the Word

Do you think about your relationship with God in terms of cleaning up your act before He will accept you? The only discipleship Christ requires is that of forgiveness and following, in that order. Spend time today examining your heart and list the sick and broken areas of your life that need healing. Then take them to God and rest in His promised forgiveness.

Pray with Us

Every part of Moody Global Ministries is supported by the hard work of the Operations teams under the leadership of Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer. Please pray for their dedicated service on Moody’s Chicago campus.

Controversy Begins

Keeping the Law was an essential component of being a faithful Jew. By Jesus' day, however, the religious leaders had added so many legalistic qualifications to the Law that so-called "law-keeping" went far beyond what was actually required.

Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees today

centered on the application of fasting laws and Sabbath observance. When He was questioned about the lack of fasting by His disciples, Jesus defended their actions with a wedding analogy: the guests of the bridegroom should not fast while the bridegroom

is present. Fasting has a place, even for His disciples, but that time was not now. Jesus, the "bridegroom," came bursting the old wineskins and tearing the old cloth of religious tradition. Celebration, not fasting, was the appropriate response.

Likewise, in the controversies over the Sabbath, Jesus demonstrated that the new order He was ushering in would break the bonds of legalism. Challenged about the

right way to keep the Sabbath, Jesus clearly proclaimed that the purpose of the Sabbath was for human flourishing and doing good. Performing works of necessity (like eating) and works of mercy (like healing) were not violations of the Sabbath but fulfillments of its purpose.

So the Son of
Man is Lord even of
the Sabbath.

Mark 2:28

More importantly, however, notice Jesus' claim about who had the authority to decide these issues! With His mouth, He declared that He was "Lord even of the Sabbath" (2:28). With His actions, He demonstrated it by healing the man in the synagogue.

In each confrontation about fasting and Sabbath, Jesus not only challenged the stifling chokehold of legalism, He also proclaimed His own identity as God's Son and Israel's Messiah. Living as a disciple in that kingdom does not mean self-righteous legalism. Discipleship entails understanding the spirit and purpose of God's law and responding appropriately to the kingdom that has come with Jesus.

Apply the Word

Scripture calls us to see God's law not simply as something to avoid breaking but as an opportunity to express our love for God, who desires our flourishing. Write out one of the Ten Commandments, setting it in a visible place. As you see it throughout the day, consider how the application of that law in your life might be a joyous response to Christ's liberating kingdom.

Pray with Us

Moody Radio's ministry wouldn't be possible without the support of our faithful listeners. Collin Lambert, vice president, and Doug Hastings, general manager of Moody Radio, invite you to thank God for this wonderful provision through His people.

The New Family in Christ

A common proverb declares: “Blood is thicker than water.” It means that loyalty to our blood relatives is stronger, and more important, than the bond of friendship or acquaintance. This may be generally true, but today’s reading challenges our understanding of “family.”

After the previous controversy with the religious leadership and further healing of the crowds, Jesus withdrew to a mountain and chose twelve of His followers, that “they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (vv. 14–15). This group of disciples represented a new community centered on Jesus. The rest of the chapter will sharpen our understanding of what this new “family” of Jesus looks like.

Large crowds surrounded Jesus, eager to see Him at work, but misunderstand-

ing abounded. His natural family thought He was “out of his mind” (v. 21), and the teachers of the law went further by accusing Jesus of using Satan’s power to cast out demons. In response, Jesus clarified both His own work and who, exactly, constituted His true family. Jesus pointed out that Satan would not work against himself; rather, the Spirit of God was the agent behind Jesus’ exorcisms. Those who denied the Spirit, or labeled it as “demonic,” would cut themselves off from God’s forgiveness.

Whoever does
God’s will is my
brother and sister
and mother.

Mark 3:35

Jesus’ identity and activity, then, was at one with the Spirit of God. A true member of His family is one who correctly identifies the Spirit at work through Jesus, and whoever “does God’s will” (v. 35) as it is now revealed in Christ. We may think of our family primarily in biological terms, but we also have a spiritual family: those who belong to Jesus are also now our brothers and sisters.

Apply the Word

How well do we appreciate our new family in Christ? Those who belong to Jesus—whatever their economic situation, ethnicity, personality, or looks—are now our siblings in Christ. Seek out a fellow Christian who is different from you and find a way to express Christ’s love—write a note of encouragement, invite them for coffee, or initiate a conversation to learn more about them.

Pray with Us

Keeping in prayer Moody Radio’s ministry, please mention its Production team. May God bless Joseph Carlson, William Davis, Jon Hemmer, Chris Papendick, and Amy Rios as they produce uplifting Christian programs.

Parables of the Kingdom

The ancient world of Jesus' day was primarily an agricultural society, and so it makes sense that Jesus' teaching often used stories and images from everyday agricultural life in order to convey a message about God's kingdom.

In each of today's parables about the kingdom, Jesus highlighted the idea that although God's kingdom may appear small—even invisible, like seeds—in time it would reveal itself in a fullness of astounding abundance, growth, and protection. In the parable of the sower and seeds we learn that the seemingly tiny seed of God's Word, when received by the proper soil, will not only take root but produce an incredible harvest far beyond what seems possible.

In the parables of the lampstand and the growing seed, what at first appears hidden and invisible will in fact be fully revealed in God's timing. And the par-

able of the mustard seed demonstrates that while God's kingdom may start small, one day it will be "the largest of all" (v. 32).

Yet behind these parables, Scripture also sends a warning about the importance of how we respond to God's Word in our lives. Just as the first parable demonstrates

that some soils were not ready or willing recipients of the seed of the kingdom, so Jesus declared that the heart condition of each of us affects our ability to receive God's Word.

The phrase, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (vv. 9, 23), calls us to be open to God's Word so that it might produce a flourishing, abundant spiritual life in us. But the passage cited from Isaiah about "ever hearing but never understanding" (v. 12) warns us that, tragically, those who harden their hearts to God will find Christ's teaching mysterious, hidden, and barren in their lives.

Whoever has
ears to hear, let
them hear.

Mark 4:9

Apply the Word

The image of a seed is a powerful picture of the way God's Word works in our hearts. Plant some seeds this month in rich, fertilized, and watered soil. In the weeks to come, as those small plants begin to grow, let it be a living parable reminding you of the growth of God's Word in your life when you receive it with openness and faith.

Pray with Us

Ask for God's inspiration for creativity and generating ideas in the service of these additional Moody Radio's Production team members: Lee Rugen, Christopher Segard, Deb Solomon, Joel Swan, and Steven Tabor.

Messiah's Authority Displayed

Because of the geographical terrain surrounding the Sea of Galilee, sudden, violent squalls were quite common. Even for experienced fisherman, such storms could prove deadly. Just such a storm seems to have beset Jesus and His disciples as they were crossing to the eastern shore. The disciples were terrified. Their lack of faith was revealed when they addressed Jesus as “Teacher,” rather than “Lord” or “Savior.” Even Jesus identified their weak faith with His question: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (4:40).

In the midst of the chaos and danger, Jesus was not only untroubled, but firmly in control. Much like the description of God’s control over nature in Psalm 107:23–30, Jesus awoke from sleep and commanded the wind and waves: “Quiet! Be still!” (4:39). The disciples were left wondering about the identity of Jesus; their faith may have been weak, but Jesus’ divine power and identity remained clear.

Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you.

Mark 5:19

The episode in the next chapter also demonstrates Jesus’ power and identity when He met a demon-possessed man. The lengthy description of the man’s condition highlights for us the extent of his enslavement to demonic control. It also emphasizes the power of Jesus to break that bondage. The demons address Jesus as “Son of the Most High God” (5:7), and their recognition of His identity was confirmed by Jesus’ single command that sent the demons to their destruction and restored the man to a sound state of mind.

Although most of the people in today’s reading were afraid, even hostile towards Jesus’ power, one man—the former demon-possessed—sought to join Jesus. Notice Jesus’ response. He turned him away and encouraged him to proclaim God’s power and mercy to others. The man obeyed, fulfilling his call to follow Jesus by witnessing to his own people.

Apply the Word

Discipleship is focused on Christ’s identity as the Son of God who has authority over nature and spiritual forces. Find a hymn that proclaims Christ’s reign over all things, like Charles Wesley’s “Jesus! The Name High Over All.” (If you don’t have a hymnal, it can be found online.) Then demonstrate your discipleship by singing your praise to God and inviting others to join you.

Pray with Us

Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, requests your prayers for Moody’s media ministries he oversees: Moody Radio and Moody Publishers. Pray for God’s blessing on these ministries and for the people whose lives are enriched by them.

Models of Faith

One pop singer recently summarized what many people today think about faith: “If you believe in yourself, anything is possible.” Today’s reading is about having faith—but not in the way our modern world thinks.

Today’s reading presents two healing miracles, one nestled within the other. The story opens with a picture of faith: a synagogue leader, Jairus, came to Jesus seeking healing for his sick daughter. While Jesus is in the process of traveling to Jairus’s house, we meet another person in need of His help.

Daughter, your faith
has healed you.
Go in peace and
be freed from
your suffering.

Mark 5:34

Then an entourage reported to Jairus, “Your daughter is dead . . . Why bother the teacher anymore?” (v. 35). At this point it seems that the delay with the bleeding woman had cost the life of Jairus’s daughter! But Jesus reassured him: “Don’t be afraid; just believe” (v. 36).

This wasn’t a call for Jairus to believe in himself or even to have faith in faith. The verb Jesus uses is in the present tense (“keep on believing”), meaning that Jesus was instructing him to continue with the faith that first brought him there: faith in Jesus and His ability to heal!

A woman, suffering for twelve years from incurable hemorrhaging, desperately sought healing. The woman pressed through the crowd, secretly touched Jesus’ garment, and was healed! Her faith was also highlighted, both by her own thoughts—“If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed” (v. 28)—and Jesus’ response—“Daughter, your faith has healed you” (v. 34).

That faith proved well-founded. When Jesus arrived at the house, He quickly ejected the gathered crowds, went into the young girl’s room, and commanded her to get up. Immediately, the girl was brought to life and restored to her family. The central theme of faith in today’s passage calls us, too, to see Jesus’ power and to respond with faith in His ability.

Apply the Word

We know that God does not always grant our requests, but today’s reading reminds us that nothing is too big for God’s power. Reflect on the greatest struggles in your life or the most troubling realities in our world, and bring those before God in faith—not in ourselves but in who He is and what He can do.

Pray with Us

Since its founding by D. L. Moody, Moody Publishers has been used powerfully by God to spread His Word all over the world. Would you include in your prayers its Editorial team: Carolyn McDaniel, Elizabeth Newenhuyse, Pamela Pugh, and James Vincent?

A Discipleship of Costly Witness

In one version of Aesop's tale "The Lion and the Fox," after repeated meetings between the two animals, the fox grows increasingly disrespectful toward the lion. By the end, the fox approaches the lion to criticize him, and the lion in turn throws the fox into a river. The moral: "Familiarity breeds contempt."

We see a similar theme in Mark 6 as Jesus continued His ministry in His hometown of Nazareth. The family and neighbors who had known Jesus for years now respond to His power and wisdom not with faith but with contempt. Simply because they thought that they already knew who Jesus was—just the hometown boy, "the carpenter . . . Mary's son" (v. 3)—they took offense at Jesus, refused to listen to His message, and rejected him.

That mission and ministry of Jesus, including its rejection, would soon expand to include His followers. They too were called

If they persecuted
me, they will
persecute you also.

John 15:20

to share in Jesus' ministry of witness to the world. Gathering the Twelve together, Jesus sent them into the world to carry on His ministry of healing and preaching repentance. This was no comfort tour. Traveling without food, bags, money, or extra clothes, His disciples had to rely on the provision of God through the hospitality of others. In some cases, Jesus warned that their discipleship and witness would face outright rejection (just as Jesus did).

In the final scene from today's reading, we see the ultimate cost of discipleship in the story of John the Baptist. After preaching against the immoral marriage between Herod and Herodias, John the Baptist was imprisoned and then killed by beheading. As the Gospel of Mark moves forward, we are seeing more clearly the true cost and sacrifice of being a disciple of Jesus. As we know from the Gospel's end, such discipleship follows the path of Jesus Himself.

Apply the Word

Throughout the world, countless Christians face daily persecution and the threat of death for their faith in Christ. From parts of Africa, to the Middle East, to the Asian continent, these Christians know first-hand the cost of true discipleship. Pray today for your persecuted family in Christ, that they may know the strengthening presence of Jesus in their obedience to the call of discipleship.

Pray with Us

Over the next three days we invite you to pray with thanksgiving for our Human Resources staff headed by vice president Debbie Zelinski. Thank God today for the dedicated servants of Christ that our Human Resources bring to the Institute.

Shared Ministry with Jesus

In the classic advertisements for Calgon bath and beauty products, a woman surrounded by stressful scenes at home and work would cry out, “Calgon, take me away!” Immediately, the commercial would show the woman relaxing in a peaceful bath away from the chaos.

Jesus encouraged His disciples to find solace away from the stress of ministry. But the crowds followed, disrupting their retreat. Jesus looked on them with compassion, and when the disciples wanted to send the crowd away, Jesus not only provided food but also used the disciples in the miracle. He asked

them to determine how much food was available, recruited them to get the crowd seated, used them to distribute the multiplied food, and had them gather up the abundance at the end. Jesus used them to accomplish this miracle even though they didn’t fully understand.

That theme of misunderstanding continued as Jesus walked on the water past

the disciples in their boat. Notice the clear motifs of divinity in this episode. Just as God alone “treads on the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8), so Jesus walked on the water. Just as God’s presence was often described as “passing by” figures in the Old Testament (Moses in Ex. 33:19 and Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11), so now Jesus intended to “pass by” (v. 48) the disciples in the boat.

For [the disciples] had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

Mark 6:52

Finally, when Jesus spoke to the terrified disciples, He said to them, “it is I” (v. 50). This phrase could be translated literally as “I AM,” and it clearly evokes God’s divine name in Exodus 3:14.

In this one scene, Jesus’ full divinity is revealed—but Scripture tells us that the disciples did not understand, for “their hearts were hardened” (v. 52). Nevertheless, despite the disciples’ failure to fully comprehend who Jesus was, Jesus desired to be with them and to share His ministry alongside them.

Apply the Word

Today’s reading should encourage us, no matter how much spiritual misunderstanding or lack of faith we have. Jesus chooses to use us for His ministry in the world! How will you act on that today? Speak to a co-worker, offer a hand to a neighbor, or give generously of your resources. God can bless those efforts, despite our feelings of inadequacy!

Pray with Us

Today we continue to lift in prayer our Human Resources staff—Jill Douglas, Serene Hudson, Mia Gale, and Candra Michelle Garrett. Praise God for their integrity, commitment, and encouragement to others.

Teaching about Cleanliness

We usually tell children to wash their hands before they eat as a way to remove unhealthy dirt and bacteria before touching food. The Pharisees also instructed others about hand washing, but as Scripture shows us, it presented a major conflict with Jesus. Why would hand washing be such a problem?

The real issue was not about hygiene; rather, it was about the Pharisees' interpretation of Gentile "defilement." They were offended that Jesus' disciples were not following the same practices, which the Pharisees believed was an indication of Jesus' lax approach to holiness and spiritual purity.

Jesus' scathing response teaches us the true understanding of cleanliness before God. Citing Isaiah 29:13, Jesus identified the hypocritical attitude of the Pharisees. They honored God externally (by the custom of hand washing), but internally "their hearts are far from" God (v. 6). The prob-

lem was not simply following the "tradition of the elders," but elevating human rules over God's clear commands.

The practice of Corban was a similar situation. Whereas God's command to honor one's parents was clear, the Pharisees had privileged their own custom of devoting

resources to God in such a way that made caring for their parents impossible. As Jesus summarized, "you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down" (v. 13).

Jesus reminded His followers that it's the heart that matters most. The Pharisaic

cleanliness laws focused on external defilement of the external, not on what came from the heart. As Jesus said, "Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them" (v. 15). If you want to know whether a person is holy and "clean," don't look at their hands—look at the evidence from what comes out of their hearts and lives.

Nothing outside a person can defile them . . . it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.

Mark 7:15

Apply the Word

Psalms 51 echoes today's message that a "clean heart" is more important than empty external actions. Take a moment to pray through this psalm to God, then write out Psalm 51:10–12 and commit it to memory. As you go through the activities of your day, bring that Scripture to mind, asking God to cleanse your heart with His Spirit and Word.

Pray with Us

As we conclude our prayers for Human Resources, add to your list Jean Jacobsen, Peter Miller, Luci Harris, and Michael Lin, that they would be encouraged by God's love every day as they interview people and oversee employee benefits and events.

Ministry to the “Unclean”

Many Jews of Jesus’ day viewed Gentiles as “unclean” and beyond God’s love and care. On some occasions, Jews even referred to Gentiles with the pejorative term “dogs” to express their disdain for this people group.

Today’s reading demonstrates that Jesus worked to overturn these traditional Jewish attitudes, now applying His earlier teaching about cleanliness to interactions with the “unclean” Gentiles. Traveling to the region of Tyre (a predominantly Gentile area), Jesus encountered a woman whose daughter was demon-possessed. Scripture reminds us that this is a “Greek” (i.e., a Gentile), and Jesus reminded the woman of the typical Jewish attitude about Gentiles—they were “dogs” (7:27). Why would she ask Him for help and healing?

Jesus’ actions demonstrated His disagreement with this Jewish sentiment and His recognition of her faith. Rather than dismiss her as an unworthy “dog,” Jesus

healed her daughter and demonstrated that God’s kingdom was for Jews and Gentiles alike.

Next, Jesus healed a man who was deaf and mute. Notice where this miracle was performed: “in the region of the Decapolis” (7:31), another Gentile region hostile to Jewish influence. Again, Jesus openly ministered to the “unclean” Gentiles.

Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people.”

Mark 8:1–2

Finally, our reading ends with the feeding of the four thousand. This is not a redundant account of when Jesus fed the five thousand (see Mark 6). This was a different group—a Gentile group! The same provision previously given to the Jewish crowd was now extended to Gentiles, and with the same abundance (notice their full satisfaction and the plentiful leftovers). In each of these three episodes, Jesus demonstrated that the grace of God’s kingdom extended not just to Jews but also to people whom many Jews considered “unclean.” Jesus didn’t just talk about cleanliness—He lived it out as well.

Apply the Word

In what ways do we consider certain people “unclean” and therefore unworthy of our love or God’s grace? How might you minister Christ’s forgiving grace to those who are in desperate need of Christ? Take the first step of building a relationship with someone whom you have considered “unclean” and let God extend His healing love and compassion to them.

Pray with Us

Would you pray for Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, and the teams he leads? May they continue to bring glory to God in the way they handle all Moody’s financial matters, constantly working to ensure that every donation is used efficiently.

A Failure of Understanding

Many atheists today assert that they won't believe in God until clear proof is given. Often these demands are not sincere requests but expressions of hostility toward any concept of faith.

The Pharisees in today's reading made a similar demand for a "sign from heaven" (v. 11). The problem was that they were not genuinely seeking the truth. Scripture says that they did this "to test him" (v. 11). Just as the Israelites demanded a sign from Moses after witnessing the miracle of God's deliverance from Egypt (Ps. 95:7–11), so now the Pharisees demanded a sign from Jesus after He had already provided multiple instances of miracles, healings, and exorcisms. In the face of such willful spiritual blindness, Jesus got back into the boat and left them.

Things were not much better in the boat. The disciples also revealed their misunderstanding. When Jesus warned them

about the negative influence of the Pharisees, the disciples thought He was talking about the fact that they had forgotten to bring bread. Jesus chastised the disciples with no fewer than eight pointed questions, including: "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (vv. 17–18). Jesus reminded them of His recent miracle of feeding the crowds with abundant bread and ended with a stinging query: "Do you still not understand?" (v. 21).

Do you still not understand?

Mark 8:21

Unlike the Pharisees, however, the disciples' misunderstanding did not stem from a lack of faith. They had imperfect comprehension of who Jesus was and what He was doing, but they were still committed to following Him. And unlike His response to the Pharisees, Jesus did not abandon the disciples but remained with them, even in their state of misunderstanding.

Apply the Word

What are the areas of your life where you "still do not understand" God's activity or purpose? Take those issues to God in prayer, asking for an increase of understanding, but also giving thanks that He remains faithful and present even when we don't understand what He is doing. Praise Him for the ways you have seen Him work to answer prayers and meet needs in your life.

Pray with Us

Patrick Friedline oversees Career Development on Moody's Chicago campus, helping students and graduates with employment. He would appreciate your prayers today for good communication and team work with the students and alumni he coaches.

Messiahship and Discipleship

One of the big questions of life is, *Who am I?* Philosophers, poets, singers, and counselors have encouraged people to grapple with that question. But today's reading highlights a different important question: *Who is Jesus?*

Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' identity had been revealed primarily through His miracles (like the healing of the blind man) and His authoritative teaching. Yet several times in the Gospel, Jesus charged people not to tell others about His activity. He did this with the blind man in today's reading, as well as His own disciples after Peter correctly identified Him as the Christ. Why? Didn't Jesus want people to know He was the Messiah, sent by God?

The answer lies in the clarification Jesus provided after Peter's confession. Jesus revealed that as Messiah He would have to suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again.

Earlier identifications of Jesus as Messiah tended to be connected to His power and authority. But Jesus shifted the emphasis of His messianic identity onto His suffering. Yes, He was the Messiah, but He was the *suffering* Messiah. Any sentiment (even Peter's!) that wanted to reject suffering as part of Jesus' messianic identity was utterly opposed to God's purposes for His Messiah and His kingdom.

Whoever wants to
be my disciple must
deny themselves
and take up
their cross and
follow me.

Mark 8:34

Notice that the question of Jesus' Messiahship had implications for discipleship. To be a disciple of the suffering Messiah meant following a similar path: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (v. 34). Messiahship was not just about power but about suffering. Likewise, discipleship is not a promise of an easy life; rather, it requires sacrifice, denial of self-will, and willingness to suffer for Christ's sake. Our identity as true disciples flows from Jesus' true identity as Messiah.

Apply the Word

How does today's Scripture challenge your previous view of discipleship? Think of one area of your life that God might be calling for greater sacrifice or self-denial—perhaps certain attitudes toward others, your use of free time, or even addictions in your life—and use this coming week to give those over to Christ in order to follow Him more faithfully.

Pray with Us

Please uphold in prayer Moody's vice president of Information Technology Services, Frank Leber, and his staff on campuses in Chicago and Spokane. We appreciate their contribution to developing and maintaining online ministries at Moody.

Question and Answer

By Michael Rydelnik, Professor of Jewish Studies and *Open Line* Host



Are the Jewish people still God's chosen people? Since most Jewish people don't believe in Jesus, haven't Christians become the chosen people?



This question assumes that the church is the new people of God and that the Jewish people are has-beens in the plan of God. To understand the status of Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus, it is necessary to examine Romans 11:28–29.

Romans 11:28 asserts, “As far as the gospel, they [the Jews] are enemies for your sake.” This does not mean that Jewish people are enemies of God or Christians; rather, it refers to their opposition to the gospel. Except for a remnant of Jewish people who have become followers of Jesus (see Rom. 11:1–6), tragically, most Jewish people do not believe in Jesus and reject the good news that Jesus is the Redeemer of Israel. Despite this, however, Jewish people continue to have a special status as God's people. This unique national identity (which is different than their spiritual status) has three aspects.

First, Jewish people remain God's chosen nation. Romans 11:28 continues: “but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.” The word *election* means “choseness.” This refers to God's choice of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their physical descendants to be the people through whom God

would make His name known throughout the earth.

One might ask: *Aren't believers in Jesus chosen?* Yes—Ephesians 1:4 says that believers were chosen before the foundation of the world. But that refers to God's *spiritual* choice for salvation, not God's *national* choice of Israel. The Jewish people are still God's chosen people.

Second, the Jewish people remain God's beloved nation. They are loved not because of anything intrinsic in themselves but because of God's commitment to the Patriarchs. God loves Gentiles, too—John 3:16 says God loved the world. But God has a special love for the Jewish people, just as I care about children but I have a special love for my sons.

Third, Jewish people retain God's unbreakable promises. Romans 11:29 says that God's gifts and calling to the Jewish people are irrevocable, including the gifts mentioned in Romans 9:4–5 (adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants—including the land covenant—the law, temple worship, promises of the Abrahamic covenant, and Jesus the Messiah of Israel). Every promise that God made to Israel still belongs to the people of Israel. One day, when the nation turns in faith to Jesus (cf. Rom. 11:26), God will fulfill every one of them.



Is the modern state of Israel a fulfillment of prophecy?

Continued on next page

Every promise that God made to Israel still belongs to the people of Israel.

Continued from previous page



For any person who believes in God's sovereignty and providence, it is hard not to conclude that the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 was part of His plan. Even more than providence, it is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

First, the Bible predicts that Israel would return to its land in unbelief. Many question the prophetic nature of Israel's return because most Jewish people do not yet believe in Jesus. But biblical prophecy indicates that the Jewish people would only turn to the Messiah *after* returning to the land of Israel: "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:24–26). Note that the national restoration of the Jewish people will precede the spiritual regeneration of Israel.

Second, the Bible predicts that Israel would return in stages. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones describes a series of events. The bones come to life in stages, first sinews on the bones, then flesh, then skin, and finally, the breath of life (37:6–10). God tells Ezekiel, "These bones are the people of Israel" and their restoration is a picture of the way God will bring them "into the land of Israel." This is precisely how the Jewish people have returned to their land. Through the different waves of

immigration, beginning in 1881 to the present, the Jewish people have returned in stages.

Third, the Bible predicts that Israel would return through persecution. God says, "I will restore them to the land I gave their ancestors" (Jer. 16:15), and He says that He will use "fishermen" and "hunters" to pursue His people back to their land. This metaphor for persecution has been fulfilled in the rebirth of Israel. Historically, the primary motivation for Jews to return to the land of Israel has been anti-Jewish persecution. For more than 100 years, God has used Czarist pogroms, Polish economic discrimination, Nazi genocide, Arab hatred, Soviet repression, and revived European anti-Semitism to drive Jewish people back to their ancient homeland. God uses "fishermen and hunters" to pressure Jewish people back to the land of promise.

Finally, the Bible predicts that Israel would return to set the stage for end-time events. Daniel speaks of a firm covenant between the future world dictator and the Jewish people, which will unleash the final events before Messiah's return (9:27). This prophecy assumes a reborn state of Israel. The Jewish state had to be restored so that the events described by Daniel can take place. Without Israel back in its land, this prediction (and many others) cannot be fulfilled.

Yes, from the biblical evidence it appears that the modern state of Israel is indeed a fulfillment of ancient prophecy, setting the stage for the imminent return of Messiah Jesus.

The Glory and Cost of Discipleship

These days, laundry detergents promise to “get whites whiter.” Different brands claim to have ultra whiteners, vivid whiteners, and bright whiteners. No detergent in the world, however, can compare with the white apparel described in our reading for today.

After taking Peter, James, and John up a mountain, Jesus was transfigured. His clothes became “whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (v. 3). The appearance of dazzling white clothes was not about good laundry techniques. It demonstrated His true divine identity. Just as God’s Shekinah glory shone with brilliance in the Old Testament, so now Jesus’ divinity was revealed on this mountain.

Moreover, just as Moses and Elijah each conversed with God on a mountain (see Exodus 33; 1 Kings 19), so now Christ’s conversation with them—and the inclusion of the three apostles—indicated that His purpose in coming to earth was to bring

humanity to Himself. In all His dazzling, divine glory Jesus joined in conversation with humans. Even now, we are called into relationship with God through Christ. In the process we too will be transformed more and more into the image of Christ. That is the glory of discipleship.

This is my Son,
whom I love.
Listen to him!

Mark 9:7

The disciples did not fully understand what was happening. Peter referred to Jesus simply as “rabbi” and offered to build shelters for everyone. The declarative voice from heaven corrected this idea: This is not just a great rabbi, but God’s beloved Son! “Listen to him!” (v. 7). And what did Jesus have to say? Repeating what he said before and will say later (8:31; 9:31–32), Jesus declared that the Son of Man must suffer, die, and then rise again. The mystery of the Transfiguration was not just confirmation of the divinity of Christ, but that as God’s Son, Jesus was called to suffer on the cross. Divine identity and suffering went hand in hand. So too is the costly way of discipleship.

Apply the Word

Most of our Christian life is spent off the mountain, where only glimpses of God’s glory break through. One tool to remember the blessings of the mountaintop is a spiritual journal so that you can be reminded of God’s close presence during difficult days. And we can thank Him for times of transcendence that inspire us and for daily faithfulness that sustains us.

Pray with Us

The Enterprise Applications team is part of our ITS department. John Saucedo, John Bolthouse, Gina Lee, and Diane Rogers provide software solutions and support to the Moody community. Pray for God’s wisdom and guidance in their service.

The Frailty of Faith

The expression, “There’s nowhere to go but up” applies when you’ve hit rock bottom. But the opposite may equally be true. Once you’ve reached the top, “there’s nowhere to go but down.”

After the glorious mountaintop experience of the Transfiguration, Jesus and His disciples descended immediately into a scene of chaos, conflict, and challenge. Scripture vividly presents the depth of the problem, a boy possessed by a violent, seemingly incurable, spirit.

I do believe;
help me overcome
my unbelief!

Mark 9:24

Note the detailed description of the situation. Three separate times we read of the power of the demon to convulse and torment the boy. We hear of his extended anguish (“from childhood,” v. 21) and the extreme danger of the situation (near-death by fire and water). So far, no one had been able to help, and we feel the despair of the father in his words, “If you can do anything...” (v. 22).

It’s a moving scene in which the unrelenting grip of dark forces is made clear. Yet Jesus highlighted the underlying root of the problem: a frailty of faith. When He learned of His disciples’ inability to cast out the spirit, Jesus replied: “You unbelieving generation . . . how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?” (v. 19). And after the father’s expression of incredulity about Jesus healing his boy, Jesus responded: “If you can? . . . Everything is possible for one who believes” (v. 23). Frailty of faith stands as a central theme in our text.

It’s important to note that faith is not an all-or-nothing matter. Look at the father’s response in verse 24: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” And Jesus quickly and decisively cast out the demon. Faith may be frail, but it does not constrain the power of Jesus. A frail faith is faith that can grow!

Apply the Word

What areas of your life still suffer from a frail or fragile faith? Rather than be discouraged at your own weakness, rejoice in the grace of God, who uses even small faith to accomplish His great will. Spend time in prayer, making the words of the father in verse 24 your own, and ask God for an increase in faith.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Enterprise Applications, please lift up Kevin Davis, Chuck Huang, Chris Kolody, Juan Lemus, and John Rood. We thank God for expertise and effectiveness in their work as they develop and support the software at Moody.

Discipleship Recast

Many people post pictures online of themselves posing near someone famous—a singer, movie star, athlete, or politician. The photo hopes to prove that the person has a connection—however tenuous or remote—to fame and power.

Some of us approach discipleship in the same way. As long as we have a few connections with Jesus to show off—a Bible here, a church bulletin there—we're OK, right? In today's reading, Jesus corrected that kind of attitude. He is the Messiah who must be betrayed and killed. Discipleship is not about our connection to power but about following His example of service and humility.

Jesus used a child to illustrate the point, wrapping His arms around this little one and identifying with the low social position of the child. Because the ancient world placed no status or value on children, Jesus' words and actions would have been shocking. Being a disciple of Jesus meant

welcoming and serving those without societal value, not accumulating honor.

Next, in responding to John's anxiety about outsiders doing good in the name of Jesus, Christ offered a second lesson about discipleship. Our concern as followers of Jesus should not be our own privilege and status as "insiders" but the service we owe to others. In fact, even so-called "outsiders" can be used by God. Can we be humble enough to accept the lesson?

Finally, Jesus offered a message about discipleship and sin. Causing another person to sin, as well as tolerating sin in your own life, are so detrimental to discipleship that Jesus used graphic and hyperbolic statements to convey their seriousness. Better to be thrown into the sea tied to a millstone, to cut off a hand or foot, or even to pluck out an eye rather than cause anyone to sin. Serious discipleship means a serious attitude toward sin in our lives.

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.

Mark 9:35

Apply the Word

True discipleship contradicts the worldly values of ambition, self-promotion, and making light of sin. Instead, Christ calls us to put others first. Throughout this week, consider the people you interact with—at work, during your commute, in the grocery store, or in your own family—and look for ways to demonstrate your discipleship by serving them and putting them first.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for Enterprise Applications, please focus on the team that provides project oversight and analysis: Larry Carlin, Sherman Jules, and Kati Middleton, as well as Pepi Manieson and Fred Schultz, our database administrators.

Discipleship and the Ordinary Life

A common sentiment today opines: “As long as I’m not hurting anyone, why should God care about my personal life?” Today’s passage reveals that He does! True discipleship includes the details of our ordinary life.

First, Jesus taught that God cares about marriage. Although the Pharisees were testing Jesus about His requirements for divorce, Jesus turned the tables by focusing on marriage. From the beginning, God had a design for marriage. It was to be between a man and a woman, monogamous, and lifelong. The focus should be on the model of marriage, not on how one can get out of it. Moreover, in a culture that denigrated the wife to the status of mere property, Jesus highlighted the equality, value, and worth of both husband and wife: they each have marital responsibilities toward each other (vv. 11–12).

With the blessing of marriage came the blessing of children. When Jesus learned

that the disciples were dismissing children being brought to Him, He was indignant: “Let the little children come to me” (v. 14)! Not only does God value children, they are a model of faith. Just as a child does not earn her worth but simply receives the love given to her, so too must a true disciple trust and receive God’s love for us.

With man this
is impossible, but
not with God; all
things are possible
with God.

Mark 10:27

Finally, Jesus taught that God cares about our wealth, too. In the encounter with the rich man, Jesus highlighted the danger of anything that steals our hearts away from full submission to God.

A life of discipleship is not focused on rules, regulations, and loopholes; rather, it seeks to have the heart focused on Jesus. Discipleship involves giving over all aspects of life to God. That may seem a difficult teaching, but the underlying point is key: left to us, salvation is impossible, but left to God, “all things are possible” (v. 27).

Apply the Word

The nineteenth-century hymn “I Surrender All,” captures well today’s lesson about a discipleship of all aspects of life: “All to Jesus I surrender,/ All to Him I freely give;/ I will ever love and trust Him,/ In His presence daily live.” Find that hymn online or in a church hymnal and make it your song of prayer and praise to God.

Pray with Us

Please uphold in prayer Moody’s president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, in this busy time for the Chicago campus. As Dr. Nyquist prepares to greet new and returning students and open the Convocation service, pray for God’s leading and grace in his life.

Models of Discipleship: Bad and Good

According to a *Forbes* magazine article about leadership, “Real leaders have strong backbones and are not *afraid* to confront problems.” We see the leadership of Jesus in today’s passage as the disciples headed into dangerous Jerusalem, “with Jesus leading the way” (v. 32).

Despite the fate that awaited Him (betrayal, abuse, and death), Jesus forged ahead in obedience to His mission while continuing to instruct His followers about discipleship. When James and John requested a place of honor with Jesus in His kingdom (and thus missing the point of Jesus’ previous words), Jesus used this as a teachable moment. His followers thought of discipleship in terms of honor and prestige. Jesus refocused their attention on the suffering to come and on the centrality of service to one another.

The world sees leadership as power and authority. Jesus called the disciples

to something else: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all” (vv. 43–44). In fact, Jesus was the prime example, who came not “to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45). A true disciple will follow the example of Christ.

Whoever wants
to become great
among you must be
your servant.

Mark 10:43

Jesus’ exchange with the disciples—who continue to misunderstand what He is saying—gives us a corrective lesson about discipleship. The encounter with Bartimaeus, the blind man, gives us a model of faithful discipleship. His faith was rightly focused on Jesus and His ability to heal. It was persistent—he called out to Jesus repeatedly. It was responsive—he jumped up quickly and came to Jesus when called. And finally, it was long-term—after his healing, he became a follower of Jesus. Today’s Scripture uses both a positive and negative example in order to deepen our understanding of discipleship.

Apply the Word

Who are the individuals in your church who lead by an example of faithful service? Whether official ministers in the church or people in the pews, they are vital to building up the church as a community of disciples. Seek out those individuals and find a way to encourage them through a positive word or a thoughtful note.

Pray with Us

Today is the first day of orientation for new undergraduate students arriving on the Chicago campus. Please encourage them and their parents in prayer and ask that they experience God’s love and protection in all seasons of their lives.

The Messiah Enters Jerusalem

Today, when people are asked to describe Jesus, most identify characteristics of gentleness and compassion, a Jesus that is meek and mild. Our reading today reveals that this is an incomplete understanding of the person and priorities of Jesus!

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, crowds gathered around Him, giving him a royal welcome by paving the way with cloaks and branches. Their shouts from Psalm 118, and their references to the “coming kingdom of our father David” (v. 10), stem from their understanding of Jesus as a military figure coming to take His royal throne. But Jesus’ choice of transportation undercuts that sentiment. Echoing the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, the use of a colt demonstrated both His kingship and His humility.

That gentleness was balanced by Jesus’ zealous activity in the rest of the chapter. Entering the Court of the Gentiles in the temple, Jesus used strong action to

purify the worship space. He drove out merchants, overturned tables, and forbade certain foot traffic. His concern: the temple was to be “for all nations,” not just Jews. And the current temple regime had so corrupted worship there that it was nothing less than a “den of robbers” (v. 17).

My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Mark 11:17

That aggressive action was sandwiched by another enacted parable of judgment—this time on a fig tree. The two actions went together. Just as the tree was cursed and withered for lack of fruit, so too the corrupted temple would be “withered” and purified. Worship itself would be transformed to focus

no longer on buildings but on Jesus, and it would include the whole world. The brief teachings that seem out of place at the end of our text actually continue this theme. Faith and prayer, grounded in forgiveness from God and for each other, are the foundation for the true worshipping community for all nations.

Apply the Word

The church today is on every continent, and God is worshiped in a multitude of languages (see Rev. 7:9). If there’s a church near you comprised primarily of a different ethnic group, consider sharing joint services of worship. Some churches have used Skype to have prayer times with believers in other countries. What a privilege to participate in the house of prayer for all nations!

Pray with Us

Please include in your prayers Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, whose office fosters Moody’s ongoing legacy of commitment to the Bible. Pray that Moody will remain anchored in the unchanging truth of Scripture.

Resistance toward Messiah

The expression “caught on the horns of a dilemma” refers to being presented with two equally uncomfortable options. In today’s reading, this is exactly where the religious leaders find themselves.

Having challenged Jesus’ authority in the temple, the Jewish leaders discover the tables turned. Instead of answering their question directly, Jesus asked them first to identify the source of John’s baptism. This was the dilemma. They did not want to grant prophetic status to John (because they had refused to listen to him); nor did they want to deny John’s prophetic office (for fear of the crowds). So they refused to answer. In turn, Jesus refused to respond to their demands, which had really showed the hardness of their hearts.

That heart attitude was underscored by Jesus’ parable. Drawing upon the vineyard imagery for Israel in Isaiah 5:1–5, Jesus described the hardened, violent

behavior of the farmers assigned to the vineyard. As servants were sent to collect the harvest, the farmers mistreated or killed each one. After a period of great patience by the vineyard owner, he finally sent his “son, whom he loved” (Mark 12:6). The tenants seized the son and killed him as well. Jesus summarized what would happen next: the owner “will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others” (12:9).

Then the chief
priests, the teachers
of the law and the
elders looked for a
way to arrest him.

Mark 12:12

The parable was a drama about Israel, specifically the mistreatment of God’s many prophets and the coming death of Christ, His Son. Even the religious leaders knew this story was directed at them. Sadly, instead of turning to God in repentance, they actually re-enacted the parable and “looked for a way to arrest him” (12:12). Now, even worse than being caught in a dilemma, these leaders were demonstrating outright opposition to God. Resistance to the Messiah was reaching its peak.

Apply the Word

What a dangerous place to be, resisting God’s will in Christ! Think of those you know who continue to resist God’s call to repentance and conversion. Pray for them, that the Spirit would soften their hard hearts and draw them away from the danger of resisting God. Pray also for yourself, that your heart would remain open toward God.

Pray with Us

Chicago’s Student Programs department is getting ready for the new semester that starts next week. Please uphold in prayer Joe Gonzales, Cherie Carson, and Nok Prukpitikul during this busy time for their team.

Challenges from Pharisees and Sadducees

In Jesus' day, the Jewish sects of Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees did not get along. Yet one thing united them in common cause: their opposition to and dislike of Jesus.

Joining forces, the Pharisees and Herodians approached Jesus with unabashed flattery in order to catch Him off guard. Their question about paying taxes was intended to force Jesus either to support the hated Roman tax (and lose face with the people), or oppose the tax and be branded a seditionist by the Romans. Jesus bypassed the dilemma altogether by forcing them to acknowledge Caesar's image on the coin. "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's" (v. 17). But Jesus did not settle for a legal requirement. He exposed a deeper commitment for followers of God: give also to God what bears God's image—that is, our whole selves.

In the next scene, a group of Sadducees challenged Jesus about the belief in the

resurrection. Because Sadducees denied the resurrection, they posed a hypothetical question in order to trap Jesus in embarrassed confusion. If a woman was widowed seven times with no children, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? Jesus attacked their question by exposing their lack of understanding about the resurrection state and their fundamental failure to believe in God's power to resurrect. He is not "the God of the dead, but of the living" (v. 27).

In both encounters, Jesus took the challenge and moved the discussion deeper. In doing so, He demonstrated that discipleship is not about poking holes in a list of rules or doctrines. It's not even about having pat answers for challenging questions. Discipleship is about affirming the lordship of our living God and offering our whole lives to Him, knowing that our relationship with Him now will continue even after death.

Give back to
Caesar what is
Caesar's and to
God what is God's.

Mark 12:17

Apply the Word

Scripture tells us that we are made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). Like the marked coin belonging to Caesar, we are marked as God's and belong to Him. No aspect of life is beyond His lordship. As you go through your day, give it all to Him—your efforts at work, what you view on the screen, your speech to others, and your thoughts when alone.

Pray with Us

Today, we have the privilege of praying for Frank Slomkowski, Elouise Peace, Lillie Hill, and Louis Ballasch who serve in our Chicago-campus cafeteria, The Commons. Pray that God would strengthen and nourish them with His Word.

Challenges from Scribes

In Jesus' day, as now, faithful Jews recited the *Shema* (see Deut. 6:4–5) every morning and evening as a confession of their commitment to and relationship with the one true God. So when a scribe asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment, Jesus replied by citing the *Shema*, combined with Leviticus 19:19: Love God with your whole being, and love your neighbor as yourself. Even the scribe agreed: the call to double-love (of God and neighbor) was the sum of every other law, and more important even than sacrifices.

Jesus commended this scribe's wisdom, but the rest of the chapter shows the failure among many Jewish scribes to love God above all else. Challenging common notions about the Messiah, Jesus used Psalm 110 to demonstrate their failure to understand the nature of the Messiah as "Lord" (the way that the name "Yahweh" was rendered in the Old Testament). The Messiah was greater than what

the scribes had imagined, and Jesus' challenge struck at their self-importance.

Likewise, Jesus criticized the scribes' desire for praise and honor. Their concern to be noticed in public, to be greeted by others, and to gain public seats of honor demonstrated their focus on self-love rather than love of God.

Love the Lord your
God with all your
heart and with
all your soul and
with all your mind
and with all your
strength.

Mark 12:30

In contrast, the last scene of the chapter becomes an illustration of a "whole life" given in love for God. Watching the crowds bring offerings to the temple, Jesus did not draw attention to the religious leaders and the wealthy. He pointed out a poor widow who

gave only two coins, commending her action above all others because she gave "out of her poverty . . . all she had to live on" (v. 44; literally "her whole life").

What does love of God look like? Anyone who gives their whole life to God.

Apply the Word

Loving God with your whole being also includes loving your neighbor. How might you use your talents, intellect, emotions, and resources to demonstrate love for God by loving others? Look for ways throughout this coming week to provide for the physical needs of a neighbor, offer a listening ear to a co-worker, or give a gift to a friend needing encouragement.

Pray with Us

Dr. Larry Davidhizar, VP and dean of the Undergraduate School, welcomes your prayers for the undergraduate students and faculty, that they will "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work" (Col. 1:9).

Final Discipleship Discourses, Part 1

With the rise of ISIS in the Middle East and groups like Boko Haram in Africa, Christians today are facing persecution in many places around the world. According to Scripture, however, this is exactly what Jesus said would happen.

As He left the temple, Jesus predicted its coming destruction. When His disciples asked Him about this later, Jesus responded with further warnings and predictions. Twice Jesus warned His followers to “Watch out” (v. 5) and “Be on your guard” (v. 9). The end was coming, but certain events must take place first. There would be wars, rumors of wars, and natural disasters. And there would also be persecution of Christ-followers. As Jesus warned: “Everyone will hate you because of me” (v. 13).

In the midst of these dire predictions, Jesus also offered reassurance. First, His words tell us that persecution is not a surprise. Christians who face the trial of

persecution should not wonder whether God has lost control of the world. Instead, we can have confidence that this is just how Christ said it would be. Persecution is the necessary precursor to the end.

Second, persecution is not endured alone. Despite the suffering and pain of persecution, Christ promised His presence would be with the persecuted. No one should worry about what to say, for the Holy Spirit would speak through them. God does not shelter His people from facing trials, mockery, and suffering, but He does not abandon them in those moments of persecution, either.

Everyone will hate
you because of
me, but the one
who stands firm to
the end will
be saved.

Mark 13:13

Finally, Jesus reminded His followers that persecution is not the last word. Pain and trial may last for a time (and even result in physical death), but “the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (v. 13). The gospel will be preached to the world and God’s kingdom will ultimately arrive in fullest victory.

Apply the Word

In his new book, *Prepare: Living Your Faith in an Increasingly Hostile Culture*, Moody president Paul Nyquist outlines the ways American culture has shifted away from traditional Christian morals and describes how believers can respond with faith and hope in the truth of the gospel. To order your copy, visit www.shopmoodypublishers.com or your favorite Christian bookstore.

Pray with Us

As the new semester begins today, we would like to thank God for the Pastoral Studies professors in the Undergraduate School: Kirk Baker, Michael Boyle, Pamela MacRae, and John Koessler. May the Lord guide them throughout this year.

Final Discipleship Discourses, Part 2

Some Christians give inordinate attention to predicting when the end times will come and Christ will return. Scripture reminds us, though, that not even the Son knows the day and hour of His return.

As Jesus continued His farewell discourse to the disciples, He wanted to tell them more about the coming end times. Mark 13 remains one of the most difficult chapters for biblical interpreters, and some try to construct exact timelines from this chapter while others identify every historical event in the news as some new piece of the puzzle or clue to interpret. Instead, in our study we will focus on Jesus' broader message: watchfulness.

To be sure, Christ offered a general timeline. Before Christ's return, cataclysmic events will shake the world. The "abomination that causes desolation" (v. 14) and dreadful, unparalleled days of destruction must come first. False messiahs will appear, attempting to deceive the people. And the

apocalyptic language of Isaiah referring to the upheaval of sun, moon, and stars underscores the cosmic dimension of the coming events. Some scholars argue that at least a few of the things described in this passage refer to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70; others believe the evidence more strongly points to these events occurring yet in the future. Most clearly and importantly, these are signs of God's promise: Christ will return.

Jesus ended His discourse with that promise. The visible coming of the Son of Man, "with great power and glory" (v. 26), in order to gather together those

who belong to Him—that is the focus of Christ's words. No one knows when that day will be, but until then, Jesus' instructions are clear: "Be on guard! Be alert!" (v. 33). "Keep watch," and "Watch!" (vv. 35, 37). Instead of wasting our days in spiritual slumber, we are called to spiritual vigilance, eagerly awaiting our Lord and Savior.

If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ... I say to everyone: "Watch!"

Mark 13:36–37

Apply the Word

This text calls us to a renewed sense of spiritual alertness. What practices in your life have begun to slide into the margins? Intercessory prayer? Vigilance against certain sins? Attendance at church? Scripture memorization? Commit to revitalize your spiritual life, not as a means of saving yourself but as a way of preparing your whole being for the return of our glorious King.

Pray with Us

Keeping the Pastoral Studies faculty in our prayers, please mention Winfred Neely, Laurie Norris, and William Torgesen during your time with God today. Pray for the increase of their ministry to students—future shepherds in the church.

A Disciple's Sacrifice of Love

Often children report that they “didn’t hear” what a parent told them to do. Even despite repetitions, sometimes the words just don’t seem to get through.

The disciples displayed a similar inability to “hear” what Jesus had been saying about His coming death. But one unnamed woman understood. While Jesus and the disciples were gathered in the house of Simon, this woman performed an extravagant and costly action, one of the greatest acts of love and devotion recorded in the Gospels.

First, the woman risked social embarrassment by interrupting the dinner, traditionally a male gathering. Next, she furthered that social risk with a public display of love and adoration. Taking a jar of costly nard (worth a year’s wages), she broke it and poured the contents on Jesus’ head. Imagine the whole house filling with fragrance! This was hardly a subtle, secret act of worship; this was not service in the shadows.

The disciples were indignant, and harshly rebuked the woman. “Why this waste?,” they asked (v. 4). Then, in practical explanation: “It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor” (v. 5). What seemed to be a reasonable concern, however, turned out to be a fundamental misunderstanding.

Why are you
bothering her?
She has done a
beautiful thing
to me.

Mark 14:6

Jesus defended the woman, describing her act as “a beautiful thing” (v. 7) because she correctly perceived His coming death. In fact, Jesus told them that her costly act was a preparation of His body for that death. She understood what lay ahead and was willing to offer “what she could” (v. 8)

as a demonstration of her love for Christ.

The disciples had still not “heard” Jesus’ predictions of His death, and Judas used this occasion to begin the process of betrayal. But the woman understood. Her act of worship was so important that Jesus promised that her deed would be told throughout the world!

Apply the Word

We sometimes think that we have little to offer God in love. But Jesus commended this woman for doing “what she could.” Even the smallest acts of obedience to God or love for Him can be costly but beautiful. Consider the day ahead. What small acts of love or obedience can you perform that will demonstrate your devotion to Christ? Commit now to doing them today.

Pray with Us

Thank you for upholding in prayer Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing Communications. With the increasing role and avenues of communication in our digital world, your prayer support is important for Christine and her teams.

Final Discipleship Meal

The ancient Jewish Passover meal was a reminder of God's great redemption of Israel from their oppression in Egypt. It also looked forward with hope to the salvation of God's coming kingdom. Jesus, however, took this "salvation-meal" and gave it new meaning.

Preparations having been made, Jesus and the Twelve arrived for the meal. But before they partook, Jesus offered a disturbing prediction: "One of you will betray me—one who is eating with me" (v. 18)! Even that betrayal, and His resulting death, were part of God's plan, for God is able to take such evil and turn it into the greatest good.

With these allusions to His coming death, Jesus then took the Passover bread, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying "This is my body" (v. 22). By eating the broken bread, they were joining themselves to Christ and His coming redemption. Then, giving them the cup of wine, He explained:

[T]his is my body
 . . . This is my
 blood of the
 covenant, which is
 poured out
 for many.

Mark 14:22, 24

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (v. 24). Just as Moses sprinkled the sacrificial "blood of the covenant" on the Israelites (Ex. 24:8), so now Jesus' blood on the cross would inaugurate a new covenant with God's people. Jesus took these age-old symbols of God's covenant redemption (Passover bread and wine) and gave them new meaning. God's promised salvation was now centered on Jesus, the Messiah!

After the meal, however, Jesus had another startling prediction. All of them would "fall away" (v. 27). Even Peter, despite his avowed commitment to follow Jesus even to death, would deny Jesus three times. What an evening of bewilderment and sadness, with its predicted end of betrayal and death. The point is clear. Our discipleship may falter, but Jesus stays true to His mission of salvation. It is His strength and obedience, not ours, that brings salvation.

Apply the Word

The next time you partake of the Lord's Supper, think about Christ's great redemption won at the cross. As you eat the bread, give thanks to God that Christ's own broken body brings you healing! As you drink the cup, praise God that Christ's own blood was poured out for you, for your forgiveness and salvation from sin and death!

Pray with Us

Led by Paul Walker, Enterprise Infrastructure team is part of the ITS department at Moody in Chicago. Pray for Joseph Kessinger, Jim Hickman, John Wu, Kyle Sparrow, and Scott Pinnow who maintain computer network and servers.

Betrayal, Arrest, and Trial

In the lingo of the Internet, an “epic fail” is any embarrassing mistake, often brought about because of arrogance or stupidity: the cyclist who crashes because of a premature celebration of victory, the klutz who destroys the television screen because of a poorly performed handstand, or the handicap ramp that leads only to a set of stairs.

Today’s reading might be seen as a set of “discipleship fails.” As Jesus approached the hour of His death, He took His disciples to Gethsemane for prayer. While Jesus agonized over His coming crucifixion, the disciples proved poor companions. Finding them sleeping three separate times, Jesus declared: “Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” (v. 37). Despite their failure, Jesus remained faithful to the Father’s will.

Next, Judas arrived with an armed crowd and then betrayed Jesus with a kiss. The response of the disciples? “Then everyone deserted him and fled.” (v. 50). One

was so desperate to get away that he left naked. Again, despite their failure, Jesus remained faithful: “The Scriptures must be fulfilled” (v. 49). Now under arrest, Jesus was taken to a rigged trial by the Sanhedrin, full of false and contradictory accusations. Yet Jesus remained silent except to declare His identity as the Messiah, the Son of Man who would come in power. At that, the religious leaders tore their clothes, spit on Him, and struck Him.

Meanwhile, Peter had followed behind in secret. Instead of standing up for his Lord, Peter proved no help at all. Worse still, when those standing nearby identified Peter as a disciple of Jesus, Peter emphatically denied it, just as Jesus had predicted.

Throughout our reading, the disciples failed miserably as sleepy and inattentive companions, betrayers, deserters, and deniers. Jesus alone remained faithful.

Couldn’t you
keep watch for
one hour?

Mark 14:37

Apply the Word

Will you spend one hour in prayer with your faithful Savior Jesus? Go online and find the meditative song, “Stay with Me,” by the Taizé community, a Christian group founded in 1940 in France. The song was inspired by Jesus’ words in today’s passage. As you listen to the lyrics and melody, come into the presence of Jesus and offer yourself in devotion to Him.

Pray with Us

The Lord has called us to help one another, and the ITS Support Center does just that. Lift up in prayer Rebekah Campbell, Tim Gauger, and Jason Floyd who help with immediate computer needs of students and staff on campuses in Chicago and Spokane.

Crucifixion of a King

Because Jewish religious accusations held no sway with Roman governors, the Sanhedrin delivered Jesus to Pilate under the pretense of political crimes. Notice the number of times in our reading that Jesus is called “king of the Jews.”

Pilate began the interrogation by asking Jesus whether He was indeed “the king of the Jews” (v. 2). Getting no satisfactory reply, Pilate then asked the crowd if they wanted him to release for them “the king of the Jews” (v. 9). This only provided the crowd’s response, stirred up by the priests: “Crucify him!” (vv. 13, 14). In a profound moment of irony, the crowd demanded the release of Barabbas (his name literally means “son of a father”) in exchange for the death of Jesus (the true Son of the Father). Unable to appease the crowd, Pilate let the bogus political charge stand and handed Jesus over to be killed.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate.
“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

Mark 15:2

In turn, the soldiers put Jesus in a purple robe and crown of thorns, then ridiculed Him with the words, “Hail, king of the Jews” (v. 18). Treating Him as anything but a king, they struck Him, spit on Him, and knelt in mockery before Him. When they were finished, they led Jesus out to crucify Him.

At Golgotha the sarcasm continued with a written notice placed above His head: “The King of the Jews” (v. 26). Hung in misery and humiliation alongside two other criminals, Jesus was mocked one final time by the passersby and religious leaders: “Let this Messiah, the king of Israel, come down now from the cross” (v. 32).

Six separate times, Jesus is called the “king of the Jews.” Pilate misunderstood it as a political title. The soldiers and the priests meant it as a mockery. But despite the degradation, Jesus really was the King. Even His enemies could not help proclaiming that truth.

Apply the Word

Even today, many fail to recognize Jesus as the real King in the world. Sometimes even our own lives contradict our verbal profession of Christ as our King. Make this prayer of the Rev. R. T. France yours today: “Help us to offer you true homage, Lord, and hasten the time when all nations will recognize you and worship you as their true king. Amen.”

Pray with Us

Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, leads the ministry that connects Moody with our friends and supporters across the globe. Thank the Lord in prayer for Bruce and his teams, and for provision and unity in the Moody family.

Death and Burial

Today, the cross is a commonplace symbol. It's used as jewelry in necklaces and as decorations in homes and churches. We place it on car bumpers and use it as a coloring activity for children. For many Christians, the horror of crucifixion is rarely considered anymore.

Our reading, however, reminds us of the stark reality of the horror of being killed on a cross. As the sky darkened, Jesus expressed His painful lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 34). Scripture presents us the shocking reality:

on the cross at Golgotha, Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, felt abandoned by the Father. Remarkably, the Father was letting the Son die! As a "ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), the Innocent One died for sinners. The cross reminds us of that truth.

But it is not all silence. When Jesus finally breathed His last, God's silence was

broken when temple curtain, which previously separated God and humanity, was torn in two. Just as the heavens were "torn open" at Jesus' baptism, and the Father proclaimed Jesus as His Son, so now at the cross, the divide between heaven and earth was torn open. The Roman centurion proclaimed Jesus as "the Son of God" (v. 39). Jesus died not *despite* being God's Son but precisely *as* God's Son, on our behalf.

My God, my God,
why have you
forsaken me?

Mark 15:34

In the end, Jesus was not totally abandoned. Scripture tells us that many women gathered from afar to watch His death, and they were present for His burial. Likewise, Joseph of Arimathea, the Sanhedrin member, risked revealing his association with Jesus by requesting His body from the cross. Wrapped in a linen cloth, Jesus was buried quickly in a stranger's tomb. Joseph and the women were there, but not a single disciple could be found.

Apply the Word

Jesus' cry from the cross came from Psalm 22, a psalm that is a clear prophecy of Christ's death and that also included an affirmation of hope and promise. As you consider Christ's death, take time to read Psalm 22. Ask God to help you understand both the suffering Christ endured for you as well as the hope and confidence we can have in Him because of His death for us.

Pray with Us

Please spend time in prayer for Moody Radio Northwest, located in Spokane, WA. Ask that the Holy Spirit would give encouragement to the staff—Joe Gonzalez, Chris Wright, Jodi Murphy, Dee Marie, Scott LaVell, and Gordon Canaday.

A Final Call to Discipleship: Resurrection

One of the unique features of the Gospel of Mark is its ending. Although some manuscripts contain verses 9 through 20, the earliest and most reliable texts do not include this longer ending. Instead, the original ending was verse 8. As evangelical scholar D. A. Carson notes, these added verses “cannot be said to be part of the Scriptures (like the rest of the gospel), but they are an honest attempt to ‘complete’ the story of Jesus.”

So what does this shorter, original ending of Mark tell us? First we see the devotion of the women disciples. Rising early in the morning, they headed to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body. Despite the fact that a body dead for over 36 hours would already be decaying and the problem of how they would remove the “very large” stone, these women remained undeterred. Their love for Christ was clear.

You are looking
for Jesus the
Nazarene, who
was crucified.
He has risen! He is
not here.

Mark 16:6

When they arrived, however, they discovered a startling scene. The stone was already removed, Jesus was gone, and an angel awaited them in the tomb. We never encounter the risen Christ in this Gospel, but the proclamation of resurrection is clear: “He has risen! He is not here.” (v. 6). Death could not hold its grip over Christ.

Based on that exciting news, the women were given a final exhortation to discipleship. They are urged to “go” and “tell” others the news of Christ’s resurrection (v. 7). Verse 8 of the Gospel might lead us to think that the women failed: “They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.” But we know their fear and silence did not remain forever—the existence of Christ’s church today, and the Gospel of Mark itself, demonstrate that the message of the risen Christ was, indeed, proclaimed to the disciples, to others, and to the world!

Apply the Word

Christ’s call to discipleship in the Gospel of Mark culminates in the proclamation of His resurrection. In that sense, verse 8 is not the end, because the good news of resurrection continues to be proclaimed throughout the world. As we end this month’s study, how will you embody the call to discipleship by proclaiming Christ’s resurrection victory to those around you?

Pray with Us

As we conclude our study of the Gospel of Mark this month, join us in asking the Lord to use everything we learned about Messiah Jesus and discipleship to make rewarding changes in our hearts. And thank you for studying with us!



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