



**MARK  
DEVOTIONAL**

**By Pastor Phil Emerson**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

*“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6*

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

**Lifegroup 12s**

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

**Lifegroup 3s**

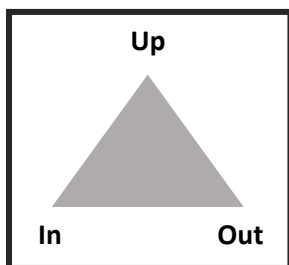
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

## A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

### Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

### In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

### Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

# HOW TO USE THE BOOK

## First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

## Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

## Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

## Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

**This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.**

## INTRODUCTION TO MARK

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels and likely to be the earliest written. It is believed that Mark was the attendant and writer for the Apostle Peter. This is the same John Mark who travelled with Paul and Barnabas as a helper on their first missionary journey (Acts 13). John Mark was not one of the twelve disciples. It is believed that this Gospel was written after Peter's death, thus, penned between 65 and 70 AD.

This Gospel can be neatly divided into two parts. The first is the servanthood of Jesus. This part clearly displays the Servant King ministering to other people through miracles and exercising His authority over death, disease, and sickness. There is action as Jesus, in a publically orientated ministry, rebukes the proud, exhorts the disheartened, and encourages the weary.

The second part (from Mark 8:31) focuses on the road to Calvary. More than forty percent of this Gospel is devoted to the events leading up to and including the death, burial, and resurrection of the Suffering Servant. Instead of an emphasis on serving others, the focus here is on Jesus sacrificing Himself for others.

Unlike the other Gospels, Mark records nineteen miracles and only four parables. There are more miracles than messages. The ministry of Jesus is revealed with vivid detail and the messages of His teaching are presented more through what He did than what He said. Jesus proves His divinity in Mark by the demonstration of miracles. He explains His mission and message through His actions.

Mark captures Jesus on the move, skipping the birth of Jesus and diving quickly into His public ministry. Mark changes from one event to another by frequent use of the Greek word 'euthus'. This colourful word, used forty-seven times in this book, means 'directly, at once, soon, as soon as, forthwith, immediately, shortly, straightway'.

For the next 16 chapters, let's go on a journey! Bibles ready, journal, and don't forget the coffee!

Phil

## Read

# Mark 1

## Live

I love this start to the Gospel of Mark. No bluffing around, just straight into the nitty gritty of what he wants to tell us. First and foremost, this is the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Let's make no mistake. It is all about Jesus! Then Mark jumps straight into the forerunner, John the Baptist, whom he depicts in graphic detail, right down to his wardrobe and diet. I find it interesting that the clothes John wore are exactly what Elijah the prophet wore (2 Kings 1:8). John also ministered in the same area as Elijah – the desert near the Jordan River! John was obviously making a statement since he and everyone else was familiar with the Old Testament prophesy from Malachi 4:5-6 that Elijah would return before Messiah came. One of the other things that grabs me is how Elijah passed on authority to his successor, Elisha, who received a double portion of his spirit. Jesus' ministry eclipsed John's as well. Also, Elisha's ministry didn't begin in fullness until after Elijah had been taken up into heaven; the same was true of John and Jesus.

John's message of repentance is a perfect hinge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This new message John proclaims is highlighted by a visible symbol of baptism. Christ's coming through baptism, which He personally didn't need, was Him emphasising the reason for His coming, to forgive sin. John magnifies Jesus through two sayings. Firstly, John speaks of his own unworthiness compared with Jesus, *'He is so great that I am not worthy to touch His shoes!'* Secondly, John says that although he baptised with water, Jesus will baptise with the Spirit. John makes the point that there is a difference between him as the outward administrator of baptism and Christ as the Author of spiritual baptism. Mark is insisting, early in his record, that the Messiah is no mere man. After all, who can command the Spirit of God but God Himself?

## Pray

Father, convince me, yet again, that I need Your presence more than I need circumstances and people to change. Jesus, today and every day, I declare that my hope is built on nothing else, nothing less, and nothing more, than You and Your finished work on my behalf. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Scholars are coming to believe that Mark was not just a collector of stories about Jesus but that he gave form and shape to these stories to counteract some dangerous distortions of the gospel message. Apparently, some early Christians focused so much on Jesus' deity and glorious resurrection that they began to ignore His humanity and suffering. As a result, they expected to be spared suffering in this life and to quickly join Jesus in the glories of heaven.

We read today of Jesus healing a paralytic. Jesus looked up at the four men struggling with crude ropes tied to a stretcher, and He saw their faith. I so love this story of the boys who dug into the roof of a house so they could get their friend to Jesus. It wasn't a peep hole either, it was huge, enough to let a prostrate man through. Mark records for us that their faith could be seen. Their bold, determined action to bring their friend to Jesus proved they had real faith. I find it inspiring that in this account, the emphasis is on the faith of the *friends* of the paralysed man. I wonder what these boys on the roof thought when Jesus said to their paralysed friend, "*Your sins are forgiven you.*" I'm sure they thought, '*We pulled the roof off, and this is it?!*' But remember, sin, almost always, is the real problem and Jesus got right to the problem. He addressed the man's greatest need and the common root of all pain and suffering – our sinful condition. Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs, bringing the greatest blessing with the most lasting results. Jesus asks the question, '*Which is easier, forgiveness or healing?*' Actually, for humans, both real forgiveness and the power to heal are impossible. But for God, both are easy. In a way, it was harder to heal the man than to forgive his sins because forgiveness is invisible. But Jesus did both. How amazing is that?

### Pray

Father, I have a yearning to live less of a driven life and more of a called life, a life lived less by frenzy and more by faith, with less concerns about the future and more contemplation of Your beauty. In short, I want to live at the pace of grace, more like Mary, less like Martha. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

When reading the stories of situations Jesus found Himself in, I try to imagine I am in the scene. This first scene today I find feisty and raw. I can imagine statements like, *'A truly religious person wouldn't do such a thing!'* and *'How dare this man just come in and disrupt our meeting! Such insolence.'*

This chapter today at some of the pressures and privileges of following Jesus. It forces us to ask some searching questions ... Where are you currently facing pressure or conflict? Are there some areas where you need to ask God to provide strength through His Word and the Holy Spirit? What types of opposition have you encountered as a Christian? How have you dealt with experiences of opposition? When you are opposed or rejected by those who are closest to you, what comfort can you receive from Jesus' words in the final verse of this chapter?

I love how Jesus asks the man in the synagogue to hold out his hand, that which was embarrassing and probably hidden. The thing that was a hindrance and handicap, Jesus asked for. The same goes for us all today; the things that we would hide, Jesus asks us to stretch them towards Him and receive His power, mercy and forgiveness. Jesus offends the traditional leaders of the day with this miracle in the synagogue. He then draws large crowds who follow Him. Demons shriek in terror at His ministry now unfolding on planet earth. This is a very powerful and strategic moment in Jesus' life here on earth and it is when we see Him choose His followers. There is such an interesting collection of characters in this bunch. There are brothers – James and John, Peter and Andrew, who were also business associates. There were men of opposing political viewpoints – Matthew the Roman-collaborating tax collector, and Simon the Roman-hating zealot. And there was one who would betray Jesus – Judas Iscariot.

### Pray

Father, because You've robed me in the perfect righteousness of Jesus, I no longer dread Your decrees; I delight in them. For Your decrees aren't rules by which I earn anything; they're wisdom by which I learn about everything, everything that pertains to life and godliness. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Some of the stories in the Gospels are like people who wear their hearts on their sleeves; they wear their points on their sleeves, obvious for all to see. Other stories have something *up* their sleeves, which, when it gets pulled out, punches us square on the nose. Among Jesus' stories we find those that are easy to understand and those that are not so easy. The stories in this passage are in the latter section; these demand our study again and again.

The first parable of the sower makes us look inside ourselves and ask big questions about what kind of soil we are and what we can do to become the kind of soil Jesus is looking for. Jesus' closest followers sought to better understand this parable. It makes me wonder, though, where was everyone else? And if they didn't fully understand it either, why didn't they come and ask Jesus about it? It seems that these closest followers cared enough to seek out an answer while the rest just took the parable with a pinch of salt, as we would say. The lesson for us is to keep studying, learning, asking, and meditating to understand more than before. We don't want to become spiritually dull, but rather, we should sharpen our spiritual capacity to understand through more study and meditation. We must always value God's Word instead of taking it for granted.

It was a great privilege that Jesus' followers could hear and understand spiritual truths, truths no one had grasped until that point in history. These parables of the Kingdom taught things that were a mystery never revealed until the time of Jesus. We too have been taught these same truths; they are recorded in Scripture for our benefit. We have more knowledge and understanding about the things of God and His kingdom than any generation who lived prior to Christ. We would do well to cherish this and seek for more.

### Pray

Father, I'm challenged by the types of soil today. I'd love to think of myself as a 100-fold believer but the truth is that just as I savour a nice meal, I can savour stories of revenge. Actually, it shocks my heart when I see a bad guy getting it worse than he gave it, and I think, '*He deserved that.*' Redeem my heart today to the soil that produces good fruit. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

It is very interesting to me where this chapter kicks in, straight after the calming of the storm at the end of chapter 4. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills, one of which, just maybe, was where this demonic man dwelt. I wonder, did he watch from a distance? Did he see Jesus calm the sea and think, *'Wow, He could calm the storm in me!'* Hence, he runs to Jesus as Jesus climbs out of the boat.

This chapter is fully loaded with Jesus' mercy, power and grace. He heals a demonised man, restores a lady to full health after years of sickness and abuse, and then, to tap it all, He raises a little 12-year-old girl from the dead. Now that's my Jesus. He is certainly cool to be around, bringing joy to a party and life to a funeral. I love the way He sends the delivered man home to repair and restore his probably very broken and estranged relationships. I love how He wasn't content to let the lady slope off into oblivion after she got healed, but called to her, wanting relationship with her, and for her to have her full potential of His grace. I love the way He emptied the room of the little-faith people where the young girl lay dead and then commanded her to rise. He is the Lord of the individual. I love the way He still beckons us to more – more of Him and less of us.

I love how, in all of these cases, the individuals were completely helpless and hopeless; the people around them could do nothing more to help. The storm on the lake terrified experienced sailors. The demoniac could not be subdued by anyone. The haemorrhaging woman had been seeing doctors for twelve years and was worse. The young girl was no longer sick, but dead. Not only does Mark demonstrate the power of our Lord Jesus, but he also reveals His person. What we see in these passages is not just that God is a God of infinite power, but that He is a God of infinite compassion and tenderness.

**Pray**

Father, this chapter today literally bulges with Your power through Jesus filled with the Spirit – the triune God that explodes into people's lives, changing them for time and for eternity. There is nothing not to love about this Trinity. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Jesus returned to His hometown and faced a crowd that wondered how He had become so powerful in both word and works. He left Nazareth as a former carpenter and came back as a rabbi, complete with a group of disciples. As a result, everyone is scratching their heads, wondering how this all happened. When they ask the question, *“Is this not the carpenter?”* they weren’t paying Him a compliment. It was a way of pointing out that Jesus had no formal theological training. He hadn’t been to Bible school, we would say. The bigger issue of Jesus’ day was that He was never a formal disciple of a rabbi. Even calling Him *“the son of Mary”* was no compliment either. It is very likely that the non-mention of Joseph means that Mary is widowed. Rumours that Jesus was illegitimate may lie behind this reference also.

We have some huge stories outlined today: Jesus’ rejection at Nazareth, and then Jesus sending out the Twelve. I find it hugely interesting that Mark decides to tell us of the murder of John the Baptist before jumping back into the report of the disciples returning from their journey. Burnout is all too common an experience among Christians today. One of its most disastrous consequences is a hardened heart that keeps us from being refreshed by our Lord. In this chapter, we see the disciples suffering from burnout and we catch a vision of how Jesus can help us to counteract its effects.

Next, we have the feeding of the five thousand. It really seems too extravagant. The people eat until they are full. We would say, *‘I’m stuffed!’* Jesus provided extravagantly, yet simply. He simply gave people bread and fish. When Jesus provides, don’t be surprised if He provides simply. We finish with the miraculous event of Jesus strolling along an open sea in a storm. Hanging around with Jesus is definitely the cure for a dull life.

### Pray

Father, of all the sweetbreads from the great bakeries of the world, none can compare with the Bread of Heaven. I’m not just looking to be satisfied, like a hungry person in a restaurant. I’m a needy person who daily requires Your unfailing love for the opportunities and challenges of the day – including this day. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Today we start with the Pharisees and scribes, who accusingly ask why Jesus' disciples eat with defiled hands. Jesus pulls the carpet from under them and accuses them of gross hypocrisy. Apparently, some people were giving their money to the temple instead of caring for aging parents. Jesus goes on to say that nothing outside a person defiles them, only what comes out. He explains to the disciples that while external actions matter, internal motivations and intentions matter too. Bad motivations result in bad actions.

Jesus then went to Tyre, which is Gentile territory, perhaps to get some rest. Yet He could not escape. A woman approaches Jesus. Her daughter has an unclean spirit, she explains. There are so many cultural boundaries being crossed here, Jew to Gentile and male to female, which I'm sure the disciples were uncomfortable with. The fact is, Jesus' ministry thus far has been for the Jews. We see Him sending out the 12, and feeding 5,000 as a symbol of a renewed Israel. So when Jesus says, "*Let the children be fed first,*" He means it quite literally. However, this woman is able to see that in the Kingdom, there is plenty for everyone, even the Gentiles. This reality is embodied in our next chapter when 4,000 Gentiles are fed. Up until now, it has all been for the Jew, the feeding of Israel; now it will spill over to the Gentiles. The Kingdom of God spreads like wildfire, new wine bursting from old wineskins.

Interestingly, Jesus heals a deaf man and I have to admit, when I read this, my prayer was, '*Lord, forgive me for the times I've been spiritually deaf, whether through hardness of heart or through substituting traditions for true obedience.*' We all need Jesus' healing touch today and every day, when we whine more than we worship, and judge people more than seek to understand them.

### Pray

Father, forgive me for when I think about myself more highly than I should, and think of You less often than You deserve. May I risk anything and everything for Your glory. If I don't feed on the banquet of the gospel, I'll be reaching for junk food all day long. Today I want to honour You with my heart and soul, and not just my lips. I love You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

The setting for this miracle of the feeding of the four thousand is significant. Some theologians try to suggest that this is a repeat of the feeding of the five thousand. Their thoughts surround the disciple's naivety ... surely they would have remembered how He did it before. However, the location gives us a clear idea that these are separate, unique events; Jesus had just healed a deaf man with a speech impediment in the region of Decapolis, and had drawn a massive crowd. There are also deeply spiritual reasons as to why these are different events, which I wouldn't have space here to write about. Important to say, though, that it is worth a study. Look at the differences even in the surplus baskets of leftovers, one being for the Jews and the other for the Gentiles. Jesus, in this passage, confronts His disciples over their lack of understanding. It would seem to imply that Jesus was expecting more of them by now. They were missing the depth of these things by looking at the natural instead of the spiritual. I often wonder, what would Jesus have to say to us about our level of insight? We have no real excuse as we have the full measure of the Holy Spirit in us and these boys didn't!

Then we have the story of the man being healed partially, the only instance of this recorded in all of Scripture, which makes it worthy of note. It is interesting to see the different ways of healing described in the ministry of Jesus. Why did Jesus choose this method at this time? Maybe Jesus was highlighting the disciples' spiritual blindness or maybe He was teaching us that sometimes our advancement in the Kingdom can be little by little. We like the huge leaps forward, but more often than not it is 'here a little, there a little'. We end the chapter today with Jesus revealing the true and total cost of following Him – everything!

### Pray

Father, because of Your unfailing love for us in Jesus, I have put my trust in You. I desperately want to lay my life down to You afresh today. It's just that my selfishness keeps getting in the way, hence, I know I need to die to self. Lord, I really do believe; would You help my unbelief. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Let's talk through the story. Imagine we are on the mountain with Peter, James and John. Jesus is praying and as He prays, we see Him totally transform. His face is altered; the Greek word means 'other' or 'completely different'. A cloud appears over us. We are scared out of our wits. We want to dance, sing, fall on our faces, run away, all at the same time. Jesus' clothing becomes radiant, which means 'to flash intensely'. His clothing is like lightning flashes. He has been transfigured or 'transformed'. This is the same word used in Romans 12:2 *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind"*. It's where we get our word metamorphosis from, meaning a complete change of form, like caterpillar to butterfly – such a dramatic shift that you couldn't put them together in the natural mind. You can't look at a caterpillar and think that that wriggly green thing will fly in a week. This kind of change is what happened here. One moment, Jesus was human-like; next moment, He was God-like.

I think that God, in Jesus' transfiguration, is giving a sneak preview into what a renewed mind should look like. The renewed mind is a radiant exposure of Christ. Jesus didn't reflect light; He was the light. We are not meant to be reflectors, but people in whom Christ dwells. Paul said, *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). Isaiah 61 says, *"Arise and shine"*, not arise and reflect. You are not a moon that reflects the light of the Son; you are one in whom the Son lives. So, to transform your mind, you need to rise up out of your position into HIS position and radiate who He is, having a mind that reveals GOD's glory, a mind that picks up God's mind and radiates it out over any given situation. This is why Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-8 *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus"*. What is the mind of God? According to Jeremiah 29:11, it is your 'welfare' or 'shalom': peace, health, prosperity, favour, wholeness, rest and safety.

### Pray

Father, like fine silver refined in a fire that brings impurities to the top so the silversmith can drag them off, would You work in my life to make me a channel of Your grace to others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Read

## Mark 10

### Live

Jesus, in the Gospels (just as in the apostles' writing in the epistles and in the Old Testament before them), never allowed religion to be divorced from family life and social relationships. This passage today exposes some of the ways the gospel ought to transform these areas of our life. Think about a child you know and how that child trusts his or her parents. Compare that picture to how you regard God. Talk to God about what you discover about yourself. What obstacles were (or are) hardest for you to overcome in entering the Kingdom? What evidence has there been of God's help in overcoming these obstacles? These are huge questions that Scripture forces us to answer, instead of compartmentalising our lives to suit ourselves.

I love how Jesus handles this dispute, with His emphasis on marriage, rather than divorce. Divorce cannot be seen as an option when things are hard. Marriage is like a mirror; it reflects what we put into it. If someone has divorce readily in mind as a convenient option, divorce will be much more likely. Jesus actually uses the little phrase, *"from the beginning"*. I love how Jesus takes us back to the beginning to learn about marriage. People often say to me, *"It's a different day we live in now,"* or *"This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century,"* but we need to listen to Jesus and go back to the beginning.

It's important to see an amazing contrast between an unnamed rich man who couldn't see the wood for the trees and a named beggar, Bartimaeus. I find it quite amazing that the blind man could see what the rich man missed. The rich man refuses to put Jesus in His rightful place; blind Bartimaeus sees and senses something with spiritual insight and alertness that arises from the heart rather than status or position. Today I want the faith of this blind man who threw away his coat (a beggar's identity) because he saw something that the rich man, along with all those bustling around, missed. Such faith!

### Pray

Father, thank You today that You never change. You're the same yesterday, today and forever. Your Word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens, as Psalm 119:89 reminds me. Forgive me for watering it down or changing it to fit my issues. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

The rabbis of Jesus' day had different ideas of how He might come and splintered into different groups: Essenes, Zealots, Sadducees and the religious Pharisees. It was into this division and strife that Jesus came and in today's chapter we see how fickle the mob can be. We see Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and the people shouting, *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"* These are the very same people who, in a matter of hours, will shout, *"Crucify Him! We don't want this man to reign over us."* The Jews had thought their Messiah would come on a white charger, overthrow the Romans and bring liberty and freedom. They weren't expecting this manner of entry to the city and they certainly weren't expecting Him to chuck the money changers out on their ear.

When I read about Jesus clearing out the rogues from the temple, two words come to my mind: Oh dear. The Bible says to be angry and sin not, but if the truth be told, and if you are like me, we get angry and sin plenty. Our words are not always wholesome, and our minds can be a cesspool of unrighteous activity. In reading this passage, it strikes me that anger is an emotion that needs to be expressed at the appropriate time and from the appropriate source. It is so important to get angry at the proper things, like the injustices of the world, the trafficking of people, the abuse of children and animals. So often we can take our frustrations out on easy targets – 'kicking the cat' psychology, when the poor cat hasn't done anything wrong. Road rage for losing ten minutes in traffic is not a proper place for outbursts of anger. The trouble with righteous anger is that it is so much easier to be angry than righteous, but it is possible to be both.

Stuck in the middle of this chapter we have the fig tree story – false advertising we might call it – all foliage and no fruit, just like Israel, all show and no substance. God can't bear false impressions that don't deliver.

### Pray

Father, thank You that You love me and that Your righteous anger against my sin was poured out upon Jesus so I get to go free. Is it any wonder I love You more each day? In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Today we see two sects of religious leaders try to trap Jesus with their questions; one asks about monies and taxes, the other about resurrection. Some people ask questions because they want to know the answers; others take malicious delight in posing unanswerable questions. Jesus often asked questions to get His hearers to think deeply for themselves. Learning to look behind questions to motives, and learning to pose effective questions can help us become better evangelists and servants. As we seek to share the good news of Christ, we will meet people with a wide variety of questions and motives. Let's examine the two groups mentioned in today's passage...

Sadducees were the most blatant of the collaborating mob. They did not believe in the afterlife or in divine intervention in this life. They had a very humanist philosophy which was based on limited time on earth. They lived a more upper-class lifestyle; they knew everyone and everything, and were looked after by the ruling corrupt system.

Pharisees were very popular and the main party of the middle class. They flirted between separation and collaboration. They held to tight standards of purity (particularly on Sabbath), ritual cleanness, and times for feast days. They treated other Jews who didn't follow these practices as second class, shutting them out of local councils and boycotting their businesses. In the midst of social, cultural and political pollution, the Pharisees focused on personal cleanness, almost as if they sought to cleanse and purify an area over which they had control as compensation for what they couldn't control. For the most part, though, they were orderly and decent people. Pharisees taught the Torah, and they were good at it. Jesus presented a Torah of love that conflicted with their teaching. The Kingdom of God for the Pharisee was determined by external acts of religion; Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand and available for everyone and it was domineered by love!

### Pray

Father, today, I desire to have the heart and attitude of the widow, to be known as one who gave all. In the final day, it will not be the amount I gave, but more how I gave it and what was left. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

As we start out in today's passage, someone points out to Jesus the beauty of the temple. The beauty of the ancient temple is well known; we can read about it in many ancient texts. The Jewish historian Josephus says that the temple was covered on the outside with gold so brilliant that when the sun shone, it blinded anyone who was looking on. What wasn't overlaid with gold was fixed with blocks of marble so pure white it looked like snow. Even though this temple was a splendid piece of workmanship, it was just a thing, a substance, a place. Jesus never hid the fact that He is more important than the temple. The problem was that people actually worshipped the building; it had become an idol. Jesus is in the business of destroying our idols.

This passage outlines the end times and the signs pointing to it. One of these signs is the abomination of desolation. Some people think this points to the site where the temple once stood, which is now occupied by an Islamic mosque known as 'The Dome of the Rock'. I have often wondered about this and will give you a suggestion to ponder today ... Surely we, as Christians, are the Church and individually we are the temple of God. Could this passage actually be a reference to the believers (as temples of the Holy Spirit) becoming profaned? When the Church takes on the characteristics of the world, is not the temple of God profaned? When a Christian engages in godlessness, is not the temple of God profaned? When the Church or an individual Christian embraces error at the expense of truth, is not the temple profaned? When the Church is apostate, is not the temple profaned? The New Testament warns us repeatedly that there will be widespread apostasy in the time leading up to the end. Jesus answers some questions in this chapter about the future, both near and far off, but above all He encourages an attitude we all need to develop – waiting. When is it hard for you to wait for God? Ask Him to give you insight and courage as you watch and wait.

### Pray

Father, many people throughout the ages have tried to make precise predictions about the return of Jesus. I just know that I need to be ready and leave the timing to You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

It is almost time for the final Passover meal and only Jesus knows that in two days' time He will die as the ultimate Passover – the one Lamb towards which all other Passover meals pointed all through the ages. Over and over again He tried to warn His disciples this was coming, but they never grabbed it. Only Jesus understands what is really going on. It is into this scene that the woman comes in from behind and breaks her alabaster flask of pricey ointment over Jesus' head. The King had just ridden into Jerusalem and needed to be anointed; only Mary saw fit to do so, the disciples missed it. She could never have done this through another person. You can never send someone to worship for you because you are busy. She had to do it herself, just like our love and devotion to Jesus must be expressed personally. This woman didn't announce what she was going to do, she didn't describe it as she did it, nor did she explain it afterwards. She simply did it. While many, including the disciples, longed for fame and influence, she is the one who finds an enduring memorial. She found it not by longing for a position, but simply by loving Jesus and serving Him.

Today as I read, I find Jesus not only betrayed by one of his disciples, but also abandoned by all the others, and then ruefully denied by one of His closest friends. All of this added to the cruel and unlawful treatment by the Sanhedrin. This account reveals how intense pressures can test the quality of our discipleship. We probably all betray Christ in the things we say or do. If you've ever caught yourself yawning at a critical moment or felt spiritually asleep when the Lord was calling you to a task, you'll have little difficulty empathising with the disciples in this account. We enter now into the last few days of Jesus' earthly ministry. The mood is sombre as more and more people begin to fail and desert Him.

**Pray**

Father, I repent of the things that I'm hypocritical in. I never saw them as betrayal until right now, and from this moment on I am determined to keep my sights set squarely on You, Jesus. May serving and loving You become more and more my soul's delight. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

What a chapter this is today. As soon as it was light, the Sanhedrin met to confirm the conclusions they had arrived at during their illegal meeting the night before. They themselves had no power to carry out the death penalty; that had to be imposed by the Roman governor and carried out by the Roman authorities. Before Pilate could make a decision, he had to follow the normal procedures for a trial. Just like everything the Romans did, there was an established procedure for a criminal trial; they were public by principle. No doubt, Pilate had seen many men grovel for their lives before him. As the governor of a Roman province, he had stood in judgment of many men. Yet there was something different about Jesus that Pilate marvelled at. Such silence was weirdly unusual and the poignancy of it must have filled the room. Without a defence from the accused, the law was on the side of the accusers. Roman magistrates didn't like to find an undefended man guilty, but they often felt they had to. Of Barabbas, we know nothing other than what we read in the Gospel story. He was no petty thief, but a bandit, and there must have been a roughness about him that appealed to the crowd. Palestine was filled with insurrections in this day with the Zealots leading many of them, so men like Barabbas would have been looked on as heroes.

When Jesus died, there was the great shout, "*Finished!*" Jesus died with a cry of triumph on His lips, His task accomplished, His work completed, His victory won. The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. This was the curtain that shut off the Holy of Holies, into which no man may go. Symbolically, that tells us that the way to God was now wide open. Only the High Priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and he only once a year on the Day of Atonement, but now, the curtain was torn and the way to God was wide open for every person.

### Pray

Father, may I serve others as You serve – with compassion and tenderness, never diminishing the worth of another, choosing to extend mercy to the broken-hearted, like You have repeatedly shown it to me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

We read of Friday when Jesus died, and today we will focus on Sunday when He rose, but what about dark Saturday? Oh, that dreaded day in between. I'm sure you've been there; the land in between, the unknown, the darkness where there are more questions than answers, a place where the silence is deafening. That's where the disciples found themselves. With the hurried coming in of Sabbath, there was little time to do the necessary preparation of the body. The earliest the women could get to the tomb to properly embalm the body of Jesus was on Sunday morning. Sabbath was over at the start of Saturday evening, but it wasn't light enough until Sunday morning to do the work. The time from sundown on Friday to sunrise on Sunday must have been a dark and desperate time for the disciples. The women came to the tomb in a state of sorrow and mourning. They had come intending to anoint Jesus' dead body. They contemplated how they would solve the apparently insurmountable problem of moving the huge stone that secured the tomb. And they were no doubt perplexed when, upon arriving, they found that the stone had already been rolled away and alarmed when they encountered a young man dressed in a white robe. When they heard the news of Jesus' resurrection, they fled from the tomb, overcome with trembling, astonishment, and fear.

Most scholars agree that verse 8a is the original end of Mark's Gospel. Two alternative endings have been added. The longer ending is found in verses 9-20 and tells of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene and two disciples. It then tells about Jesus' commissioning of the eleven disciples, and His ascension. Most scholars agree that both of these endings were added later in an attempt to round out the story. Some say the ending was either lost or Mark died before finishing it.

**Pray**

Father, thank You for Jesus' birth, sinless life, atoning death, glorious resurrection, and ascension to glory. What a price, what a Saviour, what a redemption. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

