

#InstagramJesus

Weekly Devotional

A ministry of Chapel Hill
chapelhillpc.org



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Grew up at Chapel Hill. Currently working towards a Master of Divinity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Loves engaging with Scripture with both mind and heart and discussing it with others, particularly when paired with good food or coffee. Also enjoys viewing God's creation through the lens of photography.

Saturday through Friday January 19 – January 25

LifeGroup Guide

Review

Story

Head

What does the Gospel of Mark teach us about Jesus as Messiah / Man / Son of God? If you have a study Bible, you might find it helpful to read about each of these themes. If you don't have one, skim through your Bible, highlighting these titles of Jesus as they come up in Mark's Gospel.

What does the Gospel of Mark teach us about the power and authority of Jesus?

What does Mark teach us about the kingdom of God?

Heart

Every story where we learn who Jesus is also gives us a chance to evaluate our response to Jesus. A good summary of those responses can be found in the parable of the seeds in Mark 4:3-9. How do you see yourself in the different responses to Jesus?

One of the unusual features of Mark's Gospel is its abrupt ending in Mark 16:8. Marks 16:9-20 are later additions to the text, and it is highly likely Mark deliberately ended his account of Jesus' life in this abrupt way. How does this abrupt ending of Mark leave you examining your response to Jesus?

Hands

How can you imitate Christ's humility in serving others and thinking of others better than yourself? Talk as a LifeGroup about:

- 1) What opportunities and need you have to serve within your group*
- 2) How you could serve together for the broader mission of the kingdom*

Which aspect of Jesus' character is most challenging to you - his power and authority or his servant leadership? Commit this week to do a little extra Bible reading and research about that characteristic. If you didn't already do so, highlight the stories in Mark's Gospel which teach us about Jesus in this way. For bonus points, read through the other gospels and do the same! As you do so, journal how God is speaking to you personally through his Word.

Pray

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 8:29-33

Ask

What does the Gospel of Mark teach us about Jesus as Messiah / Man / Son of God? If you have a study Bible, you might find it helpful to read about each of these themes. If you don't have one, skim through your Bible, highlighting these titles of Jesus as they come up in Mark's Gospel.

Reflect

Who is Jesus? This question is at the heart of the Gospel of Mark. Those who encounter Jesus as he goes from town to town teaching with authority, healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the thousands, and quieting storms, are constantly confronted with the question, who is this guy?

Just like how we use our roles and relationships to define ourselves, so also Jesus uses such titles to define himself. Three of the key titles that appear in the Gospel of Mark are Messiah (translated Christ), Man, and Son of God. These titles, especially Messiah and Son of God, are unique to Jesus.

While the titles are unique to Jesus, they were well-known before Jesus began his ministry as described in Mark. For example, Jeremiah 23:5-6 describes the coming Messiah as the one who "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely" (ESV). When Peter declares that Jesus is the Christ, he probably has this powerful, conquering king image in mind. At face-value for Peter, this is who the Messiah is.

Have you ever been quick to make an assumption about someone based on their title? Have you expected them to behave a certain way and then they do the unexpected? That is where Peter was when he declared Jesus was the Messiah. He was correct in regards to the title, yet his assumptions about what it meant were not quite right. Jesus is Messiah, he would indeed execute justice and righteousness, save Judah and Israel, yet he would do it through his suffering (for more on this, take a look at Isaiah 53).

As you read through the Gospel, watch for these titles (Messiah, Man, Son of God) and pay attention to how Jesus defines them.

DAY 2 – Tuesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:3-12

Ask

What does the Gospel of Mark teach us about the power and authority of Jesus?

Reflect

The story in Mark 2:3-12 is one of many in the Gospel of Mark that reveals something about the power and authority of Jesus. As we walk through this story together, I want to suggest two questions to be thinking about as you read the stories in Mark that teach of Jesus power and authority.

1) How does Jesus demonstrate his power and authority?

In Mark 2:3-12, Jesus does two things that show his power and authority. First, Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic. The scribes (religious leaders) help us out here, indicating that the forgiveness of sins is a demonstration of authority and power, for as they ask, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (v. 7, ESV). To prove that he had this authority and power to forgive sins, Jesus does a further, visible sign. He heals the paralytic man. This is immediate and readily evident. No one in that room could contradict that Jesus had the authority and power to heal the man by commanding him to get up and walk, because the man just got up and walked.

2) What is the response to Jesus’ power and authority?

Like the two demonstrations of Jesus’ power and authority, this story also includes two reactions to this authority and power. What’s the reaction of the scribes when Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic? What’s the reaction after the former paralytic picks up his bed and walks out? The responses differ dramatically from one another and throughout the Gospel, we will continue to see various response to the power and authority of Jesus.

As you continue reading through the Gospel including these stories of authority and power, what is your own response? Do you believe Jesus has the authority and power he claims to or are you grappling with doubts?

DAY 3 – Wednesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 1:14-15; 4:26-34

Ask

What does Mark teach us about the kingdom of God?

Reflect

Recall that at the time Jesus arrives on the scene in Galilee, the people of Israel are living under oppression by the Romans. The oppression they faced likely made them all the more eager for the kingdom of God to come. For the Messianic King to liberate them from oppression, as had been foretold in the Old Testament. With this in mind, what do you think the initial reaction would have been to Jesus' first words recorded in the Gospel of Mark, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand"?

In response to Jesus' declaration that the kingdom of God was at hand, there was likely a lot of excitement. Finally the time had come! The King was here to save us! Mixed with this excitement, however, was a heavy dose of doubt and confusion. Is Jesus really the Messianic King we were waiting for? If he was, shouldn't he be gathering an army or doing something to confront the power of the Romans? If he is the king, where is his kingdom?

Fitting with the theme of immediacy in Mark, the people were expecting an immediate, grand arrival of the kingdom. The kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed, however, countered this expectation, much like what we saw on Day 1 of this week with Peter's expectations of the Messiah. Take a look at Mark 4:26-34. What we see in these verses is a kingdom that starts small and grows large. As the ESV Study Bible points out in their notes on these verses, the grand reveal the people were waiting for was still coming in the second coming of Jesus, but till it reaches this "glorious culmination point" the kingdom "grows slowly but steadily in the mist of much adversity."

DAY 4 – Thursday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:3-9

Ask

Every story where we learn who Jesus is also gives us a chance to evaluate our response to Jesus. A good summary of those responses can be found in the parable of the seeds in Mark 4:3-9. How do you see yourself in the different responses to Jesus?

Reflect

In the commentary *Mark for Everyone*, N. T. Wright notes that parables are like political cartoons.¹ To understand the meaning of the drawing, we need to know the code associated with it. Read vv. 14-20 following today's reading. In these verses, Jesus gives his disciples the code by which to understand the parable.

As Jesus explains, the parable describes four different responses to the good news. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, we see examples of each of these various responses demonstrated. Can you identify at least one example in Mark's narrative for each of the four responses?

Different people have different responses to the good news. Notice, though that it is not just that different people have different responses to the good news. The same person may have different responses at different times.

We may all find ourselves going through seasons of life according the four responses. Have you ever found yourself hearing the Gospel, but it seems to be going in one ear and out the other (like walking through the doors of amnesia after Sunday service)? Have you ever received God's promises with joy, yet questioned those same promises when trials arise? Have you let other voices drown out the voice of God? Or have you ever experienced the fruitfulness that comes with the Gospel taking a secure root? I encourage you to be open with your LifeGroup and share what sort of season you may be in right now.

In the same way political cartoons often point to something that needs to change, Jesus is using this parable to evoke change in our own lives. Be like the good soil! Certainly this is a work of the Holy Spirit, but there are practices we can do to help cultivate the soil. Discuss in your LifeGroups what this might look like.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, New Testament for Everyone (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 48.

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 16:1-8

Ask

One of the unusual features of Mark's Gospel is its abrupt ending in Mark 16:8. Marks 16:9-20 are later additions to the text, and it is highly likely Mark deliberately ended his account of Jesus' life in this abrupt way. How does this abrupt ending of Mark leave you examining your response to Jesus?

Reflect

Have you ever seen a movie or read a book where the ending left you with major questions? If you are like me, once you get over an initial bit of frustration that you were not presented with a clear resolution at the end, you begin to flip back through the book or watch the movie again, hunting for clues to help you answer your questions.

Recall on Day 1 of this week we looked at the question at the heart of Mark's Gospel: Who is Jesus? Here at the conclusion of the book, Mark does not provide us with a clear-cut answer. Instead we are left with women who had heard Jesus teachings, seen him brutally killed on the cross, and now are in a state of confusion as they hear he has risen from the dead. The women seem to still be grappling with the question, who is Jesus? Is he really who he claimed to be? The confusion of the women is not a new reaction. Check out the short (10 min.) video on YouTube entitled "Read Scripture: Mark" created by The Bible Project, which outlines Mark and shows how the conclusion echoes earlier reactions to Jesus.

Why does Mark not provide us with a clear conclusion that answers the question? Why does he leave us with the women, perhaps feeling like they did, in a state of confusion? I think he wants the reader to go back through the Gospel. He wants his readers to personally examine and grapple with the evidence supporting Jesus claim that he was and is the Messiah (Christ). Mark already told us what he believes about Jesus (see Mark 1:1). Now it's up to you. Based on the narrative presented to you in the Gospel of Mark, who do you say Jesus is?

DAY 6 – Saturday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 10:42-45

Ask

How can you imitate Christ's humility in serving others and thinking of others better than yourself? Talk as a LifeGroup about:

- 1) What opportunities and needs you have to serve within your group
- 2) How you could serve together for the broader mission of the kingdom

Reflect

There is something remarkable about Jesus. He has all power and authority, yet he uses it in service. When two of his disciples come to him seeking positions of great power (Mark 10:35-37), Jesus uses it as a teaching moment for all of the disciples. Jesus begins by acknowledging that the desire to pursue power and use it to exercise authority over others is part of the culture they live in. Perhaps it's not that different than our culture today. Instead of living in this way, however, Jesus calls them to live in a different manner, in the way he himself has lived, a life dedicated to service. As James Edwards writes in his commentary on today's passage, "service is love made tangible".²

When you encounter today's Ask question, don't be too quick to give a short answer and say 'service is great' and move on. Really take the time to think about it for your own life and discuss it in your LifeGroups.

Regarding the first Ask question to talk about in your LifeGroups, think about specific opportunities you have to be of service to one another. Realize too that acknowledging a need for help could be a struggle for some people. Yet, from life experience, we all know that we all need help at one time or another. Don't be afraid to ask for help! Realize that it is a blessing to be served, yet it is also a blessing for the one serving to have that opportunity!

For the second question, try to come up with something you could do together as a group. Yes, it is likely true that every member of your group has ways in which they are serving in different areas. That is great! Celebrate how the group is reaching into multiple communities. There is something special, though, when people have the experience of serving alongside one another on a particular project. Is there an opportunity within the next two months for you to serve together?

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 325.

DAY 7 – Sunday
Daily devotional

Read

John 10:11-17

Ask

Which aspect of Jesus' character is most challenging to you - his power and authority or his servant leadership? Commit this week to do a little extra Bible reading and research about that characteristic. If you didn't already do so, highlight the stories in Mark's Gospel which teach us about Jesus in this way. For bonus points, read through the other gospels and do the same! As you do so, journal how God is speaking to you personally through his Word.

Reflect

As we've gone through an overview of the Gospel of Mark this week, we've seen Jesus as one who has power and authority and one who actively displays servant leadership. In the narrative of Mark, we see the people Jesus encounters have different reactions. For example, the disciples readily accept the authority of Jesus and follow his command to follow him (Mark 1:18-20). Others struggle with the authority Jesus demonstrates (Mark 6:1-6).

Remember Peter from Day 1 this week? Peter had expectations for the Messiah, some of which needed to be corrected. Just like Peter, all of us approach Jesus with expectations (perhaps more aptly called assumptions) about who he is. These are going to be challenged as we continue to dig into the Gospel. The challenge can be tough, as we've grown to love the Jesus whom we have pictured. But as we know from loving a family member or a friend, true love involves loving the person for who they really are. Are we willing to love Jesus in that way?

Personally, I find myself drawn to one aspect or another of Jesus' character at different times and seasons of life. I think this is natural. I have to be careful that I am not turning a blind eye to his other aspects. He holds all these aspects together in such a way that I struggle to understand how he does it. For example, in the two characteristics highlighted in the Ask question today, I tend to emphasize one or the other, choosing to focus on his authority or his servant leadership. Yet Jesus, as presented in the gospels, holds them together. Jesus demonstrates his authority in his service, as he proclaims in John 10:18. How amazing is that! I would miss out on that grand image of who Jesus is if I focused on just one aspect or the other. Don't miss out on who Jesus is!
