

The Gospel of Mark

WHO
DO YOU
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Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Welcome to the book of Mark! Mark is a striking, dynamic account of Jesus' ministry; from the appearance of John the Baptist, all the way to the empty tomb. In sixteen short chapters, Mark paints a vivid picture of Jesus, but it is more than a mere biography. As Mark himself tells us in 1:1, his story is a "gospel," a declaration of good news. News that the kingdom of God is at hand (1:15); that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins (2:10); that Jesus himself has bound the strong man, Satan, and is plundering his house; that Jesus is in fact the Christ (8:30), God's anointed servant, who will deliver his people.

Mark tells us his story so that we might repent and believe in this Jesus, the one who came "not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). May God bless you and bring you closer to Jesus as you dive into the incredible book of Mark.

Who Was Mark?

The author of the book doesn't name himself anywhere, focusing instead on the message. The early Church attributed the book to John Mark, who served with the apostle Peter quite closely (e.g. 1 Peter 5:13). By this account, Peter, as an apostle, passed the stories of Jesus on to John Mark, who then carefully arranged them into the book we have today. Surveying the evidence across the New Testament, there are decent reasons to think that this is true, which makes Mark's story an eyewitness account, and probably the first of the four gospels.

Who Was Mark Writing To?

The gospel of Mark was likely written to Roman Christians who were enduring persecution under the reign of Nero. Details from the book, like the explanation of purity laws in 7:3-4 for example, alert us to the fact that Mark was not initially addressed to a Jewish audience, but to a Gentile one. There are also Latin words and turns of phrase, which, at the very least, locate Mark's audience within Italy (e.g. the unclean "Legion" in 5:9). In 1 Peter 5:13 we get a reference to Peter and John Mark being in "Babylon," which was usually a cryptic way of talking about Rome. If John Mark did in fact write this gospel in Peter's company, then it likely happened during Roman persecution, perhaps in Rome itself. This would also make good sense of details in the text that seem to refer to persecution. In 1:13, for example, Jesus is "with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him." The comment about wild animals is not included in any of the other gospels, and might strike us as a bit odd. One explanation is that this aspect of Jesus' wilderness temptation was emphasized in order to encourage Roman Christians, because death by wild animal in the Roman circus was in fact a typical way for the emperor to both entertain the masses, and to eliminate undesirables.

Mark's Style

Anyone who reads Mark for the first time is instantly struck by how unusual the book is. It is a biography like no other biography. Everything happens "immediately" or "again." Miracle piles up on miracle, with hardly any time to rest. Critics sometimes accuse Mark of being unrefined or clumsy, but the episodes of Jesus' life which he presents are carefully arranged, and all hang together as a single story (So for example, it can hardly be a coincidence that we see Jesus lovingly shepherding the crowd (6:34), by feeding them both soul and body, immediately after an account of the corrupt shepherd King Herod). In all likelihood, Mark was intended to be read aloud without interruption, as the most incredible fireside story ever written. Repetitions and links between episodes, extraneous details like a random pillow (4:38), vivid emotional responses, smatterings of Aramaic; all draw the listener in, so that "he who has ears" might hear the gospel and be compelled to respond.

The performative, oral nature of Mark also comes out in what are elegantly referred to as "sandwiches," where a story begins, is interrupted, and then continues. What is so masterful about these interruptions, is not only that they heighten the dramatic tension, but that they serve as interpretive keys for the story which they interrupt. So, for example in 3:21 a story begins where Jesus' family declare that Jesus is out of his mind. The story is interrupted in 3:22, and doesn't resume until 3:31. In between we get an episode with the scribes, who accuse Jesus of being in league with the devil. Jesus' response to them gets at the heart of the entire issue, and then explains the radical statement he makes about family when the first story resumes. Look out for sandwiches.

IMPORTANT THEMES

The Kingdom of God

Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand!” We often understand ‘kingdom’ as a static concept, located in a particular place. When Jesus speaks about the kingdom, he is talking about God’s dynamic rule, which breaks in wherever the gospel is preached and takes root (4:30-32). The kingdom of God is the reality out of which Jesus operates, and into which he invites his followers.

Jesus’ Identity

Mark tells us in the very first verse that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; we as readers are given the secret. Those in the story however, struggle to figure out who Jesus is, and are even intentionally prevented from spreading the good news (1:43-44). Yet even when people are told, or see miraculous things which point towards his identity, they still struggle to understand, some even outright rejecting him. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? The story of Mark takes us deep into this question.

The Nature of Discipleship

At the start of Jesus’ ministry he calls all to repent, yet chooses some to be with him, promising that he will make them to become “fishers of men” (1:17). But the life of discipleship is not straightforward. The disciples walk with Jesus, witness his ministry, are given “the secret of the kingdom of God” (4:11), and receive “authority over unclean spirits” (6:7). Yet at the very same time, they regularly struggle to understand, because their “hearts are hardened” (6:52). Even Peter, with his monumental confession that Jesus is the Christ (8:30), immediately opposes Jesus when Jesus explains more fully what the Christ must do. Though they are loved, their faith grows slowly, as they grow in knowing and following their Lord.

Study #1



Mark 1:1-15

This study kicks off the gospel of Mark, and what a start! In fifteen short verses, we get a prophecy, a prophetic fulfillment, a baptism, a testing, and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as the beloved Son. It is the “beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” who comes to announce that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” Compelling, powerful, wasting no time at all (for the time is now), we dive into the remarkable reality that in Jesus, God’s plans for the world are fulfilled.

STUDY NOTES

1:2-3 *“As it is written...”*

Mark is actually quoting two prophets at once, which was not an uncommon practice during Jesus’ time. The first reference in v.2 is from Malachi 3:1, where Elijah returns to prepare God’s people for the awesome Day of the LORD. The second reference in v.3 is from Isaiah 40:3, where a messenger exhorts the people to prepare themselves for the revelation of the glory of the LORD. The use of both prophetic witnesses makes a strong comment on the appearance of Jesus.

1:4 *“baptizing in the wilderness...”*

Mark connects Isaiah’s “voice in the wilderness” with John’s ministry in the wilderness. He is the one preparing the way for the LORD, through a ministry of baptism and preaching. John is described in v.6 as a man who was clothed in camel’s hair and a leather belt. This is intended to remind us of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), who is also the messenger in Malachi 3:1. Jesus himself will make this connection explicit in Mark 9:9-13.

1:8 *“he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit...”*

This is something promised by God in Isaiah, both in 32:15 (a chapter about a coming king who will rule in righteousness) and Isaiah 44:3, where the prophet receives an oracle from God concerning a redeemer who is also the LORD of Hosts.

1:9 *“Jesus... was baptized by John in the Jordan...”*

This verse is reminiscent of Israel passing through the waters of the Jordan river before entering the Promised Land back in Joshua 3. Where Israel originally failed, by persistently rebelling against the LORD, Christ will succeed, by living a life of perfect obedience. Jesus’ story also contains another echo of Israel’s story: in the wilderness of Sinai Moses dwelt on the mountain for forty days before beginning the next phase of his ministry, and Israel was tempted (and failed) when wandering in the wilderness for forty years.

1:10 *“the Spirit descending upon him...”*

John has already mentioned that Jesus’ baptism will be superior, and here we see the first evidence of that. This is a clear sign that the very power of God will be at work in Jesus’ ministry, and that any rejection of him is a rejection of God (cf. Mark 3:20-30 in Study #5)

1:11 *“You are my beloved Son...”*

There are probably three allusions present in this pronouncement from God: Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, and Genesis 22:2. The connection with the first two is fairly clear, demonstrating Jesus’ unique and favoured status before the Father. The third reference is not immediately obvious in English, but is clearer in Greek. This reference to Genesis 22 means that Jesus’ ministry as the sacrificial son is being sealed. For the sake of the world, God will not spare his only son.

1:15 *“the kingdom of heaven is at hand...”*

This phrase indicates dynamic nearness; God’s reign is breaking into the world in a unique and final way. God is physically close in the person of Jesus, and he is also temporally close: history is reaching its fulfillment.

Study #2



Mark 1:16-39

As we continue to look at the early ministry of Christ in Mark we transition from Jesus’ own calling to how he calls his own disciples. These rather large and diverse passages provide us a fantastic picture into Jesus’ own ministry priorities, the authority with which he carries them out, and the importance of preaching The Word. Mark’s gospel is sometimes attributed as primarily being about the work of Christ. While helpful this can understate the immense importance of what happens in Chapter 1. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that from the very beginning the Word is the work and he is here to preach, not just information but transformation and salvation. So as Christ’s proclamation of the kingdom of heaven 1:14 breaking into our world reverberates through these passages the work of the gospel and discipleship hit full throttle in our chapter of Mark.

A note on the writing of Mark.

There are many interesting facts about the Gospel of Mark and its unique place among the 4 books that detail the life of Jesus. Primarily amongst them are its claim as the first Gospel to be written, and its extremely clever use of language and structure. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that Mark is the earliest complete Gospel written for the people of God, and while some stylistic adaptations from existing genres were sometimes used, Mark as an author is setting out on a completely new genre defining adventure. With this in mind we should remember the purposeful nature of both what is written and how it is written. Mark is very intentional with the composition and arrangement of this account of Christ's life and ministry. He doesn't do this to hide details or make things more confusing, but to emphasize narrative, historical, and theological elements of importance.

A note on miracles in Mark.

There is a great deal that could be written, discussed, and learned on the topic of miracles in the Gospels. The big question of why such events occur so commonly in the text and not in our lives is perhaps the most frequently asked on the subject. The short answer is to understand the monumental nature of Christ and the kingdom of God breaking through the regular bounds of life into this world. There has never been a time of such widespread overt spiritual activity as this. Jesus' incarnation breaks all rules, the miracles he performs are done by his power and word to exemplify his divinity and completely unique authority; and further the entrance of God's perfect heavenly kingdom into our world. And while it may seem somewhat unimpressive to only read about such events, the bible is very clear that the greatest miracle ever is Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension offered to us freely.

1:17 "...I will make you become fishers of men."

Aside from the wordplay here about the disciples' already existing occupation of being fishers of fish there is an Old Testament tradition of God both being a fisher of men/people and sending forth others to fish for him. (Jer 16:16, Ez 29:4, 38:4) To be a fisher of men is to call them to repentance to avoid God's judgment.

1:23 a man with an unclean spirit.

There is some debate as to what the particulars of this "unclean" means in this circumstance. Strongest arguments can be made that it either means that the spirit drives the man to commit unclean acts in a Jewish legal sense or that the spirit itself is so contrary to the nature of God it does not belong in His sight let alone one of His synagogues. With the second interpretation a wider point can also then be made at the state of religion currently in Jesus' age, that evil, gross spirits so far from God are inhabiting the people of God as they go to worship in His own house.

1:23 a man with an unclean spirit.

The concept of demons and possession have become increasingly unpopular amongst modern minds, often excused by claiming mental illness or religious superstition. It is important to address these ideas and the wider idea of spiritual warfare at play here in the Gospels. Jesus has come to challenge the authorities on earth, those religious, political, and spiritual. And the agents of his enemies do not take this mission of his lightly, first exemplified here by an "unclean spirit" receiving Christ in a place of holy worship. Note that this is not simply a mentally unwell person, for they correctly identify who Jesus is, a truth that even his closest disciples won't grasp for another 7 chapters. These are not the ramblings of an unwell mind but words of challenge to Christ and his cause from an enemy. With that in mind also the 'exorcism' that takes place is one completely without ceremony, bells, smells, and incantations. Jesus uses his word and authority to instantly and wholly overwhelm Satan and everything he brings to the table; it is a complete and utter victory.

1:38 "...for that is why I came out."

This sentence confirms the priority of His preaching ministry. "I came out" may be ambiguous, either from Capernaum (indicating where his mission journey will go) or from God (indicating his wider earthly mission).

***Mark 1:40-2:12***

Up to this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus has moved quickly to identify the nature of his ministry, call some disciples, proclaim the good news in the synagogues, cast out demons and heal the sick. The response so far has been awe-inspiring and singularly positive: "What is this? A new teaching with authority!"

In this passage, Jesus performs healings that are unmistakably miraculous and are also accomplished in ways that are either prohibited by OT law or offensive to religious or societal sensibilities. Two new problems now arise: the overwhelming popularity hampers his mission, and we see the beginning of opposition, as not everyone seems entirely pleased with his teaching and activities.



Study #3

Mark 1:40-2:12

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

1:40 And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.” 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.” 42 And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, 44 and said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.” 45 But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

2:7 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” 12 And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 28.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

D A few questions to consider

- What is the leper asking Jesus to do, and what did the leper believe about Jesus?
- What do the actions by the paralyzed man and his friends reveal about what they believed about Jesus? How does Jesus respond?
- What does the text tell us about the responses of those who witnessed or heard of these two healings?

STEP 4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

A Living it out

This fourth step is for responding in faith. How are these revealed truths going to change the way I live? Is there a sin to confess? A promise to claim? An example to follow? A command to obey? Knowledge to embrace?

B A few questions to consider

- How do we appropriate the promises implicit in Jesus' cleansing of the leper?
- In this passage, Jesus intervenes in the lives of two marginalized people in order to make them whole again, but restoring their relationships with God takes priority over the ravages of leprosy and paralysis. How do we organize our lives so that we treat sin with the same seriousness that Jesus does?
- Why do you think God sometimes heals people miraculously and at other times chooses not to?
- What in our life changes when Jesus declares us clean?

PRAYER & PRAYER REQUESTS

Spend some time praying out of the passage. You can use this space to record prayers or prayer requests.

1:40 “leper”

Leprosy in the Bible was one of the most feared diseases, and was viewed as practically incurable. The term “leprosy” covered a wide range of visible and often disfiguring skin diseases, including Hansen’s disease, which were thought to be contagious. This disease is in a category of its own in that its effects were as much social, emotional and spiritual as physical. Lepers were ceremonially unclean and therefore social outcasts—in addition to the fear of contagion, touching a leper would be to become unclean oneself. So lepers were required to dress in torn clothes, allow their hair to remain disheveled, live in isolation, cover the lower part of their faces and cry out, “Unclean, unclean” if others approached (Lev 13:45-46).

It’s worth noting that leprosy was considered direct punishment from God (Lev 14:34; Deut 24:8, 9; Car 26:16-23; 2 Kings 5:26-27; 2 Kings 15:1-7), and that the future hope expressed by the prophets included the removal of all uncleanness (Isa 35:8; 52:1; 64:6; Ezek 36:25; Zech 13:2).

1:43 “sternly charged and sent him away”

“Sternly charged” translates the Greek verb *embrimaomai*, which usually means to rebuke, scold, censure, or sternly warn. “Sent away” translates the Greek verb *ekballō*, which usually means cast out or eject by force. Taken as a whole, this phrase suggests, at the very least, a note of anger and disapproval by Jesus.

1:44 “for a proof to them”

This Greek phrase could also be translated “as a testimony against them”. Where it is used elsewhere in Mark’s gospel, it has a hostile intent. So, in 6:11, Jesus says: “And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them”. In this passage, Jesus may have intended it as a warning to the priest that Jesus was there doing clearly miraculous things and they were going to have to take notice of him.

1:45 “talk freely”

“Talk freely” translates the Greek verb (*kērussō*) routinely used in the proclamation of the gospel—which, in this case, most likely refers to the good news of the leper’s cure by Jesus.

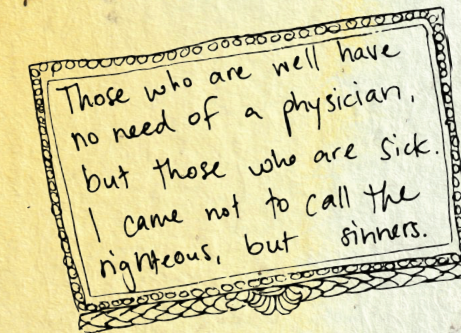
2:9 “which is easier?”

Forgiveness of sins or healing? Considering the widespread view that much illness was direct punishment from God, the distinction between physical healing and forgiveness of sins probably seems much more pronounced to modern ears than it did to Mark’s first readers. Just as sin and disease were viewed as closely related, so also were forgiveness and healing.

2:10 “Son of Man”

This is Jesus’ favorite self-designation, but it appears to have had no prior messianic significance—the crowds probably hear this as “son of Adam” rather than as a claim to divine authority. The term most likely derives from Daniel 7:13-14, where Daniel, in a vision, sees “one like a son of man” who was apparently human, and yet was coming “with the clouds of heaven”. He was presented before the Ancient of Days (7:13) and was given God’s glory and kingdom and authority, permitting him to act on behalf of God’s people in the cosmic struggle against Satan. The expression carried connotations of power, glory and authority.

Study #4



Those who are well have
no need of a physician,
but those who are sick.
I came not to call the
righteous, but sinners.

Mark 2:13-3:6

In this passage, we again encounter a Jesus who claims authority that belongs exclusively to the LORD. He reveals himself as Lord of the Sabbath—the holy day set apart for God since the dawn of creation. He also shows an authoritative, ground-shifting understanding of the meaning and purpose of religion and holiness. Religious practices and Sabbath, ritual cleanliness and holiness, all revolve around Jesus himself. They anticipate and announce his arrival. Jesus shows here the kind of kingdom that he is announcing and bringing in. It will be an upside-down kingdom: sinners will be saved and welcomed in, and holiness will not depend on a person’s position or religious stature or ritual holiness, but on following Jesus.



Study #4

Mark 2:13-3:6

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 36.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

Jesus Calls Levi

13 He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. 14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. 15 And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 17 And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

A Question About Fasting

18 Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” 19 And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. 20 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. 21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” 25 And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” 27 And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

A Man with a Withered Hand

3:1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” 4 And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

D A few questions to consider

- Who does Jesus spend his time with and who are called his followers? What reason does he give for this?
- What three questions do the scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus here? Does Jesus answer them? What kinds of responses does he give?
- What are Jesus’ emotions towards the Pharisees and what portrait do we get of them in 3:1-6?

2:14 “Levi the son of Alphaeus”

In Luke 5:27-32 the name of the tax collector is Levi, as here in Mark. Somewhat surprisingly, Matthew calls the tax collector Matthew in Matthew 9:9-13. The likeliest solution is that Levi/Matthew had two names, just like Simon/Cephas (Peter), or Joseph/Barnabas (Acts 4:36).

2:16 “why does he eat with tax collectors?”

Taxes are rarely looked upon favourably. Tax collection in Palestine during this period was seen in an especially negative light because most of the money which was levied would go - directly or indirectly - to the Roman empire. Because the Jews saw the Romans as impure outsiders, financial support of the Roman government was considered a betrayal of the Jewish people. The job of tax collector was also a fairly lucrative position, only exacerbating the issue.

2:16 “the scribes of the Pharisees...”

The Pharisees are often considered the bogeymen of the gospel stories, particularly because of their persistent opposition to Jesus’ ministry. They were a distinct group of educated Jewish elite, characterized by a zeal for purity through the observance of the Law given by Moses on Mt Sinai. This way of thinking had such concern for legal observance, that there was a secondary set of laws discussing and interpreting the Law. Here the Pharisees are criticizing Jesus because he is a teacher who is fraternizing with the unclean. The Mishnah (the first collection of secondary law) states, for example, that a learned person must not “recline at table in the company of ignorant persons.”

2:23 “One Sabbath...”

The Sabbath day, or seventh day, of the week, was established by God as a day of rest right from the beginning of creation (Gen 2:1-3). This was affirmed again with the giving of the Law in Exodus (Exod 20:8-11), and defined further as a day of worship in Leviticus (e.g Lev 23:3), Numbers (e.g. Num 28:9), and Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut 5:14). It was also meant to function as a weekly renewal of covenant (Exod 31:16). Deepening the reality of Sabbath is the law concerning a Sabbath year (Lev 25:1-7), which culminates in the year of Jubilee, when Israel was to “proclaim liberty throughout the land to all...” (Lev 25:10). The Pharisees in Jesus’ time had fixated on the idea of strictly limiting the amount and kind of work done on the Sabbath day, in the hope of ensuring that it was a day of rest. Relevant to our passage is the prohibition against harvesting grain (Exod 34:21). Radically, Jesus claims to have authority over the Sabbath (which only God had), and he also deepens its reality. Sabbath rest is meant to be a day of blessing and restoration, not a yoke of burdensome rules.

2:26 “Abiathar the high priest...”

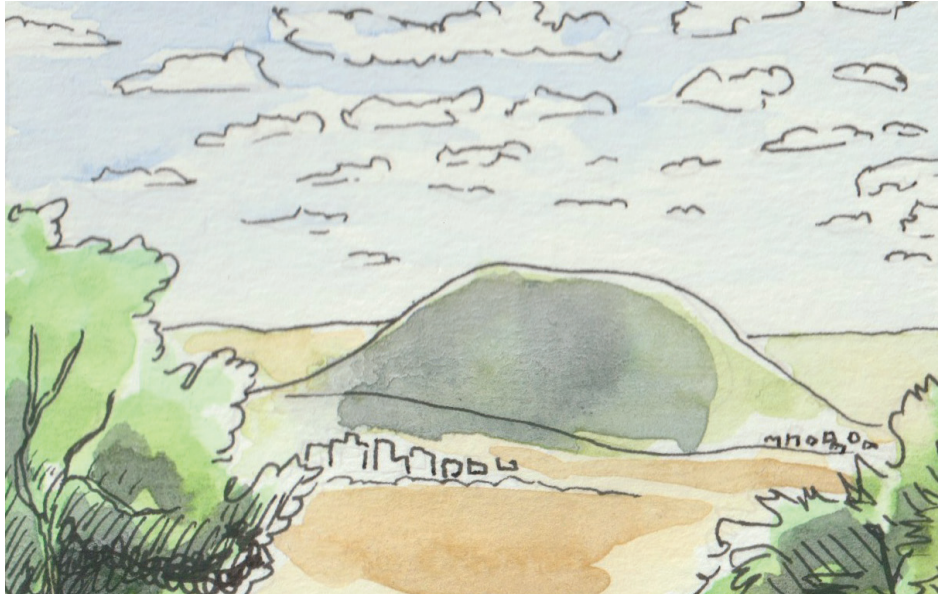
Jesus alludes to a story that comes from 1 Samuel 21. There, David had not yet taken his throne, and was on the run from King Saul. In desperation, and in need of supplies, he takes weapons and bread from the priest Ahimelech (father of Abiathar); bread which was meant to be eaten only by the priests after they had performed their duties on the Sabbath day (Lev 24:8-9). There is no indication from 1 Samuel that David took bread from the Holy Place during the Sabbath. The point is that he ate what was not allowed under the law. Jesus’ argument uses Scripture to demonstrate that the Pharisees’ narrow interpretation of the Law had misled them.

3:6 “the Herodians...”

This term is not very well understood, simply for lack of evidence. In the gospel of Mark they are consistently in strong opposition to Jesus, and probably connected to the political power of Herod Antipas, who we will meet in Mark 6. In Mark 8:15 Jesus warns his followers “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod,” so the Herodians (on behalf of Herod) would appear to be exerting some sort of influence over the people. There are only two other references to the Herodians in all of the Bible: Mark 12:13 and Matthew 22:16.

**Mark 3:7-35**

Just before this passage, those in power began to make plans to eliminate Jesus. Jesus withdraws from them, but it is a tactical retreat, giving him yet another chance to display his power and accomplish his purposes. Though official opposition to Jesus’ ministry is growing, God’s kingdom cannot be stopped, even breaking out of the Promised Land. Outside the boundaries, on the outer edges of this passage, are those who have begun to follow Jesus, even being called his family! And at the heart of this passage is a dire warning to those who would consider themselves inside the family of God, even while they actively rebel against the work of God in their midst. It is those who follow Jesus and do the will of God that are called “brother” and “sister.”



Study #5

Mark 3:7-35

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?
If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 44.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

Healing and Unclean Spirits

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea *8* and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. *9* And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, *10* for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. *11* And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” *12* And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Calling His Followers

13 And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. *14* And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach *15* and have authority to cast out demons. *16* He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); *17* James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); *18* Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, *19* and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Opposition and the Family of God

20 Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. *21* And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” *22* And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” *23* And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? *24* If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. *25* And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. *26* And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. *27* But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. *28* “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, *29* but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— *30* for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” *31* And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. *32* And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” *33* And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” *34* And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! *35* For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

D A few questions to consider

- How many scenes are there in this passage? Who are the main characters in each scene?
- What are the duties and privileges of the apostles whom Jesus calls?
- What descriptions of Jesus do we get?

STUDY NOTES

3:7 "From Galilee and Judea... Tyre and Sidon..."

An enormous geographic region is being described here, basically all of northern Palestine. Jesus' ministry, though starting small, has begun to attract significant attention. It is also important to note that people outside of the traditional boundaries of Israel are coming to Jesus.

3:13 "He went up on the mountain..."

This scene is probably intended to remind us of the confirmation of the covenant which Israel enters into with God at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24. The fact that Jesus calls twelve disciples to himself is a symbolic representation of the twelve tribe of Israel. In effect, Jesus is enacting a new covenant and building a new nation for himself.

3:22 "The scribes from Jerusalem..."

These would have been part of the religious elite in Israel, whose job was to read and faithfully transmit Holy Scripture, both in writing and teaching. They were essentially religious lawyers, and because they came from Jerusalem, were probably representatives of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council. The fact that these men are coming to Jesus in the north from Jerusalem (which was in the south), is another telling indication that Jesus' ministry is drawing a lot of attention. Their opposition to Jesus is particularly troubling, because they are supposed to be the shepherds of Israel who know the will of the LORD, and yet when the LORD is in their midst they do not recognize him.

3:22 "By Beelzebul..."

To make matters worse, the scribes, in their opposition to Christ, accuse him of being a servant of evil spirits. The name Beelzebul is not found in any other documents from this period, but the name translates to "Lord of the Flies" or "Lord of the Swarm." This may be due to the fact that the dump outside of Jerusalem (which would have had innumerable flies) was associated with decay, death, and the forces of evil. This interpretation is bolstered by Jesus' answer to the scribes, when he asks "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

3:29 "but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit..."

Historically there has been a great deal of (often unhelpful) debate about what Jesus means by blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In context however, it seems reasonably clear: God will not forgive those who persistently reject the blessing of his presence, and instead call his work demonic. In addition to disarming the scribes ludicrous argument, Jesus is making a strong statement about who is at work in him through his ministry.

3:31-35 "Your mother and your brothers..."

Bonds of kinship in Jesus' time were typically much stronger than they are in our Canadian context. For Jesus to reject his family in this way was an absolutely scandalous thing to do. It should be noted that Jesus is in fact not abolishing healthy family relationships, but rather re-orienting them towards his ministry (still a bold and uncompromising thing to do, even by today's standards).

Study #6



Mark 4:1-34

To this point in Mark, Jesus' proclamation of the good news concerning the kingdom of God (1:14-15) has been met with varying responses: from followers who have responded very positively to Jesus' message, to the enthusiastic but untested crowds who were impressed with Jesus' healings and exorcisms and teaching with authority, to those who reject Jesus from scepticism or disinterest, all the way to those who are so hostile to Jesus that they attribute his work to Satan and wish to destroy him. This passage offers an explanation for that varying response by introducing the reader to the importance and meaning of parables, and by further developing the notion of insiders and outsiders, both of which have to do with the secret of the kingdom of God, the countercultural message of a cross-shaped kingdom with a cross-oriented messiah. The notion of insiders and outsiders is a theme that will continue through to the end of chapter 8, with surprising developments—some of those who assumed they were in the kingdom of God are not the insiders they thought they would be, and some who were outsiders become insiders.

Study #6

Mark 4:1-34



Parable of the Sower

1 Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” 9 And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

The Purpose of the Parables

10 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. 11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, 12 so that,

“they may indeed see but not perceive,
and may indeed hear but not understand,
lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower

13 And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word. 15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. 16 And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. 17 And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, 19 but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. 20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

Parables on Revelation and Response

21 And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? 22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” 24 And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. 25 For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”

Two More Parables about Seed

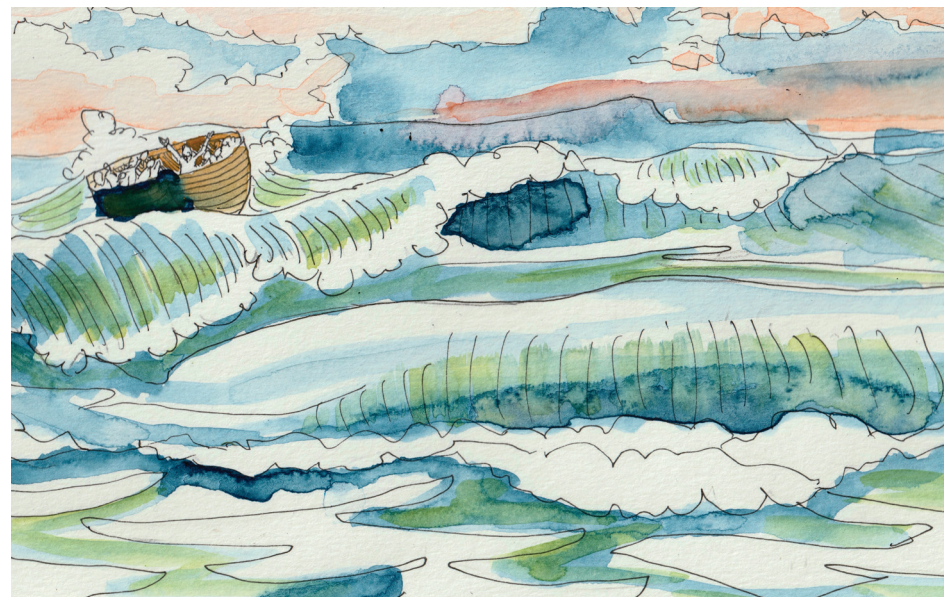
26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

30 And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”



Mark 4:35-5:43

This rather large section of Mark may at first glance seem an odd place to follow up after such a carefully arranged passage explaining parables and the Kingdom's spread through the word. But the miracles that Christ enacts are here to show how both the word and his authority over humanity's oldest enemies witness to his divinity and majesty. Amidst Jesus' radical displays of power that he poses a question to his followers and to the world at large. Even after all he has done do you still not believe or trust in him? (4:41)



Study #7

Mark 4:35-4:43

Christ's power over nature.

4:35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." **36** And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. **38** But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" **39** And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. **40** He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" **41** And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Christ's power over Satan

5:1 They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. **2** And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs, a man with an unclean spirit. **3** He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, **4** for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. **5** Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. **6** And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. **7** And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." **8** For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" **9** And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." **10** And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. **11** Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, **12** and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." **13** So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

5:14 The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. **15** And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. **16** And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. **17** And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. **18** As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. **19** And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." **20** And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

Christ's power over sickness & death


5:21 And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. **22** Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet **23** and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." **24** And he went with him.

Interlude - It is faith and trust that matter, not a magical garment.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. **25** And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, **26** and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. **27** She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. **28** For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." **29** And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. **30** And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" **31** And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" **32** And he looked around to see who had done it. **33** But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. **34** And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Christ's power over sickness & death (continued)

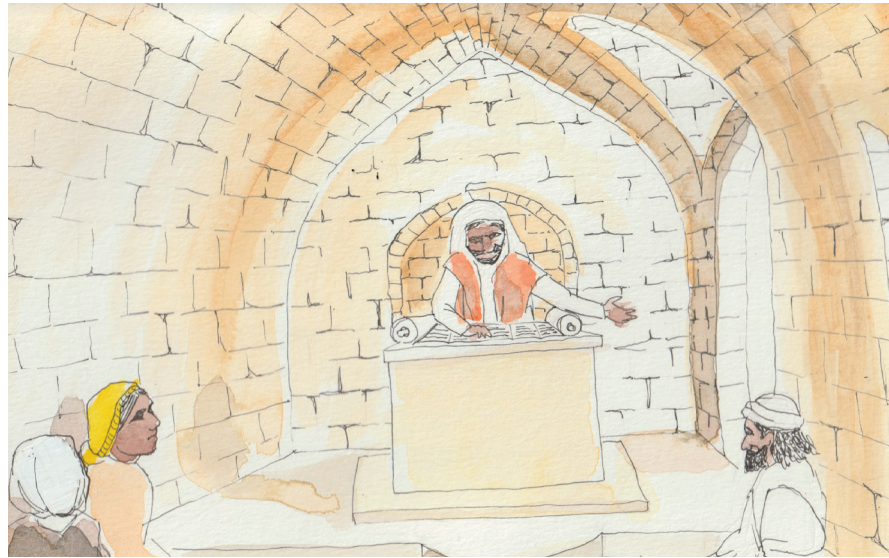
5:35 While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" **36** But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." **37** And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. **38** They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. **39** And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." **40** And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. **41** Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." **42** And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. **43** And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.



Where did this man get these things?

Mark 6:1-29

Jesus' ministry has been a whirlwind of healing and preaching up to this point, but in this passage we get an interesting interruption: here Jesus is unable to do any mighty works because of unbelief. In response, he sends his disciples out, giving them his spiritual authority over the forces of darkness. And Herod, hearing reports of the disciples' ministry in Jesus' name, thinks that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. This rather striking cluster of stories foreshadows themes that will be developed more fully as Mark's gospel progresses, and it reminds us that being given the Word of God does not entail endless triumphs, but rather a complex, and complicated ministry to all who hear.



Study #8

Mark 6:1-19

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?
If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 72.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

Jesus in his Hometown

1 He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4 And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." 5 And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

The Ministry of the Twelve

7 And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— 9 but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. 10 And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. 11 And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." 12 So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

The Death of John the Baptist

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." 23 And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison 28 and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

A few questions to consider

- What is the purpose of the disciples' mission?
- What is similar and different about the people's reaction in vv.2-3 and Herod's reaction in vv.20-21?
- What kinds of rejection do you see in this passage? Who is doing it and what is the result?

STEP 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Need some help?
If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 72.

A *Look at the context*

This second step is for linking your observations together to get at the purpose(s) of the passage. How are the different parts connected? How does it connect to the rest of the book? What is the historical context? What do you think the original intention of the passage was?

B *A few questions to consider*

- Who is John supposed to be, and why is his death surprising?
- We get another interesting “sandwich” from Mark, where a story begins (vv.7-13), is interrupted (vv.14-30), and then resumes (v.31 onwards). Why do you think Mark spends so much time telling the story of John’s beheading here?
- What is the basic content of the message given by God’s agents in these three stories?
- Is there a recent parable that might help explain these different reactions to the gospel?

C *What’s the Main Idea?*

D *Stop to Pray*

Thank God for all he has revealed to you, ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly and love him more deeply through the next steps of your study.

STEP 3. WHAT DOES IT REVEAL?

A *Thinking Theologically*

This third step is for considering the timeless truths of the passage. What do we learn about Jesus’ identity and mission? What do we learn about God? What do we learn about us?

B *A few questions to consider*

- What do you make of Mark 6:5-6?
- Rejection, or possible rejection is a central theme. Rejection of what? What does this rejection tell us about the human heart? What does it tell us about the work of the kingdom?

STUDY NOTES

6:2-3 *"Where did this man get these things?...And they took offense at him."*

It is probably best to understand this interesting tension as an example of Jesus' hometown taking offense that he has risen above his supposed lot in life. The questions they ask in v.2 could be read as expressing incredulity or bewilderment, rather than positive amazement.

6:5 *"And he could do no mighty work there..."*

Given everything else that has taken place in the gospel, it is unlikely that Mark is describing Jesus' inability to heal. Rather, because the circumstances (or soil conditions!) are not right, powerful healings would be inappropriate, because they would not lead to faith. Compare this episode with 6:11-13. The potential hardness of a human heart is no small thing.

6:7 *"He gave them authority..."*

This idea has been slowly building in the gospel, but now Jesus is making it explicit: his disciples will be his representatives in the world, with the consequence that they will often be opposed as well.

6:8 *"He charged them to take nothing for their journey..."*

Some interpret this as specific terms for a specific mission that the disciples are being given, rather than a template for all disciples to follow at all times (though the mendicant orders of the Middle Ages are an interesting counter-example). The particular purpose of this mission seems to be that Jesus wants his gospel to be preached throughout all of Galilee before moving on to Jerusalem, hence the speed of their journey.

While we might now take more than one tunic with us, Jesus is beginning a ministry that the disciples will have for the rest of their life; a ministry that they will pass on to other disciples. Here the emphasis is on mobility (not getting tied down by unhelpful material possessions) and hospitality (looking for those who will welcome you and your message). This lean approach to mission is consistent with other exhortations in the New Testament (e.g. Phil 3:8; 2 Tim 2:4), reminding us that denying creature comforts for the sake of Christ and his mission is part and parcel of the life of faith.

6:13 *"...and anointed with oil many who were sick..."*

Oil was used for a lot of things in the Old Testament, and could include anointing for the purpose of sanctification (e.g. the Levitical priests, the king). By Jesus' time though, the use of oil was often seen as primarily medicinal, rather than ritual or magical. The fact that the disciples' healing ministry includes the use of oil is a simple illustration that their ministry is below that of their master.

6:14 *"King Herod heard of it..."*

Herod Antipas was the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, the area in which both John and Jesus were ministering. Having already fallen prey to lust in marrying his brother's wife, he now falls further into sin due to the provocative dancing of his step-daughter. It is worth noting that he had no authority to promise half of a kingdom, since his dominion belonged to Rome.

John was arrested back in 1:14, but we haven't had any news of that situation until now, in the form of a remembrance, occasioned by Jesus' own ministry through his disciples. We don't know much about what Herod thought of Jesus during Jesus' ministry, but there have already been some ominous signs of opposition in 3:6. In Mark 8 Jesus will warn about the leaven of "the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Later in Mark, it is the Pharisees and Herodians who try to trap Jesus (12:13). Locally, Herod was the most powerful, so perhaps his opposition was simply political, but the way in which he engages with John's preaching indicates that there was a spiritual battle going on within himself.

Study #9



Mark 6:30-52

This passage opens with the return of the disciples from their first solo mission, where they were teaching, preaching, healing and casting out demons. They are then privileged to receive further revelation of the kingdom of God in the form of two miracles depicting the divinity and authority of Jesus. Yet Mark concludes the passage by telling us that their hearts were hardened—Jesus was too much, too big, too unexpected for them to fully comprehend.



Study #9

Mark 6:30-52

Five Loaves and Two Fish

30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. 35 And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. 36 Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. 41 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. 44 And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

Lord of the Sea

45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. 47 And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. 48 And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, 50 for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." 51 And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, 52 for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 80.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

C *A few questions to consider*

- Why did Jesus take the disciples to a remote region on the far side of the Sea of Galilee? And how did Jesus respond to the crowds who disrupted his plans?
- What is the attitude of Jesus to the disciples throughout this passage, and what can you point to in the text to support your view?
- How does this crowd differ from other crowds described in Mark? What is the reaction of the crowd to the feeding of the 5,000? What is the reaction of the disciples?

STEP 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 80.

A *Look at the context*

This second step is for linking your observations together to get at the purpose(s) of the passage. How are the different parts connected? How does it connect to the rest of the book? What is the historical context? What do you think the original intention of the passage was?

B *A few questions to consider*

- Explain the illustration of the sheep and the shepherd and how it relates to the preceding passage about the death of John the Baptist. (If you need help with this, see Study Notes and Gen 48:15; Num 27:17; Psalm 23:1-4; Isaiah 40:11; Jer 23:2-4; Ezek 34:10-16)
- The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle of Jesus recounted in all four gospels. What was there about it that made it so important? (Consider Ex 16:11-15; Isa 25:6-8; Mark 14:22, 25)
- How does v.52 explain why the apostles “were utterly astounded” (v.51)? What is it that they did not understand about the loaves? How is Jesus’ walking on water connected with the feeding of the 5,000?

C *What’s the Main Idea?*

D *Stop to Pray*

Thank God for all he has revealed to you, ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly and love him more deeply through the next steps of your study.

STEP 3. WHAT DOES IT REVEAL?

A *Thinking Theologically*

This third step is for considering the timeless truths of the passage. What do we learn about Jesus’ identity and mission? What do we learn about God? What do we learn about us?

B *A few questions to consider*

- Mark says the hearts of the apostles were hardened even after receiving privileged access to God’s kingdom revealed by and through Jesus. In that context, what does the expression “their hearts were hardened” mean? And are followers of Jesus, then and now, in a position to accurately assess the state of their own hearts?
- What do we learn about God’s coming kingdom from Jesus’ actions in 6:30-44?
- Like some modern Christians, the apostles had no problem with miracles like the cleansing of the leper and the healing of the paralytic, but stumbled when it came to the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus’ walking on water. Why is that? Can you be a Christian without believing in miracles? Defend your view.

STUDY NOTES

6:31, 32, 35 “desolate place”

The Greek word *erēmos* can be either an adjective (usually translated isolated, desolate, or deserted) or a noun (usually translated desert or wilderness). The significance of the word is obscured by the English translation, but would have been immediately apparent to any Greek speaking Jew. It is the place to which God called the Israelites out of Egypt, and it is the place in which God created the nation of Israel, made covenant with them, made them his people, gave them his law, protected them, fed them, and dwelled with them.

6:34 “sheep without a shepherd”

This is an allusion to Num 27:17 and Ezek 34:5-6. At the end of Moses’ life, immediately before Israel was to enter the land, Moses called upon God to appoint his successor so that the Israelites would not be “as sheep that have no shepherd”. God appointed Joshua, whose name, in the Septuagint, was translated *Iēsous* (Jesus). In Ezek 34, God instructed the prophet to prophesy “against the shepherds of Israel” because there was no shepherd and his sheep had become scattered. God said that he himself would be the shepherd of his sheep (34:15) and he would “set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them” (34:23).

6:39 “groups”

The word “groups” doesn’t come close to reflecting the meaning of the Greek word *sumposia*, which refers to people gathering to enjoy a banquet or drinking party, and suggests a convivial, party-like atmosphere.

6:41 “said a blessing and broke the loaves”

This was most likely the traditional *HaMotzi* blessing recited before eating bread and one of the most frequently said of the Hebrew blessings: “Blessed art thou, LORD our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth...”

Study #10



Mark 6:53-7:30

In this passage, Jesus makes some more surprising and counter-intuitive moves. He honours the faith of people who are unclean, sick, and Gentiles, but rebukes the careful, thorough piety of the religious elite! He makes a long detour through Tyre and Sidon—Gentile territory—and has an unsettling conversation with a Gentile woman; unsettling to the disciples as much as to us as readers, though probably in very different ways. In doing so, Jesus deepens and widens his purposes in salvation. He deepens salvation from outer cleanliness to one’s inner heart and will, and he broadens salvation beyond just the Jews to the Gentiles and the whole world! The focus of his ministry may be to Israel, but his plan for salvation is universal.



Study #10

Mark 6:53-7:30

(Thus he declared all foods clean.) **20** And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. **21** For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, **22** coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. **23** All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

The Syrophenician Woman's Faith

24 And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. **25** But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. **26** Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. **27** And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” **28** But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” **29** And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” **30** And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.

Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennesaret

53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. **54** And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him **55** and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. **56** And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Traditions and Commandments

7:1 Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, **2** they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. **3** (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, **4** and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) **5** And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” **6** And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
7 in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”
8 You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

9 And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! **10** For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ **11** But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— **12** then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, **13** thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

What Defiles a Person

14 And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: **15** There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” **16f. 17** And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. **18** And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, **19** since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?”

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 89.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

D A few questions to consider

- When does the author break the flow of the narrative to explain certain details? What might this tell us about his intended audience?
- Notice the setting, where is Tyre and Sidon?
- Who are the characters we meet in this passage? What are their ethnic/religious/social backgrounds?
- With what tone, actions, and words does Jesus respond to each of the people or groups in this passage?

STEP 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 89.

A Look at the context

This second step is for linking your observations together to get at the purpose(s) of the passage. How are the different parts connected? How does it connect to the rest of the book? What is the historical context? What do you think the original intention of the passage was?

B A few questions to consider

- What themes and images tie this series of episodes together? How do they build on one another?
- What does Jesus' declaration of all foods as clean imply socially and morally? Can you think of a story in the book of Acts that the verse in 7:19 points towards? What in the surrounding stories also supports this trajectory?
- What is so remarkable about the story in 7:24-30 for the original audience (See Study Notes for help) How does the woman express her faith and show a surprising awareness of Jesus' will and purpose?

C What's the Main Idea?

D Stop to Pray

Thank God for all he has revealed to you, ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly and love him more deeply through the next steps of your study.



Mark 7:31-8:33

Here in the final passage of the first half of Mark Jesus makes a tremendous amount of effort to cement the overarching lesson that he has been teaching for many chapters. Who is he? This lesson is given to the deaf, the foreign, the blind, the unbelieving and ultimately to his followers. And while they might see him they have yet to truly understand him or what he must do. Rather than simply chronicling the events of Jesus' life the first section of Mark's gospel is cleverly written to emphasize this big lesson. The importance of what Jesus said and did, and the significance of what people did to him depends entirely upon who he truly is.



Study #11

Mark 7:31-8:33

"I see people, but
the look like trees
walking."

The Blind See But Not Fully

22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. **23** And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" **24** And he looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees, walking." **25** Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. **26** And he sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village." **27** And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" **28** And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." **29** And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are The Christ." **30** And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. **31** And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. **32** And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. **33** But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

The Deaf Hear

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. **32** And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. **33** And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. **34** And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." **35** And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. **36** And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. **37** And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

The Hungry are Fed

8:1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, **2** "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. **3** And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away." **4** And his disciples answered him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" **5** And he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." **6** And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. **7** And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. **8** And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. **9** And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. **10** And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

The Seeing are Blind, the Hearing Deaf

11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. **12** And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." **13** And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. **14** Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. **15** And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." **16** And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. **17** And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? **18** Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? **19** When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." **20** "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." **21** And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 99.

A Pray

B Read Closely

This first step is for observation and close reading. What details do you notice? This could include: characters, setting, commands, promises, repetitions, Big Bible words, et cetera.

C A few questions to consider

- Jesus has done similar miracles to these before, what is unique about these ones?
- What is different about the audience for these miracles?
- Jesus asks a number of piercing questions in this passage? What are some of them? Who does he ask them to?

STEP 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Need some help?

If you need a hand with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 99.

A Look at the context

This second step is for linking your observations together to get at the purpose(s) of the passage. How are the different parts connected? How does it connect to the rest of the book? What is the historical context? What do you think the original intention of the passage was?

B A few questions to consider

- How does the structure of this passage help us in understanding vv.27-33?
- Compare and contrast the Pharisees and disciples:
 - How are both of their expectations for Jesus incorrect?
 - How do their demands of Jesus make him their adversary?
 - How does Jesus rebuke them differently?
- Similarly to last week's passage we have another bread metaphor (7:27-30, 8:14-18). What does the bread in this passage represent? Why is the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod dangerous?

C What's the Main Idea?

D Stop to Pray

Thank God for all he has revealed to you, ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly and love him more deeply through the next steps of your study.

STEP 3. WHAT DOES IT REVEAL?

A *Thinking Theologically*

This third step is for considering the timeless truths of the passage. What do we learn about Jesus' identity and mission? What do we learn about God? What do we learn about us?

B *A few questions to consider*

- Why are verses 11-18 so damning within this context?
- Jesus' healing of the blind man requires two attempts. What might this healing be trying to show the reader? Especially with verses 27-33 in mind? What does this passage then say about how our spiritual eyes are also opened? Who is responsible?
- Why does Jesus command the disciples not to reveal who he is in verse 30? Have they managed to grasp who he is if they have not understood his mission?

STEP 4. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

A *Living it out*

This fourth step is for responding in faith. How are these revealed truths going to change the way I live? Is there a sin to confess? A promise to claim? An example to follow? A command to obey? Knowledge to embrace?

B *A few questions to consider*

- If you were asked by a non-believing friend who Jesus is and why he came how would you answer? How might this passage be used to make that answer clearer?
- The leaven of cultural, political, and religious falsehoods and temptations still exist. What dangers can you see in the world today? How might they be particularly threatening to your faith?
- This passage shows that even when we don't immediately grasp who Jesus is fully he does not abandon us, but rather desires to fully restore us like the blind man in verse 8:25. How is this message encouraging to you?

PRAYER & PRAYER REQUESTS

Spend some time praying out of the passage. You can use this space to record prayers or prayer requests.

Lined writing area for prayer requests.

STUDY NOTES

8:1 "In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat." There is some discussion as to whether this miracle is a second retelling of the feeding of 5000 in 6:30-44. This would be a bold assumption and a misunderstanding of Mark's ability as a writer. While the miracles are similar it is the differences that make them important. The previous feeding is more full of Old Testament imagery particularly the theme of Christ being a "shepherd" (see Study #9's study notes for more detail). This miracle takes place in the outer regions of Capernaum amongst a mixed audience. This alongside the other miracles of the passage speak to the wider nature of God's kingdom, its healing, providing, and caring for also the Gentiles. Mark has also included this miracle of a similar nature to enforce the lack of understanding the disciples currently have. People are quick to forget the grace and compassion of God if not reminded. It took Israel only 3 days after having the Red Sea parted before their eyes for them to grumble about not having drinkable water. The disciples have witnessed numerous miracles and still haven't got the lesson.

8:29 "...Peter answered him, "You are The Christ." Peter at this point accurately becomes a spokesperson for the twelve. "The Christ" is a term heavy with meaning. Echoing Ex 29:7,21; 1 Sam 10:1; 1Ki 19:16 the term comes from the consecration of a king to God's service. This king would be chosen by Him for a particular task, and endowed with power. This term in Jesus' day was commonly used to mean a political figure, a hoped for individual who would rule Israel and free them from their enemies such as Rome. Jesus however understands and uses the term from a biblical and theological understanding. He is the king, come to set the world free from sin and death, to transform and fulfill all of scripture. So while Peter's identification is correct and expresses the truth of the gospel he does not understand what it truly means, (vv31-33) like a blindman half healed seeing people as trees walking (v24).

8:31 "...be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed..." This grouping of individuals was also commonly known by the term "The Sanhedrin". Both before and after the time of Christ, it was the highest tribunal or council of Jewish religious and political power. Amongst the culture of Israel these were the highest tier of learned individuals. They regulated the yearly calendar, led the staples of Jewish culture such as feast days, and wrote and enforced Jewish law even over the Jewish king. Everyone who was anyone was on this council, and it is these figures Jesus directly identifies who are going to be the ones who will kill him.

8:31 "...be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed..." 8:31-33 marks the beginning of Jesus' second big lesson for his disciples. This is a turning point within the book and is the first of 3 examples of this message coming from Jesus. This lesson of "what he must do" will be a central theme and will be continued upon in the next set of studies in Mark so stay tuned!

8:33 "...Get behind me, Satan!..." Jesus meets a strong rebuke from Peter with an even stronger comeback. Having just plainly taught them about the truth of what the Messiah must do Peter cannot put these two ideas together. How can someone be a king and reign sovereignly while at the same time suffer and die? Jesus here identifies the source of Peter's remarks as Satan whom he also rebukes directly. Jesus is not calling Peter himself Satan but is again engaging the enemy of God who is attempting to disrupt Christ's mission and tempt him away from completing it. (Mark 1:12-13, 3:23-27, Matthew 4:1-11).

