

1 Mark: Who, What, Why and When?

Written by whom?

Although the gospel is anonymous, there are strong early traditions that the writer is John Mark, first mentioned in Acts in connection with his mother. Mark accompanied both Paul and Barnabas (his cousin) on mission trips. He was closely associated with Peter. It is believed that Mark has compiled this gospel from Peter's preaching and stories about Jesus.

Written from where and when?

Early tradition says that it was written after the death of Peter (A.D. 64), from Italy. It could be no later than A.D. 70 because it makes no reference to the destruction of Jerusalem that year. Irenaeus of Lyons (circa A.D. 180) and the Muratorian Canon (circa A.D. 200) agree with this tradition.

Written to whom?

Early church tradition locates the writing either in Italy in general or specifically in Rome, for these reasons. (1) It is likely that Peter was in Rome toward the end of his life, most likely martyred there. (2) The biblical evidence points to Mark's presence in Rome about the same time. Therefore, the readers were probably Roman, or at least generally Gentile. Mark explains Jewish customs that would be unfamiliar to the Gentiles, translates Aramaic words, uses Latinisms and Latin loan words. His subjects were particularly relevant to the Roman Christians.

Why was it written?

In A.D. 64 a terrible fire destroyed more than half of the city of Rome. Christians were blamed and massive persecutions began. In order to encourage and guide them, Mark writes this book. He prepares them for suffering by presenting the passion experience of Jesus. Almost one third of the book is about the death of Jesus. To Mark, and to his readers, faithfulness and obedience in following Jesus inevitably lead to suffering and perhaps even death.

Another important idea is that of Jesus as a human man. At the time of writing, some Christians had begun to emphasize Jesus' divinity and downplay his humanity. So in Mark there is an emphasis on his humanity, underlined by his suffering.

2 Mark: Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. How did Mark describe his gospel? (vs. 1)
2. What did John the Baptist preach? (vs. 4)
3. What was the Baptist's primary message? (vs. 7, 8)
4. Who was present at Jesus' baptism? (vs. 9-11)
5. When did Jesus begin his preaching ministry? (vs. 14)
6. Who were the first disciples called by Jesus? (vs. 16-20)
7. Why were the people of the synagogue amazed at his teaching? (vs. 22)
8. What evidence of Jesus' authority amazed the people? (vs. 27)
9. Who was healed after Jesus and his disciples left the synagogue? (vs. 29-31)
10. When he healed demon-possessed people, what did Jesus forbid? (vs. 34)
11. Why did Jesus say he had come? (vs. 38)
12. When Jesus healed the man with leprosy, what did he tell him to do? (vs. 44)
13. What was the result of the healed man's experience? (vs. 45)

3

Mark: Chapter 1 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Mark was writing the gospel, or 'good news'. The good news is that God has provided salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mark begins with a brief recap of the work of John the Baptist. He uses the Old Testament scripture to establish that this prophet was making things ready for the coming of Jesus. Jesus was, according to John, much more powerful and important than himself. Jesus was coming, and he would not just baptize but transform people. Jesus himself came to be baptized, and present at that occasion was God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Mark uses the words 'at once' to describe the sending of Jesus to the wilderness for testing. The word translated as 'at once' or 'immediately' is used by Mark 39 times in this gospel. After John is imprisoned, Jesus begins his ministry.

After Jesus starts preaching, people start to follow him. He calls his first four disciples: Simon (Peter), his brother Andrew, James and John (the sons of Zebedee). They were all fishermen.

Next, Mark tells the story of Jesus teaching in Capernaum. All the people were startled by his preaching, because he didn't use the authority of the prophets. He spoke on his own authority, which was very unusual. While he was preaching, a demon-possessed man in the audience loudly identified Jesus as the Holy One of God. Jesus cast out the demon, which again amazed and impressed the audience. Word started spreading over the countryside.

Mark tells the story of how Simon (Peter) brought them all to his home, where Jesus healed his sick mother-in-law. News of this healing soon had all the sick people in town at the door, and he healed a lot of them. He still wouldn't let the demons say his name.

After spending time in prayer, Jesus took his disciples traveling so that he could preach. On this trip, he healed a man with leprosy. Even though the man was commanded not to talk about his healing, he told everyone. This made it impossible for Jesus to go into towns, but the people came from everywhere to hear him.

4 Mark: Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. The gospel of Mark is action packed! There isn't much discussion of motive, just reports of what happened. Do you think we might be spending too much time **talking** about Jesus and not enough time **doing** things for Jesus? Why or why not?
2. Jesus' baptism was almost like an ordination for his ministry. When we have baptisms at our church, should we make a bigger 'splash' to celebrate? How do you think we should emphasize and celebrate the occasions?
3. The good news from Jesus seems pretty simple to understand. Why does it get so complicated afterward? Do Christians miss the simplicity of the Gospel? Why is that?
4. The healing and casting out of demons that Jesus did was a clear demonstration of his power and authority. What kind of demonstrations do we have today of his power? Are these good enough to be evidence to unbelievers?

5 Mark: Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. In what unusual way do people arrange for the paralyzed man to be brought to Jesus' attention? (vs. 4)
2. What does Jesus see in the friends of the paralyzed man that causes him to respond? (vs. 5)
3. What accusation do the teachers in the crowd of make against Jesus? (vs. 7)
4. How does Jesus answer the criticism of the teachers who were in the crowd? (vs. 10)
5. Where is Levi when Jesus meets him? (vs. 14)
6. Who are Jesus' companions at the meal in Levi's house? (vs. 15)
7. What question do the Pharisees ask? (vs. 16)
8. How does Jesus describe his calling? (vs. 17)
9. What is the difference that is pointed out between Jesus' disciples and the disciples of John the Baptist? (vs. 18)
10. What are the three figures of speech that Jesus uses in his reaction to the criticism about fasting? (vs. 19-22)
11. What is the next criticism against Jesus? (vs. 23, 24)
12. How does Jesus describe the Sabbath? (vs. 28)

6 Mark: Chapter 2 – What Did It Mean to Them?

We will see in Mark two contrasting attitudes about Jesus: popularity with regular people and constant criticism from the 'establishment'. In this chapter we see some of each. One of the characteristics of Mark is that he was writing to push back against skepticism arising about Jesus and his life and teachings. One thought is that he chose stories for this gospel which addressed these questions and doubts.

The first story covers the healing of a paralyzed man and addresses the skepticism about Jesus' authority and divinity. Jesus was in a crowded house (popular with regular people). The man's friends go to great lengths to get him inside, and the first thing Jesus does is forgive the man's sins. This agitates the teachers—they know (and they are right) that only God can forgive sins. This shows the conflict with established authorities. Jesus then physically heals the man, showing that he has divine authority.

The next story covers the calling of Levi (Matthew), and addresses skepticism about Jesus' real mission. Jesus recruits Levi/Matthew—a man in a despised profession. He eats with rabble and 'sinners', people outside the acceptable religious population. This shows his popularity again. Then the Pharisees are scandalized by his behavior—conflict with religious leaders. He uses this as an opportunity to speak directly about his mission, which is to call the lost into a 'healed' relationship with God.

Mark's next story shows Jesus using his authority in matters of fasting. Fasting in general was supposed to show sorrow. The law of Moses only required one fast, on the Day of Atonement. In Jesus' time the Pharisees fasted twice a week, for a variety of reasons. It had become a way to show how religious and devoted they were—in a very public way. Jesus doesn't even answer the question about whether his disciples or John's were more devout. Instead, he teaches that not only is there joy in being with him (Jesus) but that his teachings and ways are new, no longer needing or fitting the old ways.

Last, Jesus has a run-in with the Pharisees who are evidently watching him like a hawk watches its prey. They see his hungry disciples picking dry grain from a field and accuse them of breaking Sabbath laws. Jesus is well aware of their real desire, which is to discredit him to the people who follow. Most of the Sabbath laws were merely traditional, not actually specified in the Law. The Pharisees focused on the **letter** of the Law, Jesus on the **spirit**. Jesus emphasized that God's original purpose for the Sabbath was for man's restoration.

7 Mark: Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. When Levi followed Jesus he left behind his profession. Have you given up anything because you followed Jesus?
2. Jesus deliberately spent time with people who openly refused to keep the requirements of the Law. How should this affect our choice of friends? What would this mean to our church if we advertised that we wanted pagans, atheists and criminals to attend?
3. Jesus implied that after he was gone there would be plenty of time (and reason) for fasting. What place does fasting have in your life? How could our congregation use fasting to improve our spiritual discipline?
4. When the disciples ate the grain, the issue wasn't the grabbing and eating. The problem was that rabbis down the years had added to the original law about not harvesting on the Sabbath to include this kind of activity. What sort of activities has the church developed that, over time, seem to be as important as the commandments of Jesus?

8 Mark: Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. Why were some people in the synagogue watching Jesus closely? (vs. 2)
2. What question did Jesus ask the watchers? (vs. 4)
3. How did Jesus feel about his critics? (vs. 5)
4. Where did the Pharisees go? With whom did they conspire? (vs. 6)
5. Who were the people that were crowding around Jesus? What did they want? (vs. 8-10)
6. How did evil spirits react to Jesus? (vs. 11, 12)
7. Who were the 12 that Jesus appointed, and what was their purpose? (vs. 14-19)
8. What did Jesus' birth family think had happened to him? (vs. 20, 21)
9. What did the teachers from Jerusalem say was wrong with Jesus? (vs. 22)
10. What riddle did Jesus pose to the teachers? (vs. 23-27)
11. Rejecting Jesus, the One anointed by the Holy Spirit, makes a person guilty of an _____ sin. (vs. 29)
12. Who is included in the family of God? (vs. 33-35)

9 Mark: Chapter 3 – What did it mean to them?

For a Jew in Jesus' time, the Sabbath was more than just a requirement of the law. It was a badge showing how Jewish they were. It reminded them of their past and was a promise of time to come when they would be freed from the pagan world. Jesus plowed through their Sabbath expectations because it had come to be used as a weapon, both to keep the people in line and to exclude outsiders. He was threatening to the Pharisees, so much so that they were willing to work with their enemies to bring Jesus down.

Jesus had become a celebrity (think rock star)! Everyone in range of rumor came to see his show, or to bring their sick friends and loved ones to be healed. Mark makes it clear that Jesus was operating on more than a physical level. The 'evil spirits' recognized Jesus not just as a great healer but also as a being of great spiritual power and presence.

The hills around the lake were not just a quiet place. These hills were known as the place where revolutionaries went to plot. When Jesus took his people there to organize, everyone knew what they were doing. The number 12 was significant, too. All Jews knew that there had been, originally, twelve tribes. Jesus' actions let them all know that he was beginning the longed-for restoration: spiritually, physically, socially, and--inevitably--politically.

The scribes and teachers oppose what Jesus does, so they have to discredit him. They can't deny that he has power, so they decide to label him as an evil spirit himself, saying that his power comes from evil, from Satan (the Accuser). Jesus doesn't lash back--he points out the flaw in their thinking. Then he goes on to tell them that he is stronger than Satan, making inroads into Satan's territory. He adds a warning: once you label the work of the Holy Spirit as the work of the devil, there is no way back. There is no middle way--he is either the one who brings God's kingdom or a madman.

In Jesus' world the family bond was part of the God-given fabric of thinking and living. Loyalty to God, loyalty to the nation of Israel, loyalty to family--these were strong and binding. Jesus, by his words and actions, cuts through these traditional ties. He says that God is starting a new family. This was deeply shocking to those who heard. Clearly, the old ideas of who was 'inside' and 'outside' were changing.

10 Mark: Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. Are there ways that we as a church are blinded by what seem to be necessary rules, to the point that we don't see or allow God to break through?
2. Do we have any rules that get overused and end up hurting people? (Are we intolerant sometimes? Are we TOO tolerant sometimes?)
3. How can we recapture the true sense of Sabbath?
4. Is there any possible way to make Jesus' message seem revolutionary today? What are some of Jesus' teaching that are very uncomfortable for us? (For instance, "Love people who are your enemies.")
5. Why is it so tempting to label Jesus? Why is this dangerous?
6. What are some groups to which we give our loyalty? How can we maintain our loyalty to Jesus in the face of the pull of these groups?

11 Mark: Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. How did Jesus deal with the huge crowd that had gathered to hear him speak? (vs. 1)
2. Which parable did he use to teach the people how his teachings would affect different hearts? (vs. 3-8)
3. What did the Twelve ask Jesus when they were alone? (vs. 10)
4. Some people followed Jesus and listened to him, but it was for the wrong reasons. How did Jesus say that his words would affect these people? (vs. 12)
5. Jesus explained the Parable of the Sower to the Twelve. (vs. 13-20)
 1. The farmer (teacher) sowed the _____ (or gospel)
 2. For hard-hearted people, the word would be taken away by _____.
 3. For shallow people, the word would have no _____ and so it would die quickly.
 4. For people consumed by the cares and worries of the material world, the word would be _____.
 5. For people who were ready and able to hear clearly, the result would be _____.
6. From the parable of a lamp on a stand, what do we learn about our responsibility towards the teaching that we have received? (vs. 21-25)
7. From the parable of the growing seed, what do we learn about the growth that comes from listening, hearing and applying the gospel to our lives? (vs. 26-29)
8. From the parable of the mustard seed, what do we learn about the effects of the gospel in this world? (vs. 30-32)
9. What was the difference between the way Jesus taught the general followers and the way he taught his disciples? (vs. 33, 34)
10. When Jesus calmed the storm, what was the effect on his disciples? (vs. 40, 41)

12 Mark: Chapter 4 – What Did It Mean to Them?

When we move back into the story of Jesus teaching, we are spectators at a huge mass gathering. It is so big, in fact, that Jesus has to move out onto a boat in the water to get some space between him and his hearers. From this pulpit, he gives his hearers The Word—the good news about God’s Kingdom. While it is true that Jesus (and by extension God) wants everyone to be saved, the hard news is that not everyone is receptive. So he taught in parables. These stories worked on a number of levels. First, they told (symbolically) an important truth. Next, they were in a format that could easily be remembered and repeated to others. Last, for those that were listening for the wrong reasons or whose hearts simply weren’t ready to hear, it was a puzzle that could be thought about and pondered. Then, when and if their hearts ever were ready, the story would be there to be (finally) understood.

In these four parables Jesus covers several important truths.

1. Not every heart will be ready or able to take the Good News and commit to Jesus. Also, the Israelites believed that God would ‘sow’ them again in their land—and EVERYONE who was Jewish would be included. Jesus’ parable contradicts this belief.
2. For those who accepted and committed to following Jesus, there would be expectations. They were expected to generously share their knowledge and understanding with others.
3. When the Word took root in a heart, the growth and results would be due to God’s work in the heart. The gospel message contains its own power.
4. The kingdom of God may have had quiet, insignificant beginnings, but the end would be powerful, its greatness seen by all the world.

The last story, of Jesus calming the storm, isn’t just about danger and rescue. Here the disciples see the physical truth behind the parables they just learned. God’s power is being unleashed. It isn’t what people thought it would be, but it is real. Jesus defeats the forces of chaos!

13 Mark: Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. How do you think it would affect unchurched people if our public teaching was stories that they had to figure out?
2. The parables used common items to be symbols in the stories. What are some common items in our lives that might be used as symbols in stories about the gospel?
3. Let's try and write a parable together. We need:
 1. One main point
 2. Common items or situations, recognized by everyone
 3. Results from the situation that reflect a truth about the gospel
4. Jesus deliberately concealed his teachings, creating a mystery to those on the outside. Part of the reason for this, no doubt, is that people are intrigued by mysteries. Is there anything about Jesus, or Christianity, or faith that is mysterious to you?

14 Mark: Chapter 5 – Scripture Questions

1. When Jesus arrived on the east side of the lake of Galilee, He met a man. What was wrong with this man? (vs. 1-5)
2. What did the spirit within this man know about Jesus? (vs. 6-8)
3. Where did Jesus send the spirits? (vs. 12, 13)
4. How did the swineherds react to this mass suicide by their pigs? (vs. 14-16)
5. After seeing the healed man and the dead pigs, what did the townspeople ask Jesus? (vs. 17)
6. What command was given to the man healed of demon possession? (vs. 18-20)
7. Back on the Jewish side of the lake, a synagogue ruler came to beg Jesus for something. For what did he beg? (vs. 22-24)
8. Who was healed by touching Jesus' clothes? How did he react to this healing? (vs. 25-34)
9. During the delay, what happened to Jairus' daughter? (vs. 35)
10. Jesus encouraged Jairus by telling him that his daughter was _____. (vs. 36)
11. Who came into the dead girl's room with Jesus? (vs. 37, 41)
12. What happened to the little girl? (vs. 41-43)

15 Mark: Chapter 5 – What Did It Mean to Them?

This chapter focuses in on uncleanness. What separates us from one another? What separates us from God? How do our fears keep us 'chained'? How does our faith set us free?

The chapter starts with Jesus in a territory on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. It was disputed property then, and it still is – this region is now known as the Golan Heights. It was called the 'Decapolis' which means 'Ten Towns'—but even in the ancient world people couldn't agree which towns were included. The scribes who copied the manuscripts of Mark couldn't agree whether it took place near Gerasa, Gergasa or Gadara. The point is, it was not in any way Jewish land and the people who lived there weren't Jewish.

So the first person Jesus meets is not Jewish (unclean), is insane (unclean), and lives in a graveyard (extremely unclean). And he is, like his country which was completely under Roman control, overcome with a troop of spiritual invaders that made him physically strong but left him a human wreck. When Jesus brings God's kingdom into that place, the man is healed of his demon possession, becoming well and whole in mind and body. The spirits, recognizing Jesus' power, fall into the chaos of the sea and lose their hold and power. This story is foreshadowing the time when Jesus himself will end up naked, isolated, outside the town among the tombs, torn by Roman lashes. Then, as now, Jesus comes to share the situation of the people—and overcome the evil.

The next two stories (one inside another) are about fear and faith. Back on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee, a man who normally would have kept his distance from Jesus (Jairus, a synagogue president) is distraught because his daughter is dying. Jairus lets go of his pride and fears of religious controversy to ask Jesus to save his daughter. Jesus agrees, and does bring her back to life.

On his way to Jairus' house, Jesus is in a crowd of people. He is touched by a woman who has suffered from internal hemorrhaging for many years. Because of this she had been unclean, impure, for a very long time. She was isolated and rejected in her society. She was so afraid that she couldn't even speak to Jesus—just touch him. Both Jairus and the woman overcame their fear to ask Jesus for salvation. He honored their faith by healing them both.

16 Mark: Chapter 5 – Application Questions

1. In the face of Jesus' power, the people in the region of Gadara were so frightened that they asked him to leave. Have you ever been frightened of Jesus? Have we made him too tame? What do you find scary or intimidating about Jesus?
2. When the demon-possessed man wanted to go with Jesus, he was told no. In fact, Jesus told him to 'Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' That's all he was told to do. Do we place too many demands on people saved by Jesus?
3. Jesus didn't go looking for people to heal, or dead to resurrect. They came to him and asked for the healing. Is there something in our church that needs to be healed or resurrected? What should we do about this?
4. Is there something in your life that needs healing or resurrecting? Have you asked Jesus for this healing?

17 Mark: Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. How did Jesus' hometown react to him? (vs. 1-6)
2. What were Jesus' instructions to the Twelve when they were sent out on their mission? (vs. 7-12)
3. People were talking about Jesus. Who did they think he was? (vs. 14-11)
4. Why didn't Herod have John the Baptist killed immediately? (vs. 20)
5. For what purpose did Jesus take the apostles away? (vs. 31)
6. Why did Jesus have compassion on the people who followed him? (vs. 34)
7. What actions did Jesus take to feed the hungry people? (vs. 41)
8. Why did Jesus go up the mountain? (vs. 46)
9. What did the disciples think when they saw him walking on the water? (vs. 49, 50)
10. Who came to see Jesus? What did they want? (vs. 54-56)

18 Mark: Chapter 6 – What Did It Mean to Them?

There was doubt in Jesus' hometown about who and what he was. He was saying on his own authority that the kingdom was coming. He was doing things that demonstrated this authority. In Nazareth, however, they rejected him and his talk of God's kingdom. As a consequence, he chose not to do much there. There seems to be a connection between healing and faith. In times to come, his family DID accept him as Messiah. In fact, one of his brothers (James) became the primary leader of the Jerusalem church.

There are scattered reports of beggars (Cynics) who wandered the countryside teaching that people could only be happy by rejecting conventional desires (wealth, power, etc.) and leading a simple life free from all possessions. Some people might have thought that Jesus' apostles were these people. They soon learned differently! The apostles cast out demons, healed the sick—and told of a kingdom that was good, a kingdom that was to be desired and sought out. Not everyone would accept it. Those people would be left behind.

Everyone knew the kind of ruler Herod was in those days. Just like today, everyone loved to gossip about royalty. His treatment of John the Baptist would have been all over the country within a very short time. There was sex involved in the story, too! Everyone knew that Herod Antipas had divorced his wife to end up with his brother's wife, Herodius, in his bed. And then there was religion. John the Baptist was popular, but he was a troublemaker to Herod. That's why he was in prison! John's prophecy about Jesus made it clear that Herod was NOT the true king of the people of Israel, however much temporary power he had.

The next two stories are remarkable to read. Jesus' compassion for the crowds led him to feed them. His concern for his disciples sent him out on the water to get to them. While the easy call on these stories is to say that they show his divine power (and they certainly do), there may be more to his actions. He called himself "Son of Man*", emphasizing his humanity. It is possible that the amazing things Jesus did (feeding 5,000, walking on water) were not only to display his divinity but to show the authority that humans were supposed to have over the natural world, the authority that was lost with Adam's fall. What if the things he did were meant to have been possible for all?

*'Son of Man' was also a reference to the Book of Daniel and God's Emissary.

19 Mark: Chapter 6 – Application Questions

1. Jesus' brothers and sisters and his neighbors saw him very differently than people in other towns and villages. Their disbelief limited what he could do. What do you believe he can do in this day and age? Is it possible that God's power to help us is squelched by our unbelief?
2. Jesus evidently felt that it was urgent to get out the word about God's Kingdom breaking into the world. Is there anything today that you feel urgent about? Is it possible to maintain a sense of urgency about the Gospel? If so, how do we do that?
3. Jesus' compassion for the people led him to feed them. God's kingdom is not simply a matter of power, but also of love. What does our faith lead us to do? How can we push back against the evil and indifference of our world?
4. If we saw someone walk on Lake Lavon, we would look for the platforms under water. In other parts of the world (for instance, Thailand, China, Africa), believers routinely report miracles. Why do you think that these Christians are so willing to accept miracles?

20 Mark: Chapter 7 – Scripture Questions

1. How did the Pharisees and teachers manage to catch Jesus and his disciples eating with 'unwashed hands'? (vs. 1)
2. Why did these people care whether or not hands were clean? (vs. 2-5)
3. What did Jesus think the real problem was for these onlookers? (vs. 8)
4. What was the example Jesus gave of their behavior that showed their preference to follow traditions over God's commands? (vs. 9-13)
5. After Jesus slapped down the Pharisees and teachers, he taught the crowd an important truth. What was this truth? (vs. 15)
6. When Jesus said that nothing going into a stomach could affect the heart, what effect did it have on food? (vs. 19)
7. List the evils that truly make people 'unclean'. (vs. 21-22)
8. What did the Greek woman want Jesus to do for her daughter? (vs. 26)
9. Describe the interaction between Jesus and the Gentile woman. (vs. 27-29)
10. How did Jesus heal the deaf and mute man? (vs. 33-35)

21 Mark: Chapter 7 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Instructions about hand washing (and washing of cooking vessels) was a key part of a very complex system of purity regulations. They weren't actually written down until about 200 years after Jesus' day, but they were already very well known. These instructions were a part of what we call the 'oral traditions' of Judaism. The question that the teachers asked Jesus wasn't just about where he stood on traditions. His answer to them would tell them about his political stand, too. The Pharisees had built up an agenda, and if you stood with them on following traditions, you also ended up standing with them politically—which meant supporting revolt against Rome.

Jesus turns their question on its head by going past the surface. He shows them that they were actually using their traditions to avoid obedience to God's intentions. He also makes it clear to them that his work to bring in God's kingdom will turn people's obedience back toward Scripture, not on the Pharisee's interpretation of Scripture.

There were famous stories (in Jesus' world) about Jewish people who had been tortured and killed for refusing to eat unclean food, particularly pork. So for him to make it clear that all food was 'clean' was like telling the leaders of the old South Africa that all races are equal in the sight of God. This is one reason he told parables—so that difficult subjects could be spoken of in an indirect way, giving people time to understand and accept the points. In this discussion about the things that make you clean or unclean, Jesus teaches that good and bad external and physical actions come from internal and spiritual sources. The purity laws were pointing toward the need to purify human motivations. Jesus is leading them towards understanding that they need a cure for the problems of the heart.

The next story is not isolated from the previous story. The woman was a Gentile, and her daughter was unclean because she was possessed by an evil spirit. In Mark's telling, Jesus and the woman banter together, and he heals her daughter. He didn't deny that Gentiles have a claim on the love and mercy of God. However, he was very aware that his personal mission was not to spread the gospel to the Gentile world (his followers would do that) but to tell the Jewish people themselves that their long-awaited deliverance was at hand. He couldn't let himself be pulled off into other areas. He had a limited amount of time to get his job done.

One of the points of the last story, the healing of the deaf/mute man, is secrecy. Jesus was doing things which raised dangerous ideas and suspicions. The legal experts were already angry with him. Look what happened to the last prophet! Maybe he was hoping for more time to teach the disciples. It was becoming impossible to avoid the crowds, but it wouldn't take much more to get the authorities after him.

22 Mark: Chapter 7 – Application Questions

1. The difference between 'clean' and 'unclean' was extremely important to the Jews of Jesus' time. Do we have any conflicts in our time that are like this?
2. While Jesus knew that the gospel would eventually be spread to all the world, he tried not to let himself be pulled 'off task'. What is the main task of our church? How can we stick to this task?
3. The purity laws were set aside, not because they were irrelevant, but because the deeper truth to which they pointed had arrived. This truth was that Jesus calls us to purity of heart. What are some of the church 'laws' that we follow? Are these based on scripture or on church tradition?
4. Tradition itself is not a bad thing. It can be very helpful to us, helping us keep focused on our service to Christ. What are some of the good traditions that we observe?

23 Mark: Chapter 8 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did Jesus have compassion on the crowd? (vs. 1-3)
2. What did Jesus do as he was feeding the people? (vs. 6-10)
3. How did the Pharisees test Jesus? What was Jesus' response? (vs. 11-13)
4. Of what did Jesus warn the disciples? (vs. 15)
5. What did the disciples think he was talking about? (vs. 16)
6. How did Jesus attempt to bring their thinking to the right answer? (vs. 17-21)
7. How many times did Jesus lay hands on the blind man to heal him? (vs. 22-25)
8. What question did Jesus ask the disciples? What was their answer? (vs. 27, 28)
9. When Jesus asked them who they thought he was, how did Peter answer? (vs. 29)
10. Jesus spoke plainly about what was to happen to him. What was Peter's reaction? (vs. 32)
11. How did Jesus respond to Peter's attempt to stop him? (vs. 33)
12. What choice did Jesus put before the disciples? (vs. 34-38)

24 Mark: Chapter 8 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Mark describes a second feeding of a large crowd. Coming after the chapter 7 events, this may have happened in Gentile territory, and there may have been Gentiles in the crowd. The disciples still didn't understand what was going on, but we can't really blame them. Nothing like this had ever happened. Mark seems to be using the feedings and healings as a way of showing that Jesus' identity as the true Messiah was being revealed. The problem was that nobody was looking for this kind of Messiah. In both feeding stories, Jesus involves the disciples. The closer you are to Jesus, the more likely it is that he will call you to help him serve people.

The Pharisees show up and ask for a sign—as though the things they had already seen hadn't been enough. They were trying to get Jesus to perform for them, as if he needed to gain their approval for his work. He refuses to accommodate them, because he knows their request comes from unbelief. His version of kingdom was wildly different from theirs. They were looking for a Messiah who will set up a kingdom for the benefit of Jews who observed the law strictly. Those who followed Herod were hoping that God would set up their royal family as the true King of Israel. And so he warns the disciples not to be sucked into either vision of his purpose, but to keep their focus on him.

Jesus takes his disciples on a long walk for a conversation. Mark has put the story of the blind man just before this walk/story to highlight what is going on with the disciples. Jesus takes the blind man away from the village; he takes the disciples away from the lake and crowds. After the blind man is healed he sees but does not understand; the disciples see and hear Jesus work but do not understand the meaning. Jesus completes the blind man's healing and he knows what he sees; Jesus makes the disciples speak their beliefs, and then they truly understand who he is. Finally, their eyes are 'opened'.

Even now the disciples aren't looking for a divine healer; they were longing for a king. When Jesus speaks plainly about the coming days, Peter tries to stop him. This is actually a temptation for Jesus, similar to what happened to him after his ordeal in the desert after his baptism. And he responds in a similar way; 'Get away from me, Satan!' He doesn't really think that Peter has been changed into Satan. He is rejecting the temptation to become an earthly king and avoid the pain and trauma to come.

Jesus' friends and followers were used to danger. It was a dangerous time in their country. All they had to do was remember how John the Baptist ended up, and they knew that following Jesus put them in harm's way. Now that they truly understood who Jesus was, he teaches them about the life that they are going to have to pursue. The Kingdom is coming with glory—but not without a struggle.

25 Mark: Chapter 8 – Application Questions

1. Jesus performed a miracle when he fed the people, even though they didn't know it was going to happen and didn't ask for it. He refused to perform a miracle for the Pharisees when they asked. Can you think of a blessing that you received 'out of the blue', something you did not ask for?
2. Jesus warned the disciples of the 'yeast' or ideas of the Pharisees and Herod. He knew that it only takes a little evil to gradually corrupt good. What sort of evil should we avoid, even just a tiny bit, in order to keep ourselves from being corrupted?
3. Peter tried to make Jesus stop talking about the terrible things that were going to happen, probably because he thought Jesus was wrong. Jesus very strongly knocked Peter back. Tell about a time when you were wrong about some religious matter. Who set you straight? What happened afterward, in your life and in your relationship with that person?
4. Jesus makes it crystal clear that you either choose him or lose your soul. How can we fit this in with the popular idea that 'there are many ways to heaven'?

26 Mark: Chapter 9 – Scripture Questions

1. What happened when Jesus took Peter, James and John up to the top of a high mountain? (v. 2)
2. Who appeared with Jesus when he was transfigured? (v. 4)
3. What did the voice that came out of the cloud say? (v. 7)
4. What did Jesus say Elijah would do when he returned? (v. 12)
5. Who was unable to cast out the spirit that possessed the child of the man that spoke with Jesus? (v. 18)
6. What did the boy's father say when Jesus said, "All things are possible for him who believes."? (v. 24)
7. Why were the disciples unable to cast the demon out? (v. 29)
8. Why were the disciples silent when Jesus asked them what they were discussing? (v. 34)
9. Jesus told his disciples that "whoever is not against us is _____." (v. 40)
10. What did Jesus say would happen to anyone that caused children to stumble? (v. 42)
11. What should a person do whose eye causes them to stumble? (v. 47)

27 Mark: Chapter 9 – What Did It Mean to Them?

- Jesus took his inner circle of disciples up to a mountain where he conferred with the prophets Moses and Elijah. Jesus' disciples were awestruck. The voice of God the Father came from a cloud and attested to Jesus' importance – even above Moses and Elijah.
- A man brought his child to Jesus' disciples for healing but they were unable to help the man. The man complained to Jesus who cast the demon out. Jesus explained to his disciples that some demons are much more difficult to control than others.
- As they travelled, Jesus' disciples got into a trivial argument about which one of them was the most important. Jesus taught them that in God's eyes, greatness is measured much differently – and that the most humble are the greatest. Jesus stressed this by using the example of the innocence, trust and humility of children.
- Jesus' disciples tried to forbid others from infringing on their healing “franchise”. Jesus told them not to – that anyone who wasn't against them was on their same side.
- Jesus stressed that his followers should take great care not to cause others to stumble – and that children should be especially protected. Jesus also warned his followers that their own wants and desires could hurt them if left unchecked. He told them to not let their hands (what they owned or held) or their eyes (what they wanted or lusted for) to cause them to stumble.

28 Mark: Chapter 9 – Application Questions

1. Peter was terrified when he saw Jesus transfigured with Moses and Elijah and wanted to get busy building shelters for the three of them. Sometimes we try to avoid situations through staying busy. What is the danger with becoming too busy to do “God’s work”? What is the danger with becoming too busy DOING God’s work?
2. The distressed father told Jesus, “I do believe. Help my unbelief!” How is it possible to believe and not believe at the same time? Does doubt undermine faith or strengthen it? What kind of questions about faith cause you to wonder or doubt? Is it bad to question our faith?
3. Jesus’ disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest. What kinds of trivial things do Christians sometimes argue about? If Jesus were here, what would he have to say about these kinds of arguments?
4. When someone else was doing good in Jesus’ name, Jesus told his disciples to not try to stop the man. He told them, “Anyone who is not against us is for us.” What does this tell us about how Jesus would want to maintain control over his followers if he were here today?

29 Mark: Chapter 10– Scripture Questions

1. Jesus and his disciples were back in Judea, across the Jordan—in John the Baptist’s territory, where he preached. What question did the Pharisees use to test Jesus? (vs. 2)
2. What did Jesus say was God’s original intent (based on Moses’ words in Genesis) for the relationship between a man and wife? (vs. 6-9)
3. How did Jesus compare children and those who wished to be in God’s kingdom? (vs. 14, 15)
4. The rich young man wanted to know how he could guarantee himself a place in ‘eternal life’. What did Jesus say he needed to do? (vs. 19, 21)
5. How is salvation possible? (vs. 27)
6. Peter reminds Jesus that they have given up everything for him. How does Jesus comfort the disciples? (vs. 29, 30)
7. What does Jesus clearly tell the disciples? (vs. 33, 34)
8. Which of the Apostles seemed to be most concerned about status? What was Jesus’ answer to them? (vs. 35-39)
9. How does Jesus describe the type of ‘status’ that his followers will have? (vs. 42-45)
10. In contrast to James and John’s request, what does Bartimaeus want Jesus to do for him? (vs. 51)
11. How did Jesus heal the blind man? Where did Bartimaeus go? (vs. 52)

30 Mark: Chapter 10 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Jesus and the disciples go from Capernaum, where Peter and Andrew lived, to the place where John the Baptist had preached and baptized. In this politically tense area, the Pharisees ask Jesus a question which they hope will cause trouble with Herod: what is Jesus' opinion about divorce? In his usual fashion, Jesus forces them to deal with what they already know: God's teachings on the subject. They knew what Moses had to say on the subject. God's intent was that marriage would make a new being, and that it shouldn't be split up. The exceptions were given because of human nature, and in a way that would protect the culturally vulnerable partner—the wife.

The Jewish people of Jesus' era thought of time as being divided in two: the Present Age and the Age to Come. In their minds, God's kingdom would be in the Age to Come, and everything would be made right in that time. When Jesus said "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (children)," those who heard it were thinking of that Age to Come. Jesus was telling them that their entry to God's kingdom, in the Age to Come, would not be based on anything except the innocence of their hearts. The story of the rich young man touches on the same subject. When he said he wanted to inherit eternal life, he meant that he wanted to guarantee his status in the Age to Come, in God's kingdom. Jesus made it clear (to the young man and the disciples) that salvation—their place in God's kingdom—was only possible through God's power. This was world-shaking to those who heard it. Most of the followers still thought that Jesus was going to set up an earthly kingdom, and that they were going to help him rule it. Peter is distressed: will his sacrifices (and those of the other Apostles) be for nothing? Jesus comforts them and reassures them that they will be rewarded. It just won't be the reward they expected.

Jesus usually spoke in parables and cryptic stories, so it isn't too surprising that the disciples didn't understand what he said about his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. They were probably trying to figure out the 'hidden meaning' in his words. You can tell this because of James and John's concerns: they wanted to know if they could have important posts in his coming kingdom! They still thought it was going to be an earthly kingdom. Jesus knows that they will indeed suffer and die as he will. Then he tries to teach them about genuine status in the coming kingdom. It isn't who you rule that matters. It matters who you serve. The example that will teach them? Watching Jesus give his life to save the world.

Mark gives one last lesson about sight before Jesus' Passion begins. Bartimaeus knows what he needs: to be able to see. In contrast to the disciples Bartimaeus clearly knows who Jesus is, the Son of David. This was a term that specifically referred to the Messiah. He willingly leaves behind his old life (the cloak, which would have been spread on the ground for coins). He has complete faith that Jesus can save him. He follows Jesus without question. He is an example of the child-like spirit necessary for salvation. It will only be after the resurrection that the disciples see Jesus this clearly.

31 Mark: Chapter 10 – Application Questions

1. Jewish law concerning divorce had, by Jesus' time, become very casual. It didn't even involve any judicial or rabbinical courts. (It was also strongly weighted in the husband's favor.) Jesus takes a strong stand against divorce (though see exceptions in Matthew 19:3, 9; 1 Corinthians 7:12, 15). Should divorce in our time be easier or harder?
2. The Jewish people believed that riches and material comfort were a reflection of God's approval. There are a lot of people today who believe this. Why do you think this belief is so attractive to people? What effect does this belief have on the way in which we care for the poor?
3. The rich young man, Peter, James and John were all looking for security in the Age to Come. What kind of security are you seeking? How do you seek it?
4. Do you, like Bartimaeus, have something which prevents you from following Jesus? What do you want Jesus to do for you?

32 Mark: Chapter 11 – Scripture Questions

1. To which city were Jesus and his disciples drawing near? (vs. 1)
2. What did Jesus send two of his disciples to do? (vs. 2-3)
3. What did the people do when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the animal? (vs. 8-10)
4. What did Jesus say to the fig tree that had no figs? (vs. 14)
5. What did Jesus do to those he found in the temple in Jerusalem? (vs. 15)
6. What did Jesus say God had intended the temple to be? (vs. 17)
7. What had the temple been turned into? (vs. 17)
8. What did the priests and scribes in the temple think about Jesus and what he had done? (vs. 18)
9. The next day, what did Peter notice about the fig tree? (vs. 20-21)
10. What lesson did Jesus draw from the withering of the tree? (vs. 22-25)
11. When Jesus and his disciples returned to Jerusalem, what question did the priests ask of him? (vs. 28)
12. How did Jesus respond to their question? (vs. 29-30)
13. How did the priests answer Jesus? What was his response? (vs. 31-33)

33 Mark: Chapter 11 – What Did It Mean to Them?

At the end of the last chapter, Bartimeus' blindness was healed. This stands in stark contrast to the blindness of the religious leaders Jesus is about to encounter in Jerusalem. In this last section of the gospel, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem for the final week of his ministry.

Jesus' entrance into the city was from the eastern side, through two small villages (Bethany and Bethphage). On the outskirts, he sent in two disciples to bring back a donkey colt. Because of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, the donkey was considered the proper ride for the Messiah. Unused animals were regarded as especially suitable for sacred purposes. The reaction of the crowd to his appearance was spontaneous, and an act of royal homage. Jesus' entrance was an implicit declaration of himself as Messiah, but in a way that showed it was not political, but spiritual. No one could charge Jesus of political activism.

The story of the unfruitful fig tree is difficult: it is important to see it in context. First is the incident on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus is hungry, and there was no fruit on the fig tree, so he sentenced the tree to death. Then the Temple is examined, found wanting, and cleansed. Lastly, the fig tree is seen to be withered and dead. Looked at this way, we can see that the fig tree is a parable about the failure of Israel to fulfill God's commands, and that their failure would result in the destruction of the Temple and the fracturing of the people of Israel.

Concerning the cleansing of the Temple, one thread is easy to miss. The first passage quoted by Jesus is Isaiah 56:7, a prediction that non-Jews who worship God would be allowed to worship in the temple. By allowing the Court of the Gentiles (the only place in the temple area where Gentiles could worship God) to become a noisy, smelly public market, the Jewish religious leaders were preventing Gentile believers from the privilege promised to them. The merchants were not only cheating those purchasing animals for sacrifice: they were cheating Gentiles of their ability to worship God.

There is a close connection between the kind of faith Jesus speaks of and prayer. Prayer is the source of the power of faith, but it must be offered in the spirit of forgiveness. Faith and the willingness to forgive are the conditions of powerful prayer.

When Jesus and his disciples came back into the Temple, they met three opponents: chief priests, teachers of the law, and the elders. These men composed the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. Their purpose in their questioning was to find a way to make Jesus condemn himself in the eyes of the people, so that they could take him into custody. Of course, they failed.

34 Mark: Chapter 11 – Application Questions

1. Jesus allowed the people to praise him as he rode the donkey into Jerusalem – but he did the unexpected and didn't rise up as a political Messiah. What false expectations do we have of Jesus today?
2. Jesus used the fig tree as a way to teach his followers about the dangers of not fulfilling God's mission as his people. What do you think God's mission for the church at large is today? What about God's mission for our church, specifically? How are we fulfilling this mission?
3. Jesus chased people out of the temple because it was not being used properly. If Jesus came back today, how would he feel about the things we do with our building?
4. Jesus told his disciples they could do great things if they prayed and believed. What is going on when our prayers aren't answered? Is there a right way to pray?

35 Mark: Chapter 12 – Scripture Questions

1. In the parable of the Tenants, the owner plants a _____, puts a secure _____ around it, digs a place for the _____ and puts in a _____ for security. Then he goes away. (vs. 1)
2. What did the tenants do when the owner tried to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard? (vs. 2-8)
3. What did Jesus say would happen to those who failed to show respect and obedience to the owner? (vs. 9-11)
4. Who knew that Jesus was talking about them? What did they do to him? (vs. 12)
5. Who was sent to try and trip Jesus up with word traps? What trap did they use? (vs. 13-15)
6. What was Jesus' answer to them? (vs. 17)
7. Who tried to trick Jesus next? What hypothetical situation did they propose? (vs. 18-23)
8. How did Jesus insult these questioners? (vs. 24-27)
9. One teacher seemed to approve of Jesus' answer. What technical question did he ask? (vs. 28)
10. What did the rabbi think of Jesus' answer? (vs. 32, 33)
11. This rabbi spoke wisely. What did Jesus say to him? (vs. 34)
12. What riddle did Jesus propose when he was teaching in the temple courts? (vs. 35-37)
13. Who did Jesus warn his listeners against? (vs. 38-40)
14. Why was the widow's offering considered valuable? (vs. 40-44)

36 Mark: Chapter 12 – What Did It Mean to Them?

In this parable Jesus was re-using a theme from Isaiah. Isaiah writes a poem about God planting Israel like a vineyard, watching over it, hoping for good grapes and finally discovering wild grapes. Israel had gone bad, and all that is left is judgment. Jesus tells the story differently. God is still the vineyard owner, Israel still the vineyard. God sends prophets, and finally his son. Mark's readers knew that Jesus was referring to himself. In the parable, the tenants realize it is either the son or them that will inherit, so they kill the son. The listeners who heard Jesus understand what they heard; Jesus understands that they will reject him. The quote about the 'capstone' finalizes the point. What Jesus has come to do and to be must be fitted into a different kind of 'building'.

There were many taxes paid: local taxes, Temple taxes, taxes to Herod. Roman taxes were just the final straw. The tax represented to the Jews that they were not free. But that was not the only problem. Jews were forbidden to make carved images, especially images of people. The words on the coin with the emperor's face called him the son of a god, high priest. Some Jews wouldn't even touch these coins, so Jesus asking to show him one was very troubling. Jesus does three things with his answer. First, he essentially says 'Send this filthy thing back where it came from.' Second, it was a way of saying, 'Pay them back in their own coin.' Third, the command to give God what belongs to God was a way of saying that they owed God everything.

Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection. They were extremely conservative, seeing resurrection as a dangerous new idea, not taught in the Pentateuch. Resurrection had become a popular belief as a way of affirming that those who were martyrs had a glorious future waiting for them. The Sadducees tell this ridiculous story as a way to ridicule the idea of resurrection. Jesus rebukes them by saying they clearly don't know their scriptures, or how powerful God is. Jesus says that resurrection is a transformation into a new mode of bodily life. Second, Jesus uses a passage from their accepted scripture to argue that God is the God of the living Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so they must not be dead and gone forever. What God has made, he will remake.

The scribe asked Jesus a question that wondered which commandment really mattered. Jesus begins with worship, the love of God. Whatever we do, we do for him. The second part means to show to all people the same respect and care that we show to ourselves. Jesus implies that the work he does will make this possible. The lawyer's response understands that these choices are more important than any sacrifice. Jesus commends his response, recognizing his wisdom.

Lastly, Jesus uses a riddle to teach that he will be not only a king from David's line, but David's Lord as well as his 'son'. Using Psalm 110 he points to the fact that the Messiah will also be David's Lord. This is about him, of course; not only is he Messiah, with royal authority in Jerusalem and the Temple. He will bring in the true Kingdom. Jesus is claiming authority over the Temple. Jesus warns against those who would use their position to line their pockets, a show put on so they can gain money. Then he watches the poor widow who gives everything she has—essentially her own life. The contrast between the two is stark. Her sacrifice is like his will be; he will give everything.

37 Mark: Chapter 12 – Application Questions

1. The Jews of Jesus' day believed that God was waiting at a distance, only talking to them through prophets. What do you think? Is God close, or does he watch from a distance? Why do you think this?
2. The answer Jesus gave the Pharisees and Herodians was not what they wanted to hear. They were trying to trap him by mixing religious and political problems. What current political/religious questions seem to be mixed together? How do you think Jesus would deal with these problems?
3. What do you think the 'after life' will be like while we wait for resurrection into a new kind of life?
4. The scribe that asks Jesus a question about the greatest commandment seems to speak to Jesus as a peer. Jesus finds his answers wise and tells him he is close to the kingdom. What does it mean, to be 'close to the kingdom'? Do you know anyone in this position? What should we do with them? What should we do FOR them?

38 Mark: Chapter 13 – Scripture Questions

1. Why were the disciples impressed? What startling thing did Jesus tell them? (vs. 1, 2)
2. What were some of the things that would NOT be signs of the destruction of Jerusalem? (vs. 5-8)
3. In order to prepare them for the time after his death, what warnings and encouragement does Jesus give his apostles? (vs. 9-13)
4. How would the disciples know when it was time to leave Jerusalem? (vs. 14)
5. How were the disciples to act during the attack and destruction of Jerusalem? (vs. 15-19)
6. Of which people did Jesus particularly warn his followers to beware? (vs. 21-23)
7. List some of the vivid descriptions Jesus uses to emphasize how terrible the destruction will be. (vs. 24-27)
8. How did Jesus let his listeners know when the destruction of Jerusalem would happen? (vs. 30)
9. Did Jesus know the exact date that the destruction would occur? (vs. 32)
10. How were the disciples expected to respond to this prophecy? (vs. 33-37)

The language Jesus uses in verses 24-27 comes from prophecies in Isaiah which were directed at Babylon and Edom, two long-time enemies of the nation of Israel. They describe a horrible time, and in fact when Jerusalem was under siege it was dreadful: people starved, ate their own babies, fought for scraps of dirty food. Even worse, more Jews were killed by other Jews than by the invading Romans, as the factions fought for political gains.

39 Mark: Chapter 13 – What Did It Mean to Them?

Jesus' disciples were understandably impressed by the Temple. While it was still incomplete, Herod's efforts had made it into one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. It was the largest structure for hundreds of miles, certainly the biggest these men had ever seen. When Jesus tells them that it was going to be destroyed, they naturally want to know when it was going to happen. Jesus used a familiar picture to describe how they would know it was coming. Many writers from Jesus' time spoke of the Jewish hope for the Age to Come in terms of pangs of childbirth. Since Jesus believed that his kingdom-mission, his message, was God's way of bringing this new world to birth, it makes sense that he would use these words to describe the coming times. Verses 3-13 assume that a great catastrophe was coming, and that in the times leading up the disciples would be in danger. There would come a time when they needed to run for the hills—but in the mean time, they are not to panic.

The historian Josephus is our main source of information about the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. In AD 66 the Jews rebelled against Rome. In AD 68, the city was put under siege. In AD 69, one Roman emperor succeeded another—four in one year, and each one worse than the other. As the last one, Vespasian (who was originally the general in charge of the siege), marched to Rome to take the throne, his son Titus entered Jerusalem, burnt the Temple, destroyed the city and crucified thousands of Jews. When Jesus made his prophecies forty years earlier, he didn't specify what the 'desolating abomination' might be—or he chose not to tell them, to prevent too much fear. Josephus (a Jew who surrendered and took the family name of Flavius) tells of the insane burning of the Temple, against Titus' orders. Titus wanted the treasure in the Temple, but he was unable to stop the rampage of his soldiers. The soldiers began slaughtering the people. All ages, whether they surrendered or fought, were killed. Because of the height of the hill on which the Temple stood, and the size of the fire, it seemed that the entire city was on fire. It must have seemed like the end of the world to the people who lived there. And it was the end of THEIR world. Their way of life had failed because of injustice towards those inside and violence towards those outside, the failure to obey God's call to be the light of the world.

This fall was also the sign that God had vindicated Jesus as his Son. As prophet, he predicted the destruction. As Messiah, he enacted it. He brings in the final biblical text from Daniel 7:13, "They will see the son of man coming on clouds with great power and glory." In Daniel, this is not about the RETURN of the Son of Man, but about his COMING to God after suffering. It is triumph, judgment on Israel which opposed God, and speaks of the Son of Man sitting at God's right hand. Jesus is saying, in extremely vivid terms, that the fulfillment of his prophecy concerning the horrible destruction of Jerusalem will prove that He was who he said he was: God's Son, sitting at God's right hand in authority and power.

Jesus makes clear that he does not know exactly when this destruction will happen. He does know that they need to pay close attention. He expected it to come 'within a generation', which was a common way of speaking. It generally meant about forty years. He knew that some of them would still be alive and wanted them to run when it started so that they would still be able to spread his message. He knew that he was the last of the prophets, the son who came to the vineyard as the last possible messenger. The generation that rejected his message would fail. And that is exactly what happened.

40 Mark: Chapter 13 – Application Questions

1. Why, do you think, we are so interested in WHEN something will happen?
2. There are people today who believe that civilization is going to crash and burn before too many years pass. Sometimes they set up camps in the wilderness, spending a huge amount of time and money preparing for the end they fear. They usually think the rest of us are living in a dream world. Are they wacky, or are they right? What difference does it make, whether they are right or wrong?
3. Jesus is specifically talking about the destruction of Jerusalem, but he does say he will return. Do you believe he is coming back? What are you doing in preparation for this time?
4. Jesus told his disciples that there would always be bad people doing bad things, wars, weather disasters, etc. This is certainly still true. How much attention should we pay to the chaos of this world? How much should we ignore?

41 Mark: Chapter 14:1-31 – Scripture Questions

1. What were the chief priests and teachers trying to do? What was complicating their plot? (vs. 1, 2)
2. How was Jesus worshipped while he was visiting Simon? Why were the watchers angry? (vs. 3-5)
3. How did Jesus answer the complainers? (vs. 6-9)
4. Where did Judas go immediately after this event? (vs. 10, 11)
5. How did Jesus and the disciples prepare to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread? (vs. 12-16)
6. What was the sad and frightening thing that Jesus told his disciples during supper? (vs. 17-21)
7. What did Jesus do during the celebration of the Feast? (vs. 22-25)
8. How did Jesus and his disciples finish the evening? (vs. 26)
9. What prophecy did Jesus make when they arrived at the Mount of Olives? (vs. 27-30)
10. How did Peter and the other apostles respond to Jesus' prophecy? (vs. 31)

42 Mark: Chapter 14:1-31 – What Did It Mean to Them?

From this chapter on, Mark focuses on the coming Crucifixion. The opening section has three parts: the plotting of the chief priests, the story about a woman with a pot of ointment, the betrayal of Judas. Each section makes it clear that the end is near.

It was Passover, which was freedom time. The story of the Exodus from Egypt, leaving behind slavery and going to the promised land. Even the way the Jews sat (reclining) was important—only free people reclined. In a sense, Jesus had been acting like Moses: miracles which were signs of coming freedom. His 'Red Sea' moment was coming, when he would cross and defeat death itself.

Jerusalem was crowded at this time. The population went from 50,000 to several hundred thousand. The streets were twisted and hard to navigate. That's why the priests couldn't just go and find Jesus, not to mention their fear of the mobs of people. Judas' motives are not clear. He may have been disappointed; he may have been trying to force Jesus to become King; he may have been hoping that if Jesus was going to die anyway, he might as well make something out of it.

When the woman uses the expensive perfume, the disciples were angry. It was customary to give gifts to the poor at the end of a feast, and they seem to have thought money for the poor was better than pouring it out. Jesus gives two reasons for accepting her gift. First, he knows that he will not be with them for long; they will always be able to care for the poor, but their time to be with and honor him was short. Second, he says that she is preparing his body for burial. He is not implying that she has any foreknowledge of his death, only that her intuition about the rightness of her act is correct.

The Passover meal was significant in many ways. It was not just food, it was a way of changing the people who ate the food. It was both a religious and political act, sustaining national loyalty, faith and love. When Jesus and his disciples came into town, they would have been only a few among many, providing anonymity. Jesus will use this meal as a way of changing his followers, making them dependant on his death for their life. Their participation would spiritually nourish them in the difficult times to come. Jesus probably told the Passover story, as the head of the family. This time, instead of saying words that linked the bread and wine to the Exodus, he links the bread and wine to himself and his coming sacrifice. The covenant is changed. From now on, salvation is only possible through Christ.

After the meal was ended the group went out of town to the Mount of Olives, which overlooked the city of Jerusalem. Here was the quiet, out of the way place where Judas' betrayal could take place. Before the end, Jesus speaks again to the men he has led and loved—and the words were not comforting. Jesus' words to the disciples would have been frightening. They knew that he was in danger, but this prophecy about their abandonment shook them. Peter refuses to believe it, and the other disciples agree. The words that Jesus uses from Scripture have a clear meaning to him: he knows he will be alone, facing death and abandonment. Mark makes it clear that everything is rushing to a climax.

43 Mark: Chapter 14:1-31 – Application Questions

1. The disciple's chief objection to the woman's act of devotion to Jesus was that it was wasted money. Jesus strongly rejected this. What are some excellent ways that our church has spent money?
2. There is a possibility that Judas betrayed Jesus because he was trying to force him to use his miraculous powers to become a powerful king in Jerusalem. Have you or someone you know ever tried to force something to happen? Did it work? Have you had ambitions for your spouse or children that they didn't live up to?
3. The Feast of Unleavened Bread went on for eight days. What are some of the important things that our church celebrates? Do you have any personal celebrations that are extremely important? Why are they important to you?
4. The disciples were determined not to fail Jesus, even in the face of his prophecy. They did not want to face an end to their hopes and dreams. What do we do when a dream seems doomed?

44 Mark: Chapter 14:32-72 – Scripture Questions

1. Who did Jesus take with him when he went to pray? (vs. 33)
2. How was Jesus feeling at this time? (vs. 33, 34)
3. What did Jesus want? How many times did he ask for this? (vs. 35-41)
4. Who did Judas bring with him when he betrayed Jesus? (vs. 43)
5. How did those around Jesus react to the arrest? (vs. 47-50)
6. When Jesus was taken before the Jewish court, where did Peter go? (vs. 54)
7. What was the Sanhedrin doing to justify condemning Jesus to death? (vs. 55, 56)
8. What evidence was presented that was partially true? (vs. 57-59)
9. Which question did Jesus finally answer, after remaining silent during the interrogation? (vs. 61, 62)
10. How did the high priest and Sanhedrin respond to Jesus' answer? (vs. 63-65)
11. What happened to Peter as he waited during Jesus' trial? (vs. 66-70)
12. How did Peter react when he realized what he had done? (vs. 72)

45 Mark: Chapter 14:32-72 – What Did It Mean to Them?

This part of the story points out something extremely important: Jesus stands alone. What he has to do now, he has to do all by himself. No one else can give their life as a ransom for many. Nobody else can bring Israel's story of failure and redemption to the climax. No one else can bear the abandonment of God, to put to an end death from sin. And so we have a 'sandwich' story here. On each side is the story of human failure (Judas and Peter): in the middle is the story of Jesus standing alone.

There are four parts to the interrogation of Jesus by Caiaphas.

1. **Jesus was a false prophet.** There were warnings in Jewish scripture about these. The leaders knew he had done remarkable things, but they believed that his threats against the Temple meant he was a false prophet. That's why they blindfolded and taunted him at the end.
2. **Jesus' attitude toward the Temple.** Jesus was not only claiming authority over the Temple, but also saying that the Temple was under God's judgment and would be destroyed. It was Jesus' actions in the Temple that had led to his arrest and accusation.
3. **Jesus' actions and words were a veiled claim to royal authority.** While there was nothing illegal about this claim, the court knew that if word got out that someone had claimed to be king the Romans would get involved. Crucifixion was the standard treatment for would-be rebel leaders.
4. **Jesus incriminates himself at once on the political charge.** Everything he has done shows that he believes himself to be God's anointed. He draws together two key biblical quotations to make an explosive combination. He uses a compact response to say openly, "Yes, I am a true prophet. Yes, what I said about the Temple will come true. Yes, I am the Messiah. You will see me vindicated, and that vindication will mean that I share the throne of God."

Caiaphas now has solid evidence that can be used to destroy Jesus: for the Romans, a charge of being a rebel leader, for the Jews, blasphemy against God.

46 Mark: Chapter 14:32-72 – Application Questions

1. When Jesus was overcome with horror and fear, he took friends with him and prayed. If you have had a time of horror and fear in your life, how did you handle it? How can our church support people in these times?
2. Jesus' fervent prayer to God was answered: "No." This seems monstrously cruel of God, especially since Jesus had been perfectly obedient. Isn't God all powerful? Why didn't he find another way?
3. Jesus did not answer or defend himself against the lies told at his trial. Have you ever been 'falsely accused'? What did you do in response?
4. Poor Peter! He may have denied Jesus three times, but at least he was THERE in the courtyard. How does the church (ours, or any other) deal with failure? For instance, a pastor who is found guilty of embezzlement, or sexual sin?

47 Mark: Timeline of Passion Week

Day	Event
Friday:	Arrival in Bethany. Six days before the Passover, Jesus spends time with friends. Here, his feet are anointed with costly perfume.
Saturday:	Sabbath, a day of rest. Probably spent in Bethany with friends.
Sunday:	Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Riding into town on a donkey, Jesus fulfills an ancient prophecy. The crowd welcomes him with ‘Hosanna’ and gives him a Messianic title as the coming King of Israel.
Monday:	Clearing of the Temple court. Jesus drives out the moneychangers and traders from the Court of the Gentiles.
Tuesday:	On the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem, Jesus taught and warned the people. He predicted the destruction of Herod’s temple. He told his disciples about his own return.
Wednesday:	This day is not mentioned in the Gospels.
Thursday:	Passover and the Last Supper. In the upper room, Jesus prepared himself and his disciples for his death. After the meal they went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed in agony.
Friday:	Crucifixion. Following betrayal, arrest, desertion, false trials, denial, condemnation, beatings and mockery, Jesus carried his cross to ‘The Place of the Skull’ where he was crucified with two other prisoners.
Friday/ Saturday:	Jesus’ body was placed in the tomb before 6:00 pm Friday night, when the Sabbath began and all work stopped. It lay in the tomb throughout the Sabbath.
Sunday:	Resurrection. Early in the morning, women went to the tomb and found the stone rolled back. Jesus’ resurrection was established as a fact.

48 Mark: Chapter 15 – Scripture Questions

1. What charge against Jesus did the Sanhedrin agree to bring before Pilate? (vs. 1, 2)
2. How did Jesus amaze Pilate? (vs. 3-5)
3. What did Pilate offer to do? Why did he offer this? (vs. 9, 10)
4. Why did Pilate release Barabbas? (vs. 6-8, 15a)
5. What was done to Jesus before he was handed over to the soldiers for crucifixion? (vs. 15b)
6. How did the Roman soldiers treat Jesus? (vs. 16-20)
7. Who was forced to help Jesus carry his cross? (vs. 21)
8. What was the written notice of the charge against Jesus? (vs. 26)
9. How was Jesus insulted and mocked? (vs. 29-32)
10. After three hours of darkness, what did Jesus say? (vs. 34)
11. What happened after Jesus died? (vs. 38, 39)
12. Who was watching and waiting during the crucifixion? (vs. 40, 41)
13. Who was given permission to take Jesus' body? Where did he have the body laid? (vs. 43-47)

49 Mark: Chapter 15 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The cross was the ultimate symbol of Roman power. Crosses were, in fact, the reality on which the empire was built. Thousands and thousands of Jews had died at Roman hands. Mark's readers in Rome certainly knew this.

Pilate's main aim is to prevent riots. He is not interested in or obligated to hold 'fair' trials. Pilate might have flogged a prophet who caused trouble. He wouldn't have cared a snap for blasphemy. He was interested in showing his authority to the priests. But a would-be king? This was confronting the power of Rome, and the penalty was death.

Mark wants us to see the theological struggle. First, Jesus is silent. This fulfills a prophecy in Isaiah, where the servant is like a lamb led to slaughter—who does not open his mouth. This shows Jesus as the Servant-King. Second, Jesus is innocent. Even Pilate knows he is innocent. Yet, Jesus takes the fate of Israel on himself, to bring about God's kingdom of healing and forgiveness. You can see the example of this in the fate of Barabbas: he is guilty, but Jesus takes his place. Jesus shows us God's grace and God's love in his person.

Think of the Roman soldiers as peacekeeping forces. They had to put up with trouble every day, in a thousand different ways, from the Jewish people. When given the chance to mock and torment a 'King of the Jews', they jump at the opportunity. Mark makes this 'King of the Jews' a central point in his story: he mentions it over and over.

Prisoners were often made to carry the cross-beam upon which they would be crucified. The vertical pole would have already been at Golgotha. Jesus was weak from lack of sleep, interrogations and beatings. The soldiers used their legal privilege to force Simon (possibly related to some of the Roman Christians) to carry the cross. This would have resonated with people who had heard "Take up your cross and follow me."

Throughout the following scene, Mark is making it clear that BECAUSE Jesus is the King of the Jews, he must stay on the cross. It is the climax of his mission. This is how the kingdom comes at last. Mark shows the mysteries of the brutal act: darkness which could not have been an eclipse because Passover happened at full moon (solar eclipses can only occur at the new moon); Jesus' sudden cry of anguish; the listeners thinking he was calling for Elijah; Jesus' sudden death, much sooner than usual; the tearing of the Temple veil; the remark of the centurion. This remark is a link with things observed throughout the gospel: the opening speaks of Jesus the Messiah, the son of God; the voice at his baptism; the voice at the transfiguration; the parable of the wicked tenants; even Caiaphas asks if he is God's son. It is left to a Roman soldier to call him God's son, and mean it.

The tearing of the veil needs to be seen as evidence that the Temple is finished. From now on, people come to God through the death of his Son. The cry of horror is because of his separation from God, because of the Evil of the world. Jesus, though innocent, accepts the suffering. This is a great mystery.

The time between Jesus' death at 3:00 pm and the beginning of the Sabbath was packed. Joseph, a good man who may have been a secret follower of Jesus, risks being treated as a revolutionary himself. He makes himself unclean by handling the body. Joseph's activities, the women who helped him, these details answer the early claim that Jesus had not truly died. Mark shows that he was dead, that there were witnesses. The stage is set: now everything waits.

50 Mark: Chapter 15 – Application Questions

1. Everyone knew Jesus was innocent: the priests, the people, Pilate. Nothing was done to stop his murder. There are still martyrs today, people in Iran, Egypt, Africa, China, who lose their lives because of their faith. What is the purpose of their deaths? What sort of effort should be made to stop these deaths?
2. Simon of Cyrene (a community in North Africa) was probably a Jew in Jerusalem on pilgrimage. He was pulled into a story completely unprepared. Have you ever been called on suddenly to be a part of something important? How did you react?
3. Considering that a cross is a symbol of a humiliating, degrading and agonizing death, what do you think about the way we sanitize it for our churches and wear them for decorations? Is it possible to do this without removing the dirty reality of the cross? How?
4. We have heard the story of the death of Jesus so often. Is it realistic to think that we could keep the immediacy of his gift present in our community? How can we keep a balance between focusing on his death and on his resurrection?

51 Mark: Chapter 16 - Scripture Questions

Section 1: Verses 1-8

1. When did the three women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Why were the women worried? (vs. 3)
3. Who did they see, sitting inside the entry chamber of the tomb? How did they react? (vs. 4, 5)
4. What did the young man tell them? (vs. 6, 7)
5. How did the women react to what they heard? (vs. 8)

Section 2: Verses 9-20

1. Jesus appears to three people/groups: (vs. 1-14)
 1. _____ (vs. 9)
 2. _____ (vs. 12)
 3. _____ (vs. 14)How did these people react to the news that Jesus was alive?
2. What commission were the Eleven given? (vs. 15)
3. "Whoever believes and is baptized will be _____, but whoever does not believe will be _____." (vs. 16)
4. Where did Jesus go after this commissioning? (vs. 19)

52 Mark: Chapter 16 – What Did It Mean to Them?

The last chapter of Mark has been a puzzle for a long time. The best remaining manuscripts, both from the fourth century, end with verse eight. The last part, verses 9-20, is different in vocabulary, tone, style and content from the rest of the gospel. It is perhaps best to think of these endings as editorial notes, written by scribes in later times (most likely in the first part of the second century) to either replace a lost scroll section or to add other remembrances and anecdotes which helped people understand the story. It is certainly possible that Mark's original ending was lost. He had written, over and over again, that Jesus tried to teach the disciples that he would suffer, be killed and rise again from the dead. Looking at it strictly from a literary standpoint, it seems likely that his ending would speak of Jesus meeting the disciples and commissioning them for the work ahead of them. This is especially likely because Jesus had promised them that he would see them again.

It is interesting to see that the three women who went to the tomb early on the first day of their working week were not expecting to find anything except Jesus' dead body. They had gone out the previous evening, after the Sabbath was over, to buy what was necessary to treat his body respectfully. They would wrap the body in linen cloths, with spices layered in to help with the smell of decomposition. In a year, they supposed, the bones would be collected and put into an ossuary. What a shock they received! The heavy stone had been moved, and a young man in white sat where Jesus' body had been hastily laid two days before. He very calmly told them that Jesus was alive and would see them again. Their job, he said, was to go to the disciples (especially Peter) and tell them about his resurrection. Understandably, the women rushed home in shock.

Verses 9-20 is the ending most often appended to Mark's gospel. In this version, those who met Jesus in person were convinced of his identity, but those who only heard about his resurrection were skeptical. He spoke, walked and ate with those he met, even going to far as to speak sternly to the Apostles (here called the Eleven, since Judas was dead) about their lack of faith.

This commission given to the Apostles is short and clear. They are told to 'preach the good news to all creation'. This is the end goal of all the teaching, all the time together, all the miracles witnessed. After being hesitant to believe, they are called to be eyewitnesses themselves, passing on the hope of salvation to everyone.

Verses 17 and 18 are very peculiar. There are very specific abilities mentioned, each of which is supposed to be a way for disciples to prove to the hearers of the gospel that they are telling the truth. There are stories in Acts of speaking in tongues and driving out demons, and in Acts 28 the Apostle Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake and did not die. However, none of the other gospels (Matthew, Luke or John) mentions these miraculous gifts.

The Ascension was predicted by Jesus in chapter 14, witnessed by the Apostles (Acts 1:9). His seat at the right hand of God was not witnessed, but believed and taught by the early church (Acts 2:33-5, 7:56).

53 Mark: Chapter 16 – Application Questions

1. The women who went to care for Jesus' body were overcome by the shock of his resurrection. Have you had a 'resurrection' of some kind in your life, perhaps where you had a chance to start your life again? How were you different afterward?
2. The 'Great Commission' has been used in the past as a call to send missionaries all over the world. How can we apply it to our neighborhood? What is a good way to accomplish this commission?
3. It is a little odd to think of Mark's writings being edited by scribes. Does this kind of editing make the Gospel of Mark more or less authentic to you? Is there any reason we can't do the same thing today to passages that are obscure or hard to understand?
4. The signs listed at the end of the chapter are pretty astounding. How would people react today if they saw that kind of thing happen? Would you believe what you saw?