

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 1)

Scripture: Mark 1

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 18th, 2004

The Beginning of the Gospel

Reading: First Peter 1:3-12

Mark 1:1 (NASB)

THE beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ].

Introduction We have looked at some of the features about our church—what we think is important, who we are. But at the core, we are about the first verse of the Gospel of Mark. Whatever else we are or are not, we really are about Christ and He is the only reason we exist as an organization, as a family and as an address on the map of the Town of Dartmouth.

- We are either born again or we are not born again.
- We either have His Spirit dwelling within us or we do not.
- We either reflect and look like Jesus or we do not.
- We either obey His Word or we do not.
- We are either seeking His kingdom or we are not.

At core, we are either about Him or we are something else.

We begin today a consideration of the Gospel of Mark. For myself, I never grow tired of hearing about Jesus. Do you? When you read the incidents that happened with Him or when you read His words to people in so many seemingly random situations, or when you read how people reacted to *Him*, aren't you so completely enchanted? How long has it been since you read in a Gospel yourself? For me, I love reading the accounts over and over. I think how each Gospel begins, is interesting...

MATTHEW 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Matthew is written to a Jewish audience and it presents Jesus first and foremost as Israel's Messiah.

LUKE 1:1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you might know the exact truth

about the things you have been taught. Luke was a Gentile writer, investigating the claims of Jesus on something more of a scientific nature.

JOHN 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. John was the closest to Jesus of the four writers, the last to write, and he includes many details that the others do not have. His gospel is perhaps the most read of the four.

Mark is traditionally thought to have been the first writer to write down the things Jesus did and many believe that Luke and Matthew may *both* have had a copy of Mark in front of them when they wrote their gospels. His audience was the believing community in Rome and many scholars think that Mark received much of his information directly from Peter.

It would be like if four men here witnessed the same event—let's say, the Patriots game this afternoon, and then each wrote out their own accounts of the event. Imagine each arriving early and staying to the end, seeing the whole game--One would focus on the game itself, giving various statistical details and performance evaluations. Another might focus on the respective coaching staffs, how they made decisions and changes and adaptations and how they dealt with the clock. Another might watch the game and focus on two or three particular players. And the fourth may focus on the concessions, the weather and the crowd. Each witnessed exactly the same event and what each recorded was absolutely accurate but each was also absolutely unique. That is admittedly a very mundane comparison to the great Gospel writers but can you see that there is uniqueness and individuality and humanness and at the same time complete congruence and consistency. What seems perfectly reasonable to us is the very point that liberal scholars miss! They look for inconsistencies and variations and miss the unity of the whole.

Each of the four Gospels proclaims the same Savior and the same Messiah. Contrary to what many liberal scholars try very hard to say, the Gospel record of Jesus is consistent between the four writings. Other "gospels" were written but these are the four which are completely accurate and fit together to form a complete picture. We are persuaded that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were inspired to write down true accounts of the life of Jesus but each is unique and each gives a little different part of the picture.

So Mark's account begins plainly with a title, it seems. None of the others begins in this way—and if Mark was the first gospel written, it seems appropriate to begin it with ***The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ...***

The word "gospel" (εὐαγγελίου) comes from the old English "god-spel" ("good news") and translates accurately the Greek euangelion . In the NT the Good News is that God has provided salvation for everyone through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Mark to convey this Good News, he has created a new literary genre--"a gospel." This gospel is "about Jesus Christ." Mark intends to proclaim the gospel, already known and

experienced by the Roman believers, by rooting it in the events of Jesus' life. There are indications that they had lost hold of these historical roots.

"Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Joshua," which means "The LORD is salvation" or "salvation of the LORD," or "The LORD saves." This name was revealed by the angel to Joseph before Jesus was born and describes his mission of being Savior (Mt 1:21).

"Christ" is the Greek word for "anointed." The Greek word Christos ("Christ") translates the Hebrew *mashiach* ("Messiah") and means the "Anointed One" of God. In the OT the word is used of anyone who was anointed with the holy oil, as, for example, the priests and kings of Israel (cf. Ex 29:7, 21; 1Sa 2:10, 10:1, 6; 16:13; 2Sa 1:14, 16). The Messiah is the Son of David, an anointed leader expected to bring in an age of peace and liberty from all oppression. In the NT, the Messiah is Jesus, who came first to bring liberty from sin and peace with God and who will come again to bring all things under his control.¹ The word carries with it the idea of being chosen by God, consecrated to his service, and endowed with his power to accomplish the task assigned. Toward the close of the OT period, the word "anointed one" assumed a special meaning, denoting the ideal king anointed and empowered by God to deliver his people and establish his righteous kingdom (Da 9:25-26). Jewish literature between the Testaments spoke of the coming rule as restoring David's kingdom to its former prosperity and greatness. The ideas that clustered around the title "Messiah" tended to be political and national in nature, which is why Jesus seldom used the term. Of its seven occurrences in Mark, only three of them are in sayings of Jesus (9:41; 12:35; 13:21); and in none of these does he use the title of himself (see also comment on Mt 1:1). Because Jesus was reluctant to speak of himself as the Messiah does not mean that he did not believe himself to be the Messiah. In this passage (8:29) and in 14:60-62, he accepted it as used of him by others (cf. Jn 4:25-26). As Messiah, Jesus saw himself as the fulfillment of all those prophets, priests, and kings who were anointed in the OT; he was bringing into existence a new Israel.

The last phrase, "the Son of God," (although not presenting some manuscripts) is an important theme in Mark's gospel (cf. 1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:36, 61; 15:39).²

For Mark the good news begins when he first heard about Jesus. He probably heard about it from Peter, first. He heard also about it from Paul. For you the beginning of the Gospel might have been when you were a little child and your parents took you to church where you heard about Jesus. Or they might have told you about Him at home. I remember being about five years old when I first heard about Jesus and it was in a Methodist church. But the news doesn't become "good" until you receive it internally, personally. I heard the news about Jesus first at five, and then all the time when I went to church until I got to be about fourteen and then I quit going to church. But at 19 it became good news to me. Like for Mark, it was the beginning of the GOOD news for me.

It's always good to begin a new year by focusing on Him. Where do you stand with Him today? Is He the focus of your life? Do you get excited at the prospect of Him coming back? Do you love to talk to Him? Do you ponder and pray about what He would have you do today or tomorrow, thinking that it must be a good plan?

¹ English-Greek Reader's Lexicon of the New Testament

² The Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary

As we study this Gospel in 2004, I would ask you to do a couple of things:

1. Select one verse in each chapter to memorize.
2. Ask God each week to use the words that Mark wrote to affect this church.
3. Seek the Savior yourself. We are going to read about a lot of random people who ran into Jesus Christ. There will be different kinds of reactions. You, be like those people who wanted to follow Him, and couldn't get enough of Him.

He is wonderful. There is no activity, endeavor or goal you can set for yourself that will benefit you more than the personal pursuit of Jesus Christ.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 2)

Scripture: Mark 1:2-8

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 25th, 2004

The Beginning of the Life and Times of Jesus

Mark 1:1-8 (NASB)

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way; 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.'" 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, 2 confessing their sins. 6 And John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 "I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Introduction Today, as in ancient times, there are lots of different beliefs and convictions about God, in general. A new Harris Interactive poll of 2,306 Americans shows¹

- 55 percent attend a religious service at least a few times/year; 26% every week
- 10 percent of Protestants do NOT believe in God; 21% of Roman Catholics, 52% of Jews
- Eighty-two percent of Midwesterners and Southerners believe in God, compared with 75 percent in the East and West. Our beliefs get stronger as we age. Of those 25 to 29 years old, 71 percent believe in God. That number jumps to 80 percent for people over 40, and hits 83 percent for those 65 and over.
- 84 percent of women believe in God, compared with 73 percent of men.
- 91 percent of African Americans believe in God, compared with 81 percent of Hispanics and 78 percent of whites.
- 87 percent of Republicans believe in God, compared with 78 percent of Democrats and 75 percent of Independents.
- 82 percent of those with no college education believe in God, compared with 73 percent who went to college.

As evangelical Christians we not only believe that there is one God, but we consider that Jesus Christ was and is God Incarnate, who touched down on Planet Earth about two thousand years ago, lived a normal life and ended it in three years of deliberate preaching and ministry, dying a substitutionary death for all who would ever embrace His claims to be Messiah and Savior, rising from

¹ Wal-Mart Connect *News* January 24th, 2004

the dead and Who shall gloriously return to this planet and that a thing, which could happen any day! We do not factor in other religious systems because Jesus Christ is quite enough in every respect. We make no apologies for this belief system and we offer *exactly* the same benefits that we shall experience to anyone who will listen and believe IN those benefits.

Surrounding the life of Jesus Christ in Judea, two thousand years ago, there were lots of fascinating people whom we would love to know what they looked like, what kind of personalities they had and more deeply, exactly what Jesus thought of them. In some of them, we maybe see ourselves. You might see a little of yourself, and be able to relate to someone like Mary or Martha. You might see a little of yourself in a guy like Peter or in someone like Mary, Jesus' mother, or in a guy like Zacheus. One very real person was the man **John Mark**. His Gospel is the most widely translated book of the Bible and often has been the first book translated by Wycliffe Bible Translators into new languages.

Mark's gospel is an excellent introduction to the gospel story for people of *all* backgrounds and classes—it is truly a multicultural gospel, intended for an international audience of people in Rome. It does not have the Jewish flavor that Matthew has and it has been the most easily understood by any audience. Mark's mother was named Mary and she was a wealthy woman who owned a large house in Jerusalem. In Acts 12, we see that a large group of the early disciples of Jesus had gathered in Mary's house to pray for Peter's release from prison. Later in Acts we see Mark accompanying Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but Mark turns back at the city of Perga and returns to his mother's home—maybe afraid of robbers that awaited travelers in the Pamphylian mountains. This had not sat well with Paul who looked at him as a quitter and gives rise to a conflict between Paul and Barnabas. After this Mark drops out of sight (to us) for a time and then we hear of him as an associate of Peter, who spoke affectionately of this young man, calling him “my son Mark” (I Peter 5:13). Maybe because Peter himself had failed and denied Jesus and was restored, understood something that Paul did not—a person who has failed can still learn and grow *from* the failure and be very valuable in the kingdom. Maybe Mark was the young man recorded *only in Mark 14:50-52* who had been hanging around the fringes of Jesus' disciples and slipped capture barely. Stedman even suggests that Mark himself was the rich young ruler of Mark 10 (carried also by Matthew and Luke).² And in the end Mark comes to Rome and evidently was by Paul's side at the end of his life. Paul forgave him for his earlier fears and to Timothy refers to Mark as “useful to me.”

I love the scene in the 1980 video series *Peter and Paul*, admittedly speculative, when Peter himself finally arrives in Rome, and is met there at a fountain by Mark. Mark relates the recent execution of Paul to Peter and Peter is regretful for having arrived too late.

² Ray Stedman, *The Servant Who Rules*

We are interested in the people around Jesus. Today we consider another person, a very important person to Jesus Himself, a man who was very much in touch with Jesus. It is **John the Baptist**. Mark shows that Jesus' ministry is launched and announced by this man. He is an interesting man and I would love to know what he looked like... It is interesting that Mark tells us a little of the human side of this person: Mark 1:6 And John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey.

This description of John would have identified him as a typical "holy man" of the ancient East who lived in the desert. His clothing was woven camel's hair held in place with a leather belt (cf. 2 Kings 1:8; cf. Mal. 4:5,6). This is how *prophets* typically dressed (cf. Zech. 13:4). His diet consisted of dried locusts and honey of wild bees. This was clean food for the Jews (cf. Lev. 11:21,22). John was a lifelong Nazarite who lived an ascetic life (Luke 1:15). His personal appearance and behavior encouraged the Jews who came to him to abandon self-indulgent living in preparation for Messiah's appearing.

Well, Mark begins his gospel of Jesus Christ with a quotation from the Old Testament, which he plainly attaches to this fellow John the Baptist. Literally, verse 2 reads, **it stands written**. The early Christians believed that the Old Testament was God's authoritative word and you cannot understand who Jesus is without understanding the Old Testament picture of Messiah-to-come and all the scene-setting that was predicted by the Old Testament prophets to take place as Messiah finally arrives. John the Baptist is a key player in the Messiah drama. He is the herald of the Messiah. And what we have about the things he preached and said are the essence, from Mark of what John was teaching. People need to change their mind about their sins and turn to the Messiah. John was there, announcing that the long-awaited Messiah was come! This verse is the only time Mark quotes an Old Testament passage other than when he quoted Jesus referring to the Old Testament.

Mark 1:2; 3 (NASB)

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way; The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.'"

It is actually a blend of words taken from the Greek *Septuagint* version of three O.T. verses: Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3, and he leans on the Isaiah verse as the one which has his main point: The Son of God has arrived. I'm opening the door for him and you need to get ready to seek Him.

Under the Holy Spirit's guidance Mark gave those Old Testament texts a messianic interpretation by altering "the way before Me" (Mal. 3:1) to **Your way**, and "the paths of our God" (Isa. 40:3, LXX) to **paths for Him**. Thus the speaker, **I**, was God who **will send His messenger** (John) **ahead of You** (Jesus) **who will prepare Your** (Jesus') **way**. John was **a voice** urging the nation of Israel to **prepare the way for the Lord** (Jesus) and to

³ Tom Constable, *Dr. Constable's Notes on Mark*, 2002, www.soniclight.com
LXX Septuagint

make straight “paths for Him” (Jesus). The meaning of these metaphors is given in John’s ministry (Mark 1:4-5).⁴

The whole Christian era was ushered in by this strange holy man. And he seems to have realized it. Later, Luke realized it too because he is the one who gives us the elaborate dating of John’s birth. He was God’s messenger and Jesus’ forerunner. He “made the Lord’s paths straight” and he did it verbally, in his preaching. It was a stern, uncompromising call to people to prepare themselves for the coming of Messiah. He was the last Old Testament prophet (Luke 7:24-28; 16:16.)

I find it interesting to notice all the things you *might have thought* should accompany the Arrival of Messiah: great fanfare, a central location, angels driving limo’s, a military escort that would intimidate and impress the Romans! None of that sort of thing happened, in fact, the character of the coming of Messiah was quite te opposite.

In verse 4 we read ***John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*** In the area around the Jordan valley it is indeed wilderness. It is desert in fact and a fit place to make the verbal message the main act! John’s baptism was not Christian baptism nor did it have any association with the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was a thing that was done in later Judaism sometimes, an initiatory and purificatory rite, an outward sign and symbol of changing hearts and purpose.⁵ John demanded a changed life as proof of a changed heart.

Mark gives us the main things we need to know about what John was doing. He proclaimed three things.

- 1) People have a need to repent of their sins. They need to change their minds about how they’re living. It’s an interesting grammatical construction, ***preaching a baptism.*** How do you preach a physical act? You preach words, generally. But Mark meant that John was talking about people’s needs to mark a date on the calendar, and identify with a spiritual reality by being baptized in water. Our baptisms today have, or should have, a hint of this in them too. We baptize in water as a personal identification and relating to what Jesus did on the cross and coming out of the tomb. But also our baptism should echo a willingness to live a changed life and the DESIRE to do that. We change our mind in a great way when we come to Christ. And baptism should take place soon thereafter, still aglow with the passion and even the emotion of conversion to the way of Jesus Christ.
- 2) The Messiah was right on the doorstep. The promises of God ALWAYS come to pass. As holy a man as John would have looked like, in all his asceticism and self-discipline he was not even worthy to untie Jesus’ sandals! John was a humble man and more than willing,

⁴ Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

⁵ Alan Cole, Tyndale *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*

even excited, I believe, to see the day arrive that he must have consciously awaited all his life. Messiah was here!

- 3) And, Jesus was going to do an incredible thing. He was going to take baptism up 65 notches! He was going to immerse and cleanse people with the very Spirit of God. More about this in weeks to come of course, but it is the prediction of the last Old Testament prophet that the Greatest Prophet, also the Great High Priest and the very King of Kings, would usher in a time of the Holy Spirit. We call this the Church Age which began on the Day of Pentecost. It is an incredible event to look back on, one that we are still benefiting from.

I hope you are looking forward to studying about Jesus. I would encourage you to pick up a commentary on Mark this month and begin studying this Gospel with me. We can have some excellent fun by really immersing ourselves in the Gospel record. And as I said last week, I encourage you to pick a verse in Mark 1 to memorize, and to pray that the Lord would really use the words of this great Gospel to affect our church. May God's richest blessings be yours as we explore the very reason for our being here!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 4)

Scripture: Mark 1:12,13

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 8th, 2004

Alone, in the Neutral Zone

Mark 1:12,13 (NASB)

¹² And immediately the Spirit *impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

Introduction It was forty years ago tomorrow, that the Beatles landed at JFK Airport in New York City for the first time. Their music, personalities and care-free attitude swept the country and I believe, significantly influenced America in ways we still feel today. In fact I can think of few groups of four people and NO other music groups that have had the influence on an entire culture that they had. And when you think about it, they were four relatively simple guys from an out-of-the-way part of England (Liverpool) who were just musicians. They were not inventors or great soldiers or civil rights leaders or scholars. But for reasons that are still being studied and talked about, their impact was far out of proportion to the real importance of who they were.

Another strange influence and attraction--I wonder what it is about science fiction that is so compelling for some of us? Even as Christians, some of us still seem to find interest in science fiction heroes, great star-battles and incredible treks to the galaxies. But when all is said and done, it is only loosely science and it is heavily, usually totally *fiction*. Science fiction is the fantasy of some creative and imaginative authors, film makers and screenwriters. But it is still fiction. Something in our society, in this modern life in which we live, must be pretty boring.

In the two verses before us today we have an incredible event—words written by Mark which I believe accurately record something that really happened--we have one man who on the threshold of changing the whole world endures an encounter with another being, *not* a man and not even an angel; and if that being can win the encounter, the consequences would have been unimaginable. In these two short verses we have five different kinds of beings, none of whom are only human:

1. We have some undesignated **wild beasts**,
2. A totally evil villain who isn't human at all,

3. Ancient creatures not limited to physics at all, called **angels**,
4. The third person of the one true God, known as the Holy Spirit, and
5. The *theanthropos*, the God-man, the Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

The event we are reading about is an incredible moment in history—indeed, if not for the fact that Mark tells us the event was **forty** days, one might almost have imagined that for this event, time stopped! It is to the end of time, as D-Day was to V-J Day. Mark tells us that the Spirit led Jesus to go out into the wilderness—to be alone, in what I’m calling today “the Neutral Zone.” The exact location of Jesus’ encounter with Satan is unknown. It most likely would have been the same wilderness where John lived and ministered, the desolate region farther south between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, or the arid Arabian desert across the Jordan.¹ As for the **wild beasts**, they are undesignated as the what kind of beasts in particular. It isn’t hard to imagine though, lions or bears or jackals or hyaenas or wolves or some other fierce animal. Mark is the only one of the Gospel writers who felt led to include that detail and I think its purpose is to highlight the “Son’s invasion of enemy-occupied territory”² and they are contrasted for Mark with the **angels ministering to Him**. I imagine Jesus and some angels sitting around a little fire. The orcs and trolls and goblins of Satan’s domain howling at them from the darkness. And they feeling no fear or anxiety whatsoever because neither Jesus nor however many angels are with Him, had no fallen nature. Wild beasts just out of stone’s throw and maybe worse as Satan’s lieutenants howl and growl and threaten and mock, you and I would cringe and crawl under some rock and shake. But Jesus is there for a reason. He fears no animal and no archangel.

The situation was unique. The Son of God, now also the Son of Man, facing off with the Evil One. The Creator of Planet Earth (indeed of all planets and all matter) matched up against the prince of the power of the air, Lucifer, the former . It is a cataclysmic debate. Imagine, facing off with Satan in all his intelligence and power and cleverness but feeling no fear whatsoever--Jesus’ temptation was not an internal emotional or psychological struggle, but an external attack by a personal being.³ One can only imagine that Satan had awaited this chance for a long time. In the Old Testament there are two fascinating glimpses of Satan:

Isaiah 14:12-14

¹² “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! ¹³ “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I

¹ MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Nashville: Word Pub., 1997.

² *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, 1995 by Baker Book House Company

³ MacArthur, John Jr. *Ibid.*

will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. ¹⁴ 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

Ezekiel 28:13-15

¹³ "You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz, and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx, and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. ¹⁴ "You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you *there*. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. ¹⁵ "You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created, Until unrighteousness was found in you.

So the tempter takes aim at Jesus. Matthew and Luke record the fuller transcripts of the occasion (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). He was out there for forty days and nights, Mark tells us. The number **forty** was significant on at least three previous major occasions in the history of God's people, each a period of testing preceding a salvation assault against hostile forces (Noah, Gen. 7:17; 8:6; Moses, Exodus 24:18; Elijah, 1 Kings 19:8). Jesus always fit His own experience as closely as possible with history's precedents. But the main thing to see in this event is the actual temptations Jesus endured. Mark doesn't detail them but Matthew and Luke give three. Each seemed delicious, I am sure. One involved simple food and the power the Son of God possessed to merely speak and have matter change its form. Second involved safety and once again His certain power to control physics and angels as well. (By the way, it seems likely that Satan knew there were angels around, invisible to men probably but visible to Satan. He taunts Jesus about using the angels for His own safety. Third, He is absurdly tempted with immediate coronation and sovereignty over all humankind (Luke adds ***in a moment of time***.) Notice that to each of these seemingly compelling temptations Jesus replies with the Scripture. That is not accidental. There is power in the written Word. Satan basically has no answer to the Word when we use it appropriately. They are not magic words—spells. Jesus discerned the correct meaning in every verse He ever quoted and here He invokes the truths behind and within the Scripture to answer the temptation. We can do the same, if we are willing.

There are only three specific temptations that the Gospel writers were inspired to record. That does not mean that in those six weeks there were not more, too. I can imagine all kinds of other things Jesus endured but these three are all we really need to know about because these three categorically cover people's greatest core-desires, perhaps.

I would like you to consider though, another passage of New Testament scripture that puts more light on the whole event...

Hebrews 2:14-3:1 (NASB)

¹⁴ Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵ and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. ¹⁶ For assuredly He does not

give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. ¹ THEREFORE, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession...

Jesus' temptations did not end with Mark 1:14. There would be many more times when He was tempted and tested. The trial, scourging and cross lay before Him. The temptation to give up on many of the people to whom He ministered would repeat itself I am sure often. But the writer to the Hebrews summarizes that ***He had to made like His brethren in all things*** (vs. 17) and that ***since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted*** (vs. 18). As such, He became ***the apostle and High Priest of our confession***. You can I can always go to Him for help. There isn't any problem He doesn't understand. There isn't any hunger or craving He cannot feel. If you desire holiness and to really DO the will of God and to really stay in the path of righteousness, there isn't any blockage that might interfere that He hasn't faced.

To close today let's consider six lessons to ponder:

Temptation was in the plan of God for Jesus. We should not be surprised that He allows it in our lives too, for a purpose. By testing, we grow. And with experience with victories and seeing the Lord help us faithfully, as He promises to do, we grow in our confidence in Him and in His grace, our ability to withstand temptations.

Sometimes the Spirit may take us places that are not altogether easy. The Christian life can be hard some times. But nowhere in the New Testament was it ever promised to always be easy. Sometimes it is work and sometimes, when we are severely tempted, it is the greatest challenge we can know to find victory.

Just because there are no people around, doesn't mean "no one" is around. Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Just be aware, that the materialist lie that people and wild beasts is all there is in this world, is a lie meant to blind us and exalt ourselves.

Anything you can be tempted with, Jesus has already been tempted with, and has felt the full fury of that temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the

temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. This is a great promise and one which every Christian should memorize and learn and take to heart early in their walk of faith. We tend to think that we are all so unique and independent. We often think that our temptation has never been experienced before or never in the intensity that we feel. They have. All of them. More importantly, God is faithful and ALWAYS provides a way of escape. You can always walk away. You can always win over it. That is the hallmark of a true Christian and we might say, a "birth-right" of being a child of God.

He cares about your situation, and is ALWAYS approachable.

Hebrews 2:18; 4:15

¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.... For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. What truth about Jesus is more precious? His power alone, would be one thing. But His power coupled with His compassion and His ever-availability? He is a magnificent Savior. He is always there and He always cares!

He endured alone, so that you and I never need to be alone.

The temptation of Jesus had no other human beings around. I am sure that in His humanness He became depressed from loneliness. Remember, "Son of Man" was His favorite title and for almost six weeks He fellowshiped with no other person. The angels were some comfort no doubt, but He lacked human companionship and in a time of great trial. Part of His experience with aloneness, is so you and I never have to feel alone. He is always right here. He will never leave or go away. He will never forget you, if you are His.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 5)

Scripture: Mark 1:14-20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: April 22, 2004

It's Time to Go Fishing

Mark 1:14-20 (NASB)

¹⁴ And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." ¹⁶ And as He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ And they immediately left the nets and followed Him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

Introduction Time travel stories have always fascinated me. Michael Crichton's book and the recent film *Timeline* is one story I love. A bunch of scientists go back to Castelgard, France, year A.D. 1357. They are fascinated with what they find—a fully active castle and monastery, the ruins of which they had just been digging in, present time. Just like that, imagine being back in Galilee two thousand years ago, with Jesus, right at the beginning of His ministry. He was baptized in the Jordan River, and starts moving from one group of people to another, from town to town. At first He is just by Himself. Sometimes He talks to individual people, sometimes crowds. It is hot and there's no electricity at all. Beverage choice is very limited. When it gets dark at night the darkness is only broken by lamplight or torch or cooking fire. There is no ambient traffic noise and no radio, television, internet or .mp3 players. There's wind, camel grunts maybe, water noises perhaps--village noises like you might hear here today in a very rural or third world community. Hard to imagine, isn't it? The times were quieter. They were, in a sense, purer and simpler. Into those times, walked God's Son. He came at the right time in history and in the right place, in order to carry out God's loving plan for mankind. I love to imagine that time.

It is an amazing and incredible thing that God actually calls out to people to come to Him. It is a thing which many today do not believe, even IF they believe there is only one God. That He would initiate communication, invite people to seek Him out, is a wonderful truth. But it isn't a new idea. In the Old Testament times there were many examples of a calling-God. He actually *cares* about people.

When we last left off in this Gospel, Jesus had just been baptized by John the Baptist—you will remember, one of those really cool occasions where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all evident. Now Mark skips over Jesus' Judean (southern) ministry (which John records in John 2:13-4:4) and goes right to when Jesus starts ministering in Galilee up in the north, which was the most populous area of ancient Palestine.

John the Baptist was incarcerated for rebuking Herod Antipas over his incestuous marriage to his niece, Herodias. He is passing from the scene in light of the One for Whom he played the role of forerunner. He does not have a happy ending. Except that somehow he knew he was in the center of God's will. Please notice (and I say this to myself as much as to you), finding yourself blessed with comfort and ease are not necessarily the ultimate expressions of being in God's will. John ends his life in prison, and dies quite capriciously and unjustly, by beheading. I don't think he prayed the "Prayer of Jabez" or worried about Promise-keeping or spent 40 days recovering his sense of purpose. He died with no more fanfare than Jesus' commendation.

It is at this point when Jesus went up to Galilee and starts talking to people. Notice what Mark says Jesus said: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Two statements and two commands:

The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. In Galatians 4:4 (NASB), Paul wrote, ***But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law...***

In God's timetable, when the exact religious, cultural, and political conditions demanded by His perfect plan were in place, Jesus came into the world. **God sent forth His Son.** As a father set the time for the ceremony of his son becoming of age and being released from the guardians, stewards, and tutors, so God sent His Son at the precise moment to bring all who believe out from under bondage to the law—a truth Jesus repeatedly affirmed (John 5:30, 36, 37; 6:39, 44, 57; 8:16, 18, 42; 12:49; 17:21, 25; 20:21). That the Father sent Jesus into the world teaches His pre-existence as the eternal second member of the Trinity.¹ The time in God's overall plan had dawned for the Son to arrive. He was the Son of God and He was also Israel's long-awaited Messiah and King. This wasn't something the Jews were unfamiliar with. Involved in the term **Kingdom** is the sovereign authority of a ruler, the activity of ruling, and the realm of rule including its benefits. Thus "the kingdom of God" is a dynamic (not static) concept that refers to *God's* sovereign activity or ruling over His Creation.

¹MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville: Word Pub., c1997.

This concept was familiar to the Jews of Jesus' day. In light of Old Testament prophecy (cf. 2 Sam. 7:8-17; Isa. 11:1-9; 24:23; Jer. 23:4-6; Micah 4:6-7; Zech. 9:9-10; 14:9) they were expecting a future messianic (Davidic) kingdom to be established on earth (cf. Matt. 20:21; Mark 10:37; 11:10; 12:35-37; 15:43; Luke 1:31-33; 2:25, 38; Acts 1:6). So Jesus did not have to arouse interest in His message. His hearers naturally understood His reference to the kingdom of God to be the long-awaited messianic kingdom predicted in the Old Testament.²

A simple but very practical lesson to learn here is that God HAS a timetable for things. Some God-fearing Jew who lived in the first century B.C. might have wondered, "Does God know what He is doing? We've been waiting for Messiah for an awful long time!" John the Baptist DID wonder that from his prison cell. Worse, Jews who lived during the time of the Babylonians' siege and destruction of Jerusalem and who perhaps waited to see Solomon's Temple destroyed, could easily have wondered, "Does God see?" "Did He miss the time when He should have sent Messiah?" But He does have a timetable and a sovereign regency over all things. He sent Jesus to Judea in the first century. He could have sent Him to China in the sixth century or to South Africa in the sixteenth century. Those plans might be interesting to us, but they would not get the job done, integrated with all time. When Jesus came, where He came and all that He did demonstrated His right to be called King. His kingdom was beginning in a new way then. And as important a theme as it is in the New Testament, I believe we have not seen all that we shall see of this kingdom, only the beginning of it.

The lesson for us is that there is no reason to disbelieve that He has a plan for our lives too. In fact, if you want purpose in life, I think it is our overall quest and task and duty to FIND His plan for our lives. And I think He will reveal it, a piece at a time, as we seek it. Sometimes we find ourselves in a time of transition—we're unclear how He is leading. Those are times to cling to the belief that He is not random about our lives—He never says, "whatever" to us. He has a plan, a program, with detailed mile markers along the road.

Then Jesus said to people, "Repent and believe the gospel." In a sense they are a two-part command. To believe in the gospel, the good news that Christ has come, IS to repent. To repent means a change of direction or a change of mind. A person does that when they really turn to Christ. I am admittedly skeptical of the person who says, "Well I believe in the cross, but I'm not interested in the kingdom." I don't think that person has repented, has believed in the gospel or even sees what's so GOOD about the good news, other than they might feel about a really good deal at Wal-Mart. No—when the grace of God has really

²Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

moved into a person's heart, they WANT a new life and a new direction. They hunger for the kingdom principles that they have just started learning about.

During my first summer as a Christian, I could not get enough Bible study. I was fascinated by the kingdom principles of the Sermon on the Mount, the Upper Room discourse in John 13 and the things Jesus said to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. I was hungry, and had a complete change of direction in my mind. It wasn't because I was hungry for friends for I had plenty. It wasn't because I was at some emotional crisis for I was pretty carefree. It wasn't because the good news was completely new to me and I had no idea at all who Jesus was, for I grew up in a church and knew adequately about Jesus. But I felt that summer like I had met Jesus HIMSELF for the first time and there was no hanging on to the old life when He invites you to follow Him. That's what HAPPENS when a person embraces the gospel for themselves.

Then we have the first examples of people who DID all of this. In verse 16 Jesus begins to create a team of disciples. Actually, one wonders if He thought of Simon, Andrew, James and John as a team? Maybe they were random encounters that just flung random guys together? But in fact, Jesus looks to be much more deliberate than that. He first invites two pairs of fishermen brothers to follow Him. It involves a dropping of one way of life and the embarking on a new way of life.

There is an interesting promise involved: "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." He didn't say, "Follow me and I'll make you soldiers." Or, "Follow me and I'll turn you into nice guys and big-time do-gooders." And it is not some smart-alecky witticism to show He can be clever. He means it. The hard work of catching fish—the most familiar thing in the world to these four men--will become the hard work of catching men. Fishing is a skill (one which I have never mastered, I might add) that was hard livelihood and no mere sport for Simon, Andrew, James and John. Man-fishing is also a skill and one which one can fail at just as easily as fish-fishing despite every sincere intention to land a few.

The really interesting thing is that all four of these men—called in two parts—IMMEDIATELY dropped their nets and followed Him. I love the folly of how liberal scholars here will suggest things like a) they must have been hungry for insurrection, b) James and John probably had a brewing family-conflict going and were *looking* for a way to escape Zebedee's tyranny, or c) it was *ethnic* pride which Jesus appealed to—an ethnic, Galilean club that Jesus was creating. All of that escapes the central fact that the Son of God, the Davidic King was standing there looking them in the eyes and saying, "Follow Me..."

Following Him is what discipleship is all about. We mimic it even today when we take on younger Christians in a personal relationship and begin to build the faith into them. We talk about kingdom-principles and we try to

demonstrate the faith to them. We aren't making little replicas of ourselves. We are trying to build up Christ in each other. Christianity is very relational! Jesus worked with a number of people very closely. He built a relationship with them. We are doing that too and that is a hallmark of evangelicalism.

For our church, I feel it is time to go fishing. I do not have all the answers about where we will put people or their cars (or SUVs). I do not have all the answers to how to manage and craft the education of their children. But I am very clear that a time of opportunity is before us. We have never had more resources than we have right now. Our Christianity is not just about holing up inside a castle and making sure our kids see no R-rated movies. We are about man-fishing. There are some in this body who know how to do it. It is the sign of a healthy church. It is time to go fishing! Will you make this a part of your daily prayer life? "Lord, who can I work with? Who can I disciple? With whom do you want me to share the principles of the Kingdom?"

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 6)
Scripture: Mark 1:21-28
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: April 22, 2004

Amazing Authoritative & Awesome @ Capernaum

Mark 1:21-29 (NASB)

²¹ And they *went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *began* to teach. ²² And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³ And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, ²⁴ saying, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" ²⁵ And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" ²⁶ And throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him. ²⁷ And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." ²⁸ And immediately the news about Him went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.

Introduction When Jesus shows up, it is never boring! Take for example when He goes into the Capernaum synagogue and stands up to teach... Mark tells us they were **amazed at His teaching**. Then, real random like, this dude **with an unclean spirit** jumps up and immediately gets expunged of the spirit by Jesus. He becomes the Capernaum Synagogue Newsletter headline. The news spreads fast... Pretty soon He is getting talked about everywhere in the region.

Two thousand years later, it is still about Jesus. Who He is, what He does and what He says will happen at the end of the age. And to people, when they die. To me this would be like living at 4 am on June 6th, 1944 on a little fishing boat in the English Channel. What would you be thinking about? The prospects of catching some fish? The music on the radio station out of Paris? Of course not. You would be overwhelmed with the 5,000 ships streaming past you heading to the Normandy beaches and the thousands of aircraft flying overhead. Everything else would shrink down to TINY in light of the big event. That's the way I feel about this Sabbath day when Jesus came into the Capernaum synagogue.

Now notice that Jesus DID go into the synagogue on the Sabbath. I think that's interesting. Why did He do that? Tradition only? A strategic moment only? I think He went in first of all because it was the right thing to do on the Sabbath. (See Matthew 12:9; 13:54; Mark 3:1; 6:2; Luke 4:16; 6:6) He went where He was supposed to be. In the synagogue they often invited people to

stand and read or teach. It wasn't without discipline but they were interested in what people might teach. Jesus was there at the time the place was open. And I am sure He wanted to be there and that he was in one synagogue or another every Sabbath. It was what believers did. There, they would hear the word of God. There, they would be with kindred spirits. There they would learn about how to live and there they would pray together.

Mark tells us that Jesus taught often but he doesn't tell us much about the things Jesus *said*. Matthew, Luke and John would record long discourses that Jesus gave but Mark focuses on the ACTION of Jesus' life. What did He DO? What kinds of things happened around Him? Mark was action-focused. And I think it is a great testimony and interesting feature of how the four Gospels create such an integrated picture of Jesus, that He DID great things. He wasn't just "talk." He didn't simply sit, and dispense wisdom. He traveled about, dealt with all kinds of people, and solved many of their problems—usually of significant magnitude (we don't read of one bad back healed or one monthly budget balanced or one safe vacation trip completed). He was going from place to place intriguing people first, teaching them about Who He was—their future king—and authenticating that claim with many signs and miraculous benefits. Along the way, He met opposition too of different kinds. Disbelief, misunderstanding, carnality and here—a demon.

Now in verse 22 Mark tells us that Jesus was a public speaker and teacher unlike any other. He did not simply say things like, "Well MacArthur says this," and "Dobson says that." He did not fit Himself into the slate of intellects who might take their various stabs at particular interpretations of the law. He said amazing things and Mark used a strong Greek word ways running in the background but didn't just talk ABOUT theology just to talk about it or to impress people. He said radical things as we read from John's account:

John 6:41-58 (NASB)

⁴¹ The Jews therefore were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." ⁴² And they were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" ⁴³ Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. ⁴⁶ "Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ "I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh." ⁵² The Jews therefore *began* to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?" ⁵³ Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the

last day. ⁵⁵“For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. ⁵⁸“This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who eats this bread shall live forever.” ⁵⁹ These things He said in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

This set Him apart from the scribes and the little local scholars because He did not live the life of a scholar. He was a journeyman and spoke with the insight of a realist. I am also confident that He didn't use vocabulary people would not have understood although there were times when they plainly didn't *get* what He was talking about and that He used images and analogies beyond what they could simply comprehend—as with His talk about eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

The encounter with the **unclean spirit** or we would assume, “demon” is very interesting. There are people today—we know some—who deny the existence of such beings. They are too scary to believe in. Naturalistic people or rationalists, think that because we cannot see them they do not exist. But the spirit world is right there. In some ways I think, it is “more real” than our own world. Spirit beings which evidently can be somehow inside of people, are right around too. And when the Son of God entered the place where this unclean spirit was hanging out, it immediately recognizes Jesus and compels the man's voice box to speak for him. It says, ““What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” It calls itself “WE,” implying that *it* might be several. Or, it may mean that it senses that Jesus has arrived in the realm of the demons and speaking as a representative. But there is no small talk and no formal greeting. It just blurts out a plain assignment to Jesus of the title **Holy One of Israel**. An unbelieving Jew today would simply have to say, “This is false. It did not happen.” Because if it DID happen as Mark records, then the question “Who is Jesus?” is immediately settled. There is no uncertainty and no debate in the spirit world as to Who Jesus is. And immediately this spirit assumes or fears that Jesus has shown up to destroy it. That of course, is the ultimate destiny of all demons and evil spirits. They will be destroyed by the Son of God at the right and appointed moment. There will be no escaping it. This spirit knew that—still does!

But Jesus tells it to be quiet—He will not debate with it and not let it consume the afternoon. Two simple commands: **Be quiet** and **Come out of him**. The spirit has no choice but it goes kicking and screaming, literally.

If you were there, you would be amazed. Jesus walks in, teaches in an incredibly authoritative way and immediately any demons present give loud protest and screech in fear. That's the Savior we sing to and about every Sunday. He is amazing! If we were there we would be amazed too. Simon and Andrew and James and John—just normal fishermen a few days before have

begun their indoctrination into the School of Discipleship with the King, who just walks into places and invisible spirits knock each other over hitting the door! Imagine the boys looking at each other! Whoa! We have signed on with someone incredible! Who IS He?

In verse 28 Mark tells us that the news went out from that little building all over the place? How long did it take? We don't know but we do not think long. People started talking about a teacher who commands unclean spirits and they do what he says.

Now how does this press on us today? Should we go out looking for demons to tangle with? Should we open up a new small group for deliverance ministries and start to emphasize spiritual combat? Should we do, as one spiritual leader locally did not too many years back, and put on camouflage clothing and invent little ceremonies and rituals to act out exorcisms? I do not think we should do any of this. I think when we are confronted with demon possession or oppression we should set to prayer—right on the spot if need be. We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, not set to battle with His enemies. We do not ignore demonology at all. Indeed because of the Scriptures we know a fair amount about demonology and angelology. But I know nowhere in the New Testament where Christians are mandated the task of in a proactive way or a taking- the-initiative way of focusing on demons. They are there and if we encounter them we rebuke them in the name and power of Jesus Christ, trusting Him to be present and to do the work of banishment. But our focus is to be on the good news and on the work of building people up.

Jesus, in His first days, was already amazing, strikingly authoritative and awesome. There is a time we can and should use the word “awesome,” when we are talking about Jesus Christ. He is incredibly fascinating and even perplexing sometimes. He speaks absolute truth, all the time. And He is amazing in His love and power and sovereignty and control. We love our Savior and we seek to be consumed by Him.

Summary Points:

1. Routinely in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day
2. Complete confidence in the truthfulness of what Jesus says
3. Complete amazement for His power over all things and beings
4. Love for His ridding this man of an unclean spirit

I hear the Savior say, Thy strength indeed is small. Child of weakness watch and pray, find in Me thine all in all. Jesus

paid it all, all to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow...

Matthew 12:9 (NASB)

⁹ And departing from there, He went into their synagogue.

Matthew 13:54 (NASB)

⁵⁴ And coming to His home town He *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, "Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom, and *these* miraculous powers?"

Mark 3:1 (NASB)

¹ AND He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand.

Mark 6:2 (NASB)

² And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"

Luke 4:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

Luke 6:6 (NASB)

⁶ And it came about on another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 7)

Scripture: Mark 1:29-34

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 9th, 2004

A Savior Who Powerfully Heals

Mark 1:29-34 (NASB)

²⁹ And immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they *spoke to Him about her. ³¹ And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. ³² And when evening had come, after the sun had set, they *began* bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. ³³ And the whole city had gathered at the door. ³⁴ And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

Introduction For some reason, I have always thought that “coolness” is an important thing—I am not sure why. Sometimes I'm not even sure if I could *define* the term. But if one could say that Jesus was “cool” one would certainly very quickly point to, as evidence “exhibit A,” the healings that He did and the demon-dealings that He had. Last week we considered the first demon-dealing of the Gospel of Mark. Basically, Jesus came, saw and conquered; end of story. And I LOVE this story. It's something I just can't seem to get enough of these days. I want to be there.

When we read a passage like this one from the life of Jesus we probably want to blast into an immediate application of what Jesus did then, for today. We want to see healings—mothers-in-law getting up from their sick beds and waiting on us (just kidding), all kinds of illnesses completely and immediately healed, and any foul spirits cast out and removed from our presence or worse, from our bodies or the bodies of loved ones. I want to see these things too. Those kinds of events would be an immediate boost to our spirits, we suppose and we would fancy ourselves serious New Testament Christians. And sometimes I do admit that I think evangelical Christianity has become too prefabricated, too programmed, and too predictable. We like our comfortable form of Christianity which doesn't crowd out too much of the rest of our lives and doesn't take us into areas that are risky. We would like to READ about the things Jesus did, believe them and leave them at that. It's like the church that was built over top of the ruin of what might have actually been Peter's house... A church, pleasant to look at, comfortable to be in, tame... That represents the Christianity many people are more “all set” with... Than a kind of Jesus-following that takes us to places unpredictable or unplanned. The whole charismatic movement represents an attempt to make Christianity much more

“experimental” and more spontaneous and more supernatural. It seeks to duplicate the healings and exorcisms of demons that we read about in the Gospel of Mark.

But having digressed into those observations, let’s look at what happened. Why? Because it happened, and because Mark wrote it down—probably from Peter’s personally reporting it to him and because it is important to know the life of Christ. Now if we think that the only point of the record that Mark gave is to give a social activism template for how His disciples were to spread Christianity, we miss the point. There is something going on in Mark 1 far more important than any one or two or twenty persons’ health improvement. Mark writes this to show Jesus doing miracles to identify Himself as God’s Servant and to authenticate His message.¹ Of course Jesus did what He did out of compassion and love. Of course He cared about the miserable people He encountered. He is above and beyond time, but IN that time He observed many suffering people. They had no antibiotics and few physicians even. They had no health care system. If someone got the flu, they often died. If someone’s immune system was weak and they went down with an infection, what recourse did they have? What resources? Jesus knew this so well and of course He ministered out of His divine power FOR people’s benefits. But that was not the end in itself. His deeper purpose was to lay the roadbed for His claim to BE Israel’s chosen one, and ours. All of His good works and signs and miracles led to the cross and the empty tomb. People had no New Testament. They only had the credentials that Jesus (and later the apostles) could generate on the spot. You and I are immensely blessed to HAVE the New Testament. We are rich with a powerful tool and weapon and dispensary of power in the Bible that we have and love.

Now in this story I want you to appreciate that each Gospel writer had a slightly different perspective as he wrote; thus, the comparable stories in the Gospels often highlight different details.

- In Matthew Jesus touches the woman’s hand.
- In Mark He helps her up.
- In Luke, He spoke to the fever and it left her.

The accounts do not conflict. Each writer chose to emphasize different details of the story in order to emphasize a certain characteristic of Jesus.² (By the way, only Mark mentions that James and John were invited in too.) Jesus and the boys go into “**the house of Simon and Andrew.**” It was right down the path from the synagogue. And Peter’s mother-in-law was **lying sick with a fever.** Do you notice that Peter HAD a mother-in-law? Why? Because he had a wife. On in I Cor. 9:5³ is any other mention of the wife of Simon Peter or anyone else’s possible spouses. Now in order for this to NOT mean that he had a wife, you have to impose some OTHER meaning on the text that Mark wrote. You have to manipulate this into some *hidden*

¹Tom Constable. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mk 1:32). Galaxie Software.

² *Life Application Bible Insights*, PDA version.

³ Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

meaning. Generally, I am not smart enough for that and so I tend to take the text at face value. His wife's mother was ill.

Notice that the healing was instantaneous. That is important when we watch supposed healings today. I would not begrudge anyone a healing from God. Would you? But I DO begrudge people the insult and the humiliation and the confusion of injecting them with a false hope for healing when it is NOT real. This healing was completely real, marvelously real, wonderfully real and completely total! She gets up and begins to serve them. I love how the miracle almost seems understated. There isn't a big service, lots of groovy, emotion-stoking music. They don't take an offering. There are no future healings announced or scheduled. The thing was completely spontaneous. And then they just move on to the next thing coming... I think Simon and wife and Mom and Andrew and Jimmy and Johnny then recline for supper... And then well, the news had spread so dramatically you know-- that in a few hours (you weren't supposed to heal on the Sabbath day itself) all kinds of people knocked at the door and wanted and NEEDED help.

A few of you have experienced divine healing. I am sure you praise God for that experience. We believe with certainty that God still heals. But it is HE who heals, when and whom He decrees shall be healed. When He does, it is what is best. He knows the reason why He chooses to sovereignly intervene. Other times, He chooses to withhold an immediate and miraculous healing. The testimonies of healings are perhaps more dramatic and exciting—they hold hope for us of relief from pain, incapacity and immobility and even longer life. But testimonies of having to wait on the Lord, and deal with the illness, are sometimes more deeply powerful. They engender more faith. It takes faith in the goodness and providence of God to withstand an illness or a disability. Sure, we would all like to be miraculously alleviated of hurt and pain. And when we are, we should give joyful and verbal credit to the Lord! But when we must wait, that involves a growth kind of faith. The key to understanding healing is to understand that God is ultimately sovereign and in His plan, sometimes gives healing and sometimes gives another plan. Joni Eareckson Tada is perhaps the best example of the latter plan that I can think of. When she was young she went to a major Kathryn Kuhlman crusade in Washington. As she told us at Congress a few years ago, she didn't even make it to the platform before the evening. She was so disappointed. But her experience with waiting on God and learning many deep lessons of faith has paved the way for a ministry to millions she perhaps would not have had otherwise.

People came from all over, Mark tells us, to be healed or rid of demons. Mark says, graphically, ***And the whole city had gathered at the door*** (vs. 33). This is a word picture or figure of speech called *hyperbole*. Mark doesn't mean literally every person whose address was "Capernaum, Galilee" was necessarily there. Any more than in 1:5 he meant every single person in Judea was going out to John the Baptist to be baptized by him. It is a figure of speech used to indicate that a whole bunch of people, it LOOKED like everyone in town—was gathered at the door. It was big news! It seems like a minor point, but this is the kind of thing liberal scholars

sometimes leap upon and say, “See? The Bible has errant exaggerations and inconsistencies in it!” We use *hyperbole* today to emphasize or dramatize something we saw. “The whole crowd was going nuts when Nomar hit that homerun!” “It snowed for a year!” Evidently, Mark surely got his information from someone who was there, for this *hyperbole* to be used. The door was crowded as people wanted access to Jesus.

Then we read in verse 34, ***And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.*** There was a distinction between illness and the demonization that some were experiencing. They are not the same thing. Sometimes people believe that because they are sick, they are under Satanic attack. It is not necessarily true although illness CAN be brought on by a demon. It is important for you to see that a biblical world-view DOES have demons in it. They are still real. They didn’t exist “back then” and now do not. In other words, THEY STILL EXIST. That is precisely the kind of lie that the devil (and his friends) would like us to believe. But our focus is on Jesus.

What I like here is the use of the word *many*. He healed many and he cast out many demons. Every one was wonderful. Every person received a great blessing from the Messiah. The whole town, you could say, was corporately improved by one evening’s work! What a great thing it was. I read few commentaries who picked up on this. There were not SOME whom He did NOT heal. He looked at each one, saw their predicament or sickness and healed them. Some no doubt had eye ailments. He healed them and they saw. Some maybe had broken or paralyzed limbs. He healed them and they walked or grasped perfectly. Some had internal diseases. No more. And some—and here I think it is interesting to wonder how this worked—some had demons. Did they come or were they brought. However, there seems to be no prerequisites for cleansing. They foul ghosts are banished! And the people—multiple ones—are clean and freed in their spirits. I’m not sure any of us can imagine the joy of that. For all we might say about exorcism I have yet to meet someone whom I know has been personally exorcised. I can only imagine what it would mean to the human spirit to be lightened up by the removal of a dark and smelly and malevolent spirit. And Jesus did it. For all who came to Him.

Finally, it’s significant that ***He was not permitting the demons to speak because they knew who He was.*** Why not? A couple of reasons, I think. He wanted no testimony from the demonic realm to fuel charges that He was in league with Satan, as MacArthur suggests.⁴ Although their theology must be completely correct, He does not want THEIR testimony to be His authentication—He wanted the focus on the good He was doing for people to make them put a connection between Him and Messianic identity. Then, by commanding the demons to stay quiet He proved beyond a shadow of a doubt His power over them. Third, He wanted to reveal His identity as Messiah accord to *His own* timetable, not according to Satan’s

⁴ The MacArthur Study Bible

timetable, who would have wanted people to have a mind of mutated discipleship with Jesus FOR WHAT THEY COULD GET FROM HIM, not because He was the Son of God who could truly free them from sin's guilt and power.⁵

Whatever His plan for us, He is a great Savior who can heal and heal completely. He can rid a person of Satanic attack and possession completely. What kind of response does that command from us? We need to completely appreciate this Savior of ours. For one, I wish to be completely on His team. Yes, I want to do what He commands and enables me to do. That involves focus on other people. It involves a ministry which *benefits* them and puts them in touch with Him who has made my life so happy and wonderful. There is none other than the Son of God, who came, who saw and who conquered!

⁵ *Life Application Bible Insights.*

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 8)

Scripture: Mark 1:35-45

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 23rd, 2004

Bustin' Loose

Mark 1:35-45 (NASB)

³⁵ And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. ³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for Him; ³⁷ and they found Him, and *said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." ³⁸ And He *said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for." ³⁹ And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. ⁴⁰ And a leper *came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." ⁴¹ And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and *said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." ⁴² And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. ⁴³ And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴ and He *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 testimony to them." ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

Introduction "That our idea of God correspond as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is." (A.W. Tozer)¹ I am often wondering what a true Christian really is. We know that every person who will go to heaven must be born again; that part, we have down. But after, what then? How does a Christian, a real modern-day disciple of keep developing? I have known all kinds of models, as many probably as there are kinds of Fords or Chevies. One model takes a certain programmed path, learns certain disciplines, does certain things. Another model can't or won't learn the ways of the first model, but he loves Jesus Christ too. Another model is disabled, weakened by one thing or another, and he also loves his Savior and wants the Spirit to guide his life.

I think this hunger I have for wanting to really understand what a modern-day disciple is and does is what has driven me back to the Gospel of Mark. In my own life I am increasingly restless with franchised Christianity although I am glad our faith has achieved a certain legitimacy in the public eye. But I am

¹ From the *Ransomed Heart* web site. www.ransomedheart.com

restless. I feel this need to get back to Him. I do not think this is sophomoric or juvenile. And so we are exploring what were probably the first words ever written down about Jesus, and we come to the end of Mark 1. I have called this message *Bustin' Loose* because here we read about Jesus wanting to move out from Capernaum. He is on the move...

Think about the land of Judea *before* Jesus got there. I'm talking about the land of Israel, at the far end of the Mediterranean Sea. It was a Roman province on the far edge of the empire, a posting for soldiers that was thought to be the armpit of postings! Much of it was hot and desolate. There were NO Roman centers of culture. Water was hard to come by and disease happened with a vengeance, especially leprosy for which there was no cure. And the people were stubbornly independent minded, only grudgingly in subjection and after years of Roman muscle-flexing. As far as I can see it was not a happy place.

In our passage today we are aware of the needs of many unhappy people. Many deal with one kind of illness or another. Some are demon-ravaged. Satan no doubt, laughed at it all. But Jesus has had a busy evening and now in 1:35 we read a thing UNLIKE what we would probably have done.

And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.

“Many people would have slept late after such a busy day. However, Jesus rose early, even before dawn, and went to a remote place to pray. This sacrificial act paints Jesus as consciously dependent on His Father for strength and direction for what lay ahead of Him. Prayerlessness typically manifests self-sufficiency, but prayerfulness reveals humility.”² That Jesus needed and wanted to pray is part of what I mean by “getting back to Jesus.” In the core of Who He was, there was the need to speak with God and get answers from Him. It is difficult to imagine what He said to His Father—His prayers that we DO have are always so deep and incredible. Here, He is at the beginning of His ministry, just starting out. I think He might have spoken ABOUT the people He was ministering to and what He saw in them, and what He felt about them. How they needed hope and to see that in this hundredth year or so of Roman occupation, their God had NOT abandoned them. Perhaps He wanted to talk to the Father about the demons. They were an annoyance to Him but the Father and the Son could think on the days long, long before when the demons probably had blessed names and served God. It would not have seemed long before to Jesus. Perhaps He talked with the Father about the route of ministry to take. Matthew tells us that Jesus pronounced a “woe” upon two towns that were near to Capernaum...

Matthew 11:21

²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

²Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 1:35. Galaxie Software; 2003.

Perhaps Jesus and the Father talked about His ministry that would happen in those towns, which apparently would meet His ministry with little faith. Whatever the content, Jesus knew He needed time with the Father. “Mark selectively portrayed Jesus at prayer on three crucial occasions, each in a setting of darkness and aloneness: near the beginning of his account (v. 35), near the middle (6:46), and near the end (14:32–42). All three were occasions when He was faced with the possibility of achieving His messianic mission in a more attractive, less costly way. But in each case He gained strength through prayer.”³

To live with regular, private prayer in your life is to plug into the presence of the Lord. It is to refuel and to recalibrate with His priorities and perspective. This is one of our biggest challenges. It is really not hard to go to church, to listen to great speakers and music on Christian radio or in some other way. It isn't hard to advertise our Christianity or to take a stand on plain issues. It is not easy though, to get alone with the Father and to open our hearts to Him in prayer. Jesus needed it and despite the demands on Him the previous night and what would come that day, He arose and went out.

But Simon found him, in fact the text says they *hunted Him down* (κατεδίωξεν, used only here in the N.T.) and says, “Yo, Rabbi, everyone’s looking for you!” (my translation). So Jesus said ***Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, in order that I may preach there also; for that is what I came out for.*** WHAT is what He came for? Preaching. Proclamation. That is, He had come from God on a divine mission. His purpose was to proclaim “the good news of God” (v. 14) and confront people with the demand to “repent and believe” it (v. 15). Since the Capernaum crowds sought Him as a Miracle-worker, He deliberately departed to preach elsewhere.⁴

I think that is the main function of Christian outreach today too—we do not control how people will react to talk about Jesus or to the lifestyle of living for God. Our job is to proclaim the claims of Christ. He talked about the kingdom of God and repenting and embracing Him by faith. He talked a lot of good news in a land that was depressed, in a time that was despairing and to a people that were so needy. And then He did good things for them that immediately benefited them. “[He] forces healing on no one. He does not seek people out to heal but heals only those who come to him. He initiates a healing only when he takes responsibility for healing on the Sabbath. And Jesus heals freely, with no strings attached to those healings. He does not demand that people believe he is the anointed one (none do) or even believe in the Jewish God. He does not require a

³John Grassmick in Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 1:35. Galaxie Software; 2003.

⁴Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

person to be morally good Jesus does not expect to gain personally from healing, for he never asks anyone he heals to follow him. Usually he orders them, often harshly, to keep quiet or go home. They proclaim or follow on their own, and Jesus does not consider either action a condition for healing.”⁵ When He walked into the towns around the north edge of the Lake, He brought a massive benefit program. His coming could be considered *nothing* if not “good news.”

You and I today should never feel any embarrassment for signing on to the cause of Christ. It isn't about some big church organization or some sophisticated philosophical system. It isn't about right-wing politics. It is about the good that Jesus Christ still does in people's lives. Many then doubted it. Some scoffed. Some still do. Some wonder, “Does becoming a Christian really do me any good?”

Jesus busted loose some more. Mark tells us that as part of this little northern Galilee tour (which lasted weeks and maybe months), He goes into the synagogues and preaches and cast out demons. Notice that Jesus is always *going out*. He didn't stay in one place too long. Why not? Because the needs were greater elsewhere and the opportunities were greater elsewhere. We need that same drive. We need to go out. We need, along with our sister ministries around here, to always be looking for ways to spread the good news. Are you interested in that? If there is a new place, a new group of people, a new mission-target that we could *go out* to, would that be real Christianity to you? That's what Jesus Himself was looking for.

Then He is approached by a leper-- a bold move for a leper. “Leprosy” included a variety of serious skin diseases ranging from ringworm to true leprosy (Hanson's bacillus), a progressively disfiguring disease. Sometimes people today think it is an extinct and ancient disease only. But at the beginning of 2003 there were still over a half-million cases in the world.⁶ But in Jesus' day it was devastating. This man experienced a pitiful existence due not only to the physical ravages of the disease but also to ritual uncleanness (cf. Lev. 13-14) and exclusion from society. Leprosy brought anguish at all levels: physical, mental, social, and religious. It serves as an illustration of sin. The Rabbis regarded leprosy as humanly incurable. Only twice does the Old Testament record that God cleansed a leper (Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:1-14). Yet this leper was convinced that Jesus could cleanse him. Without presumption (***If You are***

⁵Rhodes and Michie, p. 47 quoted in Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 1:32. Galaxie Software; 2003.

⁶ World Health Organization, Leprosy Elimination Project. 2003 Status Report

willing) and without doubting Jesus' ability (**You can make me clean**), he humbly **begged** Jesus to heal him.⁷

Only Mark tell us (vs. 41) that Jesus was moved with compassion. This is Jesus. What others think is revolting, or dangerous or ceremonially beneath them, Jesus sees into this pitiable man and is willing to heal him. What a wonderful thing. When people say to us, "Why do you think Jesus is the only way?" this is why! When people say to us, "Why are you so devoted to Jesus? THIS IS WHY! When people say to us, "The Church is corrupt and hypocritical and undependable and contradictory," we can say, "Maybe, but LOOK AT JESUS!" We get back to the core of what we as a "We" are all about. We're about Him. I don't think I am expecting Him to make me a healer. But I think He wants me to feel His compassion and to practice it.

At the end of the chapter Jesus **sternly warned him** not to go blabbing this all over the place. Jesus didn't want to just be known as a miracle worker. He has a greater purpose. But the leper, now normal citizen, does just that and it made for more public craziness and big crowds.

Again, I wonder what the disciples thought in this time. They're still pretty new to all this. They're watching from the sidelines and you can only imagine amazed at all they see. They're still in the old school, "Man, let's get Jesus to go over here or over there to do some cool stuff..." and now in the new school too, learning and listening to Him and I think, trying to figure Him out.

We need to figure out too what His program is today. If we can latch on to that and really know what it is, we will never get tired of ministering the kingdom. We will not waver under attack. We will not abandon each other because we will be bound with a powerful joint commission that transcends all our own individual uniqueness.

The Church today needs to be about Jesus Christ. I've said it a hundred times before and I hope to be given the breath to say it a hundred times more. We need to always keep Him and what it means to be like Him, in our sights. It means we pray and we build personal prayer into our lives with whatever gets us good focus. It means we help people and we do it in the name of Jesus Christ. It means we confront evil when it gets in *our* face and we do it decisively. And it means we love each other as He has loved us. That is our vision, our creed, our drive and our purpose—to be like Him!

⁷Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 9)

Scripture: Mark 2:1-13

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 30th, 2004

Trouble Amidst Power (Case 1)

Mark 2:1-13 (NASB)

¹ AND when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. ³ And they *came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. ⁴ And being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. ⁵ And Jesus seeing their faith *said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, *said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? ⁹ "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk'? ¹⁰ "But in order 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, take up your pallet and go home." ¹² And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this." ¹³ And He went out again by the seashore; and all the multitude were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

Introduction With all the great questions of our day facing us, it might seem trivial to raise the question, "Who was Jesus?" It might seem irrelevant to pose a question that seemingly only wine-and-cheese tasting, cardigan sweater wearing, pipe smoking Harvard Divinity School professors are pondering. Most people today are far more interested in things like,

- "What should the United States do next in Iraq?" or
- "How can we get gasoline prices back down to a dollar a gallon?" or
- "How am I going to get my girlfriend to loan me money for tickets to the New Mexican Disaster Squad concert?"

Matters like, "Who was Jesus?" seem pretty dusty and retro...until you might start to think—If He's really around today, doing stuff in people's lives, what would He be like?" Then "Who was Jesus?" gets a little more relevant.

We think Jesus is around. We completely think He is here and He is very interested in us—that might be the most profound thing about evangelicals today, not just that we are against homosexuality or *for* "In God We Trust" on our money. Most powerful about us, is our total conviction that Jesus is here! Not

in legacy—in *person!* I'm not sure the culture around us knows that so much about us. We aren't interested in getting people to sign on to The Jesus Code, or The Jesus Fan Club or The Jesus Historical Society. We're interested in people signing on to Jesus. Here. Now. *Amidst* the war against terrorism, *amidst* trying to make your paycheck pay for all you want out of life and *amidst* trying to figure out what you can and can't get from your closest relationships. So, we explore, amidst all that, "Jesus, what are You like?" And we go to the places in the Bible where there are living breathing answers to that question. Like the Gospel of Mark...

The passage in front of us today is the first of four confrontations Jesus had with the religious establishment. When Jesus was around things were not churchy very often. They didn't just go to scroll conferences and TALK about esoteric points of theology. When He walked in, they saw theology. They felt it. I think there was something sort of rude about that! Many upper-crust people struggled with it.

Now, one of the things to study when you're studying a gospel is the people around Jesus. They are always important in the story.

In Mark 2:1-3:6 you should notice a great deal of controversy between Jesus and the religious leadership of His day.

Experts in the Law: Also known as scribes, these Jewish leaders were professional interpreters of Scripture. Scribes could also be Pharisees.

Pharisees: Numbering about 6,000 in first century Palestine, these defenders of Judaism were known for their knowledge of the Law and its application to life.

Herodians: Mentioned only three times in the Gospels (Mark 3:6; 12:13; Matthew 22:16), these Jewish leaders were politically loyal to Herod and the Herodian dynasty. They never appear without the Pharisees.¹

When Jesus encounters these people, they basically end up asking themselves, "Who does this guy think he is?" In the verses down to 3:6 Jesus answers with demonstrations of

- I am the Lord of forgiveness
- I am the Lord of redemption
- I am the Lord of change
- I am the Lord of the Sabbath

People in positions of religious power are almost always scary. Religion is a powerful commodity and when you possess control and influence over people

¹ Jeff Miller, Teaching Pastor, Trinity Bible Church, Richardson, Texas, Th..M. *summa cum laud* Dallas Seminary. From www.Bible.org

through religion it generally mutates and corrupts. Since Jesus' day this has repeated itself over and over in history. In our day no less, religious leverage is more often used against people's best interest.

- Cult leaders building their own personal kingdoms,
- the joining of religious and political leadership we so often read about in Islam and has happened so often in Western political history,
- the possession of huge financial assets by the Catholic church,
- even the presence in some American towns of really large and powerful Protestant churches all work to demonstrate that when a religious leader acquires social power and control it generally goes to his head.

This is what Jesus was faced with in Galilee right at the outset of His ministry. I am not saying that all the scribes and Pharisees were completely evil. There were some who turned to Christ. But many did not and possessed of great power, they turned it on Him.

We pick up the scene in chapter 2 of Mark's Gospel with a whole lot of people coming to the house where Jesus was after He and a few of the boys had gone out to surrounding towns. They're back in Capernaum now and many people want to hear Him speak and maybe get a healing from Him. He is not seeking political power for Himself but people are coming in such numbers that it just SAYS, "power." That is how His ministry is going to be interpreted anyway and taken as a threat by the religious establishment.

One group of guys have a friend who is paralyzed--perhaps he was a quadriplegic. They can't get to Jesus in the house so they bore through the roof. Isn't that great? That is determination *and* faith. Most homes in Palestine had flat roofs used for relaxation in the cool of the day and for sleeping on hot nights. And there was usually an external stairway that extended to the roof. Often, as here, the roof was made of slabs of burnt or dried clay that were placed on supporting beams which stretched from wall to wall. The builder then spread a uniform coat of fresh, wet clay over those slabs of hardened clay to serve as a seal against the rain. The paralytic's friends took him up to the top of such a house and dug out the top coat of clay, removing several of the slabs until they made enough room to lower him down into Jesus' presence.² In fact, they seem almost frantic to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus so Jesus would heal him.³

Now there's an obvious application here: how hard should a person be willing to work to get someone to hear Jesus? One of our main jobs as Christians is to introduce people to Him. We have absolutely no control whatsoever what they do with Jesus once they meet Him but getting them there is something we can either work hard at, or sort of just leave to chance.

²MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Mk 2:4. Nashville: Word Pub., c.1997.

³Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 2:3. Galaxie Software, 2003.

- These four dudes could have said to themselves, “Well, maybe Jesus will walk by our buddy when He’s done talking inside.”
- Or, they might have just not tried and said, “There’s no way to get Jesus to Him—too bad.”

I have seen some Christians work hard over the years to get people under the sound of the Gospel. There have been major evangelistic campaigns where we have worked hard to invite people and to present the campaign in a way that wouldn’t turn people off. We have tried to get people to attend church, either a Sunday morning worship service or some other special event, when we knew (or hoped) the Gospel would be presented. We really hope and want people to hear the Word about Jesus Christ. These guys wanted badly for this friend to at least have the chance to be healed.

Now, you might think, “Hey this guy is pitiful—he is certainly no sinner—he is a victim.” But in the Old Testament disease and death were viewed as the consequences of man’s sinful condition, and healing was predicated on God’s forgiveness (2 Chron. 7:14; Pss. 41:4; 103:3; 147:3; Isa. 19:22; 38:16-17; Jer. 3:22; Hosea 14:4). This does not mean there is a corresponding sin for each occurrence of sickness (Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-3). Jesus simply showed that this man’s physical condition had a basic spiritual cause.⁴ Even though paralyzed, he was also a sinner. The surface problem needed healing and the deeper problem—ultimate cause of all disease and death—needed healing.

Jesus sees their faith to be sure, but then He throws a curve. He says, **My son, your sins are forgiven.** It is kind of an enigmatic thing to say to the fellow. Say what, you might say? *“What’s that got to do with quadraplegia? And anyway, Jesus, who do you think you are forgiving sins? That’s a little over the top, isn’t it?”* Jesus always knows just what to say, at just the right time. He DOES heal the man, as Mark reports but Mark is heading towards a deeper idea--the proposition that Jesus IS God and He can and does forgive sins, as He sees fit. Who Jesus was and is, is that He claims to possess the DIVINE authority to forgive, to pardon sins. No Old Testament prophet ever claimed to forgive sins. Buddha never claimed it nor offered it. Mohammed CERTAINLY never offered it nor did he claim to possess it, to my knowledge. And I must say here that Mary never claimed it nor offered it. Only Jesus claimed to have the right to forgive sins and that implication in this story immediately gets some of the local scribes upset. But Jesus is the Lord of forgiveness.

It is an interesting situation! The scribes don’t get it at all. And Jesus—He is God remember—**aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves**—speaks directly to what these guys are FEELING. Isn’t that

⁴Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

something? He reads their hearts and speaks to that. They're thinking, "This guy is blaspheming—saying or claiming something untrue about God. And He brilliantly counters that with the simplest of logical questions (verse 9):

"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk'?"

In other words—it IS easier to say "Your sins are forgiven" since that isn't a verifiable thing, than "Be healed" which is completely verifiable. Jesus chose to do what they considered harder, to show that He could also do what they considered easier. He did the miracle which they could see, that they might know that He had done the other one that they could not see.⁵ He is utterly brilliant? Surprising? Not if He is who Mark says He is—the Son of God.

My friends, Jesus is the one people need to go to for forgiveness of sin. Their issue; OUR issue with sin is ultimately between us and Him. He is the one we offend when we sin and He is the one who forgives it. We get confused about this sometimes when someone we care about chooses a sinful decision. We take it personally. We make US the offended ones.

- In fact, David wrote in Psalm 51:4

Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge.

So there is trouble amidst the power of God. It wasn't all one big happy healing service. Jesus struggles against a hostile and unbelieving environment to establish His claims as being Messiah (perhaps why He liked the title Son of man so well). And often, even when He performed a great work--only good and beneficial--He was criticized and soon enough even hated for it. We too should not always expect that whatever good deeds we might do will be applauded. We do not do things after all, for people's approval. If we do something good for someone we do it for God's glory and to try, in some little way, to decorate our profession of faith in Christ with something good. This was His way and the Christian life best lived, develops His character inside of us.

⁵Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 2:10. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 10)

Scripture: Mark 2:13-22

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 13 , 2004

The Lord of Discipleship & the Sabbath

Mark 2:13-22 (NASB)

¹³ And He went out again by the seashore; and all the multitude were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. ¹⁴ And as He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office, and He *said to him, "Follow Me!" And he rose and followed Him. ¹⁵ And it came about that He was reclining *at the table* in his house, and many tax-gatherers and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. ¹⁶ And when the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they *began* saying to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?" ¹⁷ And hearing this, Jesus *said to them, "*it is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." ¹⁸ And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they *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, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, do they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ "But 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 patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. ²² "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins."

Introduction When Jesus comes to town, things change... I want you to think this morning with me first of all, about a couple of theoretical situations:

Let's say there's this local businessman who has a lot of money and holdings. He's politically well-connected and some would say he is powerful, such that in terms of local government you really can't get anything done without going through him. I wouldn't say folks' first thought when they hear his name is "corrupt" but it might be the third or fourth thought. Sometimes he appears at community functions and sometimes he donates some money for one cause or another. So what if this guy showed up in church one Sunday? And then again the next Sunday? This person is a very well-known individual, connected, powerful, rich. He comes in, let's say, talks to a few people who know him, and sits and joins in the service... Maybe it's the first Sunday of the month and he comes in the evening too. And then in the coffee time after, in a conversation with one of us, he says he has been born-again, that he has come to believe, in a personal way, in the Lord Jesus Christ. How would we feel? What would we think?

A second theoretical situation to think about: It is traditional for many people to celebrate Christmas. Gift lists are prepared, overtime is worked to save enough money to fund the gift-lists, decorations are put up, parties are scheduled, vacations

are planned and people go through a tap-dance every year between the secular aspects of Christmas and the Christian. It is a major tradition which dictates the calendar for six weeks every year. But what if a small group of Christians decided they were only going to celebrate Christmas for twenty-four hours, say, 6 o'clock Christmas Eve through 6 o'clock Christmas Day and that in those 24 hours they would do all their decorating, gift-giving and celebrating? It would be a very joyful but intense 24 hours, but that would be it. From a quick consideration, you might see some benefits—saved money, time, stress, distraction and energy but I think it would be hard for this little group of Christians to do that. Who would understand? It would look weird...

The passage before us today has two such scenarios in which Jesus showed Himself to be the Lord and flashed the right to change things. First, he called to be His disciple a man who was much like the wealthy, political “animal” I described before and second, He answered for His new followers who were NOT celebrating the practice of fasting. He indicated that in both cases, following Him entailed some new rules--rules with which the religious thinkers in the area around Capernaum were not familiar.

Now, Levi (“Matthew” was his nickname) is a tax collector. We still have people today by that title but the stigma today is nothing what it was then. Tax collectors were Jews who were despised for two reasons: 1) they collected taxes for the Roman government and were thus viewed as traitors to their own people, and 2) they were known for collecting more taxes than required, and pocketing the profits. They were the chief sinners according to first century Judaism. Levi worked for Herod Antipas since he lived in Capernaum. A major road passed through Capernaum connecting Damascus and the Mediterranean coast. The taxes Levi collected included export and import fees, sales and custom taxes, and various tolls.¹ And yet this tax collector receives a personal invitation to follow Jesus. Even worse, Jesus is seen eating—fellowshipping—with this guy and other well-known sinners! Who does this guy think He is? Jesus answers this question by stating that He did not come to call the righteous (the self-righteous, that is), but sinners (those who recognized their need). That is THE prerequisite to forgiveness and redemption. God has never saved a person who didn't think he needed saved, and in this Gospel the Pharisees didn't think they needed saved. Just as a sick person goes to a doctor to receive health, so a sinner goes to Jesus to receive righteousness. If that sick person refuses to visit the doctor, he will remain sick. Likewise, if a sinner refuses to acknowledge his own sin, he will remain a sinner. “Who does this guy think he is?” He is the Lord of Redemption.

People may not approve of all the types we minister to... But we try to minister to anyone who seems to have the Spirit of God working in them. These are often the “sick” people around us. I found this so confusing when we first moved to Dallas. Dallas has a lot of classy, well-kept up and genteel churches.

¹Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 2:14. Galaxie Software, 2003.

The Sunday morning church-goers are well-dressed, polite and carry themselves well. Most of the time they don't look very sick. Ancient synagogue goers were maybe similar. The "good religious people" were not the tax collectors and prostitutes and corrupt politicians. They were the good, hard-working, honest and upstanding citizens. Jesus tells the Pharisees who are questioning His judgment about who He was eating with that He ***did not come to call the righteous but the sinners.***

Remember that back in the beginning, there was Jesus, the Holy Spirit, some disciples of John (who were sort of half-allies), lots and lots of needy people just all over the place, and a bunch of religious leaders. There weren't any church buildings (just Jewish synagogues). There wasn't much music except some traditional Jewish music. There were no pastors and no Christian books or programs. Most of what we do today which we call "Christianity" was decades if not centuries in the future. And here we have Jesus ministering to those who would let Him do so.

But there's something else here in Matthew's call. Jesus commanded him to follow Him. And Matthew did. It isn't random, but it is sovereign. He decided whom He would call. He didn't consult with Simon and Andrew first. He didn't put out a general call to "All Capernaumites" to come and follow Him. He called this guy, against all predictability, and Matthew did. The body of Christ is like that. It is made up of people, against all predictability, whom Jesus has called. Sure there may be some impostors within it. But in general, the Lord builds the church body with those that He has invited. We do not know why He calls some and not others with what some theologians refer to as an "efficacious call." But that is His business. Will some resist the call? Will some say, "I know to follow Jesus makes perfect sense, but I would rather perish. I do not believe so, ultimately.

The great radio preacher (who died in 1961 I think), Donald Grey Barnhouse, often preceded his messages with the prayer, "Lord any of my hearers who do not yet know Thee, rest-less-ness, that they may not be at ease UNTIL they get up and follow You."

Our ministry is going to be similar. We may wish that we get new converts that WE want and target, who are perhaps all cleaned up, and socially acceptable. Sometimes we will. But sometimes we must minister to those who are not so acceptable. They can barely stumble in the door maybe. That may cost us some folks. People might say, "I'm not sure I want my kids around *those* kind of people, I don't care IF the Lord is working in their lives." So be it. One of the new things, the changes, that Jesus was instituting was a whole new focus on reaching people.

Let me cut to the core of it. Do you sometimes feel you're above or better than some other folks? Do you look at some other people as being beneath you? I'm not talking about doctrinal orthodoxy—but social standing. This is the

perspective of the Pharisees. They criticized Jesus for associating, for eating with sinful, less than cleaned-up people. But that's where He stayed. He loved to be with them, and to offer them things like "living water" and "the bread of life."

Fasting in the first century was closely associated with mourning. To fast with the bridegroom present at a wedding would be insulting to the bridegroom, who wished for you to celebrate with him upon the special occasion. Jesus is the bridegroom; the Man of honor.

New material is incompatible with an old tattered garment. It would be inappropriate to attempt to bring the two together. Jesus is the new, superior material. He is incompatible with the old garment—the Old Testament religious system. He is bringing about something entirely new.

New wine and old wineskins were incompatible, and it would be inappropriate to put new wine into old wineskins. Old wineskins were already stretched from the fermenting gas of the wine it had already carried. New wine would likewise release fermenting gas that would burst an old wineskin which was already stretched to its limit. Jesus is the new wine that proves incompatible with the old wineskins—the Old Testament religious system. Jesus is the Guest of honor about to affect radical change that will overshadow the Old Testament way of life. The time of fulfillment has come in Jesus. The old is past; new things have come by virtue of His arrival. The wedding, the garment, and the new wine are all symbolic of the newness Jesus brings. Jesus is going to establish the Age of Grace in place of the Age of the Law. Who is this that thinks He can overshadow the Old Covenant and inaugurate a New Covenant? "Who does this guy think he is?" He is the Lord of Change.²

You know, we are about a religion of newness. Don't hate the word religion too badly. It is a New Testament word, after all. But realize that there is really only one religion which is true. And it is a system that began with Jesus' earthly ministry and it was constantly bringing up NEW stuff! It was changing or expanding or deepening rules. It was sometimes ESCAPING rules. It was constantly turning people towards the Lord personally and never letting them hide behind institutions and habits and rituals (old wineskins). Jesus is the Lord of discipleship and the Lord of change. I am sure that when He comes again and sets up His kingdom, even though we will reign with Him for hundreds and hundreds of years, things will always seem new to us. They will always seem fresh. That's the way He is and that is what He was beginning around Capernaum and that is what we all have been grafted into, two thousand years later on the other side of the planet from Capernaum!

² Jeff Miller, teaching pastor, Trinity Bible Church, Richardson, TX (on www.Bible.org)

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 11)

Scripture: Mark 2:23-28

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 20, 2004

The Point of God's Rules

Hebrews 12:4-13 (NIV)

⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons [Job 5:17; Prov.3:11]: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” ⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (At the time, discipline isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off handsomely, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God. So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! *The Message*) ¹²Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Introduction These days, conservative Christians seem to be most known in the public eye for certain rules which we believe in: things like

- You don't kill a pre-born child just because it is convenient to do so (or inconvenient to have it); or what we would call, the rule of the sanctity of human life.
- We might be pretty well known these days for our rule about the essential spiritual wickedness of sexual immorality especially same-sex relationships or what we would call, the rule of marriage.
- And hopefully we are well-known for the *mandate*, which is a big rule, for the offer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We even have a special name for that rule. We call it the Great Commission.

We seem to be thought of as a people of rules—sometimes clearly thought out rules, sometimes more arbitrary—but a people who know what they believe about what is right and what is wrong. If you are a Christian you find that you are choosing to DO certain things and you find that somehow inside of you, you have come to understand that these things are true *all the time* and for *all Christians*. And in regards to OTHER things, you choose NOT to do those things and you see that they cannot be justified regardless of convenience, personal

pleasure or expediency. Somehow, you have come to believe this deep in your heart.

And in so far as this understanding of what a Christian is about goes, I am comfortable with being thought of that way; particularly in a culture today that is so confused about what is right and wrong and so resistant to having *any* rules.

To a certain extent Christianity is a faith which sits on a set of rules. I think you know what I mean—Here's some others, random (not necessarily paired):

- You choose not to use the Lord's name in vain and you choose to honor your parents.
- You choose not to be unfaithful to your spouse (if you're married) and you choose to be here on Sunday mornings.
- You choose not to steal and you choose to work and earn your own money.
- You don't curse each other and you do look for ways to help each other.
- You choose not to watch pornographic videos and you do see the importance of reading your Bible.

All of those are Christian rules. You got them from God. They seem reasonable to us and they are part of the general discipline and order of being a Christian.

The writer to the Hebrews talks about discipline, in a father-child context. In Hebrews 12 (vss. 4-13) we read about how the Lord disciplines us as Christians and that it isn't to be arbitrary or to take our fun away. It is to produce growth in us and to protect us, even though at the moment the discipline may not be fun or immediately gratifying.

Today is Father's Day and we recognize the great role that Dads play in the growth of their kids. The Dad sets the tone in the family and sets the priorities. The kids look to him for leadership and for the general theme of the family. It is great to be a Christian Dad and to not wonder about what the general mission and purpose of a family is. We know. It is to glorify God and to serve Him and to always make decisions which point every person in the family towards the Lord. It is to sometimes exercise discipline, even if we didn't have a great example ourselves when we grew up. We trust the Lord to show us how to manage the order and rules of the family. To *not* be arbitrary *but* to be dependable, even predictable about how our family will run...

The general order of discipline we acknowledge and practice as Christians often reveals itself in the rules we believe in. God's people have always recognized God's rules. As in a healthy family, the rules are there for the good of the family. They are decided and set down to protect the individuals in the family and to maximize the family's prospects for happiness.

- If your family has a rule that you do not watch bad movies in the home, that isn't to deprive; it is to protect.
- If your family has a rule about going to church on Sunday that isn't to keep you bored it is to give you access to the Word of God, to Christian fellowship and to spiritual encouragement.

- If your family has a rule about tithing the family income (which would mean you get by on 90% of what you can do with if not tithing), it isn't to force the family to eat at McDonald's when you're on vacation instead of eating at 99 each meal: it is to give back to God out of love and honor.

Every family rule should have a point. If the point isn't obvious you have to wonder if it is a good rule. And parents should always be willing to explain why we do what we do, and why we don't do other things. And even if the kids don't quite see it, they lovingly maintain the discipline.

Now in Mark 2 we have the interesting scenario where Jesus and some of the guys are out walking on a Sabbath...

Mark 2:23-28 (NASB)

²³ And it came about that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. ²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to Him, "See here, 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 became hungry, he and his companions: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priests, and he gave *it* also to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ "Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Jesus now evokes more intense opposition from the religious authorities who take umbrage at his approval of his disciples picking heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath. Jewish law forbade reaping on the Sabbath (one of thirty-nine works forbidden on the Sabbath), but Jesus replies by citing two higher levels of authority than Pharisaic tradition. First, in the time of Abiathar who later became high priest (the likely meaning of the reference), David and his companions ate the consecrated bread in the house of God when they were hungry (**1 Sam. 21:1-6**) and were not condemned for it, though they had technically broken the law.

You see, there is the actual Law of God, or what Jews call *Torah*. But as much as that, the Pharisees had adopted a much more complicated interpretation of the Law of Moses called *Mishna*, which dated from the early third and second centuries before Christ.

Their need invoked a higher law and a special dispensation that took precedence over ritual law. Second, by analogy, but in an even greater sense, the source of the law itself, the Son of man, has given permission to his followers to pluck grain on the Sabbath, for he is Lord of the Sabbath and restores its true intent as a day designed to benefit, not deprive man of well-being and health.

The Pharisees have skewed God's intent for the Sabbath and turned it into an excuse by which they try to justify themselves as righteous by works of the law.¹

These are written interpretations of the meaning of the Law. According to Jewish tradition, they were given when Moses received the law from God on Mount Sinai, and they were to be passed down in oral form. This "oral tradition" was the "law" to which Jesus referred, for example, in Matthew 15:1-9. By about AD 200, under Rabbi Judah's leadership, the transcribing work begun earlier by Rabbi Akiba around A.D. 120 was completed, and the oral tradition was finally written down. This written material is called the Mishnah. The word is taken from a verb that reflects the way the material had been repeated orally from teacher to disciple for many generations. The Mishnah is divided into six "orders"; each order is divided into sections called "tractates," which in turn are divided into chapters. The orders give explanations for specific areas of legal concerns as follows:

1. Seeds ("Zeraim") is concerned with agricultural laws, and is introduced with a tractate dealing with daily prayers.
2. **Festivals ("Moed") deals with feasts, fast days, and Sabbath regulations.**
3. "Nashim" concerns women and records marriage and family laws.
4. "Nezikin" Damages or Injuries deals with civil/criminal law and ethical standards.
5. "Kedoshim" or Holy Things concerns the ritual laws and the activities of the priesthood and the Temple.
6. The sixth order of *Mishna* "Tohorot" concerns Purifications and elaborates the laws of ritual purity.²

Within "Moed" there was a section specifically designated as "Prohibited Activities." Jewish law prohibits Jewish people from doing any form of *melachah* ("work", plural "melachot") on Shabbat. *Melacha* does not closely correspond to the English definition of the term "work", nor does it correspond to the definition of the term as used in physics. Rather, it refers to the 39 categories of activity that the Talmud prohibits Jews from engaging in on Shabbat. Many religious scholars have pointed out that these labors have something in common -- they prohibit any activity that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over one's environment.

The 39 activities are (*Mishna* Shabbat 7:2):

Sowing; Plowing; Reaping; Binding sheaves; Threshing; Winnowing; Selecting; Grinding; Sifting; Kneading; Baking; Shearing wool; Washing wool; Beating wool; Dyeing wool; Spinning; Weaving; Making two loops; Weaving two threads; Separating two threads; Tying; Untying; Sewing stitches; Tearing; Trapping; Slaughtering; Flaying; Salting meat; Curing hide; Scraping hide; Cutting hide up; Writing two or more letters; Erasing two or more letters; Building; Tearing something down; Extinguishing a fire; Kindling a fire; Hitting an object with a hammer; Taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain.

The 39 melachot are not so much activities as categories of activity. For example, while "winnowing" usually refers exclusively to the separation of chaff from grain, it refers in

¹Elwell, W. A. (c.1989). *Vol. 3: Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.

² *Illumina Bible Encyclopedia*, Tyndale House Publishers 2002.

the Talmudic sense to any separation of intermixed materials which renders edible that which was inedible. Thus, filtering undrinkable water to make it drinkable falls under this category, as does picking small bones from fish. (Gefilte fish is a traditional Ashkenazi solution to this problem.)

Interestingly, in the event that a human life is in danger, a Jew is not only allowed, but required, to violate any Shabbat law which stands in the way of saving that life.³

All of this is the background for what was going on in Mark 2:23-28. Jesus wasn't encouraging the breaking of Moses' law. But common sense prevailed when the guys got hungry and it was completely permissible to grab a few pieces of grain on the edge of someone's field because they were hungry and in need. It wasn't stealing because the Law of Moses told people to allow this contingency.

But here is the problem. Man's rules *seem* all godly and spiritual but they so often go beyond what God said. I think it is enough to focus and concentrate on what God HAS said without making too many additional requirements for people.

The point of God's rules is always the good of God's people. But when religious leaders step in and make additional rules—almost with the implication that in order to KEEP God's rules you have to keep our rules too—people become confused. Jesus stirred up controversy in this, but Mark tells us that He said a brilliant thing: ***The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.*** And then, to make his real point, Mark comments (in a manner similar as he did in vs.10 : ***Consequently the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.*** Which takes us back to the big question we've been ferreting out over the past few weeks: WHO IS THIS GUY??

This has great relevance today in at least two ways:

One, how the tone of our church sets up—do we put most of our energy in policing one another on our own man-made rules? We DO have some. Or do we put most of our energy in developing a heart for God and the desire to keep His law in our hearts and help people satisfy basic needs in their lives? Paul wrote to the Galatians (6:2), ***Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*** The Lord predicted all the way back in the time of Jeremiah (31:33) but is repeated and applied by the writer to the Hebrews, that a time would come when (Hebrews 8:10) ***“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, And I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, And they shall be My people.*** And again in Hebrews 10:16 ***“This is the covenant that I will make with them After those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws upon their heart, And upon their mind I will write them”***

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mishna>

Some pastors and leaders would say I am too loose. They would say, "If we don't insist that people maintain certain rules that we have set up, and expectations, and prohibitions, they won't get holy." To that I say, we are probably no holier as a body than the least holy by choice among us. Holiness comes by choice, not by legislation. If our hearts are warm for the Lord we will WANT to explore His law in our hearts. If you don't want to read your Bibles, we cannot make you. If you don't want to pray or look for people to share your faith with, we cannot make you. If you don't want to make worship and fellowship a weekly part of your life we cannot make you. You either do or do not sense the Lord's call upon your heart.

Second, the Sabbath principle is pretty much summed up by Jesus in this incident. It is FOR man, a gift to get refreshment and re-fueling once a week. It isn't supposed to be a burden but a blessing for Christians and a weekly chance to get restored. We don't meet on Saturdays, for a number of reasons that we're not going to go into today. But the one-day-in-seven idea is what is most important. We use Sunday as a Sabbath and want to honor it. We want to enjoy it, as a body and as individuals. It is NOT a second Saturday as most people look at it today but it is supposed to be a unique day, one in seven, to re-energize and move at a different pace with different activities than the other six days.

To close let me tell you a story Ray Stedman told:

Our church (Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA) once sent a ministry team to a Christian college in the Midwest. We held a worship meeting in a large room in a women's dorm where there was a 10:30 pm curfew. God broke through in a remarkable way during that meeting, and the young people began to celebrate together, laugh together, weep together, confess wrongs and forgive one another, and pray for one another. It was a great movement of the Spirit of God. Promptly at curfew, the dorm mother appeared with a glower on her face that was as dark and threatening as a thunderstorm. "It is ten-thirty," she announced, "and time for these girls to be in their rooms." "But God is working here," said a member of our ministry team, "and surely you don't want to stand in the way of what God is doing in these kids' lives tonight." "RULES ARE RULES," the woman replied, "and I'm the dorm mother here. It's my job to see that the rules are followed." At that, another member of our ministry team was struck by an inspiration, no doubt from the Lord. "Well," he said kindly and gently, "we certainly understand your situation. How about if you and I step into that room over there and discuss the matter. I'm sure we can come to some sort of understanding." And he guided the dorm mother into another room, where they talked for more than two hours. By the time they emerged from the room, the meeting had come to a wonderful conclusion, and the young people had all gone off to their rooms with hearts full of blessing and rejoicing.⁴

We need a spirit inside us and between us which hungers and thirsts after righteousness. But need to know the point of God's rules and to love them. ***Oh how I love Thy law, it is my meditation all day...*** But we also need to use

⁴ *The Servant Who Rules*, a commentary on the Gospel of Mark, by Ray Stedman, 1976, Word Books. p.91

common sense and see that man's rules sometimes cloud God's rules. We need a minimum of man's rules and the grace to know that each person has to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. We need to ENCOURAGE each other with developing a heart for God, not punish each other. May the Lord of grace, empower us with a real love for one another and with a true heart to keep the law of Christ every week and every day!

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 12) Scripture: Mark 3:1-6

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M. Date: July 18th, 2004

In Their Face

Mark 3:1-6 (NASB)

¹ AND He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand. ² And they were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse Him. ³ And He *said to the man with the withered hand, "Rise and come forward!" ⁴ And He *said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. ⁵ And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He *said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ And the Pharisees went out and immediately *began* taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

Introduction Nothing is more relevant today than the need to keep focus. I am bemused at the donut shop attendant's lack of focus when they give you your order at the drive-through and instead of the small, regular and a blueberry cake donut order that I gave her, she hands me a large iced-latte with three coffee rolls, chatting with her co-worker as she does so. She wasn't paying attention. Peter Parker can't make a simple 8 o'clock curtain time to see his wonderful girlfriend's play, because he gets distracted on the way to the theatre with all kinds of crime-stopping. He can't seem to keep his focus. Sometimes I lose my grip on focus as I get so easily distracted by stupid stuff like car repairs or what a mutual fund is doing (or *isn't* doing.) We can get so focused on our careers or work things or getting ahead that they flat-out forget what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Silly things like these so easily grab our attention; and real quick we lose focus on our spiritual condition, our walk with the Lord. This is the problem of keeping focus.

Our focus so very much, needs to be on Jesus Christ. I am convinced of that every week, more and more. And this is one reason why I have decided to launch into this exploration of the Gospel of Mark, passage by passage. You and I need to have a sharp focus on Jesus. So, one might ask, "Why? I know the basic facts about Him and I have my Christology pretty straight. Why the detailed study of Him?"

- “ To see His dominant attributes
- “ To see how He revealed God
- “ To see how He reacted to people
- “ To see how He might react and respond to me

“ To just feed my imagination about what it might be like to be with Him

Getting focus on Christ, we might be asking certain questions...

- “ Did Jesus deal well with being misunderstood?
- “ Did Jesus ever display emotions?
- “ Was Jesus “just” a do-gooder?
- “ Did Jesus really fix people or just *potentially* fix them?
- “ What did Jesus expect from people?

Personally, I never get tired of looking into Jesus. I get tired of some other aspects of Christianity but I never grow weary of delving into Him. I get down on myself sometimes. I might even get down on other people sometimes. I get confused sometimes about what is the meaning of this whole system of faith with all its activities we're supposed to be involved with. I get disappointed with other people or even with God maybe, at what I thought I was supposed to be getting for my commitment to Christ... I need *focus* on Him, on Jesus Himself, and I think you do too. Let's look then at this last of five confrontations Jesus had in the early part of Mark's Gospel.

I love how Mark's approach is focused on **action**. He tells us more about what Jesus DID than what He verbally taught. In chapter 3 now we have this simple incident, which happens to occur IN a synagogue, and happens to occur ON a Sabbath day.

Synagogues in ancient Israel were not large places. I have been in the remains of three (Capernaum, Nazareth and on Masada). They were typically maybe half the size of this room that we are in here this morning. Everyone was pretty close together. The man whom Jesus targets was simply there (3:1). He did not “go forward” for healing. He was just there. His hand was “withered,” which might mean paralyzed in some way or deformed. We cannot know exactly what his difficulty was. It is interesting that this particular malady is what Jesus focused on. I can imagine many people with disabilities like this in the ancient world—nothing unusual, perhaps. There were no medical solutions—no corrective surgery, no physical therapy, no financial disability resources and no handicapped access accommodations. He was just there; with a hand that was no good. And Jesus sees him.

In verse 2 Mark tells us the people there were watching Jesus. So, I take it that this man was either up front or somehow his hand condition was obvious. Mark also indicates the spiritual condition of the people watching Jesus. Did they care about the man's disability? Were they hopeful that somehow Jesus would help the man? Mark tells us that *already* their agenda was to catch Jesus in a crime.

What an incredible irony hardness of heart is. Hardness of heart compels a person to look for bad. It makes a person WANT to see bad in a good situation. It drives a

person to *craft* bad if there might be opportunity to do so. Unfortunately hardness of heart is not just a first-century phenomenon. It is still around today. Later Mark makes it clear that it is not the sole domain of unbelievers, either. He will show us later in the book how even the disciples were capable of the condition. Hardness of heart is the very core of the human tragedy. Faced with the very "epicenter" of good (Jesus, in their midst) the hard hearts want to trap Him and get Him in some legal technicality about Sabbath laws. How foolish. Little do they know they are messing with the Lawgiver Himself.

Jesus told him to stand up and **come forward**. No information is given of the man's feelings about this, whether he himself had any faith or not. But Jesus is going to make several points in just a couple of minutes.

a. He knows what the hard-hearted are thinking. There isn't any stealth in what they want to do. The first point Jesus makes is to get in their face. He confronts them with a brilliantly relevant and painfully logical question: **Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?** Whoa! Right to the heart of those whose hearts were hard. Answer? Of course it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. The very reason the Sabbath was created by God was for man's good. It was supposed to be a good day, a blessing-day. Part Two: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to save a life or to kill? (which He knows is what THESE Sabbath-keepers want to do to HIM). Of course it is not lawful to kill on the Sabbath, or any other day. And of course it is lawful to save a life, too, Sabbath or not. The logic is plain and devastating. Mark simply says, **They kept silent**. You have got to love it! No further explanation is necessary. He smoked them!

b. A couple of things happen in verse 5: He looks at them in anger. "Vainly Jesus 'looked around' for someone who would respond to His question (cf. v. 34; 5:32; 10:23; 11:11). This expression is unique to the second Gospel. Evidently Peter remembered Jesus' looks around and communicated these to Mark as significant indications of His looking for the proper response from people. This is the only place in the New Testament where a writer explicitly stated that Jesus was angry. This was a case of righteous indignation in the presence of unrepentant evil. This is also the only account of this miracle that records Jesus' compassion for the objects of His anger. The tenses of the Greek verbs indicate that Jesus was angry momentarily (aorist tense), but His attitude of compassion was persistent (present tense). References to Jesus' emotions are peculiar to Mark's Gospel. They show His humanity.^[1]

c. Then Jesus simply told the man to stretch out his hand. Let's not speculate too far, but I want you to notice that *perhaps* he could not. Maybe he hadn't stretched out his hand in years and years; maybe never. But what Jesus commands, He enables us to do. Mark says he did so, and **his hand was restored**. Same arm. Same synagogue. Same friends. New hand. Man! How cool! No waiting period. No partial healing. Jesus just made it new. Don't you love Him?

I don't know. Maybe this isn't that big a deal. Maybe a useless hand is not that important. I think maybe it is important. I think maybe when Jesus healed, it ALWAYS

made a complete difference for the better in the person's life.

I find it interesting that one commentator I read on this said that the healed hand was a secondary importance in the incident, to the confrontation with the Pharisees and the Herodians. "Hah!" I thought to myself. Not to the man! His hand is new. He can work with it, use it all the time, not compensate any more with his other hand, even lift it in praise to God for His goodness. His whole life was changed in one moment with Jesus.

But as we said, Mark has included this as the fifth incident in his catalog of confrontations with the leaders. There is a point. Jesus was the Son of God. He was and is the only Son of God. Mark's Gospel was intended originally, probably, for Roman readers in Rome. They needed to know if Jesus was the only way or just one more option in the pantheon of divine possibilities. Mark probably got his information from Peter. Peter was there. In verse 6 we read

And the Pharisees went out and immediately *began* taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

The conspiracy was born and merely silencing Jesus, or minimalizing His influence would not be enough. They needed and wanted to **destroy Him**. Make no mistake about it. The doctrines of tolerance and diversity break down when it comes to including Jesus Christ. That is not surprising. Jesus didn't claim to be a prophet or a divine healer or a new political deliverer. Nothing so miniscule. Jesus claimed to be God, the Son of God, Israel's one Messiah. The Lord or Lords and King of Kings. He heals by speaking. He silences with divine logic. There is no negotiation with Him and thus, including Him in society's options as one choice will not cut it.

At the beginning today I suggested we sometimes have trouble keeping focus. We forget how important the faith in our lives, is. We get distracted, veered off the main road by side issues and even embarrassing cares and concerns. Sometimes the seed of the Word of God in our lives gets strangled by the cares and concerns of this world, Jesus said. We lose focus. Each of us here today needs to focus on Jesus Christ. You and I need to be in touch with Him. You must not assume you *are* in touch with Him just because you can sign off on a doctrinal statement or because you once walked an aisle or prayed the sinner's prayer. We need to seek Him. We need to **abide with Him**. IS your walk with Him the most important and the most exciting thing in your life? Are you seeing Him work in your life? If you are seeking Him about some aspect of your life will you be satisfied with anything LESS than His touch, His providence, His provision and His showing up in that aspect? Remember—He said to the no-name man, **Stretch out your hand**. We need to stretch out our lives to Him. Invite Him in. He will show up!

[1]Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 3:5. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 13)

Scripture: Mark 3:7-19

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: July 25th, 2004

Widening Out: The Essential Expansion of Evangelical Christianity

Mark 3:7-19 (NASB)

⁷ And Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and *also* from Judea, ⁸ and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. ⁹ And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the multitude, in order that they might not crowd Him; ¹⁰ for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed about Him in order to touch Him. ¹¹ And whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying, "You are the Son of God!" ¹² And He earnestly warned them not to make Him known.

¹³ And He *went up to the mountain and *summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. ¹⁴ And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have authority to cast out the demons. ¹⁶ And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ and James, the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); ¹⁸ and 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 also betrayed Him.

Introduction When you've got a great thing, you want to tell people about it. If there is a great sale at Home Depot or Wal-Mart you tend to spread the news. If you hear about a special community event that you know will be fun, you tell people about it. It was no different in the ancient world. More and more people were having a personal experience with Jesus of Nazareth and the news was spreading. We had read in Mark 2:13, And He went out again by the seashore; and all the multitude were coming to Him, and He was teaching them. It was happening more and more. So, after being in one town after another Mark tells us Jesus went back over to the Sea of Galilee area and the handful of followers that He had invited so far. But many people are following Him all over the place. Today we're going to think just about this fact of the expansion of His reputation and influence.

It may seem like a fact so simple and obvious to us. But Mark underlines it in his Gospel, a thing that comes probably from Peter: There is no one like Jesus of Nazareth! When He pulls in, everything that is bad leaves town! The passage today may seem all too familiar to us but its original readers knew nothing or little of what had gone down in Galilee, thirty years previous.

Now, what I see happening in this passage is an underlying message that from two thousand years perspective seems clear enough: the Jesus movement now begins to widen out. It could not just stay where it was. It could not remain static. It is essential and fundamental for Christianity to expand. This IS a profound thing in today's culture. We live with a faith whose very nature is to enlarge itself, to spread and to grow and to woo more and more followers. That isn't terribly politically correct today. But it is essential to what evangelical Christianity is all about. The news of Jesus Christ is just so incredible and universal and it has power. The atmosphere I think, in people back then around Galilee and Judea was similar to what we are seeing today—"Is it true? Whatever.." "But DOES IT WORK?" Jesus worked. He worked when it came to demons. He worked when it came to withered hands and paralysis. He worked when it came to debating with stuffy religious-establishment power-brokers. From a pragmatic standpoint, Jesus "worked" and this is why hundreds and maybe thousands of people were flocking to Him. They weren't coming for the reasons you and I go to Him: He is our Great High Priest; He is our sin-bearer and Savior; He is the Son of God who will come again and we hope soon. He is the fulcrum of all ancient prophecy. They were coming to Him because He could rid them of demons. He could cure them of life-long deformities or disabilities. He could speak wisdom and it wasn't all laden-over with legalism and depressing restrictions.

In verse 7 Mark identifies where the seekers were from. I think the appeal is incredible, just from how far people came from. Mark described many people coming to Jesus from all over Jewish Palestine. Jerusalem was in Judea to the south. Idumea, named only here in the New Testament, was the old Edomite territory south of Judea. People also came from the east side of the Jordan River (Perea and the Decapolis) and from the Mediterranean coast to the northwest. It is interesting that these locations form something of an outline of this Gospel. Jesus first ministered in Galilee (chs. 1–6), then in Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis (ch. 7), and finally in Jerusalem (chs. 10–16). Notably absent were people from Samaria, the land of Jewish iconoclasts who separated from the other Jews.¹

At the end of verse 8 there is a little principle, perhaps. ...a great multitude heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. That is what draws people still: What Jesus does. He is not just talk. He is not just philosophy. He is action. He makes a difference in people's lives and many people, only after He has made a difference somehow, begin to explore who He really is. And some who benefit from His touch, do NOT continue to seek Him. It has always been that way. But people still often come to churches with a quiet need, that maybe

¹Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 3:7. Galaxie Software, 2003

they can't even articulate. They sense, "Maybe Jesus is there. Maybe He can help me."

I kind of laugh when I read verse 9! Even then they were dealing with A/V issues! You know in this faith, if the people can't hear or see we are sunk! Jesus wanted all the people—or the most possible—to be able to see and hear. So He delegated to His disciples to get a little boat and set that up for Him to use as His speaker's platform. He knew they needed to hear what He was going to say and He needed some room. Interesting! Jesus was always practical. He made sure that the situation would be as comfortable as possible because there were lots of needy people and they were shoving and pushing to get near Him just to touch Him (vs. 10). This is also an interesting thing about the way people are. Nowhere did Jesus ever endorse the idea that just His touch would heal people. People are often superstitious, even today. But Jesus healed by deliberately healing, not by some default settings that just automatically healed whoever could touch Him. And that is FAR MORE VALUABLE, to know that Jesus cares and that He can make the decision to help you.

Now what DID seem to be on "automatic" was the reaction demons would give to Him when they got in His presence (vss. 11, 12). Jesus was not looking for their validation of Him and Who He was. That is probably why He warned them not to make Him known. That would be the disciples' job. That is our job too. We need to make Him known. Whenever someone asks me, "What is an evangelical?" I tell them it is really all about who Jesus is and what He does. An evangelical Christian takes the Bible, not as the object of worship, but as the accurate and reliable record of what Jesus did and Who He was. Our big task is to make Him known. I always like what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 2

¹ AND when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.²

Sometimes I think we confuse the mission with all kinds of added things we're supposed to do for people. People DO have a lot of needs. But mainly, they need to hear about Jesus Christ.

There is another principle that is important in verse 13, And He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.

The exact location of this incident is uncertain. It was probably somewhere in Galilee since this whole section describes Jesus' ministry there (1:14–6:6a). Jesus first called His disciples to join Him. Then from that larger group He selected 12 as apostles

² *The New American Standard Bible*. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1986.

(Luke 6:13). Probably Jesus selected 12 for leadership over Israel's 12 tribes during His messianic reign (Matt. 19:28). In view of Israel's rejection of Jesus, they became the nucleus of the church, which the New Testament never refers to as the "new Israel." This is a term that covenant theologians have applied to the church that has created serious confusion in the minds of many Bible students.

“. . . from a mountaintop, an imagery reminiscent of Yahweh's summons to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:20), Jesus sovereignly summons the Twelve into a new community (Mark 3:13–19) and to a mission that is founded on a relationship with himself ('in order that they might be with him,' v. 14). He confers his authority on the Twelve and sends them out with dominion over demons (6:7–13) and with freedom from the tradition of the elders (7:5–13).”⁹⁴

“In Mark's story world, the mountain connotes nearness to God and is therefore a place of divine-human communication and encounter. Atop a mountain, Jesus prays (6:46), is transfigured by God (9:2–8), and foretells the future (13:3–5).”⁹⁵

Mark stressed that Jesus initiated this appointment, and the Twelve voluntarily responded (cf. Exod. 19:20). Perhaps he did this to remind his readers that God had chosen them as disciples; they had not sought this privilege. The response of these initial disciples provided a good example for all succeeding followers of Jesus.³

Next time we will consider the Twelve, themselves. I think they are fascinating guys. But for today, let me encourage you to NOT be intimidated nor surprised by our culture where many are saying we should not “push Jesus on people.” We do not need to push, but we need to present. We do not need to cram, but we need to confront. We do not need to manipulate, but we need to invite. People need Him. He still touches people and He still changes lives. And when He changes a life, it is the greatest thing that can ever happen to a person. I am praying for a number of people I know, by name, to meet Jesus. I hope we have some new opportunities THIS week to expand our evangelical Christianity, for expansion is something it is supposed to do!

94. Edwards, p. 224.

95. Kingsbury, p. 93.

³Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 3:13. Galaxie Software, 2003.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 14)

Scripture: Mark 3:13-19

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: August 1st, 2004

The Boys in the Band

Mark 3:13-19 (NASB)

¹³ And He *went up to the mountain and *summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. ¹⁴ And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have authority to cast out the demons. ¹⁶ And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ and James, the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, “Sons of Thunder”); ¹⁸ and 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 also betrayed Him.

Introduction There are so many events that we read about in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that would be so wonderful to see a video of them! This is one of those incidents in the life of Jesus that I wish we had a video tape of it. It isn't one of the most dramatic but it is world-changing. I have entitled this message “The Boys in the Band,” but another title could be “Just Who Do We Think We Are, Anyway?” This is really what I want to say today—as Christians and modern day disciples of Jesus Christ, who do we think we *are* anyway? We go around claiming that we're going to heaven, claiming to know the truth about the universe, claiming that all our sins, past, present and future are all paid up, claiming that we, of all people, have God's Spirit living inside of us exclusively, and having the audacity to tell *other* people that they too should become Christians, and *LOOK AT US!* What a motley crew! Well, we are nothing more than the latest upgrade for the original motley crew...

Now Mark gets to the point in the story that Jesus is going to set up His team. He tells us in verse 13 that Jesus ***went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.*** This is not insignificant. Two things: Jesus **CHOSE** whom He wanted to be His first disciples, and second, *they came to Him.* Do you know what? Jesus gets to do that. Jesus gets to pick and choose whom He wants. For many today, that prerogative might seem objectionable. But I believe Mark wrote this as Peter described the scene to him, and we must remember—we're talking about a perfect Savior who is never arbitrary and is never unfair. But He **IS** deliberate and Jesus was deliberate in choosing exactly whom He wanted for three purposes: (verse 14)

1. To be with Him. I can never get over the fact that Jesus wanted to spend time with these fellows, diverse and imperfect and quirky though they may have been. He desires our fellowship too. Isn't that amazing? To speak of "spending time with Him" is no fantasy. It is a real thing. And He desires it with us.
2. To go out to "preach." "Preaching" in the New Testament means to *proclaim* certain things to be true. It happened one on one, as one or two disciples would strike up a conversation with someone. Or it happened in groups or in public situations too. But "to preach" meant primarily to spread the news about Jesus.
3. To be commissioned with authority to cast out demons. Notice something Matthew says (10:1): ***AND having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.*** Jesus delegated His power to the apostles to show clearly that He and His kingdom were sovereign over the physical and spiritual realms, the effects of sin, and the efforts of Satan. *This was an unheard of display of power, never before seen in all redemptive history*, to announce Messiah's arrival and authenticate Him plus His apostles who preached His gospel. This power was a preview of the power Christ will exhibit in His earthly kingdom, when Satan will be bound (Rev. 20) and the curse on physical life curtailed (Is. 65:20-25).¹ These boys were recipients of an incredible privilege!

You will notice also that they voluntarily responded. Jesus certainly spread a wide dragnet of invitation out from time to time and many did NOT respond. I don't think we should agonize too much about this paradox. Some will come; others will not. Ultimately, God is sovereign and what He decrees to happen, will. Now, He chose twelve to be the guys who would usher in this new era of God's program. Even that number is probably deliberate and not random. Why twelve? We could speculate that it mirrors the original twelve tribes of Israel and even that somehow that might tie into the future significance of twelve that is real present in the Book of Revelation. Whatever the meaning of Him choosing twelve, it is what He did.

You will notice too that being with Jesus was about being in action. It meant dealing with people and their problems. It meant feeling some tension with the world and rarely did it mean just sitting and being comfortable and listening to good teaching. This is true of Christian discipleship today just as it was on that mountain side when Jesus started talking to the original twelve. There was work to do.

¹MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Mt 10:1. Nashville: Word Pub.c1997.

Now Mark gives us the list of the twelve. It is interesting to compare it to the other four lists in the New Testament. At first glance there seem to be inconsistencies but closer study shows that each writer had the same people in mind. Tom Constable's *Expository Notes* give a good summary of the twelve...

	Matt. 10:2-4	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:14-16	Acts 1:13
1	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
2	Andrew	James	Andrew	John
3	James	John	James	James
4	John	Andrew	John	Andrew
5	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
7	Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
8	Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
9	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus
10	Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Judas, son or brother of James	Judas, son or brother of James
11	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
12	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

All four lists contain three groups of four names each. The same individuals head each group, though there is variation within each group. Probably these groups constituted ministry teams that broke up into pairs when the Twelve preached apart from Jesus (6:7).

Mark never used the double name "Simon Peter." Peter ("Rocky") was Simon's second given name, his nickname. All the lists place Peter first, and they all put Judas Iscariot last, except for the Acts list that omits him. "Boanerges" is a Hebrew [MacArthur says Aramaic] word, but why Jesus called James and John "sons of thunder" is unknown. Perhaps they had an impetuous nature (cf. 9:38; Luke 9:54).

Bartholomew is not really a name but a patronym meaning "son of Talmi (Ptolemy)." He may have had another name, but the disciples consistently referred to him as Bartholomew. Matthew's other name was Levi.

James the son of Alphaeus was James the Less (or little, 15:40). Thaddaeus and Judas, the son or brother of James, may have been the same person. Likewise Simon the Cananaean was the same person as Simon the Zealot, "Cananaean" being the Aramaic form of "Zealot." The Zealots were a political party bent on the overthrow of the Roman government. Probably Simon had been a member of this party. A few scholars have thought the name "zealot" referred to Simon's personality, not his political affiliation. "Iscariot" is a name of origin, but the location of Judas' hometown is uncertain.

One marvels that Jesus chose two men with apparently opposite political convictions, a Zealot and a Roman tax collector, for membership in this intimate group. Likewise His choice of the unbelieving and traitorous Judas Iscariot is remarkable. These choices are testimonies to Jesus' ability to control His disciples.

It was a strange group of men our Lord chose to be his disciples. Four of them were fishermen, one a hated tax collector, another a member of a radical and violent political party. Of six of them we know practically nothing. All were laymen. There was not a preacher or an expert in the Scriptures in the lot. Yet it was with these men that Jesus established his church and disseminated his Good News to the end of the earth.²

The variety of names and types is arresting and typical of the divine irony and “roundness” of the God who surprises: four fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot, five unknowns, and a betrayer, all laypeople. This is the new community in embryo.³

So, you can imagine the sense of “who do we think we are?” that these men had. And yet despite the great opposing forces which they felt, wherever they went, we read little about lack of confidence or timidity in them. The twelve would scatter in time over the Empire. Some would go East. Tradition has it that Thomas went far East. Strong tradition has Peter ending his life in Rome. Interestingly, some tradition has Thaddeus going north towards what is now Russia. For whatever years these men were given to fulfill Jesus’ commission to them, each was faithful TO that commission. I am sure they missed each other in later years, and fed on happy memories of the first days back in Galilee when demons would actually obey their commands to depart in Jesus’ name, and they could rended great blessing to hurting people by healing them IN JESUS’ NAME, all the while spreading HIS reputation. Perhaps some of them stayed in pairs for a while at least.

But you have to marvel and be amazed at how the Lord used such a humble group! The “boys in the band” were the least likely collection of people to turn the world upside down. So are we. But when men and women commit themselves to obedience to the Savior, He will use them. When we will join Him on the hill and do what He tells us to do, we will feel His power enabling us to be used of Him. Remember—it isn’t about us. We’re not trying to get people to simply join our church, or hold our political views or dress like us or sing our songs. We want to introduce people to the power of Jesus Christ, able to fill their lives with His presence. We are “preaching” the same message that Andrew and Thomas and Thaddaeus did. It is a powerful message, and one we can be excited about and never doubt that it will continue to transform people into new disciples themselves!

²Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 3:16. Galaxie Software, 2003.

³Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. electronic ed., Mk 3:13. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 15)

Scripture: Mark 3:20-35

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: August 22nd, 2004

A Mutated Popularity

Mark 3:20-35 (NASB)

²⁰ And He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. ²¹ And when His own people heard of *this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." ²³ And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ "And 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 he is finished! ²⁷ "But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. ²⁸ "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— ³⁰ because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." ³¹ And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him, and called Him. ³² And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." ³³ And answering them, He *said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."

Introduction What are the parameters of "coolness?" What does it take to be "cool?" I know that some of us are not the slightest bit interested in being "cool" OR in the study of "coolness." Others of us are definitely interested, and others still, I would observe, are *intensely* interested! So, what does it take to be "cool?" Probably it takes people looking at you and saying, "Hey, you are pretty 'cool'." But another reason why people might declare you "cool" is if you have something they want. In the business or political or even education scene a person might be the sort of person you would want to be with, because he has power or influence. It might get *you* some leverage or advantage if you communicate "coolness" TO that person. In the teenage scene, one person might have lots of friends in their circle, and others therefore want to get *into* the popular circle too, in order to get esteem, a sense of belonging or just fun.

In the passage we arrive at today, I think Jesus was the “coolest” thing going around the shores of the Sea of Galilee. People wanted to get near Him because He definitely was offering some “cool” things. And this is what we read in 3:15. He is “home” or “in a house,” which may well have been the place I have showed you the picture of in Capernaum. If so, it was not a large dwelling and it is not hard to imagine it getting packed with expectant, demanding people quickly. In fact, there’s a sense of craziness here and Jesus and the “boys in the band” can’t even get ANY down time to eat a bite—that’s how the crowd was making it. Then, to make matters more intense, apparently Mom and the brothers show up. They want to intervene and they say **He has lost His senses...** This is interesting because we assume they had His best interests at heart and didn’t want Him to be perceived as a crazy heretic, or to ruin His health either. How little they yet understood Him... Notice in passing too, that in this passage Jesus’ mother, brothers and sisters (according to some later manuscripts) are present. Notice as well no mention of Joseph, whom most commentators presume to be dead by this point. But Jesus HAD brothers and, apparently sisters too and thus, Mary had born them into this world. This is no compromise at all of Mary’s integrity or of her honored position as the mother of the Savior.

Right in the beginning of the passage there is a practical implication for us. Sometimes when you’re trying to do good, some people won’t understand your motives or your choices. They may even think you’re a little nuts. They may think you’re making bad decisions or making “coolness” or popularity too important a thing in your life. They can misjudge your intentions. Jesus had a number of “**stressors**” (stress-inducing events) working on him that day:

- 1) A large, demanding crowd
- 2) Working hard
- 3) Family pressure
- 4) “Media” misunderstanding from the Jerusalem scribes

Well, misunderstanding happened to Jesus and you might just as well accept that sometimes your heart and pure motives will not always be clear to people, even to loved ones.

Then in verses 22-27 we get the “media” attention! Scribes come up to Galilee from Jerusalem to check out the news about Jesus. THEY decide that Jesus is in league with Satan in order to cast demons out of people. Now this is a fascinating subject, in itself. Demons are spirit beings, ancient and apparently of differing orders or rank. These scribes imagined, incorrectly, that demons can be exorcised by someone in league with Satan more directly. Exorcism is a subject of popular interest but almost always in the public it is widely conceived. Demon possession is a true thing, although I believe far less common in Western society and in modern times than it once was. Nonetheless, it is real.

And when demons came in direct contact with Jesus Himself, there was no contest. And I believe, properly understood, they find no contest with the Spirit-minded Christian, either. But there is much popular misconception and even deception about how Satan indwells people today. Even now, the remake of the 1973 movie, *The Exorcist* is attracting movie-goers and misinforming them all over again.

Satan has some power and I think, great intelligence. He is a force in the world today as then and we need to know that. I do not think we need to go looking for demons or demon-affected people—we have enough to do to keep our own house clean and rid of evil influence and subtlety and intrigue. But Jesus logically countered the accusation about His power with the parables we read about. And you will note, His popularity is starting to mutate. A few days and weeks earlier He was the healer. Now He is being mis-designated by family and the scribes too.

In verses 28-30 we have another serious issue—the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. New Christians hear about this often, and they wonder, “Can I commit this unpardonable sin?” Well let’s look at what Jesus says about this sin:

1. In verse 28, **All sins and blasphemies** (saying vain and vulgar and incorrect things about God) **will be forgiven**. We praise God for this! Jesus says ALL sins and WHATEVER blasphemies. This is no short list! We should not focus so exclusively on the exception to forgiveness that we fail to appreciate the breadth of forgiveness that Jesus offered here.¹
2. In verse 29 there IS an unforgivable sin, not because God is mean but because if you reject the testimony of the Father and the Son, and the authenticating work of the Spirit, as to who Jesus is, nothing more can be done to redeem you. If you are worried about this sin, you probably haven’t committed it. I think the people today, if indeed it is even possible to commit it, because more probably you would have to have Jesus physically in front of you—but if it were possible I think it would be more likely theological teachers and church leaders who deny who intelligently Jesus is, and confuse Him with other forces.
3. In verse 30, it is specifically because they were saying HE, in front of them, had an unclean spirit. I think probably this was something that THEY could have done, although Mark doesn’t specifically indict them with it. The way to avoid committing the unpardonable sin is to believe the testimony that the Holy Spirit has given about Jesus in Scripture, namely that He is the Christ (i.e., the divine Messiah), cf. 1 John 5:1 **WHOEVER believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.**

God takes His reputation and that of His Son very seriously. It is not small thing to make a deliberate and wrong decision about the fruits of Christian

¹Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 3:28. Galaxie Software, 2003.

ministry. Our motives may be misunderstood and even judged with evil intent but to go all the way and say, “Jesus has an evil effect on people,” the way we sometimes hear from talk-show hosts, is to frighteningly endanger one’s self.

Finally in verses 31-35 Jesus speaks to the question of family loyalty. As important as our families are to us, (and they are very, very important!) they are not our highest loyalty. I think this is something we acknowledge too quickly sometimes. The family of God IS higher than human families. Let me ask you,

- If your wife or husband influenced you to be distant or stagnant in your relationship with Christ, is this a good thing?
- If your very child causes you to minimize your spiritual involvement with the Lord, and your growth in ministry and seeing Him work in your life, how is this good?

I am not, and Jesus was not suggesting, that walking with Him is license to abandon family—some will practice this though. I think a close walk with Christ always makes a person a better family-person. But family loyalties know their final limit when put up against a disciple’s loyalty to Jesus Christ. That relationship is eternal and in the end, the only truly spiritual one.

Well, how does all of this speak to the matter of popularity? Jesus was becoming immensely popular in a short period of time. His works attracted many people. But that popularity mutated just as quickly as people loaded misunderstanding into their expectations of Him. He is not evil in any way, although He confronted evil squarely and face-to-face, and right in front of anyone who might be present. He was not manageable or manipulable by family expectations and one can only imagine some fundamental disappointment by his family, at least for a little while.

Our popularity too may be short-lived as we deepen our walk with Christ. People may misunderstand and we might not have the chance we want to explain the decisions we make. We have seen people make decisions driven by their walk with the Lord that not everyone understands. We must pray for each other, and seek to SEE Christ at work. Not all decisions we make are spiritual. Sometimes we fall back into fearful and carnal motives. This is no rare thing. We are quite capable of selfishness and self-focus, disregarding the Spirit’s true voice. But let us seek to understand how the Lord is working inside of each other, and to support each other’s liberty to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.”

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 16)

Scripture: Mark 4:1-20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 10th, 2004

Receptivity to the Word of God

Mark 4:1-20 (NASB)

¹ AND He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very great multitude gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. ² And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, ³ "Listen to *this*! Behold, the sower went out to sow; ⁴ and it came about that as he was sowing, some *seed* fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ "And other *seed* fell on the rocky *ground* where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. ⁶ "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ "And other *seed* fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. ⁸ "And other *seeds* fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." ⁹ And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." ¹⁰ And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. ¹¹ And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, ¹² in order that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE; AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND LEST THEY RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN." ¹³ And He *said* to them, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ "The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ "And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. ¹⁶ "And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ "And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Introduction The Christian faith is a faith of ideas and thought which triggers some very intimate and personal decision-making. Since we are a faith based on a web of interconnected ideas, Christianity is a delicate faith. We do not coerce people into making decisions for Christ. We do not threaten people if they make wrong choices or police the choices that they make. Ours is not a faith of fear or compelled uniformity. Each person makes their choices and decisions inside of their own heads and hearts, and that translates into action. In this sense, our faith is very fragile.

In the area of entertainment, a young person today has many choices. When Friday night rolls around,

- 1) they can go drinking and "partying" with their friends,
- 2) they can play video games,
- 3) they can go to a movie,

- 4) they can attend a sporting event,
- 5) they can go to a dance.
- 6) They can ingest [smoke, huff, swallow, shoot or “patch”] mind-altering drugs.
- 7) They can rent a video and watch it either by themselves or with friends.
- 8) They can go driving around and look for entertainment in a random way.
- 9) They might be into role-playing or go with friends to King Richard’s Faire.
- 10) They can go out on a date with someone.
- 11) They can experiment with sexual activity.
- 12) They can go to New York or Boston and explore the night scene.
- 13) They might go to a concert or they might go to a casino and gamble. Or see a show.
- 14) They might go out to dinner and just relax and enjoy someone’s company.
- 15) They might go bar-hopping.

And I’m sure there’s other possibilities too. During that Friday night, would they be interested in Jesus’ presence along the way? If so, what might He say to them while it is Friday night? Would that young person want to sense Jesus’ presence on Friday night or wait until Sunday morning and ask for it? Would he or she be *receptive* to what Jesus might say to them...on a Friday night?

An older person is faced with decisions too, about entertainment, and about other things.

- He might be faced with a choice to become employed in a profession that has some shady aspects to it. It may not be *overtly* evil, but subtly questionable—it would involve some compromise, occasionally, of his Christian convictions. But it would involve a significant enhancement of his finances or his ability to live in a nicer neighborhood or location of the country. Would he want to hear what Jesus might say to him in this decision?

The question is **how receptive are we to the Word of God** and today we come to one of the most famous of all the things that are written down that Jesus said, and it is on this subject. We come to the “parable of the soils.” Matthew [13] and Luke [8] both also recorded this parable. The scene is waterside. Jesus is followed by a diverse crowd, more than just synagogue-goers. Adapting to the situation, he steps into a boat and uses it as his pulpit. The crowd sits down on the beach. And He talks to them about, in a sense, talking to them: Them, hearing His voice—God’s voice—the Word of God—or not. Or hearing it for the short term.

If going to church is any indication at all of receptivity to the Word of God (and it can be debated whether it is or not—I think it is), Barna Research¹ indicates some interesting statistics:

- In 1986 42% of American adults attended a church service during a typical week.
- In 1991 (the peak) 49% did so.
- In 2004 43% do so.
- Currently, 58% of Republicans do so verses 46% of Democrats

¹ www.Barna.org Topics: Church Attendance

- Currently, 39% of men and 47% of women attend a church service, *not* including weddings or funerals, in the past week.
- 53% of married people and 33% of single people will go to at least one church service, not including weddings or funerals, this week.
- Blacks (48%) are the ethnic group most likely to have attended a religious service in the past week, followed by whites (41%), Hispanics (38%), and Asians (23%).
- Catholics and Protestants had virtually the same likelihood of attending church in 2004. Catholics: 2004 51% 2002 46% 2000 49% Protestants: 2004 52% 2002 53% 2000 47%
- Baby Busters are least likely to attend church in a typical weekend (only 30%) versus Baby Boomers (49%), Mosaics (35%), and Elders 54%.
- The median church attendance total in America in 1999 was 90 people. In 1998 it was 95. It was 100 in 1997 and 102 in 1992.

Now statistics are a funny thing, aren't they? You can interpret them in different ways.

- If you're an optimist or you take a more international perspective you might say, "Wow! Look at all the Americans who go to church" and, hopefully, hear the Word of God each week!" There aren't anywhere NEAR so many Russians or Angolans or Bolivians or Japanese who go to a Christian church every week!
- If you're more pessimistic or local-looking, you might say, "Why do so few people go to church?" or "why are the numbers going down?" Are people *less* interested in hearing the Word of God or worshipping the Lord? And if so, why?

Perhaps Barna or some other research group might seek to find out why?

- 1) Some might suggest it's because of the quality of preaching today or the combination of the postmodern phenomena with churches' reluctance to alter their style.
- 2) Some might say its because many evangelical churches are growing and getting too big—thus chasing off greater numbers, and at the same time the more traditional and mainline churches have gotten way too shallow or boring.
- 3) Others might say "It's because of the clergy—ya can't trust 'em!" Or any number of other hypotheses, many of which may be correct!

But Jesus addressed the **core**-question of receptivity, by the water's edge, to a diverse crowd long ago. Mark tells us He was teaching them many things and doing so by using stories—parables—which some got and others had no idea what He was talking about, usually unbelievers. I do want you to notice that He got out where the people were—He didn't stay in the synagogue or near the Temple in Jerusalem. I think we sometimes do NOT do this. We want the crowds to come to us. But He was there, by the water and the people came from all kinds of various backgrounds, no doubt.

Embedded in his teaching that day was also this story of the soils, which some older commentators and preachers refer to as the parable of the sower. But more, it is about the soil on which seed falls. And there are four kinds of soil, Jesus describes.

His explanation of the parable comes later, to His followers and the Twelve. Parables were *intended* to veil truth sometimes. But why? Why wouldn't Jesus,

and God, just speak openly whatever needed to be revealed? Constable has a good summary of this...

Jesus drew a distinction between those who accepted His teaching, such as the Twelve, and those who rejected it, such as the scribes and Pharisees. Those “outside” were those outside the circle of discipleship. God was giving those who welcomed Jesus’ teaching new revelation about the coming messianic kingdom. He was withholding that revelation from those who rejected Him. The parables were the vehicle of that revelation. The Holy Spirit enabled the receptive to understand this enigmatic revelation, but He made it incomprehensible to the unbelieving. The parabolic method acted as a filter to separate those two types of people.

God was doing through Jesus what He had done through Isaiah centuries earlier. Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 6:9–10 drew this comparison. We might add that this is always the double effect of revelation (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6–16). God uses it to enlighten the receptive, but He also uses it to befuddle the unreceptive. Their inability to comprehend is a divine judgment for their unbelief (cf. Rom. 11:25–32). Further enlightenment requires positive reception of present revelation. This knowledge is very helpful for Jesus’ disciples. It would have been an encouragement to Mark’s original readers as they shared the gospel with others and noted the two responses.

“The judgment is a merciful one. The parable which the cold-hearted multitudes hear without understanding they remember, because of its penetrating and impressive form; and when their hearts become able to receive its meaning, the meaning will become clear to them. Meanwhile they are saved from the guilt of rejecting plain truth.” (Alfred Plummer, “The Gospel According to St. Mark,” in *The Cambridge Greek Testament*, p. 124.)²

The **seed** has to do with doctrine—with what people actually believe about God, man, the future, the purpose of life and so forth. It has to do with how to live and the choices they make. It has to do with the Gospel and how to deal with sin and how to get to heaven. The seed has to do with pretty much any issue we might raise. It is, in fact, all the things that God might or has said about life.

So, as to the soils, there are four kinds: roadbed, rocky soil, thorny ground, good soil. Four ways people respond to the **seed** that is sown, or spoken or preached—the Word of God, to what God says, to what Jesus might say to them if they had a conversation with Him...

In the first kind, Jesus said, ***these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them*** (verse 15). People might hear the Word of God briefly—in a sermon at church which they go to once in a while, from a television preacher, in a tract, in a Christian book that

²Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 4:11. Galaxie Software, 2003.

someone gives them, or from the lips of a friend who quotes a Bible verse. They might even read the Scripture once in a while. Seed doesn't grow on blacktop though. But I want you to think a little deeper with me. It isn't the words in themselves that are somehow magic. If I recite the words,

Ootos gar heggahpeisen ho theos ton kosmon, oste ton uion ton monogene edoken, hina pas ho pistoo-ohn heis auton mei apoletai all ekei zoh-ein aioh-nion³

Which is

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)

People are not automatically or magically effected by that.

Even if I could give you the exact Aramaic words that Jesus would have used when He originally spoke those words of promise to Nicodemus, and not the apostle John's Greek translation... they would not magically effect you.

The Word of God are ideas, exact ideas, expressed by God directly and personally, to human beings. They are concepts in words. The words are important but they are the vehicle for the ideas. Jesus spoke ideas and concepts which He invited people to embrace by faith. We do the same thing. We "scatter" the seed, as it were. It might be through the reading of Scripture or sharing it somehow. It might be through talking about what Christ has done and talking the facts of who He was and what He did and what He offers now... People will hear and hopefully understand those thoughts and ideas, and respond in one of several ways, as outlined by this parable. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that the Bible merely *contains* the Word of God or anything like that. The Bible is the Word of God and the words of God. Period. It is without error and inspired, word for word directly by the Holy Spirit, in the original writings of the books we have. And it isn't generally the words that Satan snatches away or gobbles up like a bird eating seed on the blacktop. It is the thoughts and ideas and the offer of salvation—that a person might want to believe in--that He gobbles up.

C. S. Lewis, in the opening chapter of *The Screwtape Letters* describes a man who goes into a library to read and meditate. His mind is suddenly opened to deep thoughts of God. Confronted with standing before God, he starts thinking in terms of his eternal welfare. But, Lewis says, there are demons assigned to this fellow. It is their unholy task to keep him from discovering God's truth. As he leaves the library and steps out on to the street, the demon calls his attention to the street noises—a passing bus, a newsboy calling out the latest headlines and so forth. These distractions are all it takes. All

³ ¹⁶ οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα παῖς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

thoughts of God disappear from the man's mind., and he returns to his old, mundane worldview.⁴

Satan is alive and well and active in this world. He always works to cloud over the thinking and the ideas of the Word of God that people hear. He confuses people and causes them to doubt the Word of God. He snatches away the word like a bird eating the seed by the road.

This is a thing we see often. The Word of God, the seed, is being sown today as never before. It is everywhere. It is so prevalent, in small bites (like John 3:16 all over the place) that it almost becomes trite, that's how prevalent it is. And yet the birds have gotten fat I think! The seed is gobbled up and taken away from people so easily. I don't mean to get too Satan-oriented but that is what Jesus said—***Satan comes and takes away the Word which has been sown in them.*** I cannot help but wonder that this has happened in a big way with Jews, and many Protestant churches which have had the pure Word of God for centuries and yet downplay it, redact it, demythologize it and explain it away. Or just ignore it.

Recently I spoke with a Jewish friend of mine who spoke of Hebrew school when he was young. He said they were taught to memorize and recite and sing the text of Torah, in a rote way. They could read the words, by sight. But then he said a remarkable thing. They were not taught much vocabulary at all and they could not translate. They were not taught to do so. *Saying* the words or *singing them correctly* was what was important. Knowing them and understanding them was not highlighted. He said he did not know if this was a function of poor teachers or if it was the deliberate agenda—but nonetheless, it is how he was raised.

This isn't the way it was with Martin Luther who never even *saw* a Bible until he was a teenager and then only one Bible that was chained to a wall in the church. I think Satan has cleverly blinded people to the plain things the Scripture says, and thus has made it *not there* or, "taken away."

For many, no longer do they listen to God on domestic morality. No longer do they stay pure until married even though the Word of God says this is the way to live. No longer do they stay married for life, although the Word says this is what God wants. No longer do they honor authority and submit to the government in a Christian way although this is what Paul said, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to the early Christians about living in the Roman empire. No longer can people even Christians clearly articulate the plan of salvation? No longer do people honor the Ten Commandments in the schools. No longer can college students recite the basic stories of the Bible because they weren't taught them in Sunday School or they didn't GO to Sunday School

⁴ Quoted in Ray Stedman, *The Servant Who Rules*, 2002 Discovery House Publishers repub. of 1976 version.

because their parents decided other things were more important on Sunday mornings. No longer do Christians study the Bible together very much. We want community, but getting together just for digesting the Scripture somehow isn't real enough or entertaining enough. I know I must sound like some old, stuffy, curmudgeon but this is what Jesus said the first soil is like.

People are not receptive to the Word of God sometimes because Satan has taken it away. They aren't accessing it. They are not seeing it with their eyes very often and they're not meditating on it with their hearts and minds very much. We have good excuses for letting Satan take away the Word, we think. We say, "We're busy." "We're bored." "We've already studied it." "We're postmodern." "We're hormonaholic teenagers." "We're hipster upper-class intellectuals." We have all kinds of reasons for not accessing the Scriptures. But in Jesus' view, what HE sees, is that Satan is taking away the Word and it doesn't put down any roots because it doesn't even get started growing in us."

But people are also not receptive to what God might say because their hearts have become like the roadbed—hard, beaten down. The word is sown on it but it can't take root and grow because it's hardened. Hardening can take place for a lot of reasons but the peril is in letting it happen at all. I have known many people who at one time were instantly receptive to the Word of God. But something happened and they stopped being open to it. My friends, we must be on "high alert" to guard our hearts and not let them ever become hardened to the Word of God. Satan will remove the scriptural truth from before us. I think Jesus warns about this and was seeing it even as He talked to them beside the water's edge. There were some in the crowd who were so very open to the things He was teaching them. But there were others, like the scribes and Pharisees. Their minds were already made up about whatever they heard Jesus say, for the most part.

The practical part here is what Jesus said in verse 9: ***He who has ears to hear let him hear.***⁵ It's a thing said a number of times by Jesus. It is an invitation to listen to Him. Are we listening to Him. Are we looking into our Bibles on our own with a hunger and strong desire to hear Him? Are we taking security measures to protect the Word of God from being snatched away by the enemy? May the Lord of grace, bless us with a richness in our own lives in His Word. May He give us a stronger desire for His blessed voice than for anything else!

⁵ Matthew 11:13; 13:9; 13:43; Luke 8:8; 14:35; Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22; 13:9

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 17)

Scripture: Mark 4: 5-20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 17th, 2004

Distractions

Mark 4:5-20 (NASB)

⁵ “And other *seed* fell on the rocky *ground* where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. ⁶ “And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ “And other *seed* fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. ⁸ “And other *seeds* fell into the good soil and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” ¹⁰ And as soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. ¹¹ And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables, ¹² in order that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE; AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND LEST THEY RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN.” ¹³ And He *said* to them, “Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? ¹⁴ “The sower sows the word. ¹⁵ “And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. ¹⁶ “And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky *places*, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no *firm* root in themselves, but are *only* temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. ¹⁸ “And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ “And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

Introduction For Muslims, the Koran [Qur'an] is the very word of Allah, the absolute God of Islamic faith, and was revealed to the prophet Muhammad. The angel Gabriel is said to have spoken Allah's words into the Prophet's ear. According to Muslim tradition, after this ecstatic experience Muhammad was able to recite exactly what he had been told. The term *Qur'an*, which means "recitation," occurs several times in the text itself; the term refers either to a fragment of the revelation or to the entire collection of revelations that are known as the Qur'an. **Oral recitation of the Qur'an is believed by Muslims to be the believer's most direct contact with the word of God.** The art of recitation, known as *tajwid* or *tartil*, is consequently highly valued among Muslims. Heard day and night on the streets, in mosques (Muslim houses of worship), in homes, in taxis, and in shops, the sound of the Qur'an being recited is far more than the pervasive background music of daily life in the Islamic world. **Recitation of the Qur'an is the core of religious devotion.** The sound of voices reciting the holy book inspires much of Muslim religious and social life. Participation in recitation, whether as reciter or listener, is itself an act of worship, for both acts are basic to a Muslim's religion and invoke a tradition beginning with Muhammad that transcends the particular occasion.¹

¹ http://ca.encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761557364/Qur%E2%80%99an.html

All Christians acknowledge the importance of the Bible. All would feel comfortable using some sort of superlative adjective to describe the Bible: special, alive, unique, cool or maybe “inspired.” All Christians recognize the authority of the Bible, at least from a distance. All Christians know that the very reason they can call themselves “Christians,” is because it is the writings of the Bible which authorize a person who believes in Jesus Christ, who has trusted in His death and resurrection and substitutionary atonement, to call themselves that.

Some Christians can tell you the names of the books of the Bible, who some of the biblical authors were and when they wrote their respective books. They might also be able to say what is the basic content of some of those books. Some Christians read their Bibles on a regular or occasional basis.

Some fewer Christians read their Bibles often, study the words and sentences and paragraphs and chapters and whole books. These want very much to understand and to *feel* the Word of God. These are not satisfied with anything less than a frequent diet of hearing the Word of God. They are hungry and nothing else will do, than to as often as they possibly can, “hear” the voice of the Lord in their own lives. Some men commit themselves to the work of just getting the Bible into other people’s hands, as with the Gideons, International.

Today we want to look at the other three soils in the parable of the sower that we began last week in Mark 4. The first soil was the roadbed, and the Lord Jesus said it would not take seed, and that since this is so, the seed is gobbled up by the birds. He told his followers that this was a picture of Satan removing the Word of God from people’s awareness and attention, after it has been put in front of them in some way. This is a great danger and ought to be defended against, we said.

Now, our Lord lays out the other three “soils,” or conditions in which people hear the Word of God. Only the fourth is positive, the pictures of “Soil Numbers 2 & 3” are also warnings.

My friends, how are we with the Word? Do we carry our Bibles around with us places? Do we open them and read them? Do we give enough time, in between all our other duties, to think about what we’re reading. Some places in the Bible are easy to understand and digest. Others are deeper and need more focus and determination to understand them. The words themselves are not magical, I do not think. I do not think that in general they’re going to magically fly off the page into your hearts by themselves. (Although I must tell you that this week Deut.4:7 did just that to me!)

Well, in “Soil #2” Jesus said that sometimes the seed of the Word gets sown into rocky soil. It grows a little quickly and then gets burned out just as quickly. He said there was this initial joy when the Word was first heard but that the person didn’t really get grounded. There is a superficial response to the Gospel that does not take into account the cost involved in continuing to follow Jesus. We have seen this often; most churches see it. People are excited about Christ in the beginning, but then their enthusiasm evaporates when affliction or persecution happens. The **affliction** (“hardships”) isn’t the routine difficulties of life—your truck breaks down, you need some medical work done, you lost a job and need to find another one, you’re lonely, you’re depressed—it is the suffering, trials, and persecutions which result from one’s association with God’s Word.² When people hear what God says or what He wants from them, they respond in various ways. When you get up from here today, is there a decision facing you? Based on something you heard from the Lord today, how will you decide? Will you say, “Yes, Lord, I will seek you in this.” Or will you say, “No,” or “Don’t bother me?” Only a “Yes” answer will further your spiritual walk with the Lord. Ignoring His Word only brings falling away, sometimes little by little. The verb translated **fall away** (skandalidzontai) means to take offense at someone or something and thereby turn away and fall into sin (cf. 6:3; 9:42-47; 14:27). **Jesus** predicted that **all** 11 disciples would take offense at His sufferings and death. To avoid the same treatment they would “fall away,” denying association with Him (cf. 14:30) and desert Him (cf. v. 50). Their loyalty would temporarily collapse.³

So, there are times when all believers fall away because we cave and are acting ungrounded. We make ungodly decisions even though we know what God has said to do. And others, hear the Word initially with joy—for it is joyful to hear God’s voice—and cave completely and utterly to the hardships that continuing to live for Christ can bring.

I suppose at this point in my ministry I have gotten used to people falling away. That probably sounds terrible and uncompassionate. But we have seen so many that are all excited about Jesus, Bible study, meeting new friends in the church and so forth, and then one price tag or another for *continuing* in discipleship offends them or distracts them, and they disappear. You see them around town and you’re friendly and act all cheerful but ultimately they have abandoned the Word of God. And it is hard to ignore that fact and pretend otherwise.

So what can you do to prevent this? You need to be IN the Word often. You need to have at the top of your prayer list the prayer request for yourself, “Lord,

²MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Mk 4:17. Nashville: Word Pub., c1997. cf. *confer*, compare v. *verse*

³Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

by Your Spirit. please keep my heart and mind open to your Word. Do not let me become hardened.” And I do not believe you *ever* become exempt from that. Pray it, dear ones, every day. You also keep people in your life who are NOT cynical and burned out and negative about their faith. You surround yourself with a few friends who are themselves hearing God’s Word and acting on it. These are the things you do to not stumble. And there are clearly those among us who succeed at avoiding the pitfall of stumbling! We praise God for those who DO walk in victory!

The third “soil” is in Mark 4:7,18,19. This is the “soil” which allows initial germination of the seed of the Word. People **hear** the Word. But as soon as it grows it gets choked out by **thorns**. Jesus said the thorns are the **worries of this world**, and **the deceitfulness of riches** which choke out the Word. How very often have we heard, “I had no time for studying my Bible because I had to go to a series of doctor’s appointments, I had to take my Mom shopping, I had to do my schoolwork, I had to work hard at building up my client-base, I had to coach rugby, I had to this and I had to that. This world will ALWAYS have plenty of concerns and cares and worries. If you wait until they’re ALL UNDER CONTROL the Word of God will always be put off and you will never be a person of the Word. Let me make this crystal clear—I desire for every Christian in this church to become a person who loves the Word of God, on a reading it and studying it basis, but also more deeply on a “I am hearing the Lord talk to me” basis. It isn’t that if you’re not that, I want you to not be here. It is that if you’re not that, I want you to become that. That being a Bible-person is a first priority in your life, and that with the Word of God firmly planted in your mind, you DEAL with the worries of this world.

People are fooled by the accumulation of more money. Having enough money for today is rarely enough. Jesus said this was a problem two thousand years ago! It choked out people’s time and hunger for hearing the Word of God. If you gamble, you put desire for money and fun in front of the Word of God. Those Bible verses that you know about ill-gotten gain and carnal pleasures get choked out because you got fooled by the prospect of winning free money. If you say to yourself, “I make X amount of money, but I want to make X+Y amount of money because then I can be happier” you are forgetting Philippians 4:11,12, that you know, which says,

¹¹ Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

And then there is the rest of stuff: **and the desires for other things which enter in and choke the word**. That pretty much covers all other distractions. And that dear ones, is the problem. It isn’t that we give lip service

to the Word or that we doubt it. It is more often that we let desires for other things get in the way.

Here's something Matthew Henry said about this passage: "Impressions that are not deep, will not last." To become deeply impressed with the Word of God you have to spend some time in it. You have to mine a bit for the meat of a passage and to let the Spirit imprint your heart with the will of God.

Now, the good soil produces fruit and it often returns gives back many fold from the single seed which was planted. Three Greek present participles (**hear, accept, bear fruit**) mark continuing action. Believers, in contrast to unbelievers, hear God's Word because God allows them to hear it. They "accept" it—they understand and obey it because God opens their mind and heart and transforms their lives. The result is that they produce spiritual fruit.⁴

Are you hearing the Word of God in your daily life? Are you reading it and hearing it that way? Are you listening to other people talk about it? Are you memorizing single verses here and there, tucking them away so that the Spirit can bring them up when you need them?

Are you accepting the Word when you hear it? Do you believe God when He says something on a particular subject? If He says to DO something in a certain situation, do you believe Him? If He says NOT to do something in another situation, do you accept that? Do you meet your hearing of God's Word with faith to believe that it is true?

The promise that a good, cultivating kind of agriculture of the Scriptures in your life will bear fruit in your life. So often when I hear a Christian complain or bemoan the fact that they aren't growing spiritually, almost certainly there is a lack of reading the Bible, studying it, or listening to it. You and I need to be around the Word of God. It is the best Word out there, that there is! It will feed you, encourage you, challenge you and remind you that this world and this life, cares and financial needs, and many desires that we have, is not all there is.

⁴MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Mk 4:20. Nashville: Word Pub., c1997.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 18)

Scripture: Mark 4: 21-29

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 24th, 2004



The Privilege of Having a Christian World View

Mark 4:21-29 (NASB)

²¹ And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed? Is it not *brought* to be put on the lampstand?" ²² "For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has *anything* been secret, but that it should come to light. ²³ "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." ²⁴ And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides. ²⁵ "For whoever has, to him shall *more* be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." ²⁶ And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; ²⁷ and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know. ²⁸ "The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. ²⁹ "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Introduction There are some things that we just love but we take for granted. Take for instance, the Red Sox. We love them. Or, some of us love them. But if we're not careful, we take them for granted. We assume that since they have been there since 1901 when the franchise began as the Boston Somersets, that they will always be there. My own hometown team, the Washington Senators, were forever first in our hearts and forever last in the American League East... We took them for granted "big time," until out of the blue they up and moved to Texas in 1971. I and my friends were devastated! I should have never taken them for granted. I think, for us as Christians, we often take our world view for granted. The way we look at the world and evaluate what's going on, is for us "Christian." If you were raised in a Christian home (some of us were and some of us were not), you make lots of assumptions about what is true, and how to live. You may not even think too often much about WHY you believe what you believe. We assume our Christian world view.

But this world view that we so often take for granted, was brand new when Jesus was giving the three parables that we read in Mark 4. He was teaching principles about the kingdom of God, but doing so in a way like dimming the light. Some who were listening to Him would not get what He was saying. They would dismiss Him as a mere revolutionary or mystic. But those ***with ears to hear*** they would understand that is was actually a whole new world view that Jesus was revealing. To start with, the seed would need good soil to grow. The

day to day concerns of this world would need to be controlled and not allowed to choke out the word. Our Christian world view needs the same. Even though our viewpoint on money and sexuality and relationships and government and time and evil are things we take for granted, we need to keep it unentangled by distractions. Jesus said that ***A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?*** (verse 21) As Christians, we possess the light. That is our Christian world view, our perspective on life. It addresses a great many issues and questions of life. Jesus then said that the light, will reveal what is hidden. The light-source should not be concealed and put away. It should be out where it can be useful. Here's some other words on this...

Matthew 5:16 ***Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.***

John 3:19-21 ***And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.***

Romans 13:12 ***The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.***

1st Corinthians 4:5 ***Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.***

Ephesians 5:8,9,13 ***for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)...¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.***

1 John 1:7 ***but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.***

I can think of few times when the Christian world view has been needed more than it is right now. Yesterday's *New York Times* contained an incredibly shallow editorial about the Christian view of sexuality. It lampooned and blasted "the religious right" for hypocrisy and even poor biblical scholarship. It included this "Note to President Bush: If you want to obey Paul, why don't you start by veiling Laura and keeping her hair long, and only then move on to barring gay marriages." We are made to look, in a newspaper with millions of readers, as foolish, ignorant and stupid for our world view of human relationships and God's word on them.

The world is saying all around us, "Get a divorce; cohabit and get intimate with anyone you like; grab for all the gusto for yourself that you can;

enhance your own lifestyle and your own portfolio any way you can; self-actualize and deny yourself no pleasure whatsoever, as long as you are sincere.” Sometimes too, the world view of the world is worse—“The fittest are the ones worthy of surviving; the ethnically franchised will eliminate anyone they want to; we will kidnap and decapitate anyone we want to.”¹

It is a privilege to have this view. So many people are stumbling around in this world today wondering what is right? I think confusion is rampant. Teenagers become people in their 20’s. They get married—or not—and make babies. Those babies turn into children who themselves become teenagers quick enough. The parents had no answers and little-to-no world view. Now there are the same and worse. They do not reject the world view of their parents, because their parents had none. One only shudders to imagine the perspective and ethics of the next generation. And here we stand, with our Christian world view of things. And as John MacArthur notes, “The one who has learned spiritual truth and applied it diligently will receive even more truth to faithfully apply.”²

Do you feel some comfort and joy at the fact that, if you are a Christian, you basically know what’s going on in the world? I don’t mean you personally have it all together and that you never struggle to live consistently as a Christian, but that basically, you know what’s going on in life? You should. We are blessed to have light, to have the Word, the seed, and to know pretty much what it reveals.

In verses 26-29 Jesus tells the parable of the secretly growing grain. It is actually one of the most encouraging of all the parables that Jesus gave! “He is speaking of how the rule of God increases and grows in our lives. If we patiently expect God to work, Jesus tells us, then we will surely see His harvest in our lives. A seed sprouts and grows—we don’t really know how—and spiritually, there are forces at work that will faithfully perform their work. We can’t *hurry* the harvest by fretting or worrying. We must let God work and He will work.³ As we seek to promote a Christian world view we must be patient, whether we are parents in our parenting, spouses in our marriages, ambassadors in the workplace or neighborhood, or churches in the community. We should expect God to work! The seed of the Word is spread by the witness of Christians. Over time, a quiet but relentless process takes place requiring patience on our part as we allow God to work. We shouldn’t demand instant results. The seed will grow

¹ Here’s the words to a song from 1969: “Look what’s happening out in the streets Got a revolution Got to revolution Hey I’m dancing down the streets Got a revolution Got to revolution Ain’t it amazing all the people I meet Got a revolution Got to revolution One generation got old One generation got soul This generation got no destination to hold Pick up the cry Hey now it’s time for you and me Got a revolution Got to revolution Come on now we’re marching to the sea Got a revolution Got to revolution Who will take it from you We will and who are we We are volunteers of America” (Jefferson Airplane)

² MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Mk 4:24. Nashville: Word Pub., c1997.

³ Stedman, Ray *The Servant Who Rules* Discovery House Publishers 2002 [1976].

and ultimately accomplish God's purposes. There WILL be a harvest, and in the long run the results do not depend on us—the seed WILL germinate!

I'm going to stop here today and let me just say once again, it is a privilege that we bear to have this Christian world view. I am sorry for so many people that I see who are living or acting on instinct. In that regard, people are acting in an almost animalistic way. They live and make decisions so much as if in the dark with no light to see. You and I on the other hand have a lot of light. We are not stumbling around with no understanding. This makes me glad!

Jesus taught about the Christian world view in these parables. He called it ***the kingdom of God***. We celebrate His kingdom although it's not yet completely visible to all people. It is unfolding gradually, blade, head, mature grain, harvest [vss.28,29]. Let's not get too discouraged. We're part of something far bigger than just Dartmouth Bible Church and just this time and place we live in!

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 19)

Scripture: Mark 4: 30-41

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: October 31st, 2004



The ZOOM Kingdom, and its King

Mark 4:30-41 (NASB)

³⁰ And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? ³¹ "It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, ³² yet when it is sown, grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE." ³³ And with many such parables He was speaking the word to them as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

³⁵ And on that day, when evening had come, He *said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ And leaving the multitude, they *took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; and other boats were with Him. ³⁷ And there *arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. ³⁸ And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they *awoke Him and *said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" ³⁹ And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. ⁴⁰ And He said to them, "Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?" ⁴¹ And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Introduction Today we come to the third of these three parables that Mark recorded. Jesus searches for an apt picture of the **kingdom of God**. I am calling this today, the "Zoom" kingdom, because of this parable. But before we look at that parable, let me tell you the thing I love about reading the Gospel of Mark--it's really mostly action. We come to the end of one of Jesus' days. He's been teaching and dealing with people all day, concluding with the third of the three parables and then we're right back into the action. It underscores that the **kingdom** is about action; it's about doing.

In my ministry, I do just a few different categories of things—

- I. I study and prepare for teaching.
- II. I do various tasks around the church here.
- III. I talk or communicate with people every day in all kinds of ways.
- IV. And sometimes I go out. I go out and I do things with people, at people, for people, because of people. Those are the action-ministries. The teaching

tasks I have are there to help you go out and do things with people, at people, for people or because of people. The Christian life is ultimately about action. We demonstrate being Christians by choice, in our home lives, in our public lives, and in our private lives. We demonstrate it by doing good ministries for one another *here*. But ultimately it's about how and what we DO. Saying is one thing. Doing is the important thing... If there is no "doing" to your faith, you will become frustrated. And I think there are way too many Christians around today whose faith is mostly talking and very little actual doing.

Now this third parable is interesting. He told them about how the spread of the word of God is like seed falling on soil. It depends on the nature of the soil as to whether the word produces fruit. And then the parable of the seed which grows to show that eventually, the kingdom of God will grow—no matter how much it seems like it is taking a long time, it WILL grow. It doesn't ultimately depend on how sincerely it is planted. It is going to grow. Bet on it.

Now He tells a somewhat puzzling story and almost seems to say, "Hmm, what else is the Kingdom like—let Me see..." Jesus used the mustard seed another time too:

Matthew 17:20

And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you."

Things start small, whether personal faith or the corporate effect of all believers together in the kingdom. But I think here there is an elusive aspect to the Kingdom of God. It isn't like other kingdoms on earth that are more obvious. This kingdom that we serve as Christians is like a mustard seed. Another seed word-picture but this time focusing on magnitude. And this might seem contrary to nature—mustard seeds do not grow into big trees. At most it might produce a plant 10 to maybe 15 feet up. That is not huge tree. The kingdom is sometimes like that. It starts very small! But it has a "zoom" effect. It grows bigger and bigger. It gets to the point that ***the birds of the air can nest under its shade***. That in itself is an interesting analogy. Because of what the birds were recently in Mark some commentators think "birds" is a reference to satanic forces, which invade the kingdom and masquerade as true "kingdom dwellers." That is an interesting interpretation and is perhaps true. Clearly there are many counterfeit versions of the true Christian kingdom of God. But the more usual interpretation of these ***birds of the air*** is to take it as a playback of several Old Testament predictions that eventually the Gentiles would be brought into the kingdom¹ and also the idea behind 1st Cor. 7:14. Whichever idea of the birds that you like, the kingdom itself would grow from very small and humble beginnings. It would definitely grow. There was no doubt about that. Jesus was

¹ See Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6; Psalm 104:12; Daniel 4:12

who He said He was. And when He comes again His kingdom will be total. But this parable is strange. It almost has more of a foreboding undertone. Even as Christianity becomes world-wide in its scope, it will see many false versions. The good seed *can* mutate into a false system “characterized by an ambition to be dominant, impressive and powerful, seeking world-wide influence²” and as a result seeing satanic forces weasling their way into it. Some of you may hear me intimating that this is the Roman Catholic Church today, but I must ask you to consider many Protestant churches, really “any church that portrays itself as being a branch of the true kingdom of God but that operates by the power of structures and systems of this fallen world.” This might even include some visibly evangelical churches or systems. If the goal is just big numbers, big budgets, impressive structures, costly art or architecture, or church growth for the sake of that alone, that is carnal. That is a false imitation of the kingdom of God. Do you remember what Jesus said to a church that aspired to wealth?

Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Revelation 3:17,18

For us here in New England I think perhaps this is a little easier to relate to. Or to a Christian perhaps in Europe today. In some parts of the world Christianity seems franchised to me. Even since I have been a Christian I have seen our evangelical faith becoming very well engineered and slick. It is political, and well-funded, and possesses huge buildings and campuses. In some places it actually looks like an earthly kingdom. Around here though Christianity, at least real Christianity is more subtle. It is smaller, less franchised, less populated.

What are the biblical marks of success for a church? Paul tells us:

I, THEREFORE, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

We are to be humble and loving, not seeking status or advancement for our own sake. We are to do as the writer to the Hebrews said, ***²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*** (Hebrews 10:24,25). You might have wondered, “How big will this church

² Ray Stedman, *The Servant Who Rules*, Commentary on Mark 1976,

become?" I do not know. I want this: for it to become the size and character that the Lord wants. Not one person bigger and not one person smaller. But there are also other scriptural principles which come to bear: having to do with using our spiritual gifts, being good and wise workmen with what we have and not just stashing away our resources, being missions minded, seeing the fields "white unto the harvest," and so forth.

Then Jesus is tired after this very long day. Into a boat He and His disciples get, and they shove off for the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark notes that they are not alone—that **other boats were with Him**. A storm comes up, which is not uncommon on that basin-like lake, five miles across and thirteen miles long. And a violent gale came down out of the hills and across the water, almost swamping this boat.³ Now why do you think Mark recorded this story, which was also written down by Matthew and Luke? Because it happened! And when Jesus did this incredibly awesome thing—speaking to the weather or perhaps even to demons who might have been inciting the weather—He was clearly revealing Himself for who He was. He is the Lord of the weather. As tired as He was (this is the only time we are told He slept, although clearly He did regularly), He has no problem calming this squall! HUSH!

But that He rebukes His scared disciples is interesting. It isn't hard to understand their terror. You and I would have probably done the same thing. Nevertheless though Jesus asks them **How is it that you have no faith?** How would you answer? How do you answer when you feel like you're about to sink? The issue is fear and not trusting. Jesus is worth trusting. He may *seem* asleep to you when you call out, **Don't You care?** But He is not. He is always in control. If you get sick, He's in control. If you run out of money or friends or opportunity or safety, He's in control. God forbid but even if this great country of ours went down, He's in control. If you are His child and you have entrusted yourself to Him, He's in providential command of your life.

You have to love the disciples' reaction to this miracle: **they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"** He is awesome. Never recover from that. Never get so accustomed to Jesus stories that you go "ho-hum" at another reading of an incident like this. This is the same Jesus we pray to, sing to, tell others about. He is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord of the wind and sea, and the Lord of salvation. If you do not know Him yet, you can. Ask Him into your life. Confess your need of a Savior because you are a sinner. Seek Him until you find Him. Make Him your greatest hunger. You will not be disappointed. You will see faith begin in your heart like a mustard seed—you'll find yourself in the "zoom" kingdom, serving its King, and you'll see the King caring about you and still the storm of your soul. He can change sub-atomic structure at a glance. He can rearrange galaxies with a thought. He hears you cry and He delights in your praise. He loves you; He wants to be in charge of every bit of your life but He is gentle enough to wait for the invitation from you!

³ The kind of boat has actually been found in the sand of the western bank in 1986! See <http://www.peterjblackburn.com/sermons/pb010904.htm>

Dartmouth Bible Notes

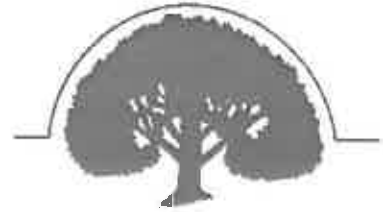
Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 20)

Scripture: Mark 5:1-20

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 7th, 2004



Legion and God's Son

Mark 5:1-20 (NASB)

And they came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. And when they had come out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. And constantly day and night, among the tombs and in the mountains, he was crying out and gnashing himself with stones. And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and crying out with a loud voice, and he said, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!" For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit." And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many." And he began to entreat Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now there was a big herd of swine feeding there on the mountain. And the demons entreated Him saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them." And He gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them, and they were drowned in the sea. And their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. And the people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon possessed, sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind, the very man who had the "legion" and they became frightened. And those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon possessed man and all about the swine. And they began to entreat Him to depart from their region. And as He was getting into the boat, the man who was demon possessed was entreating Him that he might accompany Him. And He did not let him, but said to him, "Go home to your people and report what great things the Lord has done for you and how He had mercy on you." And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled.

Introduction In 1962 a new comic book appeared on newsstands, called "The Incredible Hulk." It later led to a television series and a movie simply called "Hulk." Admittedly it is "pop-fiction" and I know some Christians have little use for that, but it is also a moving tragic story about a physicist named Bruce Banner and a radiation accident from which he mutates, upon onset of anger, into a huge and incredibly strong monster. His transformation is scary and at the same time so very sad. He is sort of a modern fantasy version of someone we read about in the Gospel of Mark. His problem was not getting overexposed to "gamma radiation" though—it was demons. And it is not at all fiction though it is very supernatural.

The situation in front of us is one of the most interesting and gripping stories in the New Testament. It is the direct confrontation between the Son of

God and an apparently large number of demons. This is an interface between the material world in which we live and the spirit world that we do not see from this world. This was not a story that I remembered from childhood. It is scary and despite the attempt by some preachers to spin it completely positive, I do not think that it is a wholly happy story. If we ask, “Why did Mark include it?” the answer is “because it happened.” Mark has other reasons, but ultimately it is to record the facts of Jesus’ life. This happened, and it happened as we read it.

Now, a first question you might ask would be, “What does this have to do with me?” It is appropriate to wonder how this is relevant, compelling and intriguing though it may be.

First, it is relevant because it tells us some things about Jesus, which is ALWAYS important.

Second, it demonstrates some things about the spirit world which are helpful. There is a lot of controversy and different opinions about how involved we should seek to be as Christians, with the spirit world. We have seen a full spectrum of involvements—all the way from practical denial of some Christians that the spirit world has any relevance to us, to an obsession and captivation with it. But Jesus’ encounter in the country of the Gerasenes was not something He went looking for, it came up to Him—but He did not shrink back nor tell His disciples to stay away. He met it face on when He encountered it and that is how we should prepare too, I believe.

This story is relevant too (**third**) because it illustrates the saving power and drama of what it means to really meet Jesus Christ.

By the way, have you met Him yet? Do you feel like you have a personal relationship with Him and that you know Him?

The story begins with Jesus and the disciples arriving on the east side of the Sea of Galilee after He had just stilled the storm on the sea. It is not a long voyage across the Sea of Galilee or “Lake of Gennesaret” as some called it. The whole body of water is only five miles across, so we can imagine the disciples have barely pulled their jaws back up from the weather control incident when they land on the beach, perhaps early morning. Greek manuscripts are divided on the precise location involved, citing three names: Gadarenes (Matt. 8:28), Gergesenes (from Origen), and Gerasenes. Reliable evidence favors the name Gerasenes which probably referred to the small town Gersa (modern Khersa) located on the lake’s eastern shore. Most of its inhabitants were Gentiles (Mark 5:11, 19).

No sooner do their feet touch the shore and coming right up them comes someone resembling the Hulk! (I can remember the first time I ever heard about this story—Spring 1972 at Allegheny Baptist Church in Sunday School as a fellow college student was teaching through it—I thought it was an awesome story, and I had never heard it before!) Matthew tells us there were actually two men, and Mark and Luke focus on the more severely disturbed. Well, you have

heard the story: the fellow is demonized or “possessed” and in fact he has a great many demons residing in him. There is no stealth or attempt to conceal themselves. They can see through this man’s eyes I suppose, that Jesus is in front of them. Although I do not think Jesus looked physically much different than His friends, interestingly the demons immediately recognize Him for who He is **Jesus, Son of the Most God**. I wonder how they knew that? Well, Jesus was a name specifically marked out for the Messiah by Gabriel even before He was born yet (Luke 1:31). It was a name which basically *meant* “savior.” I am sure every demon on the planet knew who Jesus was. And since they are spirit beings, they would recognize the Son of God immediately. There is no debate with Him, you will notice. They ask for mercy—an interesting thing: Matthew adds to the transcript, **before the time**. They know what is coming. Luke adds that they expect to be sent **into the abyss**. There is a place reserved for judgment for demons, called “the abyss.” We cannot say too much more definitively about it, except that it exists, the demons knew it existed and that it will be their unavoidable and eventual address. They hope NOT to go there early. So, Jesus sends them into a herd of pigs, which they requested, and the pigs go nuts. Down the bank they go, and into the water. And the demons, upon being disembodied apparently, end up in the abyss anyway although no writer explicitly tells us that—we infer it.

The man, who is really a bystander to the conversation, is now freed of this horrible and painful possession situation, which evidently he had endured for a long time. The “Hulk” becomes a normal man again and naturally wants to go *with* Jesus. Jesus tells him to stay and be a witness as to **what great things the Lord had done for him and had mercy on him**. This is what “witnessing” is: telling people what you have seen or experienced and how the Lord has done great things for you and has had mercy on you. It is a little different from evangelism. A witness says, “Here is how God has changed my life,” whereas an evangelist preaches the good news and says, “Here is how God can change *your* life.”¹

I said at the beginning that I do not think this story is a wholly happy one. I mean that it deals with the occult, with demons, with destruction and misery. This is why I think that no Christian has any business at all, ever, making light of the spirit world. It amazes me that people, even Christians, will pretend that the macabre, ghosts, things associated with the dead, are just “all in good fun.” The spirit world is a real thing. It is the domain of beings like Legion, who want to hurt and ultimately destroy people—all people, without exemption, if they could.

¹ Ray Stedman, *The Servant Who Rules*, p. 163, 1976.

But here *this* fellow is, clothed, in his right mind, anxious to get on with life. His name is OFF Satan's team depth chart. He is not a servant of the King! That is how it is when you've really had Jesus Christ work in your life. You want to go with Him. You want to serve Him. And you want to tell other people about the stark reality of how He has changed your life.

Now we said there were three ways this is all relevant for us:

1. It shows us some things about Jesus
 - a. He is absolute Lord and ruler of the spirit world
 - b. He did not let the demoniac remain in suffering because He cared.
2. It teaches us some things that are true about the spirit world
 - a. They are bent on destruction and suffering.
 - b. They cause isolation, torment and destruction.
 - c. They do not dispute at all about Jesus' sovereignty because when Jesus shows up, demons check out.
 - d. They obey Him.
 - e. They know their future of judgment.
3. It records and testifies about the power and drama of what it can mean to really meet Jesus Christ!
 - a. There is no degree of badness so bad that Jesus cannot undo it!
 - b. Deliverance brings big physical, mental and spiritual benefits.
 - c. When we feel and see His goodness, we should tell others about it.

For us, we have the hushing of the storm and the exorcism and healing of this demoniac. "Mark has put them together to help us see that Jesus is the Lord of all of our circumstances. No matter what circumstances arise to frighten us, subvert us or sabotage us—whether an external enemy, or an internal force such as a sinful habit or unhealthy attitude, or even a demonic influence that seeks to destroy us—Jesus is the Lord. When we have faith in Him, there is no room for fear. Faith and fear cannot coexist within us. One or the other will reign in us.²"

I hope that you will think clearly about spiritual warfare. It is wrong to think too much about it I think. And it is wrong to think too little about it and to neglect prayer and to pretend that there *is no* warfare going on. We will perhaps not encounter plainly spiritual confrontations too often. At least we do not go looking for them. If we come up against them, we pray. We stay in the Word and we enjoy the protection of staying together. Isolation is something this poor wretched fellow was living in, because he **was** driven to do so by Legion. We should not crack the window open by getting isolated. We need not be. We have each other and our chief activity together should be encouragement and prayer. May the Lord keep our focus ever on the One who but speaks and ancient spirit beings, by the thousand, flee!

² Stedman, *Ibid.*

Matthew 8:28-34 (NASB)

²⁸ And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; *they were* so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. ²⁹ And behold, they cried out, saying, “What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” ³⁰ Now there was at a distance from them a herd of many swine feeding. ³¹ And the demons *began* to entreat Him, saying, “If You are *going to* cast us out, send us into the herd of swine.” ³² And He said to them, “Begone!” And they came out, and went into the swine, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters. ³³ And the herdsmen ran away, and went to the city, and reported everything, including the *incident* of the demoniacs. ³⁴ And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they entreated *Him* to depart from their region.

Luke 8:26-37 (NASB)

²⁶ And they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ And when He had come out onto the land, He was met by a certain man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. ²⁸ And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, “What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.” ²⁹ For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and *yet* he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the desert. ³⁰ And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion”; for many demons had entered him. ³¹ And they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss. ³² Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and *the demons* entreated Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. ³³ And the demons came out from the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned. ³⁴ And when the herdsmen saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and *out* in the country. ³⁵ And *the people* went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. ³⁶ And those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. ³⁷ And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to depart from them; for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat, and returned.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 21)

Scripture: Mark 5:21-43

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 21st, 2004



The Health Care Program of the Lord Jesus Christ

Mark 5:21-43 (NASB)

And when Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered about Him; and He stayed by the seashore. ²² And one of the synagogue officials named Jairus *came up, and upon seeing Him, *fell at His feet, ²³ and *entreated Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death; *please* come and lay Your hands on her, that she may get well and live." ²⁴ And He went off with him; and a great multitude was following Him and pressing in on Him. ²⁵ And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, ²⁶ and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse, ²⁷ after hearing about Jesus, came up in the crowd behind Him, and touched His cloak. ²⁸ For she thought, "If I just touch His garments, I shall get well." ²⁹ And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. ³⁰ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?" ³¹ And His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'" ³² And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. ³³ But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came 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 affliction." ³⁵ While He was still speaking, they *came from the *house of* the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?" ³⁶ But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, *said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid *any longer*, only believe." ³⁷ And He allowed no one to follow with Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ And they *came to the house of the synagogue official; and He *beheld a commotion, and *people* loudly weeping and wailing. ³⁹ And entering in, He *said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." ⁴⁰ And they *began* laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He *took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and *entered the room where the child was. ⁴¹ And taking the child by the hand, He *said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which translated means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"). ⁴² And immediately the girl rose and *began* to walk; for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. ⁴³ And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this; and He said that *something* should be given her to eat.

Introduction Liberal Protestant theologians like to speculate about what a real Christian approach to health care might be, one like "Jesus would favor," they say. I am not sure what that might be, but I can tell you in no uncertain terms how He dealt with health care needs when they were right in front of Him! Today we're looking at two medical cases, happening at the same time, just after Jesus cast out the demons into the pigs on the east bank of the Sea of Galilee. And again, I ask you, why do you imagine Mark would include these two incidents in his Gospel? I think the main reason, simple as it may seem, is that they happened! And if it happened, how can you get away from Who Jesus was? He

must be found today! That's what our church is about. Seeking Jesus, who was and who is and who is to come. It's why I love studying through the Gospel of Mark. When we lay down our tools of ministry and meetings and issues and responsibilities and activities and politics, and get back to who Jesus was, things become clear again. At least to me...

So, I have barely recovered from Jesus stilling the storm by just speaking and from His exiling of hundreds and maybe thousands of spirit beings just by speaking, when He and the disciples go back across the water to the other side... No day off for Him, that week anyway.

Now they have climbed out of the boat back again probably on the northwest shore, near Capernaum. Still, a large crowd gathers. This was one of the distractions not blessings of Jesus' early ministry. The effects of His popularity were that they "thronged to him and pressed upon him and pursued him everywhere he went. To many today it seems to be a mark of success that a person has a great popular following. But Mark is careful to detail these incidents for us so we might see that this was not a help to the ministry of Jesus, but a hindrance. We have seen some of the effects of the popularity of our Lord: the opposition it awakens; the dimming of light which necessarily follows -- our Lord had to begin to speak in parables instead of speaking directly as before; the physical exhaustion it produces -- worn-out and weary, he boarded a boat and crossed the Sea of Galilee, as we saw in our last study together; the fickleness of response represented by the crowd on the other side of the sea, who asked him to leave their neighborhood because he healed the man with the demons.¹"

And once again the world, nature, the natural order of things cannot help these people who are desperate for help. Jairus, Mark tells us, was "one of the synagogue officials," like an elder or a trustee. Not all of the Jewish rulers were hostile to Jesus, particularly when in such a state of desperation.

Few emotions are as strong as that of a Daddy for his daughter. Twice I have rushed Susanna to the hospital, not waiting for an ambulance (once from an accident at the grocery store and once from an accident here). One day my girls were in an auto accident in Westport and I had one girl in each emergency room at Charlton Memorial. God blessed and injury was minimal.

But *this* twelve year old girl is near death. Elder Jairus has no resources and Mark tells us that Jairus ***fell at Jesus' feet***. Can you feel his passion, ***My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay your hands on her that she may get well and live.***? What do you think his great emotion was? It was fear and understandably so. There are no medications, no IV's, no medevac to Mass. General, no EMT's on the scene. So he forgets whatever pride

¹ Ray Stedman; <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3310.html>

he had or prejudice against Jesus, and comes to Him for help. Notice that Mark reports Jesus' response very simply—**and He went off with Him**—nothing about deliberating or wondering if He would help. I think this reveals something of the heart of our Savior. He cares, He feels and He responds. In fact, that's about the extent of this message today... Notice please the simple actions and verbs Mark uses in describing the day:

A c t i o n s	vs. 24	went with the man
	30	asked a question
	32	looked at the woman
	34	spoke a blessing to her
	36	challenged Jairus
	37	restrained the size of those to witness her resurrection
	39	spoke to the crowd
	40	collects the group to witness the resurrection
	41	touches her, raises her from the dead
	43	commands that this should not be talked about
	43	directs that she be fed

Jesus, Son of God, responded to the man's plea—He, in effect, says, "Let's go." In the midst of it all, He gets tagged by another very needy person, who merely believes His garment can heal her. Think about her suffering. Mark is careful to tell us three things about this woman: her **condition**, her **cure**, and her **confession** before Jesus.

Look at her **condition**. She was suffering from what doctors would call a vaginal hemorrhage, a continual flow of blood which not only gave her great distress and pain, but also rendered her ceremonially unclean so that she was ostracized from society. She had to keep her distance from everyone, could not mingle with people. She was almost like a leper. People were forbidden to touch her while she was in this condition. She was forbidden to attend services in the temple or in the synagogue. So for twelve years she had been denied all the comfort and solace of the services of the people of God. She was ostracized, separated, isolated, and in pain and distress from this unending flow of blood. To make matters even worse, she had spent all her money on doctors, and had not been helped a bit. Some of us can sympathize. Many doctors are dedicated, marvelous men who have done great work. But there are times when doctors fail, and this was such a time. Mark seems to imply that none of them had the grace to tell her they could not help her; they simply took her money, but left her unchanged. There is a wonderful picture here, in that this woman, with a touch of faith, draws power from Jesus, whereas all the rest of the crowd, pressing around him on every side, touching him many times in the course of the journey, were not receiving anything from him. This incident indicates, too, that the healing was really not done by Jesus; it was done by the Father. Our Lord did not even know it was happening. It was not his willful choice that this woman be healed. She touched him, and the touch of faith drew from him the power to

heal. But he did not even know it until it happened. This is confirmation of what Jesus himself tells us -- that it was not he who did the healing or the speaking; it was the Father who dwelt in him. An all-seeing God watched this woman push her way through the crowd, saw the faith in her heart. And when, in the midst of that crowd pressing all around Jesus and touching him in a dozen different ways, he saw this woman reach out and touch his garment, instantly the power of God flowed through the life of Jesus and healed her. This is what Jesus said: "It is not I who do the works, but the Father who dwells in me," {cf, John 14:10}.

Yet, having said that, it is clear that our Lord did have some part in this, because when the woman, knowing that he was looking for her, fell down and told the whole truth, he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go [literally] *into* peace, and be healed of your disease." Why would he tell her to be healed when she had already been healed? The idea expressed by the verb tense he used is, "Be continually healed." That is, this was continuance in health that he was granting her; this was a total **cure**.

This is the only time recorded in the Scriptures that he ever used this term "daughter." He was very tender with this woman because, despite her shame and embarrassment, she blurted out the whole truth in front of the crowd. I think that is the ground upon which Jesus continued this healing, made it permanent. In this **confession**, she told him the truth. When he looked around for someone, she fell down before him and told him what her problem was, how long she had had it, how unclean she was, how difficult it was to find access to him, how determined she was. She simply put the problem right back into his hands. And immediately his response was to make permanent her healed condition. I believe that if she had not responded in that way, if she had tried to lose herself in the crowd and seek anonymity, she would have had that disease back within hours. This may explain why there are failures of some modern purported "healings."² How many of us have received great grace from the Lord, even great healings and we are loathe to testify verbally, out loud, in front of people, that He has been good to us?

Well, Jairus has been standing there, on one leg, then on the other, waiting for Jesus to get on with it. His daughter is dying! And then word comes that in fact, she has died. Now, Jesus challenges Him, Don't fear...Believe. That is the "Health Care Program of the Lord Jesus Christ." Do not be afraid, believe. Ultimately, what is the worse that can happen to us? We get sick, have pain... OK, that's a bummer. But it passes. We might even die? So what? We're going to die anyway. But we might leave someone behind that we love. Or worse—WE might get left behind without that loved one. Well, that is true. I think Jairus was feeling that. Jesus said, ***Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.*** And

² Stedman, *ibid.*

He takes His inner core of disciples into the house, along with Mr. And Mrs. Jairus. He does not leave out the Mom, by the way, a detail Mark does not miss, as he probably got this from Peter himself, who was there. Jesus puts out all the people except the father and mother, and Peter and James and John, and together they go in to the quiet and still corpse. This father and mother are brokenhearted, but Jesus walks to the side of the little girl and, taking her by the hand, says in Aramaic, **Talitha cum**, i.e., "Little lamb, arise." And somewhere, wherever that spirit had gone, it heard those words of Jesus, and came back into that body, which began to flush with health and strength and life again. He raised her up, and she walked around the room, to the amazement of all who were there. Peter's eye-witness account of this episode is woven through Mark's record. Even the very language Jesus used at the bedside of the little girl is repeated, for Peter never forgot it. Mark does not even put it in Greek, but leaves it in the Aramaic -- the very words Jesus spoke, as Peter related them to him. He records the incident which comes after her resurrection. Jesus said to the people, "Give her something to eat." Peter was amazed at this -- that the Lord Jesus would think so tenderly of her as to remember her need for food after such an ordeal.

Now, why did Jesus do this miracle? Well, it was not for the little girl's sake. He called her back to pain, heartache, worry, weariness, and ultimate death once again. He did it for the sake of the father and mother, to assuage their agony of heart. He responded to their sorrow and restored this little girl.

"Well," you say, "that's fine. I read this story of how he healed the woman and raised the little girl. But he didn't do that for me. I'm sick, and he hasn't healed me. My loved ones are in the grave, though I wanted them back, too. Why doesn't he respond like that today?" What is the answer to that? The answer is: it is evident from this account that Jesus did not heal the woman and he did not raise the child in order to encourage us to expect the same thing today. This is why he strictly charged that no one should know this, as Mark tells us in vs.43.

He did not want this broadcast all around, so that he would get an invitation to every funeral held in Palestine for the next five years! No, he wanted us to learn something else from this. He healed this woman, and he raised this child, in order that we might have a new view of sickness and death, a view that the world will never share, a view that will keep us steady in the midst of this kind of weakness and pressure, will hold us peaceful and calm in the midst of these kinds of hours.

I want to illustrate this with a quote from Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the great English expositor of Scripture. Perhaps you have read some of his work. There was a time when his first-born daughter lay at the point of death. Years

later speaking on this incident of the raising of Jairus' daughter, he said these words:

I can hardly speak of this matter without becoming personal and reminiscent, remembering a time forty years ago when my own first lassie lay at the point of death, dying. I called for Him then, and He came, and surely said to our troubled hearts, "Fear not, believe only." He did not say, "She shall be made whole." She was not made whole, on the earthly plane; she passed away into the life beyond. But He did say to her, "Talitha cum", i.e., "Little lamb, arise." But in her case that did not mean, "Stay on the earth level"; it meant that He needed her, and He took her to be with Himself She has been with Him for all these years, as we measure time here, and I have missed her every day. But His word, "Believe only," has been the strength of all the passing years.

This is what Jesus intends for us to learn from this account -- that He is able to meet the suffering of the heart, whatever its cause, when the world's resources are brought to an end. The Health Care Program of the Lord Jesus Christ is to care for us beyond mere physical health. He is on a much deeper program. We want comfort and health and companionship. He wants us to believe in Him and to trust Him EVEN IF those things disappear. Sometimes He heals. Sometimes He does not. He is sovereign and He gets to answer our prayers as He best sees fit. **Only believe...** Is that your feeling towards the Lord Jesus this morning? Can you trust Him regardless? He is not unfeeling. But He does as He sees fit. Jesus' work is an acted parable that looks ahead to the time when death will be finally overcome and the raised fed everlastingly.³ May we learn to trust Him beyond whether we get healed or not, beyond whether our loves ones are brought back to life or not. His great program of grace extends far beyond this short life and this little place.

³Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 22)

Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 28th, 2004

and the First Sunday in Advent



Home for Thanksgiving

Mark 6:1-6 (NASB)

AND He went out from there, and He came into His home town; and His disciples followed Him. ² And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? ³ "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? 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 home town and among his *own* relatives and in his *own* household." ⁵ And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

Introduction The Fall is usually a busy time for a lot of people. School activities, the fourth quarter business cycle, Fall sports and for most churches the year sort of starts over again every September. Lots of things are accomplished in the Fall, as we stretch towards Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a time many folks travel home, from wherever they live. In 1971 I was traveling home for Thanksgiving and got caught in a blizzard in a '63 Valiant. It took 28 hours to get home for what was usually a 4 hour ride.

I use this as a picture today of these last few messages from the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. It wasn't Autumn necessarily, but in a short time there had been lots of exciting things happening. And then Jesus went home—home to Nazareth. He had just told a furious squall to be quiet. He commanded a whole bunch of demons to leave the Geresene Hulk. He raised a little twelve year old girl from the dead. And He blessed a lady who had been very sick for twelve years but solidifying her healing and making her ceremonially clean again. Now as He comes home, what is the reception He received in Nazareth? He comes into town with the boys and waits until the Sabbath and teaches in the synagogue.

Mark only give us the broadest details of the people's skepticism of Him. But if you will look at Luke 4 we can read his account of what Jesus said on a previous day in that same synagogue, some months before:

Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and **as** was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” ²⁰ And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” ²³ And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well.’” ²⁴ And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his home town. ²⁵ “But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, *in the land* of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ “And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ And all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹ and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. ³⁰ **But passing through their midst, He went His way.**

In this incident his own townsfolk are surprised. Then they get annoyed with Him. Then they get angry and want to even kill Him. Familiarity breeds contempt apparently because these are not people who didn’t know Jesus. They knew Him growing up. By the way, I’ve always thought that Luke 4:30 is one of the most underrated miracles in the New Testament!

So here He was again in the Nazareth synagogue and He is not appreciated and not recognized for who He was—despite the reputation of the things that He had accomplished—and He was certainly not worshipped.

They took a “naturalist” view of things. Their attitude was, “Unless we can see it, feel it, taste it, smell it, hear it or reason it, we will not believe it.” It was a sadly and wrongly limited view of who Jesus was. Unfortunately, too many people today take the same view of Jesus. “Oh let’s celebrate His love or His example or His ethics,” well enough they say. But see Him as the very Lamb of God, as John did, who takes away the sins of the world? “Well no, they would say.” This is why I have no use at all for liberal perspectives on Jesus. He was who He said He was.

An interesting comment is made by Ray Stedman about this town:

Jesus pointed out to them that this is so characteristic of fallen human nature. There was no recognition of his worth, no honor accorded him in his own home town. And as a result, there was no mighty work done there. He responded to the

few who had faith, but there was nothing the town could boast of. And is it not amazing that through all these centuries, though Nazareth has never been forgotten as the town in which Jesus grew up, yet to this very day it is regarded in Palestine with some sense of embarrassment. Nothing honorable has ever been associated with Nazareth, other than the fact that Jesus grew up there. They missed their great opportunity.¹

This is interesting because there is a whole denomination called The Church of the Nazarene and I think in general they are very fine denomination, though they do believe a couple of very strange doctrines, but I always wondered why they took the name of that town for their denominational identity. Jesus never made a thing out of coming from Nazareth. It is a town that has remained insignificant except that Jesus was raised there. On this day that we read about, they certainly missed their chance to recognize Him.

There is a lesson here for us too about familiarity. I think we could border on the Nazareth attitude if we allow our Christianity to become too routine, too predictable, like, “Is this not the stone cutter?” (The Greek word actually doesn’t just mean wood-worker but more stone and brick worker.) I think church life can get too matter-of-fact, too familiar and too family-life, that we begin to lose appreciation for it even IF extraordinary things go on. Even IF people’s lives are changed. “Yes, yes, this is the church. One expects the drama...” Let us never become so familiar with it all. Let us not be surprised when the Lord works dramatically in people’s lives in our midst. Let us not always react with skepticism. I know I am the first to be skeptical but I trust it is not because I don’t think Jesus is here—I just resist spiritual fraud. But I want myself and I want us to not lose the wonder of who Jesus is. He will always surprise us, I believe. If we follow Him as His disciples did, who were there that day.

It is interesting that Jesus’ doing miracles was intimately tied to whether people believed in Him or not. Unlike the slate of rapid-fire power events we read about earlier in this chapter, here Mark tells us He ***could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them.*** This is not to suggest that His power was somehow diminished by their unbelief. It may suggest that because of their unbelief people were not coming to Him for healing or miracles the way they did in Capernaum and Jerusalem. Or, more importantly it may signify that Christ limited His ministry both as an act of mercy, so that the exposure to greater light would not result in a worse hardening that would only subject them to greater condemnation, and a judgment on their unbelief. He had the power to do more miracles, but not the will, because they rejected Him. Miracles belonged among those who were ready to believe.²

¹ Ray Stedman; <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3310.html>

² MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Mk 6:5. Nashville: Word Pub., c1997.

You will notice too that Mark specifically says, as do each of the other Gospel writers, that Jesus HAD brothers and sisters. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise. It is a small point, and of no real relevance unless one is trying to prove that Mary never really engaged in physical intimacy with her husband for some reason.

Finally, Mark tells us a very interesting thing: ***He wondered at their unbelief***, or ***amazed*** (*ethaumasen*, “astonished”; 5:20; 12:17; 15:5, 44) ***at their unbelief***, their unwillingness to believe that His wisdom and power were from God.³ This is the only place where we read that Jesus “marveled” or was astonished, but here He was! He knew who He Himself was. The disciples were beginning to suspect. Mary could have recalled Gabriel’s visit to her which happened down the street of this very town. But the general townspeople would not embrace Christ by faith. Does it surprise us when people today will not? It should not surprise us at all. Even those who knew Him best allowed the dark despair of unbelief to rule their hearts and minds. So far as is known, Jesus never returned to Nazareth...

What is this all saying -- this entire account of the healing of the woman, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the reception given him by the people of Nazareth? It is saying to us today "Lift up your eyes and look beyond the visible to the realities of God. Live in the full dimensions of life, as God intended life to be." Life can never be explained entirely in terms of the natural. Its resources come to an end. Its ability to help us soon disappears. We are left impoverished and despairing if all we have to depend on are natural resources, natural power. But God is rich in grace, rich in power, rich in inward strength and sympathy, and his cry to us is, "No longer be unbelieving, but believe and have faith that I am at work, and I will enrich your life beyond your wildest dreams." As time goes on, in his own way, according to his own schedule, and through the processes of pain and toil and trouble, God will bring a depth of enrichment to you that you cannot possibly measure.⁴

³Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

⁴ Stedman, *Ibid.*

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 23)

Scripture: Mark 6:7-

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: December 12th, 2004

and the Third Sunday in Advent

The First Short-Term Mission Trip

Mark 6:7-13 (NASB)

⁷ And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; ⁸ and He instructed them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, except a mere staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belt; ⁹ but *to* wear sandals; and *He added*, “Do not put on two tunics.” ¹⁰ And He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. ¹¹ “And any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake off the dust from the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.” ¹² And they went out and preached that *men* should repent. ¹³ And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Introduction Every Christian faces the “crisis” of witnessing. Since we have received an incredible thing—eternal life—there is this inescapable logic to tell other people about it. Makes sense, don’t you think, to tell people about Jesus? And yet for many of us it is hard. We love to praise and extol and honor the Lord in the company of the faithful but to go out and bring Christ to people who do not yet know Him yet, that is hard.

I don’t know what the disciples were thinking long about Mark 6, but here Jesus sends them out to make their “discipleship rubber meet the ministry road.” Perhaps they were thinking, “Hey we get to see cool stuff happen by hanging out with Jesus.” Or, “We’re learning and getting fed and feeling joy as Jesus does miracles, kicks the posterior trailing edge of demons and wins rhetorical arguments.” Mark tells us that Jesus brought together the twelve—they may have been back in their homes or working—and He sends them out in pairs. Out where and to do what?

In “going out” they were to go out into the towns and countryside and be His representatives. They went in pairs, an important principle. Fellowship goes hand in hand with ministry, as teams. They were to talk about the Kingdom of God and to perform miracles to authenticate what they were saying. They were not to worry about how they would live, or about the

various reactions they might get to their talking. They were just supposed to do it. Now, this new faith in Jesus was supposed to translate into action. People needed to hear about Him.

You will notice the simplicity of the preparations: No food or backpack. No second set of sandals. No money for the road. Just a walking stick and one pair of sandals. (Matthew's, 9:10, account reported Jesus forbidding shoes whereas Mark said He permitted them--Probably a spare pair of sandals was what Jesus forbade. Jesus was training His disciples to serve, not to lord it over others or to expect others to serve them.^[1]

And one jacket or coat (tunic). That's pretty minimal. This was for this short-term mission trip only. I don't think this was intended to be the plan for *all* trips to come. But the principle was clear. The message is urgent. Don't spend all the time you have available to you getting ready. Go. Get there. Talk about Christ. Don't spend too much time planning, just go. The service of the word of God called for extreme urgency and complete self-dedication.

Jesus' practical instruction extended to how they would deal with lodging too. Stay at one place if possible as long as you're in that town. That will minimize distractions and keep them from looking greedy as they went from place to place. Their reputation was important as they traveled.

You will notice in verse 12 that ***they preached that men should repent.*** The word "preach" is *ekeruxan* which means to "herald" or "proclaim." I think the pairs of disciples would engage conversation wherever they could—in inns, in the streets, in the markets, in the synagogues. They would strike up conversations and, like John the Baptist, would tell people that repentance and a change of heart is what is needed towards God. Repentance means a change of heart and mind and a change of direction. It is breaking out of the same old assumptions (or presumptions) about how you stand with God. That is the content of what the disciple-pairs talked about.

As for how people might respond, they were to ***shake the dust from the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.*** A visible display like that *might* cause the people of that place to reconsider since this was a customary thing Jews did when they reentered Jewish territory from Gentile territory, and a symbolizing of the defiling effect of contact with pagans. And pagans the various people would remain if they rejected the news of Jesus Christ.

We don't need to agonize too much about those who simply will not listen. It's going to happen. God is sovereign over who really responds to the news. Our job is not to convert people, it is to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to talk about the Kingdom. I am not one who focuses on doing miracles today because I think the message is authentic enough and that God

will prosper the work of evangelism through the Spirit in other ways. Casting out demons for the purpose of impressing people just doesn't seem appropriate to me today as it was when Jesus sent out the Twelve. That doesn't mean I don't think demons exist today or that they could be cast out. I think they do exist and that they can be cast out. But I think demon possession is not quite as common today as it was then either, and if we encounter that we need to pray and deal with it accordingly. Otherwise, we preach and talk and dialogue and pray and let the Spirit call whom He will.

Now this was the first time the disciples have been sent out. We're not sure how long it was, but it was clearly for a number of days if not weeks. Later in the chapter, they return. But I think we can learn some things from this account of Mark: **Short term assignments can be extremely significant, both for the effect of evangelism and for the training value for the disciples.**

More and more we are hearing among our large family of churches about people from the churches going out to all kinds of places to minister, in the short term. I am excited about this because I think it is one of the healthiest things a church can focus on.

Might you be willing to pray about going on a trip? We have one we're working on for next summer. It will be to Russia. I am praying for nine willing people from DBC to go. I have no preconceptions about who that might be. I would be number 10 and Frank would be number 11. His translator and associate would be number 12. I have been asking the Lord, if He wants us to do this, to lay it on nine people's hearts from within our church, to clearly hear from Him that He wants them to go out. Each person gets a walking stick and a pair of sandals. You can wear a belt but don't stick your money in it! We will make adequate arrangements in advance, but the main thing is not the travel details, it is the DOING of ministry.

In recent years we have sent people to Romania, Russia, Morocco, France, Thailand, and all over the United Kingdom, mainly Scotland. We have also helped people go to various projects in this country. There are so many who need to hear the news of Christ and probably most anyone in this church possesses more Bible knowledge and good theological understanding compared to what the average citizen on the mission field knows, that all you have to do is "download" what you know! The openness of the hearts that you would see, is incredibly exciting. You see, this is one real powerful way how the "discipleship rubber meets the ministry road." It's one thing to sit in Bible studies, take classes, read more and more, listen to more and more messages, go to conferences, and just basically get fatter and fatter. But to take it on the road, where people need what you have, now my friends, that's something to get excited about.

There are other trips coming in the future too. I would like DBC to get to the point where we set up and DO our own short-term mission trip maybe every other summer. But that takes money, you say. True that! Do you think that the Lord would provide money for doing the work of ministry in places where it is not being done? Do you think He already has provided everything we need here and then some? What is our Christianity about? What is the purpose for why this church exists? Just to hide behind the walls of the castle against the pagan world out there? That may have been something of how Peter and James and John and the rest felt before Mark 6:7.

I think getting involved with short-term missions has some real benefits for us here too.

1. Another benefit is to plug into something bigger than just our own church's ministry. We are so prone to having a narrow focus and just thinking about ourselves. It is always good to do things which widen our perspective, which break us out of the It's All About Me syndrome. Who knows? We might learn some things from Christians in other places! We might come back with ideas too.

2. Another benefit is to perhaps encourage and make available the opportunity to explore doing missions work vocationally to some people—and I don't just mean young people. There is a trend these days for people to become second career missionaries. Ron Gallegos is an example of that. Going on trips, as a church together, exposes us to more possibilities than we just might learn by hearing the occasional missionary speaker sweep through here on a Sunday morning. In time, we become a sending-church and I really believe this is a thing the Lord loves! It is a good aspect of worship to make the sacrifices to get people into missions! There is no finer investment of our energies, our money and our time.

3. Another benefit is the shared-experience aspect, one of the deepest kinds of fellowship we can experience. Ten of us go to Russia, let's say: We experience together all that is involved. We meet the same needy people, we see the same things, we travel together. It isn't for recreation. It is for work and doing hard ministry. It bonds us like a decade of going to church together will not do. And the experience stays with us for the rest of our lives. It is authentic Christianity, nothing manufactured or artificial.

4. We have been praying about an epidemic of depression ravaging too many fine Christians. There are lots of reasons why depression can happen, but one antidote might be to get focused on some place other than where I'm sitting and to go there and to see people's needs and to help in meeting them. One of our modern problems is that we are so self-focused. Its one of the reasons I lobby against young people getting so exclusively involved with

boyfriends and girlfriends so early. That so completely can distract and hinder your finding out what kind of ministry you can have and how God has made you, when you define your life so totally in the context of one other person and at such a young age.

Well that's a lot to get out of Mark 6:7-13, I admit. But I think Mark wrote down the details of the first short-term project for a reason—to stimulate Christians in the times to come to consider what their real purpose is as a fellowship of followers of Jesus. It is to minister. It is to spread the good news about forgiveness of sins and new life and the abundant life and the fruit of the Spirit and the inheritance reserved in heaven for us. We need to have a going-out mentality, world-view and philosophy. We need to see that this is a big part of WHY we are even here. May the Lord work in this church. May He fire us up. May He use us to get the news to more and more people.

[1] Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 6:8. Galaxie Software, 2003.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 24)

Scripture: Mark 6:14-32

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 16th, 2005

The Fate of the Decreasing Man

Mark 6:14-32 (NASB)

¹⁴ And King Herod heard *of it*, for His name had become well known; and *people* were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." ¹⁵ But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "*He is* a prophet, like one of the prophets *of old*." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard *of it*, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" ¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, 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 and could not *do so*; ²⁰ for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him. ²¹ And a strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; ²² and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." ²³ And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." ²⁴ And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." ²⁵ And immediately she came in haste before the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me right away the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ And although the king was very sorry, *yet* because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. ²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded *him* to bring *back* his head. And he went and had him beheaded 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 And when his disciples heard *about this*, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb. ³⁰ And the apostles *gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And He *said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many *people* coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ³² And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.

Introduction Sometimes life seems so complicated, doesn't it? At times we feel like we've been "tsunami'ed" with a torrent of fast-rushing things, all at once and we battle with keeping control. If you've ever been in one of those times, and then a death occurs, of someone you care about, you probably felt completely overwhelmed. The disciples of John the Baptist, who are really second-level players in the drama before us today in Mark 6 (14-32) must have felt like that. The story as Mark gives it, is packed with intrigue and drama. It has all the elements of a block-buster Hollywood story: political maneuvering, debauchery, lust and sensuality, power, pageantry, arrogance, flash-bang gore, and of course, murder. And this murder is the bottom of the pit, emotionally,

for John's disciples: the life of their leader has come to a crashing, rude end: blunt. Beheaded. End of story.

But Mark has not just "flashed back" to tell us a gruesome story, he is giving us the reason that Jesus sent out His own twelve disciples. God's program then, and now, is to introduce people to WHO JESUS IS. Now that John has been beheaded, Jesus sends out the twelve to continue John's ministry: the message of repentance—and to add to it another note: the authority and power to cast out demons, to heal the sick, to heal emotionally and spiritually as well as physically, those who were afflicted by guilt and sin. [1]

They are gradually learning what is to be the full and complete message of the Gospel. They're ignorant men at this point—they knew nothing of Jesus' coming death or resurrection. They knew little enough of who He was. They only knew that God was at work in Israel in a new way, and that people needed to acknowledge their *need* and then God would begin to work in their lives. This is where the Gospel starts—with repentance. And little by little these other elements are being added as we go along with these disciples. This is the difference between the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus. And ultimately, it is to get people to look at "who IS Jesus Christ?"

Another principle we might take from Jesus is that Christians can learn ministry "on the job" and just by doing. Sometimes we wait so long before we will let anyone do anything but He just sent them out for a bit early. I have no doubt they learned a lot on that first ministry trip...

But John's guys must have been devastated and Mark merely gives us a clipped report: ***And when his disciples heard about this [his beheading] they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.***

The man who had said, ***He must increase but I must decrease*** (John 3:30), who had a radical little movement going, who was impressive in his character and in his speaking ministry—people were really being affected-- is now a headless corpse. His friends drag his body away, no nice funeral director or hearse or rubber gloves, maybe wrapped in a tarp or something, bloody, gross, utterly humiliating and depressing. It must have been an utter defeat, the end of all things meaningful. We can feel this way too when we face the loss of a loved one. John's death was not prefaced with any sense of justice or accident. It was outrageously unjust and bizarre. It was nothing short of just evil. His followers must have felt completely blackened in their spirits. As do we often when we face such a dramatic defeat. But here's the thing today to take away from this whole story. Mark tempers the tragedy with what he writes in vss. 30 and 31.

And the apostles [notice that! It's the first time they're called that.] gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had

done and thought. And He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.” (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat).

Herod has heard about the new movement, being brokered by Jesus and His followers. He’s in a place called MACHAERUS, the “Black Castle.” (Here’s some shots of the site today—the Jewish historian **Josephus** wrote at the time, that this was where John was imprisoned.) Herod’s wondering, “Hey is this new guy John, back from the dead?” That in itself is incredible because Herod belonged to the party of the Sadducees, who were rationalists and anti-



supernaturalists, the theological liberals of the day. They didn’t believe in resurrection. My how Herod had a guilty conscience! As Shakespeare said, “Conscience doth make cowards of us all.” He’s trying to make sense of the news coming from all around him about the Jesus movement. He stomped out John but the movement keeps

growing! This is how it is with the Gospel. Whenever someone tries to eradicate it, it pops up somewhere else. It’s almost as if the Gospel prospers **WHEN** it is attacked or challenged. This is why in recent years when some governments have made evangelical Christianity undesirable politically or even illegal, it just seems to grow. It cannot be stamped out. It will grow and change people’s lives and win more and more people to Jesus Christ. Today, there are moves afoot to eliminate the name of Christ from our culture.

Ravi Zacharias was preaching recently and made the comment--isn’t it incredibly ironic that in the former Soviet Union they have been **INVITING** Christians to come and teach about Christianity in the public schools there, and here we are doing everything we can to eliminate His name from the public forum.

Even to the point of saying, “Hey a few people don’t want to hear about Jesus at Christmas, so let’s make it illegal to talk about Christ, even at Christmas.” But the name of Jesus Christ cannot be stamped out. He is the Savior of the world. He is the only way to heaven. That is because He is the only sin-bearer that God has provided to be a perfect lamb of sacrifice for us. Many will not believe it but many **WILL** believe it, and are.

This may seem all too elementary to you, as modern evangelical biblically well-endowed Christians. But in many places around the world today, it is a powerful thing to read this story of John the Baptist’s death, and see that Jesus was still there. Many pay a price today in the world, to call themselves Christians.

- They need to know that Jesus is still here, even if they have to meet a tough end.
- They need to know that even if their Christian hero dies, Jesus is still there.
- They need to know that even if they lose their jobs or their freedom or their security, Jesus is still there.

- They need to know that even if they lose their heads, Jesus is still there.

Sometimes, the godly meet a tough end, even if their life was significant. But Jesus is still there. Sometimes serving God faithfully might still result in a tough end.

My friend Jack Arnold went from preaching last Sunday morning, to the arms of the Savior. He finished his sermon, and then died, before he hit the floor.

But more often than that Christians die less dramatic and quick deaths. Sometimes even, they die tragic or unjust deaths. They may die by themselves. But Jesus is still there. John the Baptist died in a way no one should have to, at the whim of a young power-broker-hedonist pagan. Many other Christian heroes over the centuries have been cruelly executed for their testimony of Christ. And their followers and loved ones are bewildered, for a while, I am sure. But Jesus is still there, and that is the simple point of the passage. Things are changing. It is no longer the days and time of John the Baptist. He was the forerunner and in a sense, the last of the Old Testament prophets. Now, the days were becoming the time of Jesus and soon enough, the time of His disciples, which we are still in, today!

There will be times when you will have an abrupt disappointment perhaps. It may be personal or it may be ministry related.

We may lose a ministry hero.

We may see a great ministry come to an end.

We may see the wicked prosper.

We may see sin win gains and victories publically or politically.

We may even suffer the terrorism of persecution because we stand up and call evil "evil."

But Jesus is still there. Because you "end," or someone you love "ends", it doesn't mean that Jesus "ends." All of us must eventually "decrease" and fade into time. But the apostles promise us that

...though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 2nd Corinthians 4:16b-18. So they tell us not to lose heart! Death may insult us or it may sadden us, but it is not the end of things. Jesus is still there. I know it is sad to watch your health decline but Jesus is still there. I know it is perplexing to wane in importance but Jesus is still there.

Mark moves on. That almost seems insulting, one might think, to the loyal friends of John the Baptist. **And the apostles gathered together with Jesus and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught...** HEY! Wait a minute! John was important! We're not through grieving him yet!

The movement goes on. With us for a while, and then, without us. New people take the scene. New people take the pulpit, make the news and do the significant ministries. We fade. We decrease. But He increases!

Isn't it lovely to be a Christian? We're part of something much bigger than ourselves, and we privileged to be part of it for a while. Then we go to be with Him, however the "going" happens. I am glad we have such hope and confidence. I am glad we are His and He is ours! I hope you know Him. I hope you are clinging to Him and to His cross so tightly and trusting in what He has done for you!

[1]

Ray C. Stedman, sermon *Who Is This?* Jan. 19, 1975 <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/mark/3311.html>

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 25)

Scripture: Mark 6:30-34; I Peter 5:1-4

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 23rd, 2005

The Sheep's Need for the Shepherd

Mark 6:30-34 (NASB)

³⁰ And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while."

(For there were many *people* coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)

³² And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. ³³ And *the people* saw them going, and many recognized *them*, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

Introduction My Dad didn't generally like preachers. I think he thought that most are idiots and useless. Deeper, I think he distrusted people who make their living off of other people's more fragile needs. Lots of people distrust spiritual leaders in the world today and there is no shortage of phony "leaders" who do exploit the vulnerabilities of people. Nevertheless people need shepherding. People are wandering today, full of personal exploits and ambitions, but often directionless and wondering about purpose. They're wondering about "the point" and if there is some big plan into which they fit? Like never before, people need shepherding.

As Jesus and the guys tried to escape the crowds and went back across the big lake—interestingly, followed by people on foot—He looked at them and Mark tells us ***He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.*** But notice how Jesus handles it. He had a shepherd's heart. Remember, it was he who said, ***He who hungers and thirsts after righteousness shall be filled,*** (Matt. 5:6). And here were men and women so hungry for the word of deliverance that, though he took a boat and rowed four miles across the lake, they ran ten miles by foot around the northern end of the lake and arrived at the other side before he got there! They were waiting there for him to teach them when he came. So without a word of rebuke, he began to teach them many things.¹

¹ Ray Stedman, Sermon entitled Who Is This? January 19, 1975

But what a sad notion! Sheep are pretty defenseless, left on their own.

- They have no big, nasty fangs.
- There aren't too many predatory animals a sheep can outrun.
- They're not particularly smart.

Yo, they're sheep! A flock of sheep with no shepherd is like a coupon for a free Grand Slam breakfast at Denny's! "Come on in, hungry wolves!" And a flock without a shepherd must have evoked a small sense of comedy too, all these goofy looking fur-balls (wool-balls?), wandering around in five different directions many getting lost from the flock... So Jesus saw these hungry people in that way. They needed shepherding so badly.

The Bible uses the metaphor and related imagery of shepherding generously²—it is a real common theme in the Bible. The whole of Scripture pictures God's people like sheep who need the services of a shepherd.

Numbers 27:17

... who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

Ezekiel 34:16

"I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.

Zechariah 13:7

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate," Declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.

Luke 15:1-7

NOW all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. ² And both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ And He told them this parable, saying, ⁴ "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' ⁷ "I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

John 10:16

"And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock *with* one shepherd.

John 21:15

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me more than these?" He *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He *said to him, "Tend My lambs."

Peter's whole understanding of ministry seems to have been shaped by this last conversation Jesus had with him. He wrote in his first letter,

² Timothy Laniak, "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks," in *Contact* (magazine of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Winter 2004, p.5

1 Peter 5:1-4

THEREFORE, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

So let's say something about the shepherding that people need today.

The first thing was what Jesus did when He saw the crowds. They needed **to be taught**. They needed teaching. That means the sheep were hungry for information—how to think about things—and for a challenge and a call to make decisions for the Lord. That's what Christian teaching is all about: doctrine and practice. Jesus taught them many things.

In the passage that follows, we read that Jesus tells his guys to give the people **something to eat**. They needed real food too. Christian leaders should not overlook the basic necessities of life that people come with.

Then Peter indicates in I Peter 5:1-4 that people need **willing** shepherds. That's not hard to understand whether we're talking about pastors or elders or Bible study leaders or Sunday School teachers or Awana or youth group workers... No one wants to be ministered to, where they think the leader is doing it out of obligation. I think Peter himself—having seen Christ go through all that He endured, and suffering himself some for Christ—really WANTED to do the work of working with people. (Look at I Peter 5:1.) He wished for co-workers who had VOLUNTEERED as he had to shepherd Christians. People need shepherds who love their work. They relax if they know the shepherd's not going to bolt at the first inconvenience or the first sign of trouble. They need elders and pastors and teachers and team leaders who *want* to minister to them. And who are not in it for the money—who can make their remuneration NOT the main issue. **But willingness alone isn't enough, by Peter's viewpoint.**

They need shepherds who seem to understand and **interpret THEMSELVES** in light of Christ's sufferings (vs. 3). Peter saw Jesus suffer—no one knew better than Peter that he, himself, had in essence caused Jesus to suffer. He SAW Jesus arrested and tried and crucified. Good shepherds feel like that too. They are humble. They know they do not deserve their office, and they don't try to make other people bow and scrape to them. They don't jockey for prominence among their peers. They don't vie for the best seats and for honor among men. They are approachable and they act like the kind of people that OTHERS might want to emulate and become like. More than once the apostle Paul said, "Imitate me." He could say that because he, like Peter, knew what it was to suffer for Christ. That's the kind of leaders—men and women—in the body of Christ, that the sheep need.

We cannot make this point strongly enough! Our leaders in our churches need to be ***examples to the flock***. They need to live exemplary lives. I do n't care how cool or charismatic they might be. I don't care how well they might speak from a pulpit or a lectern. It doesn't impress me how finely-tuned their theology is or even how much respect they can muster out in the marketplace. If their *lives* are not worthy of being replicated, they are not the kind of shepherds that the sheep need. We can't see Jesus yet. We don't have apostles today. We only have the leaders that we can see. They need to be good examples for the flock. Does that mean they have to be perfect? Of course not—no one can be a perfectly exemplary leader. But in general, Peter is telling the *existing* elders at the time to behave in ways that people can respect and emulate—voluntarily ministering to people, motivated by the right priorities and keeping the Lord Jesus in view. **Shepherds like this, look to the future...**

Godly and willing shepherds will see that their efforts are worth the trouble. They look to ***the Chief Shepherd***. Peter still viewed Jesus even in His resurrected state as a shepherd. He is the main shepherd, the head of the Church. He was the lamb of God, now He is the shepherd. He cares about His sheep. Good leaders in a church do what they do for the church because they know that the Chief Shepherd will reward faithful under-shepherds who LOOK LIKE HIM with something of no small value! You may ask, "what IS the ***unfading crown of glory?***" that Peter mentions in verse 4? We can say that it is something that is like an award. It has something in common with a crown so it is visible and signals achievement. It won't fade, which indicates the wonder of its awarding will not be forgotten. It is a profound honor and Jesus Himself will place it on the heads of shepherds who minister like He did. The kind of shepherds that the sheep need know this. They look past the present day itself. They look past the little problems they face and even the big ones. If a shepherd is criticized he or she looks past that. Jesus did! If he suffers with the lambs, he looks past that. If he suffers loss or deprivation on behalf of the sheep he looks past that. He doesn't just want convenience and comfort, He wants the ***unfading crown of glory*** to be placed on his head by the Chief Shepherd Himself.

Now let me tell you that there are some of these kind of shepherds in this congregation. I am thankful for the giving and love and patience demonstrated by leaders in our midst. In this day of "dumbing down" our expectations of so many people, the bar is still high for those who would lead in the body of Christ. The things that the sheep need from their leaders have not changed. Christians need shepherds they can look to and depend upon. Peter's words, and the heart that Jesus had as He stepped ashore once again and saw the hungry crowd are as current today as ever. May we always be on the lookout for this kind of leader. May we be quick to thank the Lord when He provides them to us.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 26)

Scripture: Mark 6:33-44

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 6th, 2005

Meeting the Basic Needs of 5,000 Men

Mark 6:30-44 (NASB)

³⁰ And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.
³¹ And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many *people* coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ³² And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. ³³ And *the people* saw them going, and many recognized *them*, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it was already quite late, His disciples came up to Him and *began* saying, "The place is desolate and it is already quite late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But He answered and said to them, "You give them *something* to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them *something* to eat?" ³⁸ And He *said* to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five and two fish." ³⁹ And He commanded them all to recline by groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ And they reclined in companies of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food* and broke the loaves and He kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. ⁴² And they all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³ And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. ⁴⁴ And there were five thousand men who ate the loaves.

Introduction When I think of all the in's and out's of organized religion today, it boggles my mind. Just trying to define a simple word like "Baptist," or getting a handle on a phrase like "separation of church and state," are challenging today. A person can get lost in the complexities of theology and denominations and how religion and politics connect, or shouldn't... As I fellowship with other pastors and we talk and interact about what is going on in the churches, that TOO is getting more and more complicated. I take classes, read books, go to Dallas. It is all so fascinating and confusing at the same time... So I am always refreshed and glad to just open the Bible again and simply read about an event like the one in front of us today. Authentic Christianity is ALWAYS discovered by just getting back to Jesus. Christianity is living daily as though He is alive today and if He were here among us physically and visibly, we might be seeing things like we read about. We might be like the disciples too more than we would like to imagine...

So here are the disciples, hanging close to the Chief Shepherd (as Peter liked to call Him). They've come back across the big lake, hoping to catch a few "z's" maybe, dial down a bit, recoup, relax, rest. It's probably late Winter or early Spring. But a big crowd has followed them around the long way—hurrying along, anticipating where Jesus was going in the boat, and there they are as Jesus and Peter and James and John and the rest disembark. As we read, Jesus' reaction is compassion. His heart goes out to them. And He teaches them many things, as Mark tells us. And then we see that, very understandably, the people are famished. They're seriously ready for supper. Mark tells us, by the way, at the end of his report, that there were 5,000 men there. Undoubtedly there were woman and children too, although it was a Jewish custom to number a crowd by the number of men there. So we can guess there were maybe at least seven or eight thousand people total.

Now, as early as 383 A.D. (when the European woman-intellect Egeria¹ had a three-year pilgrimage to Palestine and wrote a diary) this was all thought to have taken place in a field called Tabgha². Today there is an old site, covered by a church of course, in which there is a famous mosaic, actually one of the earliest Christian "logo" examples—the basket of bread and two fishes. (Funny though, the artist didn't really have his facts straight. Evidently there were no fish IN the Sea of Galilee that actually had dorsal fins!) There is also in this same church a rock that at least at that time people were saying it was THE rock on which Jesus did this miracle. If so, it's pretty neat to see the very place where this thing happened although it is just a simple rock. (It doesn't glow and there aren't any holy bread crumbs around!)

But here it is: Jesus tells the disciples to feed the people. **They had the most basic of needs.** Their reaction is the pragmatic one: Shall we spend 200 denarii for the food? That is the equivalent of 200 days of work, or about 8 months wages for a single worker. They don't say, "No, we won't do it." They don't argue with Jesus. They ask Him if what He wants is really reasonable. I see that as the kind of approach we might take with Him too. He tells us to do something? We want to discuss it with Him. We want to say, "Lord, do you really understand the problem?" Well, what might He ask me to do that I don't see how to do it? He might ask you to minister to someone nearby that you don't see the immediate way to do it. He might ask you to obey Him in ways He's already made clear, and you don't see the immediate way to do it. We want to reason with Him. We want Him to see that His request really isn't fully informed.

¹ <http://home.infionline.net/~ddisse/egeria.html>

² Tabgha, the traditional site of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, 2½ km s. of Capernaum, from the Arabic for "the place of seven springs." The Lady Egeria, who visited in 383, lists some steps in the shoreline where Jesus once stood, an adjoining field where Jesus fed the people with the five loaves and two fishes, and a nearby cave on a mountainside where Jesus gave the beatitudes. She only mentions one religious building, a church containing the stone on which Jesus placed the bread when dividing it for the multitude.

So this is what the disciples said. They were coming to realize that **in their own, out of their own resources they couldn't really meet the people's needs.** Ultimately we need to know this too. No amount of education or experience really equips us to genuinely meet people's needs on our own. We must depend on Jesus to give us what we need. It might be energy, patience, wisdom and discernment, decision-making ability, determination and faith to wait on Him. We need to never forget this point! We need Jesus: apart from Him we can do nothing.

And Jesus' patience with them is once again very clear. He doesn't blast them. He simply said, "Take an inventory of what you've got available." "OK, Jesus, we've got five loaves" (probably small, flat barley loaves which someone could eat several of them for lunch). And then they say (I can hear the tone in their voice maybe too), "and two fish." Here is another point: **He uses what we have.** All of us have *something* in our little bag. We have SOME spiritual gift, if you are a Christian. You have some piece of something that you can use to minister to people. He will use what you offer Him. If you don't offer it to Him, He will use someone else, I think. It always amazes me how selfish we are capable of being. We say, "I don't care about the children. I don't care about the students. I don't care about the elderly." "I can't teach, I can't help with the building. I can't give someone a ride. I already served for a while." And we disappoint Him who died for us, and we forfeit the blessing of seeing Him use OUR fish and bread to do good things!

Mark tell us then, an interesting detail, which may seem insignificant. He tells them to lie down in groups of hundreds and fifties. One can only wonder what is going through the mind of 8,000 people as they're told to have a seat together—perhaps by families, communities, maybe divided by age. We don't know the class of groups, except their number. But evidently they all comply.

Jesus takes the little bundle of food, looks toward heaven. By praying Jesus gave God thanks for the food and reminded the people that it came from Him. Giving thanks before meals was a common Jewish practice.³ I think this is definitely a touching moment and one which it is always for Jesus-followers today to emulate. Not in a sort of robotic way, and certainly not to impress non-Christians with our piety. But it is always appropriate to give thanks to the Lord for the good things He blesses us with.

Do you pray before your meals? Most of you have three per day. That's a good abundance. Are you grateful for what you have? Do you get tired of thanking God for His goodness to you? Do you think, "Oh, God knows I'm thankful, I don't have to tell Him." If I gave you something and you didn't thank

³Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 6:41. Galaxie Software, 2003.

me, I wouldn't think you are thankful. The Lord looks at the heart and He doesn't need us to play games with Him and He doesn't want us to pretend to be thankful if we're not. But if we're not thankful, we need to GET thankful. This is something that I think short-term missions trips, if they do nothing else, burns into the trip-people. You get your thankfulness re-calibrated.

Jesus doesn't bless the food. He blesses God. And then He does this amazing miracle that Mark doesn't detail any more than to say, **He broke the loaves and kept giving them to the disciples to set before them and He divided up the two fish among them all.** I think they just multiplied in His hands. And it didn't stop—Jesus didn't need to take a break to recharge His God-batteries—until seven or eight thousand people had been provided for. I love I when Mark says, **And they ate and were satisfied.** Supper for seven or eight thousand people, maybe more. They're ALL satisfied. The miracle wasn't just a side-show—it SATISFIED. Jesus didn't just talk truth. He fed them ALL and they were satisfied! The Lord is good! All the time! And do you see here what is really Mark's great theme in this Gospel? Jesus is like us, **but then again He is NOT like us. He is unique. He is like none other. He is the God-man, the Chief Shepherd.**

Verse 43 is one of the “in your face” verses in the Bible at non-supernaturalists. For anyone who would try to lessen or minimize who Jesus was, there is verse 43. It is a detail that isn't necessary to the technicalities or to the power of the story. Mark got it from Peter I think, who was there. Peter never forgot the feeling of awe he felt, not just AT the miracle but at the aftermath! Twelve baskets of leftovers. That in itself, is a haul that needs to be transported. Maybe they gave the leftovers to the people to take back with them. I can imagine some of those baskets being displayed and cherished years later in Galilean homes!

Another detail to not miss is that Jesus **used the disciples to serve the crowd.** They were the guys going through the stands, “Get your fish and chips!” They served the sheep. They served them and they fed them. All were served and all were satisfied. Imagine the disciples' mindset. It must have gone from a little bit of embarrassment to pure joy. The grass is green, the crowds are here, the teaching has been superb and everyone has plenty to eat. Nothing more fully illustrates that side of ministry which is JOY. Some days, many days, it is a joy to give our best energies to the kingdom.

People who minister need to revel in this story. Yes, on that afternoon the cross still lay before Jesus. Yes, there were times of frustration and opposition. There were days when they deserted Jesus, betrayed Him and left Him alone. The apostle Paul in particular talked about being abandoned. Every one of the original apostles except one would be martyred for the faith. They would pay

dearly for the privilege of ministering. But it is worth it! The joy of some moments, when the clouds roll back for a brief time and you see what it's all about, remind us that as Peter later wrote, ***When the Chief shepherd appears we will receive the unfading crown of glory.*** Elders, deacons and deaconesses, trustees, Awana and youth and Sunday school workers—it is worth it. We minister on behalf of One who multiplies five loaves and two fishes and feeds eight thousand people! We have received our commission directly from Him, and that is a hallmark of evangelical theology, by the way. The world says, “You are dreamers!” Yes, I am dreaming of seeing the One who has commissioned us. I believe this life is more than merely living for me. He wants us to live in service to Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 27)

Scripture: Mark 6:45-52

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 13th, 2005

Jesus, Physics and the Hard Heart

Mark 6:45-52 (NASB)

And immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the multitude away. ⁴⁶ And after bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when it was evening, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He *was* alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He **came* to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. ⁴⁹ But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; ⁵⁰ for they all saw Him and were frightened. But immediately He spoke with them and **said* to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." ⁵¹ And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, ⁵² for they had not gained any insight from the *incident* of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.

Introduction Have you had a week (or a month) when everything seemed to go wrong? Or perhaps one major part of your life was not going well? Maybe your job or school-work or marriage or ministry just seems to not be working? And the feeling is that this problem is going to overwhelm me—my life is going to fall apart. And then you realize, you have not been close to Jesus. Just like the disciples, they always seem to be in trouble when they're apart from Him. And more and more the disciples were being confronted with the truth of who Jesus was. You and I need to learn this over and over too. For myself, some days I stand outside of myself and say, "Do you REALIZE Whom it is that you serve? Do you really see the incredible identity of the one Whose name you rattle off so many times a day?" The disciples probably were like us still, at least at the point in Mark's Gospel that we're at. They got overwhelmed. "Don't you care, Jesus?" "Aren't we going to flee this or that?" "How are we going to feed so many people?"

As if we haven't had enough startling examples of who Jesus really is, now we see another. We have seen Him teach with such results that crowds randomly and spontaneously gather, at odd places, just on the rumor that He might go there. We have seen Him confront disease, with no hesitation or tentativeness. We saw Him tell the weather to chill out, and it immediately

did. We have seen Him, out of nowhere, produce a meal for 8,000 (MacArthur thinks it could be as high as 20,000!) and *still* there were leftovers. We have seen Him dismiss demons out of people, and in one case into pigs and the pigs completely “oinked” out. There is obviously a Satanic parry going on to His thrust. Satan is throwing everything he can in the way of people seeing that Jesus is the true Messiah. Even the apostles were not getting it.

So Jesus has sent the fellows back across the lake in the boat, towards Bethsaida. In the beginning of this story, there’s something important about the character of Christ. **He** [had] ***departed to the mountain to pray***. I don’t think it was that He could get closer to God on a mountain. It was a lonely place though. He could think. He could pray. And He *wanted* to pray. He wanted to get alone with His Father. I think many times we get overwhelmed by things because we pray so little. And we certainly don’t “depart to the mountain” to pray. Matthew Henry wrote:

Observe, 1. He *prayed*; though he had so much preaching-work upon his hands, yet he was much in prayer; he prayed often, and prayed long, which is an encouragement to us to depend upon the intercession he is making for us at the right hand of the Father, that *continual* intercession. 2. He went *alone*, to pray; though he needed not to retire for the avoiding either of distraction or of ostentation, yet, to set us an example, and to encourage us in our *secret* addresses to God, he prayed *alone*, and, for want of a closet, went up into a mountain, to pray. A good man is never less alone than when alone with God. [1]

Well, out on the lake it is somewhere between 3 am and 6 am (***about the fourth watch of the night***). The wind is not cooperating. They’re rowing hard. And out of nowhere, ***Jesus came to them walking on the sea***.

And then up He shows. In the middle of the lake. With no boat. And no jet-ski. Just Him. Let that sink in... (no pun intended). Note by the way, that unlike Matthew, Mark says nothing about the part about Peter getting out of the boat. That seems strange because we think that Mark got much of the material for his gospel *from* Peter. Why would that story be missing? Well maybe its not strange. He just didn’t want to be included in the record of such a spectacular happening.

So there Jesus is. Defying the law of gravity... Once again apparently, when He chose to suspend them, not wholly subject to the laws of physics. This is a thing that seems hard to believe but that is why it’s in the Gospel. It is incredible. And I love how it almost seems *understated* by Mark. ***Jesus came to them walking on the sea***. It needs no more explanation. And in case one might think that Mark was unclear, the disciples were not. ***They supposed it was a ghost and cried out for they all saw Him and were***

frightened. As you and I would have been. I think they thought this was a demon. There were certainly demons in the area. They imagined this to be one perhaps, as we sometimes do. But it was Jesus Himself. He looked like He was passing them by but instead He gets into the boat. Imagine the looks on James and Matthew's and Bartholemew's faces! Imagine the look on Peter's face as Jesus puts one leg, then the other over the gunwale and climbs aboard. And then, the second (and also understated—making it seem so authentic to me) miracle: **and the wind stopped.** Again He silences the gale. I love it: **And they were greatly astonished.** Oh yes! The son of God was like, walking on water, and then He gets into our boat and the wind and spray stop raging. The point is made. Jesus IS the Messiah. He is the Son of God. He is not just one option, He is the only begotten and beloved Son of the Father.

You will notice what He said: **Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid.** In Greek this is ἐγώ εἰμι **ego eimi.** It is "I AM." Often Jesus would say this, identifying Himself with Jehovah God: the same Who said to Moses, I AM THAT I AM. And here on the lake, Jesus said to the afraid disciples: EGO EIMI. Are you afraid of a storm—or setbacks or failures—when the I AM tells you not to be? He said to them **Do not be afraid.** I am not an apparition, some foul demon, and you are not going to sink.

Mark tells us what the problem was in vs. 52: **they had not gained any insight from the loaves and their heart was hardened.** This is the critical issue in the passage. What hardens the heart, I wonder? What does that mean? It means that the disciples' faith was still weak, shallow and tentative. Even after the miracle of the loaves, Mark tells us, they still did not believe completely that Jesus was Who He said He was. Their hearts were not soft and willing to believe. They were cynical, skeptical, bound by physical circumstances and still assuming that Jesus was bound by physics.

Now, where this goes for us is this: If we really understand who this Jesus is that we are worshipping and following, how does it affect or change how we live? If Jesus is really so great that He defies even physics, that He is really the only one who can get people to heaven, how does that make an impact on my life?

I would humbly suggest

1. If He is Who He says He is, His commands are inescapable.
2. If he is Who He says He is, we ought to trust Him in the middle of the storms we might be rowing through.
3. If He is Who He says He is, He deserves to be made known all across the land—and that can incorporate a lot of different strategies, but in the end, the name of Jesus should be proclaimed, exemplified and backed up by good living on the part of those who claim to know Him.

4. These miracles are all part of Jesus' training program for the disciples. What has He been teaching you lately? I believe all Christians can feel like they're in His "school." I love it when I hear someone say, "The Lord has been teaching me some things." What has He been teaching you?

We need to get back to Jesus. When things aren't going well we need to get back to Him. We need to spend time with Him in prayer, privately. We need to hear Him say to us, **Take courage it is I, do not be afraid.** A big part of growing in your Christian life isn't just learning all the rules. It is learning to hear His voice and sense His training of you. He wants to build your dependence on Him and your confidence that He is close at hand. Seek Him this week. Talk to Him. Give your storms over to Him. And then when you have to go back across the lake and you face another gale, give it to Him again. You will not be disappointed. He is ever faithful.

[1] Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 28)

Scripture: Mark 6:53-7:5

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: February 27th, 2005



A Big Joy Killer

Mark 6:53-7:13 (NASB)

⁵³ And when they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they had come out of the boat, immediately *the people* recognized Him, ⁵⁵ and ran about that whole country and began to carry about on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. ⁵⁶ And wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and entreating Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured. ¹ AND the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, ² and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; ⁴ and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" ⁶ And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁷ 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' ⁸ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." ⁹ He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. ¹⁰ "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH'; ¹¹ but you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God), ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; ¹³ *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

Introduction I have noticed a special joy people feel when they have worked hard at a ministry and saw it bear fruit. There is a special joy in the aftermath of such a ministry.

- Short-term missionaries feel it and talk about it when they come back.
- VBS workers feel it in the days after VBS.
- We used to run booth ministries at the Whaling City Festival. At Festival's close, we would feel that exhausted joy.

The work was intense and exhausting but the joy is real. You could see the Lord using you among hungry and needy people. It felt good. Even though you were tired from the work. I think this is something like what the disciples perhaps would have been feeling as they step ashore once again at Gennesaret. Rabbis called this plain "the Garden of God" and "a paradise." A small town there

was also called Gennesaret. In addition to the miraculous side of things that they had witnessed in a rapid-fire, short time, they had seen many people ministered to by Jesus and by themselves as His workers. Now ashore, it is the same Mark tells us.

⁵³ And when they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they had come out of the boat, immediately *the people* recognized Him, ⁵⁵ and ran about that whole country and began to carry about on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. ⁵⁶ And wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and entreating Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured. Verses 53-56

For some weeks, it was “Whaling City Festival” wherever He went! The news of the lady healed in Capernaum by her faith in just touching his robe, had spread (cf. 5:25-34). Many others were very hopeful and joyful, especially when He DID heal them! I think His reputation was like setting up some wonderful kind of free clinic and the news spread fast. People’s health care needs in those days were dramatic. There were very few resources. And the freeness of Jesus’ spirit and His effectiveness at healing were big news. And once again, I can feel the disciples’ tiredness but also their joy at what they were seeing. It was hard not to be impressed with their Jesus!

Their faith is primitive but genuine, and Jesus rewards their belief with healing.¹

Imagine with me for a minute the experience one of these people might have had with Jesus. They would approach Him with no more knowledge of Him than a vague sense of His reputation, and their hope. And their simple faith. They would look into His eyes, needy, hopeful, pitiful. Maybe they would say something briefly about their condition. There are others around so they cannot drone on and on about their pain, their deprivations and so on. Just a word to Him. And He would fix it. Just like that. No pre-conditions other than to trust Him. It was a beautiful thing, and that day on the field of Gennesaret it was beautiful too. It is a wonderful fulfillment of Isaiah’s prediction from 700 years earlier:

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy... (Isaiah 35:5,6a)

But then Mark puts our attention in a different direction. The simple faith of people just needing God’s grace is contrasted with the critical attitude of a bunch of Pharisees and scribes who come over from Jerusalem. They’re looking for something to criticize Him for; they surely cannot criticize His work. In 7:1-5 Mark tells us what they tag. It is the matter of ritual cleanliness. But it is more

¹Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989.

than that. It is the matter of ignoring the **TRADITIONS** of the religious establishment. And the Pharisees' and scribes' motive was antagonism.

Now the issue they chose to seize upon was this: As they watched the disciples and Jesus, they saw that some did not wash their hands in the prescribed way before they ate. Do not read this as though these were dirty disciples, as though they never bothered to wash their hands before they ate. This is not a problem of hygiene at all. I am sure they did wash their hands before they ate. I do not doubt it in the least. But what bothered the Pharisees was that they did not do it in the right way. You see, among the Jews, you could have washed your hands with finest of soaps, and scrubbed like a doctor preparing for surgery; but if you did not do it in a certain way, you were just as unclean, ceremonially, as though you had not washed at all.²

In the Revised Standard Version there is a marginal note which says that one word in Verse 3 -- in the phrase "wash their hands" -- "is of uncertain meaning and is not translated." It is the word for "fist." The old RSV translators evidently had difficulty understanding how this word fit into the context. But more recently scholars tell us that it was the rigid custom among the Jews to wash in this way: The hands had to be held out, palms up, hands cupped slightly, and water poured over them. Then **the fist** of one hand was used to scrub the other, and then the other fist would scrub the first hand. This is why the fist is mentioned here. Finally the hands again were held out, with palms down, and water was poured over them a second time to cleanse away the dirty water the defiled hands had been scrubbed with. Only then would a person's hands be ceremonially clean. He might not even have been hygienically clean, but he would have been ceremonially clean. That is, he would have been considered acceptable to God, having given strict attention to the prescribed ritual of cleansing, and thus would have been able to eat in a proper manner. So strongly was this ingrained in them that, when one rabbi was imprisoned by the Romans for an offense, he used the drinking water brought to him in his solitary dungeon cell to wash his hands in this way. He almost died of thirst! That is how important it was to them to observe these traditions.³

Now, the traditions had begun in right ways. That is, they were simply an attempt to understand the Law. The book of Leviticus did require that certain ablutions, certain washings, be performed as a way of teaching the people how to handle sin. That was the intent of the Law. But as these requirements were applied to various situations, certain suggestions were made as to the proper way to do it. And there was nothing wrong with that, particularly. But then the priests began to interpret the suggestions which had been made, **and added to**

² Ray Stedman, sermon *When Rite is Wrong*, Jan. 16, 1975, Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA

³ Stedman, *Ibid.*

them. *Then interpretations of the interpretations were added,* until gradually there was built up a tremendous mass of tradition which demanded inflexible obedience and scrupulous observance of even the minor details, so that the purpose of the Law was forgotten.⁴

This is what has happened in the Christian church. In the book of Acts you find an amazing liberty of the Spirit among the people of God. [Pastor Ray Stedman suggests that] **The Lord never worked twice in the same way in the book of Acts.** That is beautiful to see. But you cannot deduce a ceremony of a ritual for the church from the book of Acts, because God is moving in freshness and variety and spontaneity wherever you turn. But soon some of these ways were settled upon as the right way to do a thing, and others were added, and interpretations were added to them, until through the years, as you well know, there have grown up varying categories of worship forms -- "orders of service" we call them -- each claiming to be the right one. Many of us have been victims of these. We do not feel we have worshipped unless we have sung the Gloria Patri, or read the Apostles' Creed, or something similar. This is what our Lord is dealing with. Mark shows us first of all the force of such tradition in these people's lives.⁵

Now let me ask you on a real fundamental and basic level--what does the word "**tradition**" mean? It can mean a number of things as this dictionary definition shows:

- 1 : an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom)
- 2 : the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction
- 3 : cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions
- 4 : characteristic manner, method, or style⁶

Let me ask you at this point: Do we have traditions in our church? And if so, how binding and how important are they? I can think of a few...

Sunday morning worship + Sunday School; Thanksgiving Eve service; Easter and Christmas songs; Christmas Candlelight Service; Operation Christmas Child; Christmas Party; Snow Camp; Annual Meeting and Pot-Luck; Reading of the Covenant during Annual Meeting; Awana Bible Quiz; Awana Grand Prix; Awana Family Night; Church picnic; Reading Scripture during worship; the Lord's Table; Quarterly Family Meeting; Baptism services w/ testimonies; Family Dedications; Secret Sisters Party; Introduction and welcome of new members; Bible and Missions Conferences; Ladies' Tea; Vacation Bible School; Coffee House ministries; Nursery care provided; we mow our own lawn...

Within our evangelical heritage there are more detailed traditions that some of you perhaps can relate to. They would include:

⁴ Stedman, Ibid.

⁵ Stedman, Ibid.

⁶ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary version 2.5, © 2000

Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday night; King James Version preferred; only hymns from an authorized hymnbook; certain hymns are appropriate for Sunday morning, and others for Sunday evening; ties on men and dresses on women and girls; deacons sit up front; women do not speak too much; the duration of the service is set—it varies little from week to week; the church building has a steeple and Sunday School is before church. I could go on...

Matters of tradition can be a blessing and they can also be a problem. Some whole churches are begun in the motivation to cast off all tradition. (The funny thing is though, not too long and they start developing their own traditions.) We will consider Jesus' response to them in a coming message—but this morning we can say simply that strict traditions can become one of the great "joy killers" in the Christian life if they become rigidly insisted upon by the church leadership or by influential people in the church.

When you become a person of Christian faith—when you start to seek Jesus and to want Him in your life, the Bible says that one of the changes that is supposed to start to happen is the feeling **of joy** (Galatians 5). Nothing kills joy quicker than blind tradition. The Pharisees' and scribes' adherence to Jewish traditions was not grounded in God's law. It was man's law (as Jesus is going to point out.) The great problem of the Jews and of Christians all too often too, is forgetting what is important and showcasing what is THOUGHT to be important.

What does this mean for you? Well you and I should always be evaluating what we're doing. If we decide we're going to do a Vacation Bible School, why? If we're going to elect church officers again, why? If we are going to have a Missions Conference, why? Repeating good ministries and always trying to improve upon them is a good thing. But are we doing things just because we've always done them and we've forgotten what the real purpose is? We don't do VBS or Sunday School to keep our kids entertained so we can go drink coffee. We don't elect church officers to perpetuate the power brokers of the church that have been here for a long time. We don't sing hymns because that's all Christians are *supposed* to sing. We should always be ready and I would say HUNGRY to evaluate our ministries and traditions. Are they effective? Are they Spirit-filled and do they really benefit people? Do they give joy?

Traditions that must be insisted upon are joy killers. This presses me too. The older I get the more I like the "predictable" and the things that I know work or that I remember were effective once upon a time. But I think the Spirit-filled Christian is just that—filled with the Spirit and hearing His voice about how to minister to the sheep and how to reach the lost. I think Ray Stedman's point that the Lord never worked twice in the same way in the Book of Acts is compelling. If He is driving us and infusing us with His purposes, we will be flexible and teachable. We'll be willing to seek Him in prayer about planning and execution of ministries and not just be driven by tradition. May we be this way, dear ones. May we hear His voice as a church, and as individual Christians.

Perhaps all you've known is religious tradition, and you've thought, "It was good enough for my parents and grandparents, it ought to be good enough for me." Do not assume that. Many people have believed wrongly about how to get to heaven simply because they were blindly taught a tradition. Turn your life over to Christ! Give Him the throne of your life. Invite Him to be *your* Savior, not because it is a tradition but because Jesus offers you joy. He will never kill our joy. He is the great Giver of joy by means of His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, His free offer of salvation and the baptism of the Holy Spirit the minute you trust in Him!

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 29)

Scripture: Mark 7:6-13

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: March 6th, 2005

How Being Tradition-bound Misses the Point

Mark 7:6-13 (NASB)

⁶ And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.’ ⁷ ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ ⁸ “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” ⁹ He was also saying to them, “You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. ¹⁰ “For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH’; ¹¹ but you say, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God), ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; ¹³ *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

Introduction I noted this week that in one of the comic strips that I read, a guy is going to have his girlfriend move in with him but he acts surprised. The point is that he wasn't expecting her to do this and there is no hint at all in the strip that such a thing is immoral or wrong. She's just moving in and it just is, that's all... Very nonchalant. This is not a message about cohabitation, just an illustration of the replacement of an old rule or ethic or moral, with a new one... A new rule has replaced the old rule. It used to be thought sinful to live together without being married; now that is becoming the mainstream, accepted tradition. Few people who do this seem to ask, “How does God feel about this?” Or, “what might this lead to?”

This is the kind of thing that happened with the rules of the religious establishment in Jesus' day. What used to be the rule, was lost and replaced by a new sense of what was right. And what was *really* lost, Jesus says, is a closeness to the heart of God. Jesus cut right across that. He took the people around Him all the way back to the pure Law, the way to live that God really wanted people to live, leaving the establishment stuck in their own sense of rightness—their own traditions and rules. And He blasts right through all those.

I think it's pretty easy when it comes to things-religious, to just run on tradition, if you let yourself. You don't have to think too much about what you're doing, if you're just on “automatic.” And I must admit, it would seem

comfortable to me. Secure. Predictable. Familiar. It is also what Jesus called "hypocrisy."

Remember, this was a group of Pharisees and scribes who had come up from Jerusalem to check Him out and more specifically to trip Him up and to accuse Him of error. They seized upon the matter of hand-washing (against the backdrop of all the awesome good He was doing), which, they felt they were not doing it in the ways that the prevailing religious thinkers thought they should. They seriously were missing what He was about.

Sometimes we slip into the same blindness.

We see someone worshipping God but not doing it the way we think they should.

We see people NOT going to the meetings we think they should, or praying like we do.

We think every church member should dress or talk or minister in the ways that are customary in our church.

If we do **not** first ask, "Is the person actually right with the Lord?" or "Are they living right with the basic things of the Christian life?" we are guilty of elevating our expectations and traditions above what the Scripture tells a true Christian to do. Being tradition-bound, and seeing little else misses the point altogether about the Spirit-filled life.

In verses 8-13 In those incisive words our Lord is tracing for us what happens when tradition begins to gain sway: First, it begins with leaving the command of God. Therefore, traditions arise when in some way we try to find a substitute to give God, instead of what he really wants. This is where hypocrisy begins -- with leaving the command of God.

It is interesting that the Greek word used here for "tradition" is the word for "surrender," for "giving up," for "substitution." God says, "I want you." But you say, "Would you mind just taking this instead -- my money, my time, my wife, my children, my interests? But don't touch me!"

That is where tradition begins -- by leaving the command of God and, the second step, holding fast the tradition men, the substitute. And the substitute is always something "good." We would never think of offering God something bad! But it is not what he wants. The third step, as our Lord indicates here, is to deny and injure both God and man. He **ILLUSTRATES** it with the word about fathers and mothers. The Law says, ***Honor your father and your mother***, {Exod 20:12a}. That means more than being courteous to them; it means taking care of them, especially as they grow older. The Jews had worked out a keen little way, a "neat" way, Jesus called it -- "You have a neat little way of rejecting the commandment of God." He almost congratulates them for the cleverness with which they did this. They took the money which should have been spent on their father and mother, and said, "This is a gift to God," dedicated it to God, and then they were free to use it themselves. Their parents could not touch it because it

was "dedicated" to God. The modern equivalent is to erect a tax shelter. I do not mean that all tax shelters are wrong. But they can be, and often are, a way of setting aside money which ought to be used for other purposes, and saying, "You can't touch it, I'm sorry. I've got it all tied up in a tax shelter and therefore you have no claim upon me in this regard." Jesus exposes all that. He tells us we will end up hurting people when we do that.¹

There is an important secondary point here too: Always grown children should watch out for and provide for their parents when they become vulnerable or weak or in danger of not having enough. This is always in the heart of God and is just as New Testament as it is Old Testament.

Notice too that Jesus went further than most of us would be willing to go. He bluntly calls His critics **hypocrites** and wedges them in with the Scripture itself. He was bold. He didn't mince words at all. He knew what was in His disciples' hearts and He had been working hard ministering to a great number of people, with them at His side. He looked right into the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes and called them down for their hypocrisy. You have to want to shout and clap for Him!

From time to time I hear people say, "I don't like church. Its full of hypocrites." They are right, and if I am feeling particularly crabby on a day when I hear someone say that I might reply with, "You are right. And do not come because we don't need any more." But the point is, we are hypocritical if we set up all kinds of rules and traditions beyond what the Bible tells us are the timeless principles. It is fine and good to have routine, and happy traditions. People respond well and look forward to certain traditions. But traditions which are designed **to score** people, and **grade** them and **compare** them to each other with how sanctimonious we can be, these are rules which completely miss the point about the Christian life.

Do you come to church? Do you give money contributions to the church? Do you stay for Sunday School and enjoy that ministry of the Word? Do you serve on a team or get together with a prayer partner? Do you help with the building or the grounds or in the Nursery or in the library or the sound booth? Do you call people up on the phone to encourage them or send notes in the mail? Do you get involved with missions in some way? All of these are good things but they are human devices which should flow OUT of a love for Jesus Christ. And there is the point. The person who keeps the law, whether it is honoring their father and mother, or not co-habiting before marriage, or staying away from other temptations, or taking food or other needed items to the less fortunate or forgiving someone who has offended you, THIS is the kind of life that flows out of

¹ Ray Stedman, sermon *When Rite is Wrong* Jan.26,1975 Copyright © 1975 Discovery Publishing

walking with Jesus Christ. The Pharisees and scribes had not walked with Jesus. They had not seen Him work. They had not felt His gaze of forgiveness upon them, personally, the way James and Bartholemew and Mary and Peter had. They measured religion by the keeping of their own traditions and rules. Jesus went all the way back to Isaiah the prophet and quoted a passage from chapter 29 to show them that honoring God with the lips is cheap, and is worthless if in fact the heart is far from Him.

Isaiah and Jesus both said that worship is vain when it is driven by traditions invented by men.

I pray we never lose the point. I pray that Dartmouth Bible Church never goes on “automatic,” motored along by traditions and rules. Do not misunderstand me. Traditions and some standards by which we govern ourselves and organize and discipline ourselves are good. We should not let the pendulum swing the other way and just be down on routine and tradition just because we are ill-disciplined. Let us not be adolescent and not develop good, godly habits. But let us never lose the point. I pray we never **invalidate the word of God by our traditions.**

My friends, how is your walk with the Savior? As we grow as a church and have more and more small groups, and more teams, and explore new activities and opportunities, are we being driven by the Spirit of God? Do we spend much time in prayer seeking His face and hungering and thirsting after righteousness? When we have meetings for organizational issues, or strategy meetings for doing conferences or planning outreaches, do we seek the Savior first and ask Him, “Lord Jesus, what would you have us to do?” This is what the Spirit-led ministry and individual Christian do. They get before the Savior, by faith, and ask Him for His leading, and wait upon Him expectantly to lead and guide and confirm His will.

Many people today do not think their faith through to this extent. They sincerely like the comfort of non-thinking traditions and running on “automatic.” They are not filled with the Spirit. They are just filled with the habit of keeping the rules. They do not know that the law of Christ fills HIS heart and He desires for us to have our hearts close to Him. If you are unsure yet if you have felt His love for you, surrender to Him I beg of you. Seek Him as the Savior on the cross and who has risen from the empty tomb, defeating death and paying for *YOUR* sins. He will respond. He will free you from the guilt and dread of a tradition-bound life. He will show you to point of the Christian life.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 30)

Scripture: Mark 7:14-23

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: March 20th, 2005



Twelve Heart Hurts & Where They Come From

Mark 7:14-23 (NASB)

¹⁴ And after He called the multitude to Him again, He *began* saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. ¹⁶ [“If any man has ears to hear, let him hear.”] ¹⁷ And when leaving the multitude, He had entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. ¹⁸ And He *said* to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; ¹⁹ because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (*Thus He declared all foods clean.*) ²⁰ And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹ “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³ “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

Introduction When a homicide occurs many people wrestle to try to understand why it happened. Was the motive revenge, just plain rage, a contract, accidental? Media representatives become pop sociologists and psychologists and do interviews with family members: perhaps the answer lies in the “perp’s” or in the victim’s family relationships? When a divorce occurs, there are maybe many reasons driving it: misunderstanding, unfaithfulness to the marital covenant, a serious mis-match to begin with, etc. Often you hear people then say, “It was no fault. It just happened.” When grand-theft-auto occurs, a justification of deprivation is sometimes suggested (the person needed my car more than I did and they never had one as nice as mine). All kinds of explanations for these events are given and most of them are outside of the person himself or herself.

The Pharisees and the scribes of Jesus’ time tended to interpret people externally too. They had a lot of traditions and rules in their heads and they often went around grading people on how well they kept their rules and traditions. They score-carded people on how well they played the game. Jesus wasn’t interested in people playing any tradition-based religious games, though. He was interested in the kingdom of God. And the kingdom of God strikes down deep into the human heart. And that is where the real battle is waged. This is where we’re at in the account of Jesus’ ministry in the Gospel of Mark...

Now Jesus told both a crowd and His disciples about the problem with the human heart. It produces evil things. He was contradicting the Rabbinic view by stating that sin proceeds from within and not from without (as really was taught in the Old Testament: Jeremiah 17:9-10).

⁹ “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? ¹⁰ “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

He also demonstrated the true spiritual intent of the laws regarding clean and unclean food in the Mosaic Law (cf. Lev. 11; Deut. 14). A Jew who ate “unclean” food was defiled not by the food, but by His disobeying God’s command.¹ For spiritual purposes it isn’t the food that we eat—what we put INTO the person--that makes us unacceptable before God—and this was the Pharisees’ total focus. It’s what comes OUT of the person that is corrupt. It is our thought life that evil is brewed and stirred up.

The study of human depravity isn’t an especially fun exploration. But it is absolutely essential to understand human life and the history of what we are as people. You cannot make sense of life without a doctrine of human brokenness and sin.

Whether you consider sin from a sort of globally philosophical and universal standpoint (as Clarence Larkin’s classic **dispensationalist chart** shows from about 1915), or if you consider it from a human studies standpoint, as you find in the tragic story of **Eva Braun** (Adolph Hitler’s girlfriend), or if you just read **our newspaper** every day, you see human sin and mankind’s fundamental failure.

In vss. 21 & 22 of Mark 7 Jesus gives a basic description of the sinfulness of man; of the depravity of mankind. This is the true “human condition,” regardless of nationality, century in which we’re living or a person’s age:

The general term translated **evil thoughts** precedes the verb in the Greek text and is viewed as the root of various evils which follow. Evil thoughts generated in a heart unite with one’s will to produce evil words and actions. The catalog of evil Jesus gave has a strong Old Testament flavor and consists of 12 items. First, there are six *plural* nouns (in Greek) depicting wicked acts viewed individually: **fornications** (*porneiai*, “illicit sexual activities of various kinds”); **thefts** (*klopai*); **murders** (*phonoì*); **adulteries** (*moicheiai*, illicit sexual relations by a married person); **coveting or greed** (*pleonexiai*, “covetings”), insatiable cravings for what belongs to another; **wickedness or malice** (*ponēriai*, “wickednesses”), the many ways evil thoughts express themselves.

¹Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985.

Second, there are six singular nouns depicting evil dispositions: **deceit** (*dolos*), cunning maneuvers designed to ensnare someone for one's personal advantage; **sensuality** (*aselgeia*; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:19; 2 Peter 2:2, 7), unrestrained and unconcealed immoral behavior; **envy** (*ophthalmos ponēros*, "an evil eye," a Hebrew expression for stinginess; Prov. 23:6), a begrudging, jealous attitude toward the possessions of others; **slander** (*blasphēmia*), injurious or defaming speech against God or man; **pride or arrogance** (*hyperēphania*, used only here in the N.T.) boastfully exalting oneself above others who are viewed with scornful contempt; **and foolishness or folly** (*aphrosynē*), moral and spiritual insensitivity. **All these evils** defile a person, and have their source **from inside**, from one's heart. So Jesus took the focus of attention away from external rituals and placed it on the need for God to cleanse one's evil heart (cf. Ps. 51).²

So let me ask you, since this is what we're still dealing with really—we're not dealing with rules and traditions to keep each other in line. We're dealing with a deep down problem with sin and depravity—how can we attack it? How can we blunt the heart-hurts that we're all born with?

Well I would suggest that we've got to attack it by doing what Paul said to do in Romans 12:1,2. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian, the solutions to sin problems still are the same:

¹ I URGE you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Or, from *The Message*:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

You and I need to be in a program of being transformed by the renewing of our minds. That means we are letting the Holy Spirit work in our minds and that we accommodate that. Your mind is a net for all kinds of things. If you dredge for bottom crud all the time, you're going to bring up bottom crud. → Part of dealing with sin has to do with what we expose ourselves to, and how much time we devote to unhealthy exposures. Women are looking for romance and

²Ibid, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

love—do you look for it in romance novels? Men are looking for excitement and action—do we look for it in movies and sports? In our quest for these fantasies, which are reflections of deeper longings, I think—do we open ourselves up to carnality that damages our walk with God?

→Part of dealing with sin has to do with accessing the proven means of grace that God has given to us. It comes back once again to reading and meditating in your Bibles. That isn't a magic bullet against sin; but it is a means of grace. God intends to use that in your life. He has already promised to use it in your life and to bless it in your mind. As you read through your Bible, you will accumulate understanding about all kinds of things related to life and why and how we do things. You see examples of people making mistakes and also of good living choices, sometimes really exciting and courageous. Your spirit is trained to discern good from bad. Your mind starts to hunger for the deeper things of God.

→Learning to pray honestly and openly about sin issues is a way to attack the problem of indwelling sin, which once again, Jesus said is what defiles us. We tend to think that if we don't pray about it, God can be kept from knowing about it. He knows about it; He knows all about it. We go to Him and talk to Him about things. He asks us to trust Him to deal with them, and to surrender ourselves to Him in prayer.

→Develop some authentic and healthy accountability with someone you trust. I do not mean something that is uncomfortable or psychologically unwholesome or detrimental. But we are not intended to do battle with this deepest of problems on our own. Somehow God intends for us to be in the battle together with someone. Find that someone. Take the time and effort to build trust so that you have someone to talk to from time to time about the battle!

The war against sin is far deeper than just getting each other to obey a bunch of rules, or submit to a bunch of routines and church practices. If you come to church I want you to come because you are hungry, not because you're used to it. If you come to some special service I want you to come because you suspect, hope even that there might be something there for your daily walk. If you read your Bible I want you to do that because you know you'll hear from the Lord in that book. Deep in your mind and in your heart—you have to shut the television and the radio and the cd player and the mp3 player and the video games off for a while to get INTO the Word. We do need some quiet time. But if you will decide to do that, you will hear from Him and that will help you deal with the indwelling problems of sin. If you do NOT do any of these things, you will go along from one week to the next, maybe doing a few outward Christian things, maybe performing a few duties, but you will be empty inside. And you

will not make much progress against the internal depravity that we all have and that is the real cause of hurt, brokenness, loneliness and frustration.

Well in the coming sections, Jesus withdraws again from Galilee and heads to the coast. From there He makes His way back up north, and then east again across the Jordan and then down to Jerusalem. Much is ahead of Him.

Our biggest challenge is to defeat the dragon of sin. It is a long, slimy and powerful dragon. And this isn't a problem that only Christians have—it is the universal explanation for all of human suffering. There is no greater quest on which to enlist; no better use of your thought life; no priority higher that God will assist you in. We need to be sin-fighters, fighting our *own* sin. Accessing whatever assets might be available for that war!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 31)

Scripture: Mark 7:24-30

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 8th, 2005

Every Mom, at His Feet

Mark 7:24-30 (NASB) And from there He arose and went away to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know *of it*; yet He could not escape notice. ²⁵ But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit, immediately came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ And He was saying to her, "Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered and *said* to Him, "Yes, Lord, *but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs.*" ²⁹ And He said to her, "Because of this answer go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter." ³⁰ And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having departed.

Also Matthew 15:21-28 (NASB)

²¹ And Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." ²³ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to *Him* and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" ²⁶ And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ But she said, "Yes, Lord; *but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*" ²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

Introduction We want to wish every Mom present among us today a great Mother's Day and honor you for faithfully taking up as your calling the greatest job on earth.

- Nothing is more wonderful and nothing is harder.
- Nothing is more fascinating and nothing is more complicated than raising a child.
- Nothing is more under assault today and yet nothing is more highly esteemed by the Lord, who invented the concept of one human bearing another one into this world.

Moms: we appreciate you and honor your work, your heart and your faithfulness to the Lord in doing, to the best of your ability, and with His resources recharging and teaching you along the way, that ancient job which has such a deep and profound effect on other people.

So today I want to share with you a Mom story from the Bible. It isn't one of those more famous Bible Moms: Sarah, Mom to Isaac or Jochabed, Mom to Moses or Mary, Mom to Jesus... The Mom we're looking at didn't get her name recorded. She wasn't even Jewish. All we know is that she was a seemingly random Gentile woman, a **Syrophoenician** or **Canaanite** (as Matthew calls her) woman. Jesus had gone over to the coast (Tyre) to get away from everyone for a bit, and I think to spend some time reflecting with and teaching His disciples, on a retreat you might say. Think about that for a minute: Tyre is Gentile country; about 40 miles from Galilee and that is always interesting to me. There was no mass transit. You walked. Jesus and the boys walked 40 miles to get a little get-away! Tyre was an old city, over a thousand years old by the time of Jesus, and at that time about 2½ times the size of New Bedford--whose local god was named Melkart (no relation to *our* local god, Walmart.) Now, just to go there at all would make a strict, tradition-minded Jew ceremonially unclean. "You can't go and hang out *there!* Ewwww!" But Jesus went out of His way NOT to observe the traditional separations from defiling

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associations. He never broke the actual law of God, not once--Jesus was the perfectly "clean" man. But He had no problem crossing man-made boundaries, of which there seemed to be no end. The kingdom of God ultimately knows no ethnic boundaries. And this was the town Jesus wanted to retreat to, to spend some time with His disciples without the crowds and distractions of Galilee. But this Mom has heard that Jesus of Nazareth is in town. His reputation had obviously preceded Him there. And Jesus and the boys are no sooner settled into some lodging when there's a knock at the door. "Jesus of Nazareth, help me! My little girl has an unclean spirit! PLEASE HELP!"

Now, this is the outcry of a desperate Mom, a timeless thing. Feel what this Mom is feeling. She remembers well the day she discovered her own pregnancy. She remembers well the day her little girl was born, and she held her up and loved her without bounds. And she remembers the day when something turned strange. Her little girl had started acting weird, and as the days turned into weeks and into months the weirdness accelerated. Perhaps she went to the local Melkart priest but he could do nothing. Perhaps she paid money to some physician but it didn't help. Maybe she prayed upward herself, to Melkart or to some other god, or to WHOEVER IS UP THERE, **PLEASE DELIVER MY LITTLE GIRL!** Nothing changed. The little girl slips deeper and deeper into strange behavior, into bizarre manifestations, into darkness. Mom is beside herself with fear and anxiety. Then news reaches her ear, Jesus of Nazareth just checked into the Motel 6! And she rushes to his door... An interesting thing to think about is what language they would have been speaking? Probably Jesus would have conversed with the woman in Greek, since it is almost certain she would not have spoken Aramaic or Hebrew.

What about this matter of "having an unclean spirit?" Matthew just bluntly calls it "demon possession." Is that real? Was it real then but not now? Be assured,

it is real. Demons and Satan are both very real, and there is nothing they would rather do than get modern, rationalist people to think they are *not* real. They are as real as can be. And despite our modern enticement with horror and the macabre, there is nothing enticing about them. They single, foul motive and agenda is to destroy. How it works, varies. We read earlier in Mark how one man was possessed by hundreds, perhaps thousands of demons. This little girl, somehow, had contracted one. It was destroying her. Her Mom was desperate. As any Mom would be. Moms: Do not give in an inch in your families when someone brings the macabre into your home. Don't think that it is fascinating or that it is fun or that it is just pretend. It is not. There is nothing noble in horror or in the dark side of things. Evil is real. Guard your home. Be sober and be vigilant. Your adversary the devil stalks about like a roaring lion, seeking who he may devour.

The point of the passage is not just to demonstrate that Jesus *could* or *would* solve the problem. That does happen, by the way, as Mark and Matthew both record. Jesus was not without either compassion or the ability to rid the girl of the demon. And when He does it, He does it from a distance, which is an interesting feature of this particular encounter Jesus had with the spirit-world—it submitted to His dictates even from a distance. But at first, He responded to the woman's plea with a "hold-on-a-minute." His statement would have caught some off guard, ***Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.*** In the priority schedule for God's grace, Israel was first in line. Now, the Pharisees would have just sent her away. Jesus didn't do that (though you will notice from Matthew's account that the disciples would have!) And He uses an interesting word-picture. Dogs. The word for dogs *κυνάρῳ* *kunariois* is not like the word Paul uses in Philippians 3:2 *κύνας* *kunas*. *Kunas* would be like scavenging, vicious dogs. *Kunariois* would be like "doggie," a house dog, a smaller pet.

In our house our "kunariois" is named Spurgeon. For some reason he sits longingly at my feet, on his face the look of love. It isn't because he particularly loves me. It is because, it has been known to happen accidentally from time to time, when a morsel, a tiny piece of supper might stray from my plate and fall to the floor. Upon this he waits expectantly, motionless, languishing, acting as though at any minute he might expire if not fed.

This woman responds well to Jesus' "hold-on-a-minute." She reasons that "a little Gentile blessing would not deprive the Jews of what God wanted [2] them to have." Her persistent faith is the point of the passage. And we see that A LIVELY AND COURAGEOUS FAITH IS ALWAYS THE PROPER RESPONSE TO JESUS. He rewards her faith—a thing she had far more of, snap-shotted at that moment—than the Pharisees and Sadducees back in Judea. The reward is the granting of her request. When she gets home, her little girl is ***lying on the bed, the demon having departed.*** She rests easy now. The demon is not just partially kicked out. He is not temporarily gone.

He is gone. The “**Son of the Most High God**” has evicted it (Mark 5:7). There will be no slipping in, where Jesus has cleaned house. The girl is at ease. She is healed.

Do you think this Mom forgot that in later years? Do you think the little girl forgot as she grew up? We do not know. But as I see it, every Mom is at Jesus’ feet when it comes to their children. A Mom knows that many of the problems our children encounter cannot just be fixed by her desire to fix them. She is powerless, many times.

Many illnesses, accidents, mental problems, choice of friendships, dangerous risks chosen by our kids, all of these things are really beyond a Mom’s control. So she finds herself often at Jesus’ feet. And that is the place to be. The best Moms engage *faith* as they talk to Jesus about their children. They work at exercising **a lively and courageous FAITH** as they entrust their kids to Jesus Christ over and over again.

Perhaps in this, there is the faint hint of hope that we can engage believing prayer too, on behalf of seeking parents. Many times, I have had people ask me to pray for their children when they, themselves, have not yet found Christ. My hope is that they will but I always DO pray for their prayer request on the conviction that Jesus responds to the outcry of faith in Him, even the most elementary faith. Does that mean they will automatically become Christians? We do not know. History says nothing else of this Gentile Tyre resident. But when it comes to doing spiritual warfare on behalf of the desperate, we can call upon the Lord of grace and power to intervene. The Lord Jesus showed once again, His great compassionate heart here—and His ever willingness to respond to the plea of faith. He is most excellent! He is worthy of trusting. He is worthy of seeking Him out.

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Dr. Tom Constable’s *Expository Notes*.

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Constable, *ibid*.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 32)

Scripture: Mark 7: 31 – 8:9

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 22nd, 2005

One Who Was Deaf & 4,000 Who Were Hungry

Mark 7:31-8:9 (NASB)

³¹ And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. ³² And they *brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they *entreated Him to lay His hand upon him. ³³ And He took him aside from the multitude by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue *with the saliva*; ³⁴ and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He *said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" ³⁵ And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he *began* speaking plainly. ³⁶ And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. ³⁷ And they were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." **8** ¹ IN those days again, when there was a great multitude and they had nothing to eat, He called His disciples and *said to them, ² "I feel compassion for the multitude because they have remained with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat; ³ and if I send them away hungry to their home, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a distance." ⁴ And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to *find enough* to satisfy these men with bread here in a desolate place?" ⁵ And He was asking them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." ⁶ And He *directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the multitude. ⁷ They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. ⁸ And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. ⁹ And about four thousand were *there*; and He sent them away.

Introduction Once again, lately, I have felt lots of competing calls about what Christianity is supposed to be. Perhaps you wonder sometimes too...

- Is Christianity a "speaker's podium" from which we challenge an increasingly secular and self-centered culture, which seems hell-bent on dismantling decency, law and order and civility? Or,
- Is our faith the "loading dock" for feeding the hungry and housing the homeless in the world or in our community? Or,
- Is it a cosmic "courtroom" wherein social justice is defined and out of which are mandated agendas and missions?
- Is Christianity the "bunker" into which the beleaguered and the emotionally damaged or misunderstood flee to find safety and healing?
- Or is Christianity the "aircraft carrier" from which we launch the weapons of spiritual warfare against the enemies of righteousness, unseen to our eyes but always deployed to undermine or even destroy the kingdom of God?

I've felt lots of calls lately—again--that ALL of these are what Christianity is! And this is why, I am always comforted and I get clear thinking when I turn back to the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which remind me again that

ultimately, basically, fundamentally, first—before it is anything else—it is Jesus Christ. Christianity **IS directly about** Jesus Christ. It is about **personally pursuing Him; following after Him, seeking to hear His voice in the day-to-day issues of living,** and the **incremental experience of being personally transformed** to actually become LIKE Him. Christianity **IS** Jesus Christ.

Islam does not call Muslims to become LIKE Mohammed. Buddhism does not call Buddhists to become LIKE Buddha. Hinduism does not call Hindus to become LIKE one of their great leaders or gods. Christianity not only calls Christians to become like Jesus, but to experience the very *transfiguration* of our character and our drives and our choices into the character, drive and choice-making that Jesus would have. Our faith is about Jesus. I need to remember this.

So. When last we left Jesus, we saw Him deal with a Gentile woman who had great faith in Him, even though she had no Jewish membership; no entitlement or claim on His grace or goodness. She simply cried *out* to His goodness, hoping she might get a scrap of it, for her demon-possessed little girl. And He met her faith with complete grace and power.

Jesus and the boys had gone over to Tyre, you will remember, to get away for a couple of days to rest and talk and I think, evaluate. What Mark tells us He did was to deal with the woman. He doesn't tell us that then they "chilled" for a few days. He simply records that they went back to Galilee and beyond Jordan into the **region of Decapolis**. The Decapolis (10 cities) was primarily on the Golan Heights and on the east side of the Jordan River in the area that is now part of the Kingdom of Jordan. It was populated by Gentiles in the time of Christ, and it was largely dominated by a pagan, Greco-Roman culture. Somewhere in that area there's this deaf fellow who gets brought to Jesus. The man cannot hear and not surprisingly, cannot speak either. Communications are down! Scholars argue about whether this fellow too is a Gentile or not. I don't think it much matters actually, because Gentile or Jew the grace of the Lord Jesus is going to win the day for this poor fellow.

This is the only one of the four Gospels who records this miracle. Interestingly, Jesus uses his fingers and attacks the man's problem. The Greek word describing this man's speech impediment, *mogilalos*, is a rare one. It occurs only here in the New Testament and only in Isaiah 35:6 in the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament.

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For
waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah. **Isaiah 35:5,6**

Its presence there is significant because there Isaiah predicted that Messiah would loose the tongues of the dumb when He came (cf. v. 37).¹ The gestures seem to me to be to communicate to a man who could not hear any teaching about Messiah, that he would be blessed by God in his ears and on his tongue—meaning his ability to hear and to speak.

I want you to be struck here today with the fact that our Lord notices individual people over and over in Mark's Gospel. He can zoom in and focus His lovingkindness on ONE PERSON at a time. He does not hurry and there is no assembly line mentality. And blindness, demon-possession, even death itself do not confuse or intimidate our Savior. Nor does deafness. Messiah is a man who has great compassion on the hurting. Today we hurt often too. Be assured your Savior has great compassion today too. When you hurt or are saddled with some disability, know that your Savior notices and will heal you either sooner or later. It is His choice now as it was then, to heal or not. But one day you too will find your hurts, your failing eyesight, your bad hearing, your mental slowness or whatever trouble you are laboring with, healed by the Son of God.

Then Mark gives us one of those very few places where we know the exact word Jesus spoke: **Ephphatha** which means in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke most of the time, **Be opened**. Jesus' humanness is clear as He sighs. Although I didn't see a commentator note this, I think it is one of those moments when the wonder of the God-man becomes so clear. He is the Son of God, and yet He is the son of man. He can open this man's ears and enable him to speak, but He is a man too and surrounded by a broken and slow-to-believe world. He sighs deeply...

Verse 36 is interesting. One wonders why Jesus didn't want this talked about. Most of us would *enjoy* some notoriety if we did a good deed. We like to wear patches and display plaques and such about our accomplishments. Jesus wanted none of that. But even as he healed this man's ability to speak, he could not shut him up. The news gets out quickly. People were utterly amazed at Him and what they said, as Mark records, is a paradigm for what we want OUR witness today to stimulate in people! "HE HAS DONE ALL THINGS WELL." *The Message* has it "He's done it all and done it well!" Such was the reaction people gave Jesus' doing good things for the people. Jesus continues to inaugurate the time of the new creation that unstops the ear that it may hear and releases the mute tongue to shout for joy². Again, here is the reason, I think: Jesus wants to avoid misunderstanding—He did not come just to fix people's illnesses and problems. He came to go to the cross. Anything, any notoriety, any political

¹Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*. Galaxie Software, 2003.

²Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. electronic ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c1989.

entanglements which might even *possibly* subvert that mission—He wanted no part of.

Now, much complicated discussion goes on in the commentaries and study books about why Mark records another feeding, this time of 4,000 people. Call me simple-headed, but I think the basic reason is plain: it happened that way. You see I have confidence that what we read in the Bible, as for the historical sequences of events, and the details of the events themselves, is accurate and reliable. I enjoy greatly the simple FACTS that the Gospels lay out for us. Its almost as if Jesus is magnificent enough just in what He did. Sure, there **are** fulfilled prophecies, and there is intrigue and there is no end to the questions about what every turn in the road meant and how it applies for today. But basically, I just love WHAT HAPPENED.

Here, Jesus cares about the hunger of 4,000 people. He cared about the deafness and speech impediment of one man. Now, He cares about the large crowd with all their hungry and anonymous faces.

They need to eat.

What are our resources?

Seven loaves. OK.

Everybody sit down.

Thank You, Lord, for your goodness. Thank You for *these* seven loaves. May

God be praised. May He be loved and appreciated for what He is about to do...

OK. (breaks loaf) Here...

I love how Mark words this: ***He started giving the loaves to the disciples and the disciples served them to the multitude.*** Do you get it? They just keep giving them to the 4,000 people. How long would that take? And the loaves just keep being there and keep being enough. That is so cool! I still haven't gotten over it from 6:33-44 where Mark said, ***And they ate and were satisfied.***

Matthew Henry wrote: "He has a special *concern* for those that are reduced to [their basics] by their zeal and diligence in attending on him...Whatever losses we sustain, or hardships we go through, for Christ's sake, and in love to him, he will take care that they shall be made up to us one way or other.³" In Revelation 2:2 Jesus said to the Christians in Ephesus, ***I know your deeds and your toil and your perseverance...*** To the ancient Christians in Smyrna He said, ***I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)...*** To the Christians in Pergamum, ***I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, and hold fast***

³Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, Mk 8:1. Peabody: Hendrickson, c1991.

My name and did not deny my faith... To the Thyatiran Christians, I know your deeds and your love and faith and service and perseverance and that your deeds of late are greater than at first... (Revelation 2)

He knows what we have done for Him. These hungry people had followed Him around with nothing to live on for three days. When did we do that? We give up a few hours for Him. But we don't go hungry often, purely to attend to Him.

Sometimes He waits until WE are hungry too though. I think we have to go without sometimes in order to really look longingly to Him. We are so captivated by the need for immediate gratification. But He takes us out into the field for a bit. There He teaches us that providing for us is no problem. He demonstrates His willingness to provide for the one, and for 4,000. No matter. He is stupendously good. He is good all the time.

Are you fascinated by Jesus Christ? Do you feel as though you cannot learn enough about Him? Do you find that your hunger for Him results in seeing more prayer requests answered? Do you expand your prayer time, asking Him things, telling Him what you feel about Him; asking HIM to make His glory known through you more and more? Do you sense that He will meet your needs even when you cannot see how? This is our Savior. HE is what Christianity is all about. HE is why we are here.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 33)

Scripture: Mark 8:10-21

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 29th, 2005



When the Disciples Didn't Get It— Reasons We Can Be Encouraged

Mark 8:10-21 (NASB)

¹⁰ And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples, and came to the district of Dalmanutha. ¹¹ And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. ¹² And sighing deeply in His spirit, He *said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." ¹³ And leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. ¹⁴ And they had forgotten to take bread; and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. ¹⁵ And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they *began* to discuss with one another *the fact* that they had no bread. ¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, *said to them, "Why do you discuss *the fact* that you have no bread? **Do you not yet see or understand?** Do you have a hardened heart? 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 you picked up?" They *said to Him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "And when *I broke* the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they *said to Him, "Seven." ²¹ And He was saying to them, "**Do you not yet understand?**"

Introduction In honor of Memorial Day tomorrow, let me say something about a young WWII sailor, Ray, who was born in Temvik, North Dakota where his father, Charles, worked for the railroads. The family lived for a while in Miles City, Montana, then in Tacoma, Washington and finally settled in Denver, Colorado where his father worked in a Burlington Railroad roundhouse. Ray's mother, Mabel, was asthmatic and developed a heart condition, and after the age of six Ray lived with his aunt. His father abandoned the family, and all efforts to locate him were to no avail. Ray came to know the Lord at a Methodist revival meeting at age of ten (1927) and, living on a farm, began to preach to the cows. His dream was to one day become a surgeon, and after high school in Montana he entered a premed course at Whitworth College, Spokane, Washington. Financial difficulties forced him to drop out. After working in Montana, Chicago, Illinois, and Denver, he moved to Hawaii to work for Libby Pineapple when World War II broke out. He enlisted in the Navy there in 1943. During the Hawaii years Ray began to lead Bible studies for both civilian workers and navy personnel as well as preaching on a local radio program. It was during this season that Ray realized the Lord wanted him in full time vocational ministry.

Bible expositor Ray Stedman related this conversation in early 1975:

I spoke with a Christian man, a graduate of a Bible college. He told me, "I've been a Christian for many years, but I don't feel fulfilled. Instead, I feel empty—blah. I've lost all

interest in what God is doing, and I don't have any desire even to study the Bible anymore. What should I do?"¹

I have heard the same sentiments from others myself, many times. I have *felt* it myself more than once. Following Jesus Christ is an experience with the invisible. Following Jesus does not get you the same tangible benefits that other priorities might: money, fame, prestige, power. Being a disciple of His sometimes is hard: it involves following Him *by faith*.

Now, our passage tells us that after healing the deaf and mute man, Jesus went back by water to the western side of the Sea of Galilee. The Pharisees confront Him and they request a **sign from heaven**. Jesus has fed 5,000 men (and probably about 10,000 people), then 4,000 more. He has cast out demons, done numerous *incredible* healings, and told the Sea of Galilee to "chill out" and then walked on it. You would think all of that would get the job done of impressing the Pharisees. But it did not. They wanted "some sort of astronomical miracle." They wanted something written in the sky or the star of Bethlehem to come back or a voice from heaven to *authenticate* Jesus. And Jesus is not going to grant it. In verse 12 Mark tells us He *sighed deeply*. Matthew wrote down a little more information:

¹ AND the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. ² But He answered and said to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' ³ "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? ⁴ "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them, and went away.

Matthew 16:1-4

The only sign Jesus would demonstrate was **the sign of** Jonah, whom you will remember was swallowed by, and digested by a fish for three days, and then, I believe, was resurrected—so Jesus compared Jonah to what would happen to Himself—the sign of His own resurrection. These religious leaders just did not get it. They were focused on the wrong things. But if you think the disciples could have been smug, you are wrong. They didn't get it either, as we shall see.

Sometimes it seems that as big a challenge as it is to *obey* God when we know what to do, JUST as big a challenge is to get focus and really KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. It isn't because He is unclear about it. It is because we are so easily distracted. We often get our eyes precisely on the wrong thing, and there we stay focused. This of course was the main log in the Pharisees' eyes but it was also the problem with the disciples. There are plenty of times when God says to His people, "You didn't do the right thing. In fact, you chose to do the wrong thing." But there are other times when Jesus says (and He says it twice in this passage), **Do you not yet understand?**

Our Lord had intended to warn them of what produces dullness, what produces the condition they had just witnessed with the Pharisees. What in the world makes men so incredibly blind that, when One is standing before them doing all these wonderful signs and speaking these marvelous words, they should nevertheless insist upon another sign? He was warning them of what produces the condition because they were in danger of doing the same thing themselves. He put it in these graphic terms: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod." Leaven is a picture of evil doctrine or teaching. He was saying, "The

¹ Ray Stedman, *The Servant Who Rules*, Discovery House Publishers, 2002, p. 234; from a sermon given at Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, CA Feb. 2, 1975.

reason the Pharisees are so blind is because of what they believe, what they teach. The reason Herod cannot recognize me is because of what he believes, what he teaches."

The Pharisees believed that God was interested only in what you do, in performance. There are a lot of people like that today in the churches. They believe that all God wants is correct performance, outward, external obedience to certain demands, proper conduct of religious observances, and that if you supply this, it is all God is really interested in. What you are *really like inside -- your attitudes, your relationships* -- this makes no difference. God only wants you to do the right thing in the right way at the right time. Jesus said that if this is the way you live, if you think God is concerned only with what you have accomplished, with what your activity has been on His behalf, then you are going to dull your spirit and miss all the great lessons of life he wants you to learn. It will cause you to lose out on the excitement of faith, and you will become lethargic, apathetic, dull, and listless.

Or if, like Herod, your eyes are on man and the world around, and you are interested only in doing what makes you acceptable to others, and not what makes you acceptable to God, that too will dull your spirit. It will lead you to become blind and foolish in the way you act.²

Well, they are off again, back across the lake. But someone notices—and this is a little humorous since they had only a few hours before, picked up *seven large baskets of leftover bread and fish*—that they had no bread at all. I mean there they are standing with The Master Baker and just does not occur to them that this really should be no problem at all. You can hear them whining, "I'm hungry. And we don't have any bread at all..." I'm afraid you and I are susceptible to that too. We whine. We believe so little sometimes that the Lord Jesus is quite capable to make a feast for 4,000 out of seven orders of fish and chips.

So He asks them a series of six perceptive questions, which translate for us today into four principles for Christian living, all aimed at "What to Do When We Get the Spiritual Blahs"-when we just are not getting it. When we have lost the sense of what the walk of faith is all about...

Do you not yet see or understand?

Do you have a hardened heart?

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 you picked up?"

They *said to Him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they *said to Him, "Seven."

²¹ **And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (Mark 8:17b-21)**

I. The first thing the Lord suggests is, use your mind. "Do you not perceive or understand?" Stop and think about where you are, about what is happening to you and why it happened. Analyze it. Read what the Bible has to say about it. That is what the mind is for. Study the revelations of God to you. Use your mind.

II. Second, he asks, "Are your hearts hardened?" That is, analyze the state of your heart. Are you dull, or do you respond? Have you forgotten truth? Because if the heart does not respond to what the mind has understood, then it is because you have not really believed it. You may have recognized mentally that it is true, but you have not acted upon it. You do not really believe God is going to do what he has said he will do, that is the problem. This is always revealed by a dull, unresponsive heart. Truth always moves us -- when we believe it. It always grips us and excites us. And if we are not excited, if we do not feel a response of joy, it is because the mind has grasped it but the heart has not. One of the things the Word suggests we do at this point is to pray that the eyes of our heart might be enlightened.

² Stedman, Ibid.

III. Jesus moves on: "Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" Jesus said these words again and again to the people he taught, and each time he means the same thing. **Do not just look at the events you are seeing and think that is all there is to it.** It is a parable, a parallel to something deeper and more important, concerning your spirit. As these men were being fed by the loaves and the fishes, he was saying to them, "Don't think of this merely as a way of getting a good, quick, free meal. Remember that I am telling you that you have a deeper need, a far more demanding need, which needs daily replenishment as well. **Use your eyes to see beyond the physical to the spiritual.**"

IV. And finally, "Do you not remember?" **Hasn't God taught you things in the past through your circumstances?** Hasn't he led you through events which have made you **understand something about your life?** Do you think that the things happening to you right now, whoever and wherever you are, are just accidents? Or is God saying something to you? Do you not remember the times he said things like that in the past?

Well, remember them now, and interpret these events now, and recognize that you are in the hands of a loving Father who has put you *right in the circumstance you are in* to teach you a very needed truth. Learn to lay hold of that truth, and rejoice!³

TO put it as simply as I can, Do not MISS what God is doing in your life right now. Think about it carefully—don't make up stuff and hallucinate imaginary meaning—you don't need to. Good meditation and thought will make clear to you His lessons for you. This is the way to keep spiritually alive and alert, vital and functioning, as a believer. That is what Jesus taught these men. And the question now hangs over each one of us: "Do you not yet understand?"

I hope you are encouraged today to see that even the people who were right there with Jesus, didn't get it all the time. I want you to be encouraged by the patience of Jesus and how He labored to teach them and to get THEM to analyze their own hearts about why they would get so "dull of hearing." He does not want your Christian walk to become dull or joyless or routine duty. He doesn't want you to lose interest in His kingdom or to get defeated by the presence of indwelling sin, still.

He wants you to enjoy life but to always have Him in front of you. He doesn't want to be your hobby. He wants to be your Lord and Master and your Hero too. He wants to be the One you are most interested in pleasing whether you are on the job, on vacation, in the hospital, traveling on business, or here in church. We're all in this together and for the most part, we're all struggling with the same things that conspire to get us off the path of discipleship.

In 1975—30 years ago—Ray Stedman prayed this prayer at the end of his message on this passage:

"Forgive us, Father, for the dullness of our hearts, for the way we reflect so frequently the attitude of the pagan worldlings around us, who see no further than the surface of events, and never think any deeper. Forgive us for living like animals, in this respect, and help us to remember that we are men and women, that we have a spirit as well as a body, and that it needs strengthening, needs upholding, and needs to be fed. Lord, help us to give ourselves every day, afresh and anew, to this One who is the bread sent down from heaven, the One who can strengthen us and keep us and establish us. We ask in his name, Amen."

³ Stedman, Ibid.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 34)

Scripture: Mark 8:22-26

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 5th, 2005



When the Ministry of Jesus Turned a Corner

Mark 8:22-26 (NASB)

²² and they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Him, and entreated Him to touch him.

²³ And taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes, and laying His hands upon him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" ²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I am seeing *them* like trees, walking about." ²⁵ Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and *began* to see everything clearly. ²⁶ And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village

Introduction I find dealing with change often difficult. Recently I have absorbed a change in staff around here, the loss of my doctor (moving to Vermont) and then, we have been having our bathrooms remodeled and now, to add insult to injury in an *already* emotionally cluttered Spring, the loss of the bathroom fixtures with which I have shared an intimate relationship for almost eight years. Other changes have been buzzing at me too; I find that change isn't always easy.

The passage before us marks a bit of a change for the disciples of Jesus. In fact, it is the turning point in this Gospel, signaled by what Mark tells us in verse 30. Jesus began to talk to His disciples about what His *real* mission was.

It was not just to make people's day-to-day lives easier, or better (although knowing Jesus certainly does that).

It was not just to teach whomever would listen about ethics and morals or to throw penalty flags at the Pharisees.

Ultimately, His mission was to die and to rise from the dead, completing the redemption of the elect. That is the point of why Jesus came to earth.

But first there is another one-on-one healing by Jesus and this one occurs in the village of Bethsaida. For centuries no one knew where Bethsaida was located—other than somewhere near or in Galilee. In fact some liberal scholars said that the place was mythical. But in 1987 they started digging at a spot that had been suggested by the archaeologist Edward Robinson (1794-1863) in 1838, and there it was.¹ It was the town in which Peter, Andrew and Philip were born.

¹ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Archaeology/Bethsaida.html>

Jesus had done other miracles there previously but you will notice here that Jesus leads him OUT OF the village, to deal with Him personally.

I think that is a point, right up front, that is wonderful. Again we see our Savior taking a personal interest in a man who we have no reason to believe had any expectations about Jesus. He goes with Him, that's all. Jesus deals with him very personally, though. Mark is the only one who records this very unusual miracle. It is the only two-staged miracle recorded for us in the New Testament. And there very definitely was a reason for that.

But please note, that when you pray our Savior receives and deals with your prayers, your outcry to Him personally. I think that is one of the underlying reasons that Mark gives us *three* private miracles (though many were public). We read about the raising of Jairus' daughter, about the man who was deaf and now this man who was blind. The Lord Jesus Christ sometimes dealt very personally and intimately with people's needs. He hears our prayers too, privately, intimately. We do not need any other intercessor or go-between to soften Him up. He is our intercessor with the Father. He is our great High Priest. He deals with us as with individuals. It perhaps is a small point, until you think about the billions of people IN the body of Christ and the many millions alive just today.

Now, this is a strange situation. Jesus heals him partially, then fully. It wasn't because Jesus had to really scrunch up His power. It wasn't because the Satanic dampening field (no such thing exists) was particularly strong around Bethsaida at that time. It wasn't because the blind man had to crank up his faith in two stages. Once, again, there is nothing that I read to indicate the man himself had any faith at all. We read that OTHER people—who evidently cared about him—brought him TO Jesus. Jesus may even have known the man before. Bethsaida wasn't that big a community. But Jesus heals him in such an interesting way... Why do you think it happened in two stages?

Let me say at this point, this is one of the reasons I love the Bible. Situations are recorded for us that don't always give themselves to a simple, easily calculated answer. Basically, I am not wholly comfortable with any of the several answers to the question, "Why did He do it this way?" that I read in the several really excellent commentaries I studied. None of the commentators seems to come up with a "knock-you-over" explanation. I think Mark recorded this as it happened. I can imagine the disciples sitting around the campfire for years after talking about this one. But here are some possible ideas:

John Calvin suggested that maybe Jesus did it this way to demonstrate really plainly that He can and would heal in any manner that HE CHOSE.

Alexander MacLaren suggested that Jesus knew the man was fearful, so He did this thing gradually in a divinely *gentle* way to accommodate the man.

Constable and Stedman both suggest that He healed the man's blindness like this for the DISCIPLE'S benefit—to show THEM that spiritual perception comes gradually, a step at a time; that this particular healing held an important lesson for His followers, to whom He had just said, **“Don't you understand?”** Sight was often a metaphor Jesus and other biblical authorities used for “getting things, spiritually.”²

Whatever the exact reason, I think He had several for doing it this way and it is really enough to know that He DID completely heal the man. I don't think it took two hours either, more like three or four minutes.

But think *some more* about the power just of having sight restored in those days. Without sight you could not work, get around, be independent, gather food, find water, go to friends' homes by yourself, serve in any kind of civil way, go on travels, observe the beauty of the land, even if you DID have the chance of being taught to read, you couldn't do it; you could not see danger coming and you could not discern expressions on people's faces. You were completely dependent on other people telling you what was about. Some of all that is true today but today there are a lot of aids and social services for blind people. So to be given sight, was a life-changing thing. Jesus gave this man back that which would revolutionize his whole existence. The good things that Jesus did and does for people are not trivial.

I have yet to see on television or even read much at all about this quality of healing today. It is one of the reasons I am so skeptical of people claiming apostolic or Jesus-power with the gift of healing. You would think that if it was real, and the same kind of Pentecost-power as Peter and John and Paul sometimes used, you would see it at least every ten or so miracles done on stage, at big events. You do not.

And then again there is the reticence that Jesus had to have His reputation controlled by yet another miracle. **And He sent him to his home saying, “Do not even enter the village.”** (Verse 26). Even here, how does the guy do that? That is cool! What a joy for him to go around and ask, “Yo, where do I live? No No I can walk there, just tell me where I live!!”

If you get nothing more from this message, get this:

1. The Bible is honest about what happened. It is accurate. It isn't a simple little book with clever puzzles in it that tantalize us and then we always can arrive at, “Oh, I see, that is simple.” We are reading about a God and His Son who are awesome.

² Tom Constables Expository Notes on the Bible

2. The story of Jesus Christ never ends up with a complete and final *Finis*. He is worth studying, and mediating on for the rest of your life.

No, perhaps this story doesn't just blow away some specific problem YOU are having today. It won't give you seven steps to being a successful parent, or how to witness for the Gospel in five steps. It doesn't automatically and magically cure depression or give you a plain answer to some decision your facing. The record of Jesus Christ isn't there to just solve our problems or make us live more comfortably. It is there for its own value. He has called US into His light.

Change comes upon us all the time. The path is now changing for the disciples. They are going to see few miracles now and hear more and more about His suffering. They will next go up to Caesarea Philippi, then up on a mountain—probably Mount Hermon and then the road now begins to turn south, towards Jerusalem... But change cannot be avoided. And we ride changes, as the disciples learned to, in the confidence that ALL of our lives, all things we experience, and the changes too are part of an overall plan for our lives that is good and wonderful. We will eventually see it. In the meantime, we see things as “*trees walking*,” but we will *see everything clearly*.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

⁹ but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NASB)

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NASB)

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 35)

Scripture: Mark 8:27-38

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 12th, 2005

An Authentic Christianity That Goes Deeper

Mark 8:27-38 (NASB)

²⁷ And Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ And He *continued* by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter *answered* and *said* to Him, "Thou art the Christ." ³⁰ And He warned 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 was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and *said*, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." ³⁴ And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵ "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. ³⁶ "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ "For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Introduction Most of us are in pursuit of something that we want *very much* to know more about; something we want to understand more fully. It might be how to make money. It might be how to stay healthy. It might be some aspect of science or art. It might be how to teach better or nurse better or treat illness better. And then, for most of us, there is also the pursuit to somehow become closer, to become more fully in touch with Jesus Christ, to make our walk with Him a vital *relationship* as real as what you have with any other person. We are not satisfied with just going to church or just reading about God. We want to *sense* His presence in our lives...

If you took a test today on how much you know about Jesus, how would you do? I bet most of us would do pretty well. Most of us could lay out an outline beginning with Christmas and ending with Resurrection Sunday with many of the events of Jesus' life, in between. And there it would lie...a timeline of knowledge. The disciples could have done the same thing. They knew about

the events of Jesus' ministry. And it was while they were walking into the community of Caesarea Philippi that Jesus says, "So James, whom do people say that I am?" "Peter, what do you hear?" And they give the responses they have heard—an interesting set of speculations, none of which is correct. Today too, people are really quite uninformed of Who Jesus really was. Or is.

An authentic Christianity—a more real Christianity—goes deeper than just knowing things about Jesus, His timeline of events. A more genuine form of Christian faith goes deep into the heart and mind. It drives the disciple to make serious and profound decisions about his or her own life, against the backdrop of a risen Lord Jesus.

Speaking of backdrop, the little town in which Jesus had taken His disciples on that day—when they're having this identity conversation—was called Caesarea Philippi. There's not a whole lot left of it today, except one very dramatic place. It is about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and it was a place where the Greek god *Pan* was worshipped. Pagan worship was often conducted near running water and Caesarea Philippi (also called "Panias") was near three streams flowing down from Mt. Hermon, ten miles away. One of them is a tributary to the Jordan River. Worship of Pan was centered at this cave, who was in Greek mythology a god with the physique, not of a Greek god, but of a small man with a goatee beard and reed pipes, and the hind-quarters and horns of a goat. Pan had many attributes as a god. He was the god of goats, and sheep, and their shepherds. He was the god of bee keeping. He was also a god of music, playing upon the reed pipes he made from the transformed body of the nymph Syrinx (the one that got away). It was said that this music could inspire **panic** (the root of the word) in any who heard it. Sometimes he was a minor god of the sea. He was a god of prophesy and was also famous for being sexually worked up (Greek women with a track record were known as Pan girls). Above all he was the god of nature: meadows, forests, beasts, and even

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human nature. This cave was his place. People would sacrifice pigs to him in the pool in it. And in the wall were niches in which were statues, one of Pan and of other gods and goddesses too. It was here then, that Jesus asked Peter who He was... With the backdrop of Pan and the others, Peter says, **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** Jesus was challenging these gods and goddesses as if they were actually there, by this question and answer time with His disciples. Of course, they were NOT there. They did not exist then nor did they ever exist. And that is the point. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. He is THE SON of the living God. All other gods are imaginary. There is only one God and His Son is Jesus Christ.

So As He asks them who it is that people are saying He is, note that no one yet has suggested that He is actually THE long-awaited Chosen One of Israel. People think He is all kinds of things—some of them pretty good—but no one has hit on Who He really is yet. But it has started now to dawn on the disciples Who He is... Very soon He will take three of them up on the slope of

Mount Hermon and He will be *transfigured* right in front of their eyes. There will be little doubt, soon enough. And this story about this conversation, He has deliberately because He knows what's coming soon. Peter says, **You are the Christ**. Matthew said that Peter added, **...the Son of the Living God**. And Jesus says, **Blessed are you Simon Barjona because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father Who is in heaven.** (Matthew 16:17). Matthew gives a fuller account of the time at Caesarea Philippi. In his account we see that Jesus made four historic predictions there:

- a. The Church: (Matthew 16:18) For the first time Jesus announced His purpose to build an *ekklesia* (Church), a community of the redeemed, called out to be His Body on earth, to witness to Him while He was absent.
- b. The Keys of the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19) which refer to authority in the church—it would be shared by other apostles (Matt.18:18; John 2:20-23), an authority given to the apostles enabling them to lead the first generation of believers after Pentecost until the epistles were written, revealing Jesus' standards and provisions for His *ekklesia*.
- c. Jesus' coming and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-23) Jesus announced His death and resurrection as events which would provide the redemption essential for the Church to come into existence.
- d. Jesus' prophetic call to discipleship (Matthew 16 and Mark 8). Using the example of His own obedience to the Father, even to death, He taught these men the same definition of a disciple. His body would be made up of people who like Him, would deny themselves and follow Him.
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Now, if this seems basic and elementary to you and perhaps quaint because after all that was 2,000 years ago and surely TODAY we are beyond the pluralism of Greek mythology, note this: More and more we Christians are being considered foolish and even *fascist* for our belief and for our uncompromising insistence that there is one God, that there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Just yesterday in the *New York Times*, there is a blistering editorial about what is going on right now at the U. S. Air Force Academy. The *New York Times* says, that campus "is so permeated with evangelical proselytizing that it will take years to rid the institution of

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religious intolerance." I do not know exactly how aggressive or insistent our Christian brother or sister cadets have been, but the tone of the public debate is clearly, "Something MUST be done about these Christians who insist on their doctrine." Yes, we do. It is true. We are theologically *intolerant* of any gods or theological systems other than that which is true. I hope we are gentle and good listeners and kind-hearted. I hope we are respectful of people and that we do not "cram our faith down people's throats." If they say, "No," then so be it.

But it isn't because we've *figured out* Who Jesus is. Again, from

Matthew's account, it is God Himself who reveals this to people in their hearts. Peter started to really GET Who Jesus was, as did the others. He is not just a prophet or a miracle worker or a healer or even Elijah or John the Baptist, re-headed. He is none other than God Incarnate, the Messiah, the Chosen One, God's only Son, Himself! That's who they're walking around with. That's Who they're listening to, with the essentially silly statue of Pan looking down at them.

And now His teaching begins to look south, to what will happen in about six months time. He begins to lay out that in six months He must suffer greatly, be rejected by the religious establishment, be killed and then be raised from the dead. And Mark tells us He spoke about this very plainly to Peter and James and John and the rest. Then, Peter says something that might seem noble. All Mark says is that **Peter began to rebuke Him**. Apparently Peter's understanding of Messiah did not include a Suffering Servant, which almost everyone in Israel rejected as well.^[4] Like many modern readers of the Bible, Peter did not want to accept what did not agree with his hopes and ambitions.

You see, authentic Christianity, doesn't shape faith according to what we want it to be. It submits to things as God says they are. It subjects itself to a lifestyle of trusting Him even if it hurts for a little while here. In Jesus' case it meant the cross and losing His life. For Peter it would mean a similar fate eventually.

I fear our Christianity today is becoming so very user-friendly that we want little talk of sacrifice and taking up crosses and following Him. Too many modern professing disciples of Jesus want to feel good, to weave their faith into their schedules as time permits and to essentially tell Jesus what He must do. That may be a popular form of religion, and it may generate a lot of Christian commerce and media activity but it is not real.

Real faith goes deeper than wanting Him to accommodate our agendas. It goes deeper than staying safe. It goes deeper than just knowing *about* Jesus, story-line by story-line. Real faith involves a life of self-denial, over and over again. It is a SELF-IMPOSED life of sacrifice for Him, motivated by a keen sense of His love and sacrifice for YOU.

Real faith doesn't grind it out, out of guilt or just duty. It is energized by a vision for Who Jesus is and for what He has promised. He did not say to Peter, "Do what I say, or you will be judged." Nope. He said, "You know Who I am because My Father has revealed it to you." It's almost as if since we as Christians have this revealed in our hearts, God can ask ANYTHING of us. He has redeemed our souls. He has caused us to be born again to a living hope. Listen to these words written by the apostle Paul about thirty years later...

²⁶ And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to

pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; ³⁰ and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:26-39 (NASB)

Real Christians are not ashamed of Christ in any way. And they follow Jesus no matter the cost. They spend their whole lives learning how to do that and He shepherds us as we seek Him. Is that your experience? Have you met the real Jesus in your heart? Has the Father revealed to you who He is? Seek Him. Pursue Him. Call out to Him. He will respond...

[1]

<http://www.lugodoc.demon.co.uk/PAN.HTM>

[2]

http://www.ancientsandals.com/overviews/caesarea_philippi.htm

[3]

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/11/opinion/11sat2.html?th&emc=th>

[4]

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Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 36)

Scripture: Mark 9:1-9

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 19th, 2005

Peter's Most Awesomely Incredible Moment

Mark 9:1-9 (NASB)

¹ AND He was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power." ² And six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; ³ and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. ⁴ And Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "**This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!**" ⁸ And all at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. ⁹ And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.

Introduction I like to think about some of the cool places I've been blessed to visit, and I like looking over my photos on occasion. I enjoyed the Sea of Galilee very much, and Jerusalem too, and Abbey Road, and the British Museum, and a personal visit in Parliament with Iain Paisley and his wife (and Caroline Louis), and my friend Stuart Tanner's lovely back-yard garden in Bangor, N. Ireland, *Varsity USA* in Omaha with Susanna (this year's New Bedford High School valedictorian Dominic Zarecki was there too!) I loved taking a class with Haddon Robinson at Dallas Seminary...(I *always* love going back there.) But probably my favorite place anywhere is that place where I go with Renée on Saturday mornings, when we can: the Shawmut Diner, right here!

I am certain that at some point, maybe more and more as he got older, Peter reminisced about the places he had been to, specifically the places with Jesus. He had been on the Sea of Galilee of course many times—two times probably stood out to him (the stilling of the storm and when Jesus walked on the water). Down in old Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost! Over to Caesarea on the coast where he learned that ANY person could become a follower of Christ, not just Jews. He had been all over the place around Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Asia Minor after Pentecost, Greece undoubtedly and even Rome finally. But I imagine the place Peter remembered with most clarity and love

and even with a chill down his back, was Mt. Hermon: his most awesomely incredible moment! We draw too on those episodes when we keenly felt the Lord's presence and felt His touch! You and I, if you are a Christian, know that there were times when the Lord blazed to us. We don't sense it every day perhaps, though we remember back to certain distinct moments when He was clear to us. And He gives grace, out of those memories...

I cannot forget the moment in Ravensbruck prison camp, at one of the lowest, when Corrie ten Boom says she heard a voice behind her one day, which simply said, very plainly, the words, "Filled with tenderness." She felt it was the Lord communicating with her that His arms, for her, were filled with tenderness. It was a powerful memory for her...

Now, the Bible doesn't actually name Mt. Hermon as such, as the place where Jesus was transfigured before their eyes. It says Jesus **brought them up to a high mountain** (Mark 9:2). Almost certainly, since they were just at Caesarea Philippi, they went to one of the ridges of Mt. Hermon (9,200 ft. at top). What happened there would stay with Peter for the rest of his life. He mentions it in 2 Peter 1:16-19

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "**This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased**"— ¹⁸ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And so we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

As an older man, far from home, lines deepened in his face, many cares upon his heart I imagine, he thinks back to that day when Jesus led them away from the pool and cave at Caesarea Philippi and said, "Boys, let's go mountain climbing today, I want to show you something." And only three of them: Peter, James and John.

Notice that, first of all. The case can be made that these three, with Paul, would be the most important apostles in the first century. Peter is important because He was close to Jesus and really the central figure from the Day of Pentecost until Paul shows up. James, because he was the leader of the church at Jerusalem and because he was the first apostle martyred for Christ. John because he would outlive them all, live to write one of the Gospels, three inspired epistles and receive the Book of Revelation. Jesus knew their future on that day when they began to climb the mountain.

As they reach some ridge or place on the mountain (we don't know that they went all the way to the top), Mark reports (and he probably got it from Peter himself)

He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

Matthew has it (17:2) He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

Luke has it (9:29) while He was praying the appearance of His face became different and His clothing became white and gleaming.

Interestingly, John records none of this Transfiguration. And it is not surprising. By the time he gets around to writing his gospel, it is nearly the end of the first century. Surely he knew all three other gospels well, and might even had procured copies. He knew what had been covered well, and what needed amplification. This miracle needed no more reporting.

I am sure that years later Peter could think of every piece of this event. Jesus glowed! He blazed! For a few minutes, time had seemed to stop. He was as He really WAS. He was son of Man and Son of God. He appeared as He really is! I like to imagine this. I like to think about my Jesus and to imagine Him as He really was, and is, and shall be. His face changed. His clothing irradiated light. He didn't become alien or weird looking. He was still Jesus but He was *glorified* Jesus!

And then the strangest thing happens—Moses and Elijah materialize out of nowhere. Man, I sooo can understand why Jesus took them up on the mountain. He wanted no one to catch a glimpse of this. If ANYTHING would confuse the general population about why Jesus had come, this might! And so no one does see it happen, except Peter, James and John. And see it with their own eyes, they do. But as profound a thing as this is, it is interesting that Peter doesn't mention it in 2nd Peter! Here was the lawgiver, the symbol of the Law. Here was Elijah, representing the ancient prophets. The Law and the Prophets come together to talk with the Savior, the Messiah. Peter doesn't mention them years later.

One wonders, from where did Moses and Elijah come? I cannot say exactly, but it should come as no surprise that they were capable of appearing again, hundreds of years after they had gone to be with the Lord. Wherever they were (the "bosom of Abraham"?) they were dispatched, glorified bodies on loan or in accessory! And here they stood. And they had fellowship with Jesus. Notice one thing—apparently there IS fellowship between glorified saints. In Christ, all come together. They lived many centuries between them in this world, but in Christ they are together. And, wouldn't you like to know what they spoke about, and *how* they did so? In what language and what did gloried voices *sound* like. Alas! We must wait on these questions...

Then Peter makes this really silly suggestion. Mark suggests that it was a kind of stress-relief reaction (***they became terrified***). Babbling, not wanting

Jesus to die as He had predicted, he's thinking, "maybe we can set up the kingdom NOW and HERE. With Army General Moses and Air Force General Elijah, this can be HQ!" I am projecting just a bit, but some kind of nervousness was bubbling in Peter, so he makes his suggestion. Moses does not object. Elijah does not object. Jesus doesn't even say anything. A most incredible thing happens: *a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"* Mark doesn't come right out and say, The Father showed up. But it is plain who is speaking. And it is a direct and personal command to Peter. "Listen to Jesus. He is the Son. He does the talking, you do the listening." Peter is like, OK. I am so glad for what Matthew adds...aren't you? (17:6,7)

⁶ And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were much afraid.⁷ And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid."

They were terrified. Wouldn't you be? And just as when John saw the resurrected Jesus, and was terrified, we are told Jesus touched him, so He does that here. "Get up guys, it's me. It's OK." There is a peace in the Son of God that even the Father does not rattle. He is One with the Father. He is the One the Father sent here. When you're with Him, it's OK.

Notice too, that from a sort of doctrinal/political standpoint, this is a plain endorsement *by* the Father OF the Son. There is only one Father and only one Son. The only way to "defuse" this is to deny that it happened at all. There is no room for pluralism with this testimony!

Well, there are other details in this passage but allow me to lay out a couple of practical ideas for you:

1. I think one of the reasons Jesus did this for them—and this was for their benefit—is to prepare them for the sufferings that would follow. **Blessings are tools!** God gives grace to go along with the path He unfolds for us. That path sometimes involves suffering and struggle, sometimes severe. He knew what lay ahead for each of Peter, James and John. Each would draw on this memory in days, months and for John, many years to come. The Lord cares about our lives and He gives measures of blessing sometimes that we draw upon in later times...

2. Despite who He really was (and is), Jesus never dismisses His friends to distance from Himself. Earthly important people do this. It is hard to get time with the Governor or a Congressman or especially the President, even if you knew them before they were elected to office. But not so, Jesus. Though He was transfigured and changed BACK into who He was, and though two of the most important personalities in history appeared, glorified, and thought the Father Himself had spoken into the day, Jesus was still pleased to be with His friends. This is a great comfort as we also need Him to touch us, calm us, put

things into perspective for us. **He loves to stay close!**

3. Third, as Peter discerned, it is good to be with Jesus. This is all that quiet time is supposed to be. **It is always good to spend time with Jesus Christ!** Alone with Jesus. Enough time to sense His voice and to hear Him. It is a good thing, one of the best things there is in life.

Note, Christ doth not leave the soul, when extraordinary joys and comforts leave it. Though more sensible and ravishing communications may be withdrawn, Christ's disciples have, and shall have, His ordinary presence with them always, even to the end of the world, and that is it we must depend upon. Let us thank God for *daily bread* and not expect a continual feast on this side of heaven. ^[1]

I am sure each of Peter, James and John would draw on this few minutes over and over in their minds and remember, it was good to be with Jesus. So it is for us. Do you get time with Him? Do you have a time, from time to time, when you are alone with Him? That is a hallmark of really believing in Him. It has nothing to do with church-going. It is you, and Him.

I think Peter's most incredibly awesome moment was something he drew upon for the rest of his life. I am sure it was the same for James and John.

When did Jesus blaze for you? I am not suggesting some mystical or super-natural event although I would not deny that in His sovereignty He can grant special and extraordinary grace too that is supernatural. But in general, when has He become more visible to your faith? Are you going through struggles now? Do you wrestle with doubt now? I ask you, what was it like on that day a year ago, ten years ago, when you felt the presence of the risen Christ so thick in your life? Think back, and look forward to what is coming.

[1]

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, Mk 9:1. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 37)

Scripture: Mark 9:14-29

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: July 17th, 2005



What "All Things" Are Possible?

Mark 9:14-29 (NASB)

¹⁴ And when they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed, and *began* running up to greet Him. ¹⁶ And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" ¹⁷ And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; ¹⁸ and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him *to the ground* and he foams *at the mouth*, and grinds his teeth, and stiffens out. And I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not *do* it." ¹⁹ And He *answered them and *said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" ²⁰ And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he *began* rolling about and foaming *at the mouth*. ²¹ And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² "And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" ²³ And Jesus said to him, "'If You can!' **All things are possible to him who believes.**" ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father cried out and *began* saying, "**I do believe; help my unbelief.**" ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." ²⁶ And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and *the boy* became so much like a corpse that most *of them* said, "He is dead!" ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. ²⁸ And when He had come into *the house*, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Introduction Many of us have had "mountain-top" experiences, only to find ourselves all-too-soon back in the grips of "reality." Where we are at in the Gospel of Mark has just been an incredible "mountain-top" experience (complete with mountain) for Peter, James and John and for Jesus too. The "Transfiguration" is just an incredible event. The three guys NEVER forgot it. But soon enough, they came down from the mountain and there's the other 9 disciples, up to their necks in dispute with some Jewish scribes. It must have been such a "downer" for the three. In fact, there's quite a commotion going on... Reality and "This World" comes crashing back!

What "real-world" situation this morning do you need to see God's power come through? What situation is in front of you where you really need the Lord to show up? Some need no special demonstration of God's power right now. OK, praise the Lord for His providential goodness. For the rest of us, what real-life

thing, in which you know you are weak or that you are unable to change, would you really, really like to see the Lord change?

- Is it a recent situation?
- Is it a tendency within yourself, or even a bondage to something not good?
- Is it your state of mind, your naturally cynical or pessimistic way of interpreting your world?
- Is it a relationship that you are immersed in?

What, in your life today, do you need God to enter and bring His excellent power and grace and goodness to bear upon?

A father that I know is desperately concerned for his son who is 24. His son is drinking heavily, smoking pot, getting in trouble with the law. The son is surly, sarcastic to his Dad, presumptuous and says his Dad should pay for his cell phone, car insurance and other things.) The father is a strong Christian and did his best in raising his son. But he feels powerless to change his son. And today, the Dad is crying out to God to enter his son's life in some redeeming way and in some powerful way.

This man in our passage has a demon-possessed son. A Dad and his boy. Men, who do you love more than your sons? They are precious. You would do most anything for them, wouldn't you? And this Dad is utterly helpless and even Jesus' disciples could not confront the demon inside of this boy. Isn't it interesting that a boy can be demon-possessed? That hardly seems fair, does it? But this world is not fair and as Jesus and the three exhale the last of the mountain air, and draw in the atmosphere of normal reality again, the real world is right there with all its unfairness. So, here this boy is. He is possessed **by a demon**. Not many demons, but one extremely powerful one. Able to disable the boy for years. Able to control the boy's motor functions and cause him to go into terrible, involuntary fits. It sounds like some form of epilepsy and the Scripture does record epilepsy, but this is not that condition. This is demon- possession, in one of its most dramatic and destructive manifestations. In fact, this is so bizarre that I don't think too many of us can even imagine it in reality—we have to imagine some scene at the theatre or on a video to capture it in our heads, which of course is fiction. This is no fiction. And the demon even can motor the kid into water—against his will; or into a fire—against his will. We know no other details about the boy or his Dad. But the Dad is not hostile to Jesus, and this is the most important thing about this man!

Since we *again* encounter this in Mark, I am going to again give my little talk about the macabre. The dark world, in which so many young people dabble today (and some older people too), is about one thing: destruction. Satan, his demons, and their entire agenda is about destruction. There's nothing benign about it, and theirs is nothing "cool" about it. It is about destruction, pain, sorrow, dying, and death. That's it.

I see so many young people trying to look all *bad*. I see people with t-shirts that have demonic things on them. I know there are lots of bands around that attract

enough of a following to make a living off of themselves, whose theme is the macabre. I am so saddened by this and it is no small amount of commerce that feeds on young people's naivety.

All through the Bible believers are told to have NOTHING at all to do with the spirit world, except insofar as we engage battle there by prayer and seeking the Lord and trying to help *other* people get free of it into the marvelous light of the Gospel. Paul tells us

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

Do you know that? Do you believe that? With the problems we might face, sometimes the issue is ultimately a spiritual battle. I do not believe it every time some preacher says it today, that a person's problem is because he is demon-possessed. But it is still a real thing, and this case illustrates how bad it can be.

Now, did you notice that Andrew and Philip and Thomas and Matthew and the other guys could not deal with this demon? Don't you wonder why? In Mark 6:7 we read ***And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits...*** Why did they fail? Jesus puts his finger on the reason—their lack of really believing that the Lord would back them up; their lack of faith. But they DID have *some* kind of faith, didn't they? They weren't expecting *nothing* to happen. They went out EXPECTING things to happen when they called on the Lord. I am sure Bartholomew of Judas the Zealot stood up and prayed over the boy. And nothing happened. "What?" they went... Nothing happened. The problem is their faith was in some process not in God Himself, to answer their prayers. They thought that if you used the right words, or followed the right ritual, that bad old demon would have to leave the boy. They needed to trust in a God who can act, not in a formula that might bring something about. We do this too: we think that it is the words we say, or the way we say them or what is happening in our lives that is the reason something good happens out of our Christian life—RATHER than a God who acts.¹ Yours and my faith must be in God Himself. What are you trusting God the Father to do for you today? What do you need directly from His hand? Have you asked Him for it? Have you said to Him, ***Thy will be done, on earth just like it is in heaven, and please O Father in heaven (whose Name is holy) Give me TODAY my daily bread...***

¹ Ray Stedman <http://pbc.org/old-pbc1/dp/stedman/mark/3316.html>

The kind of faith which removes demons and moves mountains sets no limits on God's power and submits itself to His will.² It trusts Him to do as He pleases, and according as He pleases, it trusts Him to do great things.

The lesson of this story both for the disciples and for anyone who reads the Gospel of Mark is that **BELIEF UNDERGIRDDED BY PRAYER IS REQUISITE IN THE BATTLE AGAINST SATAN FOR THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS BOUND UP IN HIS HOUSE.** The boy's father, looking pretty small in this crowd of disciples, scribes, and clamoring people, puts the faithless generation to shame with his belief and prayer: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" Trust in Jesus is all that is needed, and this is what the disciples lack.³

By the way, when Jesus later says to the disciples, ***This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer***, I don't think He means prayer uttered at that moment because Jesus Himself did not pray when He cast out this demon. He is not talking about a certain kind of prayer that you say at the moment you want to relieve somebody of a demon. What He means is a **LIFE STYLE OF PRAYER.** Jesus' power came from leading a holy life, filled with prayer. He was always drawing upon His father's power; always walked in reliance upon God. He referred every event of His existence to the God who indwelt Him, and He prayed consistently and constantly to the Father—fully expecting Him to work.⁴

The man cries out with an incredibly honest appeal—Lord I believe. Help me in my unbelief. We are like that. We have some faith. We think God can get us out of the situation, maybe. But we're weak. We still struggle with unbelief. I think you should underline that line in your text. And the other thing to underline is when Jesus said, ***All things are possible to him who believes*** (vs. 23). WE want to know, what "all things?" Do you mean anything I can imagine asking for, Lord? Do you mean that every single soul in the Town of Dartmouth will become a Christian, if I ask for it? Do you mean I want you, Lord, to clean out St. Luke's AND Charlton Memorial Hospital, because I ask for it? Jesus meant that there is no limit to what God can do for the person who really believes that God is in control and can work great and mighty things. I think He wants us to ask **BIG** and to be specific. I also think He expects us to be submissive to His overall plan and will. In this case, the man agonized for his son to be freed of evil. The Lord granted that wish immediately. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all. He just speaks and demons—even really evil and powerful ones—flee. He is our Savior. He is our Master. He is our Friend. Let us believe what He tells us.

²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³Elwell, W. A. (1996, c1989). *Vol. 3: Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. Baker Reference library (Mk 9:14). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.

⁴ Stedman, *ibid.*

Finally, here are seven suggestions for making faith real in your life:

When you have a situation that you need to **see** God work in,

First **ASK**.

Then **WAIT**.

Then **WRITE IT DOWN**.

Then **EXPECT**.

Then **PRAISE** God.

Then **ASK MORE**.

Then **TELL**.

Real Christians are frequently praying people. They seek God because they believe His is seekable and findable. They trust Him for big things. And the more they **see** Him answer their prayers the more they ask of Him. It becomes a life-style!

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 38)

Scripture: Mark 9:30-37

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: July 24th, 2005



All the Things the Disciples Didn't Get

Mark 9:30-37 (NASB)

³⁰ And from there they went out and *began* to go through Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know *about* it. ³¹ For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." ³² But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. ³³ And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them* was the greatest. ³⁵ And sitting down, He called the twelve and *said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." ³⁶ And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

Introduction Do you, as a Christian, ever get into a mood where you feel like you're just not getting it? Sometimes, do you feel foggy-brained about the faith? You look at other Christians and you think to yourself, "Man, THEY get it. But I don't?" You read a passage from the Bible and you think, "I don't get it." You go to a conference or listen to some famous Christian sing and everybody's clapping and whistling and loving it, and you think, "I don't get it!" "What's missing here? Why don't I seem to see the significance or the importance or the value in what THAT person is saying I'm supposed to see?" I've had people who say they are Christians say to me, "Why all the emphasis on the cross all the time? I don't see the big deal with wanting more for my family? I don't see what's so wrong with a little extra-marital fun? Why is the Bible so down on homosexuality? Why is the apostle Paul so intolerant of a few adjustments to doctrine?—they just wanted to upgrade the software a little, that's all...I don't get it."

In our passage today in the Gospel of Mark (9:30-32) Jesus and His disciples are now beginning to make their way south, towards Jerusalem. Jesus, of course, knows what's coming. Normally, going to Jerusalem would be a happy thing—anticipation, the sights, the history, the Temple! BUT IN JERUSALEM WILL BE HIS BETRAYAL—NO SMALL THING IN ITSELF; HIS TRIAL, HIS SCOURGING, HIS EXECUTION AND FINALLY, HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. Plainly now, He tells His disciples about what's coming. Mark says, they ***didn't understand this statement and they were afraid to ask Him.*** Not

hard to understand! You and I would be confused too. We don't like news that is bad. And

- this is the same Jesus who has supernaturally fed two large crowds of people with almost no resources at all.
- It is the same man who told demons to “split.”
- The same one who spoke to a storm on the Sea of Galilee and it became immediately calm.
- This is the one who walked on TOP of the water too and did all kinds of amazing and wonderful healings.
- And it is the same *Christ* as Peter called Him, who was transfigured before their very eyes and Peter and James and John saw go “into conference” with none other than Moses and Elijah. Why all this talk now of betrayal, death and resurrection?

Ray Stedman said, “...if you are like me, you do not like the cross in your life. We Christians often make much of the joy and love and the glory of Christianity. But usually we avoid the thought of suffering and persecution, of discipline, and of dying. Much of the church today is trying to avoid these implications of the cross. But Jesus makes clear to his disciples, and to us, that there is no glory without the cross -- no cross; no crown.”¹

Another problem comes up too sometimes. Christians get the idea they're important. We sometimes think, “My goal is to achieve significance in the movement of Jesus.” And we strive for significance and jockey for position or to seek control and power. Christians, mind you... This is another way of *seriously* not getting it. But Jesus' own disciples didn't get a lot either, as we saw back in chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel. They didn't understand why Jesus kept talking about His own death and what was all this about *rising* too, by the way? They didn't understand about “rank in the kingdom” either. They figured Jesus' kingdom would be like any other kingdom—a pecking order. The disciples were NOT GETTING a lot of things yet, and often neither do we. So what we need to do is to see WHAT they missed, and NOT to miss it ourselves.

Well, the disciples weren't getting this suffering-talk. You can imagine the disciples walking along the road, looking sideways at Jesus, shaking their heads. And as they come back into Capernaum (see pictures on the overhead), they're now into another little private discussion. Interestingly, Jesus says, ***What were you discussing on the way?*** As if He didn't know... And they don't want to tell Him. Why not? I think they were embarrassed though not so embarrassed to change their mindsets. They were talking about—reasonably I'm sure—which of them was ***greatest***. Stedman again comments: “Somehow this did not sound right in the presence of Jesus. It would be wonderful if we always had this awareness that what we say and think is being done in his presence. It would

¹ Ray Stedman; <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3317.html>

make us feel differently about many things, I am sure.”² This also reminds me of the parable Jesus gave in Luke 14:7-11 and Matthew 18:3-14

7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table; saying to them, 8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 “But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. 11 “For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

3 and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! 8 “And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. 9 “And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell. 10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11 [“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] 12 “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13 “And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14 “Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

Jesus was one of the first ever to see how essentially precious any person is, particularly a young child. A concern for children was not invented by the welfare state: it goes back to the teaching of Jesus.³

Jeff Miller asks, “What is your ministry of insignificance? Are you fearful for your reputation or your status. Remember, even Jesus, for the joy set before Him, became insignificant and endured the cross for you and me. That’s what a disciple of Jesus will do. He chooses insignificance over recognition.”⁴

This is one of the hardest things for Christians to “get.” My significance stands on the place I have in the kingdom by grace, that I haven’t earned or

² Stedman, *ibid*

³ Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 9:36. Galaxie Software, 2003.

⁴ Jeff Miller, Th.M. http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=310

merited. I am a child of God by His lovingkindness and for no other reason. It is enough just to walk in the way with Jesus. My relative position up and against my brother or sister in Christ is of no matter at all.

Jesus pulled the child in close, perhaps Peter's child—the very least significant person in Jewish as well as Greco-Roman society which idealized the mature adult.⁵

Hey--Do you remember what it was like to be a kid? Insignificance ruled in your life.

- First of all you were *smaller* than all the adults.
- Second you didn't have a lot of *resources*—you couldn't drive, fly, scuba-dive or book tickets on Travelocity!
- *Money* was hard to come by. You didn't have much in the way of *certificates on the wall, uniforms, business contacts*.
- When it came to the opposite sex you pretty much looked at that opposite sex cluelessly (not that you have a clue now either, eh?)

As a kid you didn't have a great sense of significance generally. I remember when I was in the 6th grade three girls were the exception. They achieved premature significance: Patsy and Beth went to the first Beatles concert in D.C. (Feb. 1964) and actually touched one of the Beatles and then wore a white glove over the touching hand for a whole week. Cathy was a dancer and appeared on television on *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour*.

But every other kid was just the usual kid. Being a kid entails a lack of notoriety and low visibility. Jesus used one as an illustration of how His disciples should be. He wanted them to "get" this and in years to come, I think they did. But not on that day when they were laying out the leadership-blueprint for the kingdom!

Well Jesus invites takes this child—and you can't imagine Jesus *not* being gentle and kind—and places the kid there in front of the guys. He says, ***Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me.*** And then there is a second part in what He said:

And whoever receives Me does not receive Me but Him who sent Me. (vs.37).

The disciples were charting the organizational chart of the coming Kingdom and Jesus says, it's about BEING like a little kid—like the simple, trusting attitude of a child. That's who's greatest in HIS Kingdom. Sometimes I think we get so sophisticated in our Christianity that we "sophisticate" ourselves right OUT of the true Christian life!

I've been watching *Leave it To Beaver* re-runs lately—from 1957. Beaver is pretty little still. He is so innocent and has that little looking-off-into-the-distance expression on his face. He trusted Dad and Wally and Mom too implicitly!

⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

That's what Jesus was talking about. The greatest saints, the greatest disciples, the greatest Kingdom-builders have THAT kind of dependence and reliance upon the Lord... It isn't about greatness-achieved and fame and recognition. The kingdom is about developing that kind of total trust in the Lord's running of your life.

"Humility, not pride, is the mark of the person who wants to be first, evidenced in the willingness to be at the disposal of others. The humbling effect of Jesus' teaching is illustrated by his acted parable of taking a little child in his arms and exhorting his disciples to become servants of 'little children' (the helpless of this world), and by doing so welcoming Jesus and the Father who has sent him."⁶

Let's get our focus re-tuned today. Really following after Jesus and being His disciple means to "get it" that Christians must **take up their crosses and bear them daily**⁷ to really walk close with the Savior. It means to submit to the plan of God for us, trusting in Him fully. We need to see, I mean really SEE, that position is not important. What IS important is to have the trusting approach that a child has. We trust God; we trust each other. We aren't controlled by ambition or the need for prominence. We gradually become controlled by a trust that God is in control of my life and I can let that permeate all aspects of living. There were lots of lessons that the disciples didn't get at first. Eventually, I am sure they all came to understand what it really meant to be a Christian. It is to become like Jesus Christ Himself. Do you know Him yet? He is not just a principle. He isn't just a code to live by. He is a person and He is alive and He wishes to be Lord of the life of each person here. And we are seeking Him...

⁶Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. electronic ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989.

⁷ And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Mark 8:34 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Matthew 10:38 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Matthew 16:24

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 39)

Scripture: Mark 9:38-50

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: August 7th, 2005



Greatness in Authentic Christianity

Mark 9:38-50 (NASB)

³⁸ John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us.” ³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ “For he who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as *followers* of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. ⁴² “And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. ⁴³ “And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, ⁴⁴ [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] ⁴⁵ “And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁶ [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] ⁴⁷ “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁸ where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. ⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ “Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Introduction In the 1950’s and 60’s there was a TV Show called *To Tell the Truth*. From that show there came an expression which has become part of our national vernacular. “Will the real ___ please stand up?” A quick look at a search engine on that phrase shows how often it has been co-opted:

Will the real First Amendment please stand up?

Will the real William Shakespeare please stand up?

Will the real John Kerry please stand up?

Will the real Darth Vader please stand up?

I think this sort of articulates what people want today: authenticity! They want to know what’s real... They don’t like phony or fake stuff. They want the genuine article. And increasingly people are also asking, “Will the ‘real Christianity’ please stand up?” My proposition today is that “real Christianity” is found in grasping and living out some of the hard passages and hard things that Jesus taught and said. I don’t mean that we should *just* define ourselves with the hardest, most difficult dictates of our faith, but that we should see sayings like we’re going to consider today, as the best and most fundamental tests of

realness. Today, we have some interesting and difficult things that Jesus taught. We track back to “real Christianity” when we consider these things...

I think sometimes you see real Christianity in most unexpected moments. We’re so big on planning Christianity but as Jesus and His disciples were writing the book, more often than not their defining moments were random, unanticipated encounters. Like the one the disciples hatch as they’re still in Capernaum, with that little kid standing there...

³⁸ John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us.” ³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ “For he who is not against us is for us.

John—and this is the only time in this Gospel where he speaks—wants to go “denominational.” He wants to limit membership to his group. But this is the first real mark of greatness in authentic Christianity: Jesus indicated that His disciples (and we) need to look not at a person’s outward appearance but to **see** the real person that he is who is groping after truth and life and if the name of Jesus is respected in any way at all, do not quench that spark but feed it.

If I may use this expression, here’s what separates “the men from the boys” in real Christianity: Are we willing to accept other Christians or Christian groups as our brothers and sisters in Christ?” You will notice that the sole criteria John mentions is that the demon-exorcising guy wasn’t **following us**. How often **ego** enters into these things. We like to get “cliquey” with our faith. We like to evaluate people by their denominations or by the Bible schools or seminaries they support or by the music they like. But Jesus says very bluntly and with profound simplicity, that the matter is about whether a person is **against us** or not. It is so easy to be against other people. It makes you feel good if you can hand out a report card about another brother or another church which has an “F” on it. And we can, as John did, sound so *pious* about it. But authentic Christianity looks deeper than just the outward.

⁴¹ “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as *followers* of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. ⁴² “And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea.

A second mark of greatness is in how the Christian just manages other people’s *humanity*. Jesus still has the little kid standing there and He was saying that the *slightest* ministry to a young believer will be rewarded by God. Every opportunity we take, even the smallest and seemingly most insignificant gesture, to help someone develop their walk with God or just to live better, will not lose its

reward.¹ Christianity sometimes gets so heady and theological and intellectual that we just forget to be human and kind to people. People will listen to us better if we just bless them in real, day to day ways, expecting nothing in return, being gracious and friendly and going out of our way to help them.

I had the chance to bless someone a little in a wedding I performed. The young couple are not Christians and have been poorly treated by religious people in the past. They asked me to do their wedding and I was happy to do so. I hope that by being with them, performing that service for them, and just being as kind as I could be that I might at some point in the future be looked upon as their friend. I hope to be able at some point to sit down and tell them about my Savior.

Causing other people, particularly young people and young Christians to stumble is really bad. In fact, it is dangerous. Look please at Matthew 12 for a moment...There Matthew tells us (12:15-21)

¹⁵ But Jesus, aware of *this*, withdrew from there. And many followed Him, and He healed them all, ¹⁶ and warned them not to make Him known, ¹⁷ in order that what was spoken through Isaiah [ch. 42] the prophet, might be fulfilled, saying, ¹⁸ "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL IS WELL -PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. ¹⁹ "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. ²⁰ "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. ²¹ "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE."

I want to say something about THREAT. I believe a church should be perceived as a non-threatening place or a non-threatening group. That doesn't mean we are so watered down or so namby-pamby that we don't stand for anything. Certainly not. We can stand for absolutely every issue of morality, doctrinal purity and truth that we want to. And we can do it in a non-threatening way. We can say, "We believe marriage is between one man and one woman. Period." And we can do it in a non-threatening way. We can say that any other use of sexuality at all is wicked and sinful and yet we can do it in a non-threatening way. We can say that we believe the sixty-six books of Bible is the inspired, authoritative, inerrant and infallible Word of God and we can do it in a non-threatening way. We can say that we believe that abortion is murder and that people ought to honor the Lord's Day and that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that the world and the universe began by special creation by God. We can say all of these things to people and to the community, AND WE SHOULD, every chance we get—but we can do it in a non-threatening way. I think this is an important feature of authentic Christianity. People will be threatened enough with the truth, without our COMPOUNDING their feeling of threat. We should be

¹ Ray Stedman, <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/mark/3317.html>

humble and gentle all the time. It ought to be something we strive to be and to do. We will “smell real” if we value that. And we will win far more opportunities to share Christ with people and unpack the gospel message if we minimize threat and maximize just blessing people, no strings attached.

You say, “Well, what if we OURSELVES feel threatened by this evil world?” “What if we ARE at risk?” So be it. Since when is that new for true disciples of Jesus Christ. For CENTURIES the Romans *killed* Christians and in the most horrible ways, just for saying they were followers of Jesus Christ and their allegiance was to Him first. Why should WE be exempt from risk and we certainly should not make risk-minimalization our chief priority. No, we need to look at the community down the street, and in the Statehouse, and in the neighborhood as a mission field. What can we do to win chances to share about Jesus? No, you think about this. I believe we are way too concerned with keeping our guard up. And the world picks up on that. They wonder, “Why are you Christian churches so paranoid?”

⁴³ “And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, ⁴⁴ [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] ⁴⁵ “And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁶ [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] ⁴⁷ “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁸ where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. ⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ “Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

A third mark of greatness in Jesus’ eyes is in the decision for us to evaluate ourselves and to do so severely if need be. Another way of putting it is to say that a true disciple of Jesus chooses sacrifice over selfishness. The **salt** is self-judgment, I believe. And the sacrifices Jesus uses to illustrate are radical pictures. Plucking an eye out or cutting off a hand in acts of self-sacrifice were understandable by anyone. They are gruesome illustrations—and of course He didn’t intend them to be applied literally—illustrations of self-examination. We need to NOT cut OURSELVES slack. We need to take an honest look at ourselves and brutally evaluate ourselves. If we’re doing bad things with our hands, we need to stop doing that. Completely. If we’re thinking impure thoughts or saying hurtful things we need to stop doing that. Completely. Look in the mirror and evaluate yourself with no slack. Now, that’s radical.

It is very interesting that Jesus mentions **hell**. The word used here for “hell” is *gehenna*, from “Ge-hinnom” which was the name of a valley just outside Jerusalem. It was the place where some of the kings of Israel had offered their own children to the god Moloch, to be burned with fire. It was a defiled place and it became the garbage dump of Jerusalem. Fires smoldered there continuously; repulsive and ugly worms ate at the garbage. That becomes a symbol of the eternal waste of life. When we read these words about Jesus about hell (and by the way, He spoke more about hell than anyone else in the New

Testament) we must understand that when they are applied to the UNbeliever—the person who resists and rejects the good news of Jesus Christ and dies as an unbeliever—it means his whole life is like that, wasted, a total loss. There is nothing salvageable about it. He may have won the approval of men, may have lived very comfortably, but at the end his life is wiped out, a total loss, to be thrown on the garbage heap for eternity.² But these words can apply to a believer too. Christians can endure partial loss. Some of our life might be wasted and Jesus wants to minimize that. No, it doesn't mean purgatory. But we should **have salt within ourselves**.

He concludes this section with the exhortation—tying back to John's criticism—**be at peace with one another**. That is important to Jesus. We need to work at this, inside our church always and between the churches around us. It is a mark of greatness and authentic Christianity!

Now, you might be tempted to say, "Pastor do you do these things?" I would have to admit that they are a struggle, all three of them. But I am committed to these things as our goal. I am committed to spending the rest of my days working on developing these qualities in my life—IF I want to call myself a true follower of Jesus Christ. I may go to conferences and take classes, and collect all kinds of cool songs. I may give a few bucks to the church and I may go on a short-term missions trip. But communicating THE REAL THING to our town is the most important thing there is, these days. This town and your town desperately needs authentic disciples of Jesus. They don't need anything phony any more. They don't need pretend Christians and I wonder if they even need "Christianity." They need Jesus and real followers of Him. And God said to Israel that **a battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He would not snuff out**. He will never leave our efforts or abandon or belittle our pursuit of Him.

Are you seeking to become the kind of disciple He wanted? That will involve severe self-evaluation. It will involve working to put Christians together, or BACK together. It will involve sometimes blessing people without demanding the privilege in return to talk about theology or to witness to them. We need to win that privilege. Let us work at these things. He is the Lamb that was slain and He's been crowned the King!!! Let us seek to please Him first, last and in between.

² Stedman, *ibid*.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 40)

Scripture: Mark 10:1-12

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: August 14th, 2005



What About Divorce? Part 1

Mark 10:1-12 (NASB)

¹ AND rising up, He *went from there to the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan; and crowds *gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them. ² And *some* Pharisees came up to Him, testing Him, and *began* to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. ³ And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴ And they said, "Moses permitted *a man* TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY." ⁵ But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ "But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. ⁷ "FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, ⁸ AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." ¹⁰ And in the house the disciples *began* questioning Him about this again. ¹¹ And He *said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; ¹² and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

Introduction A little over twenty years ago, a young single friend of mine, full of enthusiasm for Christ and for ministry, enrolled in a theological seminary in California. He was a good fellow and had never really had a girlfriend. Not long after enrolling in seminary, he met a young woman who was a secretary in the school. They dated, and decided to marry. Within two years, she decided that she did not want to be married any longer. They were divorced and my friend, at least in his sharing with me, said he was devastated. Some years later, another friend of mine who was a church leader in another church, found himself in a very messy divorce with his wife who was also very influential in their church. Finally, when Renée and I arrived here in 1983 there were five men who were leading the church. Today, four of those men are divorced, remarried and have been for the better part of twenty years, out of church life. (Very recently, two of those four men have made their way very tentatively back into church life, on a very limited basis). As well, five of what I would call my better friends—men, who are ministers of one type or another—are divorced. Divorce is all around us and it takes no more illustration to make that point; you know it well...

We're struggling terribly with this issue today. As Christians, the Bible is our rulebook and because we take the Bible so seriously, both married or divorced Christians have agonized over Jesus' words that we read here in Mark 10 and also in the parallel passage in Matthew 19. There are a number of issues

which occur to us when we seek to understand the Bible's teaching on this subject...

1. Our culture's relaxed, accepting and financially exploiting attitude
2. There is the emotional aspect: Many, I think, are tempted to wish Jesus would have been a little more understanding. They would not say that, but they think it.
3. There are the complications of single-parent and blended families, sometimes even with "ex's" remaining in the same church.
4. The trauma and long-term effects on children is a thing the church faces, as well as individual families.
5. There is as well, the "filtering" question of how each of us was raised, through which we often temper our attitudes about divorce—more casual and understanding if we were raised in a divorce environment, less tolerant if it was a rare thing and spoken of as a bad thing.
6. There is the re-marriage question.
7. We are also faced with the problem of how to treat each other WHEN a divorce occurs, and *even when two or three divorces occur*.
8. And we must have some understanding about that long period of time afterwards, and what that person's place in the kingdom can be.

We need to look at what Jesus said, and how that fits with the rest of what the Bible teaches on this subject. We need to know clearly what His words were, exactly. We are going to spend several messages on this problem. We will seek to bring some principles of application to this problem, for which perhaps no other single issue brings as much antagonism and hurt and controversy among believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to know that I approach this subject humbly. Although Renée and I have managed to this point to remain married, and although none of our parents ever divorced, neither of us is smug or self-righteous or feel superior on this matter. It is God's grace which sustains us. And ultimately, the question comes back to "what does God want on this? What is His will?"

The passage at which we have arrived is one of the most controversial in the whole New Testament. It is controversial because of the divorce-intense, one might even say, the "divorce-happy" environment in which we live. No one likes going through a divorce, this is surely so. According to George Barna's website, the 2001 statistics look like this:

- Overall, **33% of all born again individuals who have been married have gone through a divorce**, which is statistically identical to the 34% incidence among non-born again adults. Also: Among those who have been married, college grads are less likely than those who did not earn a college degree to have been divorced (31% to 36%, respectively). Also II: The region in of the nation in which divorce is least likely is the Northeast. In that

area, 28% of adults who have been married have also been divorced, compared to 32% in the Midwest, 35% in the South, and 38% in the West.¹

Divorce is not a new part of human experience. As Jesus went east of the Jordan River for a while (to what was known as **Perea**), and again there are crowds wanting His attention, a group of Pharisees comes up to Him and wants to discuss the divorce situation in their day with Him. Why would they bring this up? They were in the area where John the Baptist had been imprisoned—and there is some intrigue in the Pharisees bringing this issue up where they were. In Greek there is a word which suggests a test motivated by the desire to demonstrate the genuineness of the article tested—as in a test in school or a chemical test to show the purity of a substance. The word Mark uses here is *not* that word. The Pharisees did not wish to approve Jesus; they wished to discredit Him.²

Their questions was a trap. If Jesus said, “No” to their question (***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?***), He would seem to speak against the Law of Moses. If He said, “Yes,” He would apparently contradict His own often-expressed commitment to the permanence of marriage. There is another factor going on in the background...

“Less than ten years before, Herodias, granddaughter of Herod the Great, who had been married to her uncle Herod Philip, and lived with him in Rome, fell in love with *another* uncle, Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, when he paid a visit to Rome. In order to marry Antipas (as Antipas also desired), she divorced Herod Philip—under Roman law since she was a Roman citizen. For a woman to marry her uncle was not a breach of Jewish law either, as it was commonly interpreted at the time. But it WAS certainly a breach of Jewish law for her to marry her husband’s brother. John the Baptist was thrown in jail for insisting that it was unlawful for him to be married to his brother’s wife. Jesus named no names in our encounter, but any reference at that time, either in Galilee or in Perea, to a woman divorcing her husband and marrying someone else was bound to make hearers think of Herodias. If the suggestion that she was living in adultery came to her ears, Jesus would incur her mortal resentment as surely as John the Baptist had done.”³

This is important because we might want to immediately transport this conversation in Mark (and Matthew) right into our modern context and carelessly attempt to come to some quick conclusions based upon what we read. But the context of the times is very relevant to our study of what Jesus said... What we have is basically another attempt to entrap Jesus and get Him into trouble, to provoke a crisis and to silence Him. Of course, He handles it brilliantly!

¹ Barna Research Group, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=20>

² *The Teacher’s Commentary*

³ Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*

The question these fellows ask Jesus is, ***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*** There were basically two ways of looking at the question in Jesus' day. One was the teaching of the great rabbi, Hillel. Moses, in Deuteronomy 24⁴, had said that a man could divorce his wife if he found any ***indecency*** in her. Hillel interpreted that to mean anything which displeased the husband. If the wife made bad coffee, he could divorce her. If she did not keep the house clean, if she got angry or argumentative, or whatever, she could be divorced. This was the *easy* school of divorce of that day. Opposed to that was the school of Shammai, another great Hebrew rabbi, who taught that divorce was acceptable only under very rigidly defined conditions (i.e. **IF** the wife's pre-marital virginity was untrue.) So the nation was split between these two schools of thought.⁵

You will notice that Jesus takes these fellows first back to Moses and then further back... He does not just pronounce the truth on His own authority. He acknowledges the authority of the Scriptures. Jesus ALWAYS did that. He saw the Old Testament as a book with answers on life. It is still so today. We see the Bible—the whole Bible—as authoritative for us, although we understand the New Testament to fulfill and explain the Old Testament for us. You can get much for your life by reading in the Old Testament. There is Law, the stories, the Psalms and Proverbs and the Prophets. All of these have value for you and I, as they did for people in Jesus' day too. Jesus always showcased the value of God's Word, and here He asks those Pharisees, ***What did Moses command you?*** They quote the passage in a way which sounds like God wanted people to get divorced. The part of the Law which they quote has focuses on getting OUT of marriage. But Jesus viewed it as a divine concession. And He quotes to them the CREATIVE plan of God in coming with marriage in the first place. It wasn't that the Pharisees were anti-marriage; but they do seem intent on finding ways to legally split people up.

TWO APPLICATIONS: How careful we must be to NOT let our Christian lives be translated into frozen rules that ignore the motives of our hearts and are insensitive to the true desires of God! We must also be very careful NOT to legalistically "test" our brothers and sisters as the Pharisees constantly tried to test Jesus, not to approve Him but to discredit Him.⁶

⁴ WHEN a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's *wife*, ³ and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ *then* her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

⁵ Ray C. Stedman, <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3318.html>

⁶ *The Teacher's Commentary*

The heart of God—and this is why Jesus takes it there—is to bring people together. God loves marriage. He created the idea. I believe He loves it when people make a commitment to each other, and seek together to honor Him in their lives. It isn't that every marriage is "made in heaven," but that the idea of marriage ITSELF is made in heaven. This is the Old Testament Law and it is the New Testament.

We are going to end here today, but there is one serious implication to this on which we will end today, with verses 6-9: ***But from the beginning of creation, God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. 7 "FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, 8 AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."*** Marriage was designed and DEFINED by God Himself. The basic materials for the concept are one male and one female. God thought that up too. One each, shall come together—ideally for life—and shall combine to make a new thing—marriage. It is the fundamental building block of human society, as GOD DEFINED IT.

Today we are amazingly in a time when men and women feel they can re-define what God has invented. The explanation for this can only be one thing: the desire to abandon what God has designed. The reason for the desire to abandon the design is NOT to bring justice. It is not to be kind to people or to create opportunity. Ultimately the reason is wickedness. God has not changed and His original concept has not in the past thirty years become defective. He created mankind as males and females. And because a few people wish to view themselves as somehow exempt from God's design, does not change the heart and mind and plan of God.

We need to see clearly—and on this I am speaking primarily to young people—that marriage is one thing and one thing only. The joining together of a man and a woman to create a new thing: ***one flesh***. Any concept other than what God has given, is to tell God—regardless of sincerity or whether they're "nice" people or not—that He doesn't understand what is going on. This is always a wicked thing to do and God will surely judge it.

As Christians we love our marriages and we need to do everything we can to always encourage, repair, rebuild and grow in our marriages. A marriage changes over the years as the husband and wife change. And I believe the Lord will always accommodate those changes with a deeper love and more power from the Holy Spirit to stay together and to be happy, if we are willing to seek Him. He is good and marriage is good. I can think of few institutions which bring such blessing as being married and knowing your marriage was a gift from the Lord!

Matthew 19:3-12 (NASB)

³ And *some* Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, “Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any cause at all?” ⁴ And He answered and said, “Have you not read, that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, ⁵ and said, ‘FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? ⁶ “Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” ⁷ They *said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?” ⁸ He *said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” ¹⁰ The disciples *said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” ¹¹ But He said to them, “Not all men *can* accept this statement, but *only* those to whom it has been given. ¹² “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are *also* eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept *this*, let him accept *it*.”

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 41)

Scripture: Mark 10:5

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: August 21st, 2005



What About Divorce? Part 2

Mark 10:1-12 (NASB)

⁵ But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.”

Introduction If the Church of Jesus Christ spent all of its time for the next generation on one problem and on one problem only, on the problem of divorce in its own family—divorce between Christians, within the church, and worked on *nothing* else, it would be (I believe) a noble and incredibly fruitful project.

- If we did no new missions,
- built no more church buildings,
- developed no more worship enhancements,
- erected no new seminaries or Bible colleges and
- sent nobody to any more leadership conferences, for one generation, and spent all our effort and focus—even utilizing the services and ministries of singles, widows and widowers—on the ONE PROBLEM of divorce—IT WOULD BRING SUCH A REVIVAL AND GLORY TO GOD that this generation would be looked upon for hundreds of years, right up there with the Reformation and the Great Awakening.

As in Jesus’ day, this is one of the most practically based, real, down-to-earth problems that God’s people face *today*. Even those who are not married, watch as others wrestle with this problem. We found Jesus last week in Mark 10, in a situation where some Pharisees were trying to entrap Him on the question of divorce, in the hopes of discrediting Him and maybe even getting Him into significant political trouble with Herodias. They had asked Jesus is it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife? We left off last week with Jesus taking the discussion back to the beginning, back to Adam and Eve and their relationship, which had been created by God Himself.

You might wonder, why is divorce such a big deal? People surely recover from it, and move on. Some collateral damage is maybe done, yes, but it isn’t *that* big a deal, is it? After all, our culture all around us accepts it. We know people who at least *look* better off. And many men in the first century, in the places where Jesus lived, could have thought the same thing. If you were

unhappy with your wife, you could find a way to divorce her. She would move on. You would move on. Why such a big deal? It is because God looks at people's hearts. A divorce is never just about frustration, or injustice, or neglect. It is always about something deeper—about how a man or a woman's heart has grown hardened. Men in ancient Israel sometimes became *very* callous and hard-hearted. Four centuries before Jesus, Israel had become pretty smug and self-assured. Men were divorcing their wives willy-nilly and the Lord, through the prophet Malachi, called them on it. We read in Malachi 2:10-16

10 “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? 11 “Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 “As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob *everyone* who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts. 13 “And this is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with favor* from your hand. 14 “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 “But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that one do* while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then, to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 16 “For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

I do not think that God has changed. He still hates divorce. It is an affront to what He has designed and wonderfully made when He brings a man and a woman together. If the man or woman then break that covenant and ***deal treacherously*** God hates this.

There are many reasons we could give which demonstrate the pain, trauma and lasting effects of divorce. But I would like you to become clear about what Jesus says about it. In Mark 10:9 Jesus said to those Pharisees, ***What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*** He plainly points to the complete wrongness of people breaking apart something God has made. When a man promises to be a faithful husband to a woman, and it was a relationship entered into righteously, it is sanctioned by God. In effect, God has joined them together. The same is true for a woman. Jesus indicates that

ideally, men and women are together for life. This is what God wants. This is what He always intends. Nothing has changed on this since the first century.

But the Pharisees (and the disciples later, in the house) want to know about the exception clause that Moses wrote into the Law. Doesn't THAT allow for a man to divorce his wife and not be in sin? Whatever their motives, the question is a fair question. Moses provided legal precedent and the details, for a man to legally initiate a divorce. And Jesus says that Moses did that as a concession to the fact that men and women generally have hard hearts. **Mark 10:5: But Jesus said to them "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."** Matthew 19:8 gives it as He said to them, ***"Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."***

What does that mean? Well, it is pointing out very clearly that a divorce *could* occur, in order to reveal in public what has been going on in private in that marriage: the hardness of heart. This is what the Law always does. The Law is given to reveal sin. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," {Rom 3:20b KJV}. So it is perfectly in line with his role as lawgiver that Moses, in giving the laws concerning marriage, should also give permission for divorce, in order to make visible what is going on in a family. What was going on in Israel was evidently hardness of heart. Hearts were being hardened, and that is why divorce came in.

WHAT IS A HARDENED HEART? Well, what would the opposite be? A heart that is softened, mellowed, gentle, and open. There are many occurrences in the Scriptures of the phrase, "hardness of heart." We are warned again and again against hardening our hearts. There is that story in the Old Testament of when Moses was sent to Pharaoh and told to deliver the message of God: "Let my people go." When Pharaoh heard that word, he "hardened his heart," {Exod 8:15, 8:32, 9:34, 10:1}. What does that mean? That he determined to handle it his own way He determined to respond to the natural inclination of his flesh, to do what he felt like doing in the situation, to handle it himself, and to ignore God. This is hardening of the heart. When you determine that you are going to handle something yourself, and not pay any attention to what God reveals about it, you are hardening your heart. This is what was going on in the marriages in Israel.

You can see why. According to Moses, a husband (he looked at it only from the standpoint of the husband) could see some uncleanness in his wife, some indecency. He did not specify what it must be -- evidently just something displeasing to the husband, something in his wife that he did not like. And Moses said that because of it, in order to make clear what the husband's attitude was, a divorce was to be permitted.

Now, what would this reveal about the husband's attitude? Well, it would be the attitude we all would naturally feel. We all can identify with this, because we know how we feel when we find something offensive in someone else. What do we want to do? We want to criticize and complain, even attack, or avoid and reject that person. This is the natural feeling of the heart when we find something offensive in someone else. We object to it, protest it, criticize it, put it down, disparage it in some way and we reject the person because of it. This is what was going on in these marriages. Husbands were treating their wives with contempt, because of something they found in them that they did not like.

What should a husband do when he finds something in his wife that he does not like? According to the further revelation of the New Testament in this regard, a husband ought to understand why his wife is like this. This is the word of Peter to husbands: "Husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge," {1 Pet 3:7 KJV}. That is, do not merely react to them; understand why they are acting the way they are. Dwell with them according to knowledge: give affection to them, honor them, share yourself with them, understand them, restore them, love them. This is what a husband ought to do. This is what a marriage is for -- to provide opportunity, as we will soon see, to work out the problem areas, the difficulties, the offensive occasions which arise.

But Moses granted divorce, Jesus said, in order to make clear the hardening of hearts that was going on. This is what law is all about. It is given to unveil sin, and to drive us to grace. Law can never heal the problem; it simply points it out. And the Law of Moses, by permitting divorce, simply unfolded a private problem and made it a public predicament, so that everyone became aware of the tendency in this direction. This is why God permitted it. It is perfectly in line with the purposes of law.

"A distinction has to be made between that which sets forth the absolute will of God, and those provisions which take account of men's actual sinfulness and are designed TO LIMIT AND CONTROL ITS CONSEQUENCES. Whereas the Ten Commandments (in this connection Exod. xx. 14) and such passages as the verses quoted in vv. 6-8 represent God's absolute command, Deut. xxiv. 1 is a divine provision to deal with situations brought about by men's *sklerokardia* [hardness of heart] and to protect from its worst effects those who would suffer as a result of it. (Much that is contained in the O.T. falls within the category of such provisions. - C.E.B. Cranfield)"¹

What does the softening of the heart involve? A heart is always soft when it recognizes its inability to handle a situation, and relies upon the wisdom and

¹Cranfield, quoted in Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Mk 10:4. Galaxie Software, 2003.

power of God. This is always what keeps the heart tender, mellow, malleable, reasonable -- a recognition of not having what it takes, a reliance upon the wisdom and love of God, and an obedience to him. This keeps the heart tender and soft.

This is what should have been happening in these marriages. But instead, marriages were getting worse and worse. Women were being downgraded and mistreated, treated with contempt and cruelty and harshness. So, in order to make it all clear and visible, Moses granted permission for divorce. It released the women from what may have become almost a hell on earth for them. So this is why Moses granted divorce. It would tend to make public what had been going on in private, so that the world would see the difficulties which were being hidden within the confines of the home. ²

In the next message we will deal with what Matthew records as the exception clause, ***except for adultery***. But let this sink in: we must work hard at not letting our hearts become hard toward God or our spouses. The Apostle Peter wrote to Christian husbands, 1 Peter 3:7, ***You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*** A hard heart has a deep effect on a husband. It even effects his prayer life. This is how God has made marriage. Marriage is no casual thing. It is the joining together of two people, of two minds, of two bodies. I'm not even sure we fully understand all that is going on in the person's spirit and the deepest part of his being when he commits to another one in marriage. And men in particular, are warned by God NOT to allow your heart to grow hardened towards your wife.

The breakdown in the family that is having such an incredibly destructive effect on our society is due to a basic denial that men and women are different. Many today simply deliberately disbelieve what the Bible says: God made them male and female. Men and women are so very different in so many ways. The modern women's movement has corrected some abuses, to be sure. But it has perpetrated a great many destructive influences and changes which is NOT helping women at all but hurting them.

Men: we need to do everything we can to keep our hearts soft towards our wives. There are so many influences today which seek to harden our hearts. Many of them are things we view on a CRT of one kind or another. But the resources for keeping a soft heart are very important: conferences, CDs and tapes that promote Christian marriage, for the man, books, fellowship groups

² Ray Stedman, <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3318.html>

which allow men to be honest and transparent and where the guys pray for each other. These are the kinds of assets we need to make available to each other.

We need to work and do everything we can to avoid divorce. You and I need to enter marriage with the commitment that it is for life. Sure, don't enter into it so quickly then if you are uncertain. So often young people reply with, "well I want to enjoy physical intimacy and all that that means. I can't do it spiritually legally without getting married." Physical intimacy is important but it is only one part of marriage. We need to learn how to build and grow healthy marriages where the commitment is for life, and divorce is regarded as a tragedy. I believe there can be divorces where the person filing for divorce is not in sin. But those are rare, and they should be the rare exception. We need to not be looking for ways to accommodate divorce. We need to be learning ways to heal hurting marriages. This honors the Lord. This is a thing He will give grace in. May we be about putting people together. May we feel God's heartbeat on this matter of marriage and its permanence.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 42)

Scripture: Matthew 19:1-12

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: September 4th, 2005

What About Divorce? Part 3

Introduction One of the most awesome things God has made, is marriage. When He invented it, He did it with brilliance! He took part of Adam and crafted it into Eve. Even the part of Adam that God took—a rib—was taken not from a high place on him or a low place, it was taken from his side—an obvious picture that a man’s wife is by his side, his spiritual equal. Other than salvation, I believe marriage is God’s greatest gift to mankind. Men and women are so different, have you noticed this? And it really takes a lifetime together to put it together. For most Christians, I believe, this is in the plan for us. He wants us to be complete, not lonely, not detached. But these days divorce seems to be as much a part of our landscape as rivers and mountains and the plains. Even for Christians, we who tout such claims about our future, we do not seem to be exempt from it.

I once knew a young fellow (back when I was a youth pastor) who was married and had a couple of children. His wife had put on a bit of weight, as I remember, in that time, and also had grown kind of crabby (as I remember it). Meanwhile, this fellow got involved in a ministry in which he met a very pretty and very musically talented young woman, 18, who had just graduated from high school. You can imagine where I’m going with this. They became a relationship, and my encounter with this was when he came to me (as youth pastor) and the associate pastor of that church, and told us that since Jesus said, *whoever divorces his wife except for immorality and marries another woman commits adultery.* (Matthew 19:9) he had DECIDED to commit adultery with the young woman (and apparently had) so that he could initiate what he called a “biblical” divorce.

I don’t know if you know the name Jaci Velasquez, a high profile Christian and Latin music superstar. She and a fellow named Darren were married on August 16th, 2003 in a Franklin, TN. They wanted the dream marriage, she says, like all newlyweds. A year ago she said in *Christian Music Today* magazine, Darren is “the greatest, the funniest, and the coolest guy you’ll ever meet. ... Any girl wants a guy that will be hers forever, and that’s how I feel with him.” This week its reported in from *Christianity Today* that they are now divorced. She told the media, “Somehow things took a turn and we have ended up in divorce...I sought

counseling but the painful truth is that our marriage didn't work out. I've had such a difficult time with this..." Now she's writing and recording songs about it.¹

Divorce is at epidemic proportions in our culture and in the body of Christ, too. Both of these incidents of divorce hurt my heart. The first, from my personal observation because of the callousness and the complete wickedness of the man's intentions. The second, from the obscenity of high profile Christians who make their living entertaining Christians and make such visible claims about their faith, and yet crash and burn so publicly and dramatically, and in this case, so quickly.

Marriage is hard work for many married couples. (You heard it here first!) And if many marriages are going to last, there must be a deep-rooted conviction that this relationship is permanent. You must determine to work on the relationship, out of your discipleship to Jesus, even if the marriage becomes hard. Now, not ALL marriages are hard and difficult. If you have a relatively easy marriage and all is happy most of the time, I am very happy with you. That's what God wants, actually!

We have been considering what Jesus said, so long ago, when He found Himself being interrogated by some Pharisees about divorce. Two weeks back we considered what He meant by telling them that men's hearts get hardened. We considered what makes a hard heart and a bit about how to keep your heart soft for your wife. The same is really true for wives too.

What keeps a heart soft towards your spouse?

1. First, it is just to be with them enough. We hear the expression "quality time" which usually means not-enough-time. To keep a soft heart you have to devote enough time to your spouse.
2. Then there is the simple word, "forgive." This headline ran in The Dallas Morning News on June 2nd, 2005 (Page 19A):

▪ **Couple reveals keys to 80-year marriage**
British centenarians celebrate landmark anniversary

London (Associated Press)- Percy and Florence Arrowsmith, celebrated their 80th wedding anniversary June 1, 2005 say the secrets of their world's record longest marriage are: "Don't sleep on an argument, always share a kiss and hold hands before you go to bed." Arrowsmith, 105, and his 100 year old wife were married on June 1, 1925. Florence Arrowsmith said of her husband, Percy, "He can't settle down if I am not holding his hand."²

3. Dads and Moms can contribute somewhat to how their kids will be when they are grown, whether they will be prone to hard-heartedness with their spouses or not... PLAYBOY FOUNDER HUGH HEFNER, "I GREW UP IN A VERY TYPICAL MIDWEST METHODIST HOME, WHERE THERE WASN'T A LOT OF HUGGING AND KISSING. MY LIFE HAS BEEN A RESPONSE TO THAT."³

4. Avoid influences which harden the heart.
5. Access influences which encourage and remind you of God's perspective
6. Attach yourself to a marriage mentor

But still, people and Christians too are getting divorces at an alarming rate and with all kinds of excuses and justifications... But as we read the parallel passage to Mark 10, which we have in Matthew 19 (as well as Matthew 5:32), we see that there is one *provisio* in the Bible for divorce however. It is the phrase (in Matthew 19:9 in Greek)

μη ἐπι πορνεία *mē* *epi* *porneia*, which is translated

in the NASB and the NET Bible as ***except for immorality***
 in the KJV as ***except it be for fornication***
 in the NIV as ***except for marital unfaithfulness***
 in the HCSB as ***except for sexual immorality***
 in the NLT as ***unless his wife has been unfaithful***

I do NOT really think, as many commentators do, that Jesus was giving what in essence, was a loophole. Many *want* that to be the case and many scholars do go that way. "IF YOUR SPOUSE CHEATS ON YOU, YOU CAN DIVORCE HIM/HER AND START OVER WITH A NEW ONE." And that is a pretty compelling way to interpret what Jesus was saying.

1. It leaves an "out" for the partner whose trust has been violated.
2. It smokes the violaTING spouse with a price to pay for his/her "fling."
3. And it gives the victim-spouse a new shot at starting over.
4. It is also still maintains a pretty strict doctrine of divorce for Christians as, if it IS a loophole it is the *only* loophole, escape-clause in the New Testament today's mindset, even Christian community, which seems to come up with all kinds of "grace-licensed" exemptions and many "special circumstances" on this subject.

Before I *tell* you what I think it means, check this out: Many of you probably are pondering beyond the actual Scripture on this issue. You're wondering,

- what ABOUT those of us who do have a divorce in our backgrounds, righteous or not?
- What about someone serving in leadership who at one time was divorced?
- What about my current spouse—are you saying I'm IN adultery now?
- If I shouldn't have gotten remarried, but did, aren't I OK now because we're under grace and not under the Law?
- What if I was abandoned, not actually cheated on?
- What if I was emotionally abandoned?
- What if my spouse never actually had an actual affair but he/she is addicted to on-line affairs?

- What about blended families?
- What if I was just too young when I got married?
- What about multiple divorces; how many do I get to have?
- What about the Catholic church's view on divorce and the hypocrisy of the doctrine of "annulments?"
- Isn't it easy for a non-divorced person to have all kinds of high-minded principles and standards about divorce?
- What about separation?
- Etc.etc.

These are all valid questions and we will say something about them too. But we're not there yet. You and I *FIRST* need to JUST HAVE THE SCRIPTURE CLEAR, and what it means without yet clouding it all over with all the many practical implications, policy statements, awkwardness and so forth...

Does it matter what the Bible says? This is what distinguishes us as evangelical Christians. It *ought* to be the thing that just distinguishes Christians but Catholics intermingle what the Bible says with what the Church says. Mainline Protestant churches intermingle a lot of modernist "spin" into the text of what the Bible says, in effect diminishing the pure statements of Scripture. Even many evangelical leaders would mute or water down what the Scripture says with the realities of church life. But it matters tremendously what the Bible says on this question, and we believe that lives brought into submission to the Scripture, REASONABLY INTERPRETTED, are the happiest lives in theory at least, on the planet.

Now, here's what I think Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 and additionally Mark 10:11 mean for us today:

Divorce is to be avoided at all costs. ***Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her***, Jesus said. He is plain about it. He is plain according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. In the Matthew verse He adds, ***except for immorality***. Jesus said, literally, ***except for 'porneia'...*** Isn't that the one exception that could maybe be stretched to include desertion? Sometimes this word does mean adultery. But here I believe it does not mean adultery but rather means "fornication," specifically during the betrothal period. There are a number of reasons for seeing this meaning of "porneia" in Jesus' use of it here which are summarized well in a study by John Piper (available in the foyer).⁴ They include

- a.) the fact that Jesus USED this word (porneia) instead of the actual word for "adultery" (moicheia, μοιχᾶται);
- b.) how the word is used elsewhere in the Gospels;
- c.) the great significance in first century Judaism of the betrothal period (far deeper in meaning than our engagement process today).

d.) the need to see how Jesus taught a consistent view of marriage (how the other places where Jesus spoke to this—all absolute—fit with this instance)

e.) as well as other reasons.

You see, I think we are so conditioned to just accept the idea that adultery or desertion make it OK to get a divorce—regardless of other implications or damage that might be done—that we overlay that interpretation on to Matthew 19:9.

From a practical standpoint this suggests several things to me:

1. If as Christians,
 - a. we care about our walk with the Lord,
 - b. we desire holiness and wish to see if grow in our lives,
 - c. we are concerned about our testimony and witness,
 - d. we care about how we demonstrate the faith to our children (let alone their well-being)we ought to be very, very careful about who we marry. Young Christians will hopefully have the benefit of godly parents, grandparents or a mentor to help them think this through. Isolation from godly influential people—on many issues—is to live in spiritual peril. Remember—the whole “I want to marry you because I’m in love with you” culture that we were ALL raised in, is not the culture of Bible times. From a biblical standpoint, as for marriage, once in, you are not supposed to get out by divorce. To do so, is sin.
2. For those of us married, we need to have such a stern determination to stay in the marriage, at all costs, that we are willing to do the hard work of hammering out our relationships. If we find ourselves abandoned by our spouse we need to search the Scriptures hard for what we are to do. At the very least, we should never initiate a divorce. Jesus and His apostles teach such an absolute rule of love, illustrated by His love for His people who do NOT always return it—that it impinges on marriage too.
3. When problems *do* occur, we work on them. We endure. We seek to cultivate the fruits of the Spirit as tools. We access every possible assistance that might be available and we do this for years. We do not give up.
4. We take seriously Peter’s words, ***Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour*** (1 Peter 5:8).
5. The most understated implication today, is the very word “porneia” from which we derive the word *pornography*. It is one of our biggest scourges today. It is evil, addictive, destructive, and metastatic. We

ought to take whatever measures we can to stay away from it and to protect ourselves from it. And we ought to assume our vulnerability to it, especially that of our young men.

Isn't it good that our God is so gracious. He is holy, but He is full of lovingkindness and grace. That also marks evangelical Christianity, or at least its supposed to!

I hope you have met our God. He is so loving and willing to restore His people. He is willing to revive them, to refuel them and to reward them when they seek Him. Sometimes we have to come to Him on our knees. Sometimes we have to trust Him to restore broken relationships. But He will do all of these things, and more. And when Jesus spoke these black-and-white words to his questioners that day, it did not invalidate His love for His people at all. He loves us and we need to love each other.

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- ¹ Less than two years after her 2003 wedding made the news, Christian/Latin music superstar Jaci Velasquez's marriage has ended in divorce. Velasquez and Indiana native Darren Potuck were married on August 16, 2003, in Franklin, Tennessee. But their marriage later "took a turn," Velasquez told Christian Music Today in an exclusive statement. "When my husband and I started out as newlyweds, we were like all newlyweds, wanting that dream marriage," Velasquez said. "Somehow, things took a turn and we have ended up in divorce. "Velasquez did not elaborate on the reasons for the divorce. A Word Records spokesman said Velasquez and Potuck had worked to save their marriage, and Velasquez alluded to that in her statement. "I sought counseling," said the 25-year-old singer, "but the painful truth is that our marriage didn't work out. I've had such a difficult time with this. My heart hurt so badly that I felt like I wanted to crawl under a rock and just die. I can't say that I have ever felt such pain before. My heart literally felt like it was breaking in half. "Velasquez referenced "Lay It Down," the second radio single from her new album, *Beauty Has Grace*, to describe what she's now experiencing. The lyrics to that song include these lines: "All of my hopes and my dreams and my best laid plans / Are slowly slipping through my folded hands." "I am learning how to live out the words of 'Lay It Down' daily and experiencing God's love, grace and mercy like never before," she said. "My God is so awesome, I can feel him lift me up every time I feel like it's all too much for me." Velasquez further said she has not discussed the divorce "because it is clearly too painful. I am still in the healing process and ask for your prayers and consideration for my privacy. "In a 2004 interview with Christian Music Today, Velasquez had described her husband as "the greatest, the funniest, and the coolest guy you'll ever meet. ... Any girl wants a guy that will be hers forever, and that's how I feel with him. "Velasquez, a Grammy nominee and multi-platinum selling artist in both the Christian and Latin markets, recently moved to London, but is still making appearances in the U.S. She will appear at the Soul2Soul Honors 2005 event

August 26 in Louisville, and she will appear at a Nashville Hecht's department store August 27 in support of the M·A·C AIDS Fund. She is currently working on her next CD, an all-Spanish for the Latin market. Velasquez is also the founder of her own Christian music label, Apostrophe Records. Her divorce is the highest-profile divorce in Christian music since Amy Grant's 1999 divorce from Gary Chapman. Grant—like Velasquez a Word Records artist—later married country music superstar Vince Gill. After Grant's divorce became public, many radio stations stopped playing her songs and many Christian retailers refused to stock her albums. But Grant has made a comeback in Christian music circles in recent years, especially with her two hymns albums, *Legacy* (2002) and *Rock of Ages* (2005). Regarding Velasquez, a Word Records representative said the label is "not concentrating on radio or retail sales. We love Jaci, and we're concentrating on Jaci and helping her work through this." *Christianity Today*

² *The Dallas Morning News* June 2nd, 2005 Page 19A

³ *The Dallas Morning News* August 30, 2005 Page 3A

⁴ Dr. John Piper, http://www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/divorce_remarriage/dr_adultery.html and http://www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/divorce_remarriage/div_rem_paper.html for a thorough treatment of this position on divorce.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 43)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:8-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: September 11th, 2005



What About Divorce? Part 4

1 Corinthians 7:8-16 (NASB)

⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. ⁹ But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.

¹⁰ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not send his wife away.

¹² But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. ¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

¹⁵ Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

Introduction In the realm of human pain, there is first of all physical pain; that which comes from injury, disease or infection. Second, there is pain which comes from psychological factors, which are many and complicated. Third, pain is experienced often in relationships.

In the second *Star Trek* series (called *The Next Generation*) there is a sophisticated android who was very humanoid but who could feel no pain at all. He went by the name simply as "Data." Data was many people's favorite character in that series, and one of the reasons probably would have been his interesting interaction with human emotions and pain. He had neither of these... until his internal emotion chip was installed and activated. But although this science fiction idea is kind of compelling, it is the experience of none of us. Pain is a part of living and divorce inflicts its own unique set of agonies.

Usually, divorce is so very hurtful to the husband and wife themselves, incredibly damaging and hurtful to any children or grandchildren they might have had, and to the larger community of friends, especially to the church. It

also has an impact on economics, social services that must be mustered to deal with the fall-out, on education and even in simple social situations.

These are the kinds of **GUT-LEVEL** real-life inner ponderings I think many unhappily married Christians might think about:

- 1.What if I just don't want to be married any more?
- 2.But what if I don't want to be alone either?
- 3.How does the church incorporate divorced people into ministry?
- 4.Doesn't grace "trump" law?
5. What is the pastor's attitude about this?

I want to say something on the matter of pastors and their various positions on this issue. I am told that another church factored into their decision about hiring a pastor or not, his position on this issue because some of those who were in leadership at that church had divorces in their background. I would say that regardless of how stringent a pastor's categories on this issue may be, or how lenient he is, the final issue is what does the Bible say and what has God already said is His will on these questions? It is not, "How lenient will the pastor be?" Each Christian must answer to the Lord for their decisions and for their mistakes, not to some pastor.

This subject of divorce is one of the most difficult pastoral topics to deal with. It is never pain-free or easy to shepherd the sheep of God on this topic. I believe divorce is the world's answer to marital difficulty. God's answer is to trust Him to work in our lives. He is quite willing and capable to reinforce us in our weak areas. He cares about marriage. He invented it.

In our mini-series on divorce we have considered Mark 10 and Matthew 19. There is one more "word" from Scripture we need to consider on this matter and it comes from the apostle Paul in 1st Cor.7 in verses 8 to 16. We can very briefly summarize what Paul wrote to that troubled church, as:

- Vss.8,9 SINGLENES IS OK, EVEN MORE THAN OK

- (BUT MOST WILL NEED TO MARRY TO AVOID SIN)

Being single certainly is nothing to be ashamed of, and I believe we need to do a better job of equipping and ministering to our singles in our church.

- Vss.10,11 MARRIAGE SHOULD BE PRESERVED

Jesus and Paul could not be more plain. We should not leave each other, in the divorce sense at least.

- Vss.12-14 DO NOT KICK OUT YOUR NON-CHRISTIAN SPOUSE

- (AS LONG AS THEY'RE WILLING TO STAY WITH YOU)

We cannot be sure all the benefits that the non-Christian spouse enjoys—whether they acknowledge them or not—of being married to a Christian. It may bear great spiritual fruit in the long run, if time is given.

- **Vss.15,16 IF YOUR SPOUSE LEAVES YOU, THOUGH, RELAX**

If your non-Christian spouse leaves you, and enough time is given for them to return, and they do not, I believe you are free to remarry.

But there are a number of practical questions that I want to address as quickly as I can. These are of course open to much discussion, but I offer my thinking on these matters:

1. What ABOUT those of us who do have a divorce in our background, righteous or not?

The past is the past. We work with what's going on now. If there's restitution or reconciliation with people from the past that we need to make, we need to do that. But, especially in the case of a divorce before the person came to Christ, we need to have a sense of moving forward. It doesn't mean to forget about the past divorce but it means that we learn from the hard experiences and seek to avoid them and make peace if at all possible.

2. What about my current spouse—are you saying I'm IN adultery now?

It depends on the situation. Second marriages are acceptable I believe, if the Christian was divorced by the non-Christian and left by them. In time, I believe they are free to marry again, this time to a Christian. That's where I see grace on this issue. If you are married to your second spouse, and your first spouse didn't die, and was a Christian, I believe you are living in adultery and regardless of how spiritual you may feel now. That may seem harsh but that is in my mind plainly the gist of the New Testament. Do not get divorced and if you do, plan to remain unmarried if you care about avoiding a sinful relationship. God will sustain you in your singleness. If you don't want to remain permanently celibate find a way to preserve the marriage.

No Christian wants to live in a perpetual state of sin. It weakens the Christian and no, I do not believe it renders the Christian spiritually impotent, because we're ALL still dealing with indwelling sin. But to just callously accept the condition of sin in any area, is to forfeit many of the blessings and rewards the Lord wishes to give His children.

3. What about someone serving in leadership who at one time was divorced?

This is tricky and my personal position is to consider each case individually rather than to have a set, and hard-and-fast policy. There are some who have divorce in their past and I think they can later serve in ministry leadership positions, after time and restitution have been made. I also think there will be a certain weakened public ministry that is often unavoidable. If they can live with that, then it is fine to minister as best we can. There are also those who have divorce in their backgrounds and I believe they are disqualified for life from serving as pastors or elders or missionaries. They clearly were callous and selfish and refusing to trust God to repair their marriages. Time does not make that fact go away. Their reputation is permanently damaged as long as they defend their divorce.

4. If I shouldn't have gotten remarried, but did, aren't I OK now because we're under grace and not under the Law?

Grace is always our wonderful possession but it should never be used as "leverage" to license ourselves to harden our hearts. On this issue or on any other issue. We are under the law of Christ. We are under a deep obligation to live at peace, to maintain marriage and to struggle to stay in marriage and THAT requires much grace.

5. What if I was emotionally abandoned?

This is a real thing. Our culture encourages it, I believe. And being alone, even if you are living with somebody is a terrible thing. I think if you are in this category you have to pray and wait. You wait as long as God gives you grace to wait. When He stops giving day-by-day grace to hang on to this commitment—at least from your end—you can then expect the other person to divorce you. God is perfectly capable of giving you what you need to always honor Him.

6. What if I, or our children, have been abused by my spouse?

I think our society has given a very broad definition to the term abuse. What do you think the abuse environment was in the first century? I am sure the earliest Christians did not have the luxury to just end their marriages because the man or the woman was sarcastic or belittling. But to be sure, true abuse certainly warrants separation, as a gesture of "tough love." And for safety's sake. I never counsel a spouse to remain at the mercy of their abusing spouse is truly endangering somebody. There is no doubt that an abusing spouse should forfeit the privilege of living with you or your children, temporarily. Even long-term, until they get help and become safe to live with. **But that is not divorce.** There are many times when a separation, for physical safety's sake, is in order. Not for emotional well-being, which I think can be defined any way one wants to, but for physical safety. But that does not license you initiating a divorce. All too often

abuse is used to validate divorce. From the world's perspective, this seems completely reasonable. But from a biblical perspective, it just isn't given as a cause to end the marriage covenant. I grew up in an abusive home, actually. And we endured until mellow years finally arrived. Not undamaged either, by the way. But we endured. That seems right to me.

7. What if my spouse never actually had an actual affair but he is addicted to on-line affairs?

Then he or she needs to get healed. But from a biblical perspective, does addictive behavior in our spouse warrant divorce? If we say that internet addiction warrants divorce what about alcoholism? What about obesity? What about workaholism? A couple that wants to heal and preserve and even grow their marriage will mutually seek victory together. That means certain spiritual tactics as well as other psychological explorations to be made. And much patience to be exercised.

8. What about blended families?

This is the natural consequence of divorce and remarriage but also when widows and widowers remarry too, with children in tow. All too often I have seen divided loyalties, a general not-caring displayed for the spouses kid. If you're going to enter into a remarriage with children involved, I think a great amount of work and determination and commitment need to be pledged UP FRONT. And then followed through with. It usually takes years to accomplish mutuality of love in a blended family.

9. What if I was just too young when I got married?

One could say, MOST of us were too young when we got married. Except, sexual drive is so strong in many young people and that is why Paul offered the maxim in I Cor.7:9, **it is better to marry than to burn**. Our culture offers the counter-strategy, "it is better to burn than to marry." True Christians will decide for the light of the Word rather than the darkness of the world's wisdom. Young marriages can be very hard and that is why mentoring and small fellowship groups for young marrieds are valuable and I think, important.

As for having the perspective on yourself, "I was too young," that is fine. But it is not cause for divorce. Statistically many young people are waiting a little longer to marry. Unfortunately, they are also choosing to live together in sin too before they marry. The experimentation approach rarely produces a happy result either. It is generally acknowledged that living together with no permanent commitment usually results in the couple going their separate ways before too long.

We all change as the years go on. That is a fact of life but it does not warrant divorce. The key is to change together and to allow changes to occur. It is also to manage *expectations* well and reasonably. And that will involve the spiritually energized disassembly of unreasonable fantasies about marriage. ***Therefore laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you, with his neighbor for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25) Also, Colossians 3:12-15*** ¹² ***And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;*** ¹³ ***bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*** ¹⁴ ***And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*** ¹⁵ ***And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.***

10. What if I was abandoned, not actually cheated on?

I have always assumed with most people that long-term abandonment is the same thing as almost-certain adultery. And if adultery can be proved, I think you can let them go. As for remarriage, that is another matter. One thing I *have* seen over the years—once a remarriage has occurred, it is virtually impossible to see the original couple get back together. Why would that be important, you might ask? Why can't we just pretend that the first relationship never happened, and just shoot for a winner the next time. Because what God doesn't read things that way: He wants one man and one woman, for life. Does God know what He's talking about? Yes, He does. He invented the concept and He has the right to regulate it.

If there is the slightest hint in the engagement period, that this person may be prone to abandon, why would marrying that person make sense? But it is hard to predict such things and we must admit that marriage is never risk-free.

Let me note at this point, a thing I often have heard from people: "Well, I prayed about it and I felt the Lord telling me to divorce that person." While I certainly grant the individual liberty of each Christian to determine God's will and voice for themselves, let me say, humbly, that based on what the Bible reveals about God, "No, He didn't tell you that." Christians all too often use the phrase, "I prayed about it" as a license to do what they were wanting to do anyway.

11. What if I WAS actually cheated on?

I believe that in this case, forgiveness is in order. Coupled with tough love. I don't think we threaten our wayward spouse with an execution of the marriage

for sin. Why not? Because the Lord Jesus does not deal with us that way. He forgives us. He lets us start over all the time.

But if the offending partner is NOT repentant and if they are repeat offenders then I think the violated partner can separate if they feel they need to. But that does not license a divorce. By my the interpretation of Matthew 19:9 that I have selected as what I think best deals with the *mē epi porneia* phrase¹, I do not think adultery mandates divorce.

12. What about multiple divorces; how many do I get to have?

Actually, none. From one, a Christian can recover. From more than one, I believe they live under a sense of divine discipline, whether they acknowledge it or not. The statistics show, pretty clearly by the way, that with each successive divorce a person experiences, the likelihood of the next marriage succeeding decreases almost exponentially.

13. You don't know what it's like to live with a crazy person.

What pastors can or cannot relate to, is pretty irrelevant. The issue is always between you and the Lord, not between you and your pastor. All Christians must answer to the Lord for their choices.

Crazy people are hard to live with. I can understand that. A pastor's attitude should always be one of empathy and understanding and compassion. But the Bible is plain on what it says. It says that marriage is to be permanent. Do not enter it lightly or foolishly, but once you've entered it, honor it.

14. What about the Catholic church's view on divorce and the hypocrisy of the doctrine of "annulments?"

This is also basically an irrelevant issue. In our theology, we do not take our cue from a religious hierarchy as to what is allowable and what is not. We take our cue from the Scripture. If there is hypocrisy in one denomination there is probably hypocrisy someplace in the other one.

15. Isn't it easy for a non-divorced person to have all kinds of high-minded principles and standards about divorce?

It may be. And I am sensitive to how easy it is for Christians to see so clearly the rights and wrongs of various life-situations in which they are not living. Of course, THEY can point out, "Hey, I was wise enough to avoid the pitfalls of a mismatched marriage." Well and good, but we are all called to compassion and gentleness. We are to love one another and not just self-righteously pronounce things at each other...

16. What if I've just grown tired of my spouse?

My first reaction to this might be, it is entirely possible that your spouse could say the same thing. But this is an emotional consideration, with a basis in reality that I think we should just admit honestly, and move on from there to the determination to honor what God has said to honor. If you are tired of your spouse, that's OK. It is an honest feeling. But you and I need to be so committed to do God's will that we will look for ways to make the marriage better. That may involve a substantial amount of work. It may include a willingness to change ourselves in some ways. We need to remember 2 Thessalonians 3:13:

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. Notice also, by the way, verses 14 and 15 of the same chapter: 2 Thessalonians 3:14 ***And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.¹⁵ And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.***

17. How can I help my child so that his/her chance of divorce is minimized?

Teach them to think about their choices. Help them learn to discern the difference between making decisions based only on emotions and feelings and to learn to invite God to meet their needs, even their deepest, most secret ones. Talk about what's involved in making decisions about marriage. Talk to them about the deep matter of how we sometimes decide to do things for subconscious reasons, without really realizing why we're doing what we're doing. And most of all, listen to them without indulging your natural tendency to lecture them.

If you are with us today and you are still not sure if the Lord cares about you, I encourage you to look at the cross of Jesus Christ. That is the most profound example of "hanging-in-there" love that there is. He did not divorce us although we have deserved it. He was faithful even when we were unfaithful. He loves us and never gives up on loving us.

We close this mini-series with this prophecy from Hosea

Hosea 3:1 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי עוֹד לְךָ אֶהְבֶּֽאֱשָׁה אֶחֶבֶת רַע וּמְנַאֲפֶת כְּאֶחֶבֶת יְהוָה אֶת־כְּנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהֵם פְּנִים אֶל־אֱלֹהִים
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Then the Lord said to me,

“Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, **even as** the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”

¹ <http://www.dartmouthbible.org/mark42.htm>

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 43)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:8-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: September 11th, 2005

What About Divorce? Part 4 **17 Questions and Implications**

BASIC GUT-LEVEL real-life inner ponderings

1. What if I just don't want to be married any more?
2. But what if I don't want to be alone either?
3. How does the church incorporate divorced people into ministry?
4. Doesn't grace "trump" law?
5. What is the pastor's attitude about this?

QUESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS

- 1. What ABOUT those of us who do have a divorce in our background, righteous or not?**

The past is the past. We work with what's going on now. If there's restitution or reconciliation with people from the past that we need to make, we need to do that. But, especially in the case of a divorce before the person came to Christ, we need to have a sense of moving forward. It doesn't mean to forget about the past divorce but it means that we learn from the hard experiences and seek to avoid them and make peace if at all possible.

- 2. What about my current spouse—are you saying I'm IN adultery now?**

It depends on the situation. Second marriages are acceptable I believe, if the Christian was divorced by the non-Christian and left by them. In time, I believe they are free to marry again, this time to a Christian. That's where I see grace on this issue. If

you are married to your second spouse, and your first spouse didn't die, and *was* a Christian, I believe you are living in adultery and regardless of how spiritual you may feel now. That may seem harsh but that is in my mind plainly the gist of the New Testament. Do not get divorced and if you do, plan to remain unmarried if you care about avoiding a sinful relationship. God will sustain you in your singleness. If you don't want to remain permanently celibate find a way to preserve the marriage.

No Christian wants to live in a perpetual state of sin. It weakens the Christian and no, I do not believe it renders the Christian spiritually impotent, because we're ALL still dealing with indwelling sin. But to just callously accept the condition of sin in any area, is to forfeit many of the blessings and rewards the Lord wishes to give His children.

- 3. What about someone serving in leadership who at one time was divorced?**

This **is** tricky and my personal position **is** to consider each case

individually rather than to have a set, and hard-and-fast policy. There are some who have divorce in their past and I think they can later serve in ministry leadership positions, after time and restitution have been made. I also think there will be a certain weakened public ministry that is often unavoidable. If they can live with that, then it is fine to minister as best we can. There are also those who have divorce in their backgrounds and I believe they are disqualified for life from serving as pastors or elders or missionaries. They clearly were callous and selfish and refusing to trust God to repair their marriages. Time does not make that fact go away. Their reputation is permanently damaged as long as they defend their divorce.

4. If I shouldn't have gotten remarried, but did, aren't I OK now because we're under grace and not under the Law?

Grace is always our wonderful possession but it should never be used as "leverage" to license ourselves to harden our hearts. On this issue or on any other issue. We are under the law of Christ. We are under a deep obligation to live at peace, to maintain marriage and to struggle to stay in marriage and THAT requires much grace.

5. What if I was emotionally abandoned?

This is a real thing. Our culture encourages it, I believe. And being alone, even if you are living with somebody is a terrible thing. I think if you are in this category you have to pray and wait. You wait as long as God gives you grace to wait. When He stops giving day-by-day grace to hang on to this commitment—at least from your end—you can then expect the other person to divorce you. God is perfectly capable of giving you what you need to always honor Him.

6. What if I, or our children, have been abused by my spouse?

I think our society has given a very broad definition to the term abuse. What do you think the abuse environment was in the first century? I am sure the earliest Christians did not have the luxury to just end their marriages because the man or the woman was sarcastic or belittling. But to be sure, true abuse certainly warrants separation, as a gesture of "tough love." And for safety's sake. I never counsel a spouse to remain at the mercy of their abusing spouse is truly endangering somebody. There is no doubt that an abusing spouse should forfeit the privilege of living with you or your children, temporarily. Even long-term, until they get help and become safe to live with. **But that is not divorce.** There are many times when a separation, for physical safety's sake, is in order. Not for emotional well-being, which I think can be defined any way one wants to, but for physical safety. But that does not license you initiating a divorce. All too often abuse is used to validate divorce. From the world's perspective, this seems completely reasonable. But from a biblical perspective, it just isn't given as a cause to end the marriage covenant. I grew up in an abusive home, actually. And we endured until mellow years finally arrived. Not undamaged either, by the way. But we endured. That seems right to me.

7. What if my spouse never actually had an actual affair but he is addicted to on-line affairs?

Then he or she needs to get healed. But from a biblical perspective, does addictive behavior in our spouse warrant divorce? If we say that internet addiction warrants divorce what about alcoholism? What about obesity? What about workaholicism? A couple that wants to heal and preserve and even grow their marriage will mutually seek victory together. That means certain spiritual tactics as well as other psychological explorations to be made. And much patience to be exercised.

8. What about blended families?

This is the natural consequence of divorce and remarriage but also when widows and widowers remarry too, with children in tow. All too often I have seen divided loyalties, a general not-caring displayed for the spouses kid. If you're going to enter into a remarriage with children involved, I think a great amount of work and determination and commitment need to be pledged UP FRONT. And then followed through with. It usually takes years to accomplish mutuality of love in a blended family.

9. What if I was just too young when I got married?

One could say, MOST of us were too young when we got married. Except, sexual drive is so strong in many young people and that is why Paul offered the maxim in I Cor.7:9, **it is better to marry than to burn.** Our culture offers the counter-strategy, "it is better to burn than to marry." True Christians will decide for the light of the Word rather than the darkness of the world's wisdom. Young marriages can be very hard and that is why mentoring and small fellowship groups for young marrieds are valuable and I think, important.

As for having the perspective on yourself, "I was too young," that is fine. But it is not cause for divorce. Statistically many young people are waiting a little longer to marry. Unfortunately, they are also choosing to live together in sin too before they marry. The experimentation approach rarely produces a happy result either. It is generally acknowledged that living together with no permanent commitment usually results in the couple going their separate ways before too long.

We all change as the years go on. That is a fact of life but it does not warrant divorce. The key is to change together and to allow changes to occur. It is also to manage *expectations* well and reasonably. And that will involve the spiritually energized disassembly of unreasonable

fantasies about marriage. **Therefore laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you, with his neighbor for we are members of one another.** (Ephesians 4:25) Also, Colossians 3:12-15 ¹² **And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;** ¹³ **bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.** ¹⁴ **And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.** ¹⁵ **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.**

10. What if I was abandoned, not actually cheated on?

I have always assumed with most people that long-term abandonment is the same thing as almost-certain adultery. And if adultery can be proved, I think you can let them go. As for remarriage, that is another matter. One thing I *have* seen over the years—once a remarriage has occurred, it is virtually impossible to see the original couple get back together. Why would that be important, you might ask? Why can't we just pretend that the first relationship never happened, and just shoot for a winner the next time. Because what God doesn't read things that way: He wants one man and one woman, for life. Does God know what He's talking about? Yes, He does. He invented the concept and He has the right to regulate it.

If there is the slightest hint in the engagement period, that this person may be prone to abandon, why would marrying that person make sense? But it is hard to predict such things and we must admit that marriage is never risk-free.

Let me note at this point, a thing I often have heard from people: "Well, I prayed about it and I felt the Lord telling me to divorce that person." While I certainly grant the individual liberty of each Christian

to determine God's will and voice for themselves, let me say, humbly, that based on what the Bible reveals about God, "No, He didn't tell you that." Christians all too often use the phrase, "I prayed about it" as a license to do what they were wanting to do anyway.

11. What if I WAS actually cheated on?

I believe that in this case, forgiveness is in order. Coupled with tough love. I don't think we threaten our wayward spouse with an execution of the marriage for sin. Why not? Because the Lord Jesus does not deal with us that way. He forgives us. He lets us start over all the time.

But if the offending partner is NOT repentant and if they are repeat offenders then I think the violated partner can separate if they feel they need to. But that does not license a divorce. By my the interpretation of Matthew 19:9 that I have selected as what I think best deals with the *mē epi porneia* phrase¹, I do not think adultery mandates divorce.

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It may include a willingness to change ourselves in some ways. We need to remember 2 Thessalonians 3:13:

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Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of the Gospel of Mark (Lesson 44)

Scripture: Mark 10:13-16

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: September 18th, 2005

Receiving the Kingdom As a Child

Mark 10:13-16 (NASB)

¹³ And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it *at all*." ¹⁶ And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands upon them.

Introduction Kids are really amazing creations. To hold a baby is to hold this little human being, complex product from two genetic sources, merged into one new person. The new person is the exact 50% each result of two contributing parents. Each one is more complex than the Sears Tower, than a nuclear submarine or than the space shuttle. They are wonderful beings, if you think about it—particularly if you have had the privilege of actually being a parent of one or more... Have you ever asked, "Why did God design the world so that the human race multiplies by having babies that take years to become adults?" Why didn't God design the human race so that we multiply like earthworms: one adult splits to become another adult? He could have done it that way, or any number of ways. Why did God ordain that there be children, and not just adults?¹ At the heart of it is that children stand for something; they point to something.

There's a connection between this little section about children and the issue He just dealt with, which was marriage. As John Piper notes, Verse 9 is one way to obey Verse 15. Verse 15 says that we should receive the kingdom as a child. And in verse 9 the King comes to us and says, in essence:

The design of My kingdom is that marriages not be broken.

Will you receive My kingship and care and protection as your sovereign?

Will you have Me as your King in marriage?

Will you submit to My design for your life, or will you reject My kingship and design for your life?

Will you be a child toward Me and trust Me and obey Me?

¹ John Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/98/030198.html> (1998)

If we will, Piper says, two wonderful things happen for children:

- a. by your humility and dependence and faith, you will honor their unique reason for being—to show the way to heaven: a child-like dependence on the grace of God.
- b. You will preserve and honor the God-designed haven of marriage where, generation after generation, children are brought to Jesus for blessing...

So don't separate what God has joined. Tough it out, pray it out, cry it out, wait it out, and when you're at the end of your resources, remember: like a child, like a helpless, insufficient, needy, trusting child, receive the kingdom—receive the KING'S help.²

Let me note here now, that verse 14 is very frequently used as a proof text for infant baptism. I remember growing up in the Lutheran Church hearing that verse quoted often. I've seen it referred to on several Catholic web sites too as the basic verse about infant baptism. This verse has nothing whatsoever to do with the ordinance of baptism. It has to do with children of all ages coming to Jesus and wanting access to Him.

Well, enough of the theology... After the debate about marriage and divorce that Jesus engaged in with the Pharisees, we now have this account of a little encounter between some parents and their children, the disciples and Himself. This passage properly has been called the *Magna Carta* of the children, the *Bill of Rights* of children everywhere in the world -- their rights to be appreciated and valued highly. Artists love to paint this scene, and if you have any imagination you can easily picture it -- Jesus gathering the children around him, one wriggly little boy on his lap, a little girl standing demurely at his side looking up into his eyes, others clustering around, clamoring for his attention. It is a beautiful scene, one which has proven to be a source of tremendous blessing to thousands upon thousands of children around the world, throughout all the centuries past.³

It is probably one of the most favorite incidents in the life of Jesus for many people who read the Gospels--one of the very few incidents involving children (that we know about) from His life. A group of parents, we're not sure how many, or how old the kids were, but they bring their children to Jesus to receive a blessing--Jewish parents commonly sought the blessing of prominent rabbis for their children.⁴ That's not too hard to understand: every parent wishes a good

² Piper, *ibid.*

³ Ray Stedman, <http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/3319.html> (1975)

⁴MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible.*, Mk 10:13. Nashville: Word Pub., c.1997.

and prosperous future for their child and that's part of what these parents were seeking from the good rabbi, Jesus.

Then two things happen: the disciples step in, and then Jesus steps in. The disciples' attitude was business-like and all *adult-like*. They wanted to shield Jesus from a bunch of bothersome children. Children are simply not important enough to be a part of their privileged circle or to occupy Jesus' time.⁵ Our Christianity can get like this all too easily. But the disciples' attitude *needed to be child-like* in its flavor.

Here we have Jesus in a very human moment. The Gospel of Mark is peppered with demonstrations of how very human the Son of Man was. And here He gets annoyed, one might even say "ticked" at His own disciples. If you don't like it being said that your Savior could possibly get annoyed or even "ticked," because somehow that seems irreverent, understand that you have subtly bought into a view of Jesus which is inaccurate. He could become provoked, but He could *only* become provoked without sinning. He definitely could be moved to annoyance and even anger. Always without sin, but irritated, He could be. And this is an instance where the attitude of Peter and James and John and the others annoyed Him. The disciples thought that Jesus needed protection from bothersome children but Jesus points out that children needed protection from bumbling adults! Once again they had not yet learned an important thing about living in the kingdom of the Son of God: We need to have the mindset of children. Children are generally pretty UNself-conscious and simple... Not "simple" in a derogatory way.

I like what the late California pastor, Ray Stedman, had to say about this: "They're basically pretty "uncomplicated, elemental. They go right to the heart of things. This is why children can ask frank questions. If you pick up a little child in your arms, he is liable to look at you and say, 'How come you have such a big nose?' All your adult friends have managed to evade that subject for years, but a child will come right out and ask it. They go right to the point. There is no beating around the bush nor any pretention. They are forthright....

It's true in every area of their lives, too. When their bodily needs are demanding, then that is what they want satisfied. They want to eat when they are hungry. They want to sleep when they're sleepy. They will go to sleep no matter who is around or what is happening. If they want to eliminate, they do so. In the realm of the soul, when they need love, they come to you and seek affection, make their need known. They are curious in mind, want to explore whatever is in front of them, and will go right ahead with it. In the realm of the spirit they are so expressive of the sense of wonder.⁶

⁵Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible.*, Mk 10:13. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989.

⁶ Stedman, *Ibid*

Jesus loved this and told His disciples THEY needed to get like this. In fact, He went so far as to say, ***Whoever does NOT receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.*** It isn't an option, or just a NICE way for a Christian to be. It has to do with the very QUESTION of who will and who will not get in.

I'm thinking about the last 30 years or so since Christian praise music has come on to the scene. This is like the songs we do AFTER we sing a couple of hymns. Praise music has gained an incredible popularity—have you ever wondered why? It's partly due to the more contemporary styles of music which speak to large numbers of people more than 100 year old tunes. But more deeply, I think it taps into this child-like side of being a Christian that is SUPPOSED to characterize our faith. A song like we sang last week, "I Only Want to Praise You" is basically very child-like. So is "Arms of Love." Some of the praise songs are unashamedly FUN. Others are repetitive and really lyrical. They're not so intellectual or heady or deeply theological. They appeal to a whole generation of children Christians who struggle to NOT want to grow OUT of that. I honor that. Maybe that's why I have lots of patience and no small liking for the praise music.

You have got to love the last verse in our passage today:

And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them (Verse 16).

Do you want some of that? I do. I don't even think we can fully define what "began blessing them" means. To be personally blessed by the Son of God stretches MY imagination. But He didn't do this to Peter and James and John. He did it to these children. They were the trusting children, in His arms. But He wanted Peter and James and John to be like these kids. And He wants you and I to be like that—a simple, trusting dependence on the King. Trusting to the point that we think we can go right up to Him and touch Him! That's a King to have, my friends. And He invites all who will trust Him, and enter His kingdom like a child to come running up to Him... May we be like that. And if we're not like that any more, may we become like that once again...