

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

1 The Gospel of Action

The theme of the Gospel of Mark is service and sacrifice. The key verse is Mark 10 verse 45. Jesus said, "For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". The Lord Jesus Christ is presented as the servant on the move. He is the ideal servant always ministering to others. We are called to do the same. We read in 1 John 2 verse 6, "Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did". We are called to be servants, and to serve God and others just as our Saviour did. We should serve the Lord with the same spirit of sacrifice and commitment.

Mark, the writer of this Gospel, lived in Jerusalem. A prayer meeting was held in his home there whilst Peter was in prison. When he was released Acts 12 verse 12 tells us, "He went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark". Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. We read in Colossians 4 verse 10, "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas". Mark was converted to Christ through the ministry of Peter. In 1 Peter 5 verse 13 Peter refers to him as, "my son Mark". Peter means his spiritual son, brought to new birth through his preaching. Peter was the source of Mark's information. Mark was not one of the twelve, so he was not present when most of what is recorded in the Gospel took place. Peter was, and he passed this material on accurately and faithfully.

Mark was a member of Paul's evangelistic team. We read in Acts 12 verse 25, "When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark". Later Saul's name was changed to Paul. Mark became a disappointment to Paul because he had returned home to Jerusalem before finishing the job Paul gave him to do. Barnabas wanted to take Mark on their next missionary trip. This caused a dispute between Paul and Barnabas. We read in Acts 15 verses 37 and 38, "Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it was wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work". A few years later Mark had clearly learned his lesson and had acted more responsibly. Paul says this about him in 2 Timothy 4 verse 11, "Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry" It is good to know that when we make a mistake in serving the Lord it is not the end of our service. We must learn the lesson from it, pick up the pieces, and continue to serve. God still has a plan for us and a work for us to do. Experience is a good teacher. We can become better servants of the Lord when we learn from it, especially when we learn from our mistakes.

Mark wrote his Gospel between 55-65AD. He wrote with the Gentiles in mind. There is no reference to genealogy, fulfilled prophecy, the Law, or Jewish customs. These are all of no significance to the Gentiles. Mark is a Gospel of action. The emphasis is on deeds more than words. There are no long teaching sections and conversations. There are very few parables. The perfect humanity of Christ is prominent. We see his compassion when the leper came to him. We read in Mark 1 verse 41, "Filled with compassion Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man". He sighed when he saw distress and sorrow. We see his reaction when a deaf man was brought to him. We read in Mark 7 verse 34, "He looked up to heaven and with a deep said to him, be opened". Our challenge is to follow in the footsteps of the ideal servant of the Lord. There is real blessing when we do. Jesus said in chapter 8 verse 35, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the Gospel will save it". Our lives must be lost in his service. This means dying to self and seeking the will of God and doing it. Jesus said in chapter 8 verse 34, "If anyone would come, after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".

The first main section of Mark's Gospel takes us from chapter 1 verse 1 to chapter 2 verse 22. Here we see the principles of service and servanthood as exemplified in both John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ. We develop a servant attitude by following these

principles. Often the role of the servant is viewed negatively. The servant is considered to be a low calling not worthy of much regard. In scripture servanthood is a high calling. The call to serve Christ is the highest calling for any person to receive. The Lord of creation became a servant. Charles Spurgeon said, "The meanest work for Jesus is a grander thing than the dignity of an emperor"

The opening eight verses introduce us to John the Baptist and his ministry. We read in verse 4, "And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins". His ministry was to prepare the way for Christ. Mark quotes from Isaiah 40 verse 3 and applies it to John. We read, "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way, a voice of one crying in the wilderness" John shows us the message and character of the one who serves the Lord. Serving God means sharing that message with everyone, including your family and friends, that God calls them to repent, and turn from their sins, so that they can enjoy God's forgiveness. That is the message the Lord expects us to pass on as we serve Him in this fallen world. We fail in our service if we do not..

John's lifestyle is important too. His clothing and food were basic. We read in verse 6, "John wore clothing made of Camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey." I am not suggesting we should have the same diet of food, and dress as he did. It does show us, though, that John was separated from the world. He was content with basic things. We see his humility too. We read in verse 7, "After me will come one more powerful than the thongs of whose sandals am not worthy to stoop down and untie". The servant of God will walk humbly before Him. Separation from the world and humility of heart, will make you effective when you share the Gospel message with those around you. May the Lord help you to develop those qualities so that you will be effective in your service for Him.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark 2 The Perfect Servant

We are studying the Gospel of Mark. We have looked at something of the background of the book, and the role of John the Baptist in the plan of God. From chapter 1 verse 9 to chapter 2 verse 22 we are introduced to the servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ. In verses 9 to 12 we read about the baptism and temptations of Christ.

Jesus' baptism involved three things. First, He identified himself with sinners. Jesus was sinless and did not need to be baptised. When He submitted himself to baptism He showed that He had come to take the sinners place and to be our Saviour. In observing the baptism of repentance He showed the nature of his mission. Jesus defines this for us in Mark 10 verse 45. We read, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many,"

Second, we read in verse 10 that as he was coming out of the water, "He saw heaven being torn open and the spirit descending on him like a dove." At this point Jesus was anointed into his role as Prophet, Priest, and King.

Third, the Father spoke from heaven. Verse 11 says, "And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'". This was the Father's authentication, and commendation of Jesus as his Son. Only Jesus Christ is sent by God to be the Saviour.

Jesus was led into the wilderness. Verse 13 says, "And He was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan". The servant of God will face temptation. Do not be surprised when it comes. Like our Saviour, we must resist it strongly.

In verses 14 to 20 Jesus calls his disciples. We read in verse 17, "'Come follow me' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'" To be effective fishers of men we must follow the method Jesus used. We read in verses 14 and 15, "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news. 'The time has come', he said, 'the Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" We fish men out of the water of sin and darkness by telling them to turn from their sin, and to believe the Gospel. Our method is the message.

The Lord Jesus Christ shows his power. He meets a man possessed of an evil spirit. We read in verse 25, "'Be quiet!', said Jesus sternly, 'come out of him!' The evil spirit, came out of him with a shriek". Christ has power over the demons. As servants of Christ you and I

have the spiritual resources in Him to resist Satan, and overthrow his attacks. We read in 1Peter 5 verse 9, "Resist him (the devil), standing firm in the faith".

Jesus heals Simon Peters mother in law. Verse 30 tells us she was, "in bed with a fever". She met with Jesus, and verse 31 says, "The fever left her and she began to wait on Him". It is this that motivates us to serve the Lord. It will be a delight to give our lives in his service because we have experienced his life-changing power.

The servant of God is always reaching out to those around him with concern. Jesus' ministry continued. Verse 33 tells us that while he was in Simon's house, "The whole town gathered at the door" We read in verses 33 and 34, "Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons". As servants of God we will be keen to help as many people as we can in the name of Christ. We will turn no one away.

Jesus meets a man with leprosy. The leper approaches him. We read his request in verse 40, "If you are willing, you can make me clean". Jesus said, "I am willing" Verse 42 tell us, "Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured" Jesus is always willing to

bless those who come to him. Leprosy is a picture of sin. It is a disease that spreads and ends in death. Sin is the same. It pollutes the heart and mind and spreads to every area of our lives. Romans 6 verse 23 says, "For the wages of sin is death". You might think that you are so sinful that Jesus will never accept you. He is willing to make you clean. You must come to Him, acknowledge your need of Him, and He will cleanse you from your sin. You can have a clean start today. The Lord says in chapter 2 verse 17, "it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

In chapter 2 verses 1 to 12 we have the story of the healing of the paralysed man. His four friends carried him on his bed to the house where Jesus was. Because they could not get in, they climbed onto the roof and made a hole in it. Then they lowered their friend down to Jesus. Jesus said to him in verse 5, "Son, your sins are forgiven". Jesus emphasised something of great importance. Forgiveness of sin is more important than physical healing. The man was brought to be healed, but Jesus forgives his sin. Be sure that as God's servant you do not turn it the other way round and place the emphasis on what is least important. Our task is to bring men to see their sin and seek God's forgiveness. We see the true character of Christ here. He is God because only God has the right to forgive sins. To show He is God and that this man's sins are forgiven He says in verse 10, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins ' he said to the paralytic, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home'". The man did so and went home healed and forgiven. The miracles of Jesus confirm that he was who he claimed to be. He is God incarnate. So He exercises the divine prerogative to forgive sin.

In verses 13 to 17 Jesus calls Levi. We read in verse 14, "Follow me' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him". He went to Levi's home and had dinner with him. Levi was a tax collector. They were viewed as sinful people by the Pharisees. The servant of God will associate with all types in society to win them for the Lord. We will reach out to the outcast, the destitute, the despised, and the needy. Is that your ministry today? Who are you reaching for the Lord?

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3 The Servant Opposed

We continue in our studies of Marks Gospel. The next main section takes us from Chapter 2 verse 18 to Chapter 3 verse 35. Christ came to make all things new. He illustrates this in the picture of the wine skins. We read in verse 22, "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins". Christ didn't come to patch up Judaism. He didn't come to maintain the status quo either. He came to give new life and make all things new in Him. There would not be a mix of the old Jewish faith and the Church. Rather he would send the Holy Spirit to fill his body the Church. New wine in new wineskins.

The response Jesus got as He taught this message will be the type of response we will get too. As we proclaim this new life in Christ we will meet with opposition. In this section the Lord shows us how to handle opposition.

As Christ worked as the servant of the Lord He was opposed by the Pharisees. Jesus and his disciples walked through a cornfield. Chapter 2 verse 23 says, "They began to pick some ears of corn". The Pharisees accused them of doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath. This law was one of the many rules the Pharisees had introduced. It is recorded in the Talmud a book of Jewish writings. Jesus turns them to Scripture. He uses the opposition to teach God's word. There is an answer in Scripture that can satisfy any unbiased enquirer. You can use opposition to bring light and understanding on God's Word.

The same thing happens in Chapter 3 verses 1 to 6. A man with a shrivelled hand was in the synagogue. We read in verse 2, "Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath" Jesus called the man to Him. He challenges his opponents. We read in verse 4, "Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent." Deal with opposition by showing what is right and what pleases God. We say what is right and leave the outcome to God. When you show what is the right thing to do, people are silenced because their conscience supports what you say.

In verse six Christ is opposed by the Herodians. We read, "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus". The Herodians were a Jewish political party who sympathised with the rules and laws introduced from Rome. The Pharisees and Herodians were enemies. Here we see them uniting in their opposition to Jesus Christ. The world falls out amongst itself most of the time. But when it comes to their hatred of the Gospel, and believers, the world will come together to persecute God's people.

What did Jesus do to handle this? We read in verse 7, "Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake". Sometimes it is right to withdraw. Jesus said in Matthew 7 verse 6, "Do not give dogs what is sacred: do not throw your pearls to pigs". This is not running away, it is just not wasting your time with someone who really does not want to know, and who is out simply to argue with you. Go on to new opportunities. We read in 2 Timothy 2 verse 24, "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel".

Mark 3 verses 13 to 19 records the appointing of the twelve disciples. We read in verse 13, "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called those he wanted, and they came to him". Even Jesus needed the help of others in the work. Serving God is teamwork. We serve God individually where He has placed us and we serve Him together as his church. Verse 14 tells us why He called them. We read, "That they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach". The secret of effective service is to be with Jesus.

We need to spend time with Him in prayer for strength to live for Him in times of opposition. We must deepen our relationship with Him. This takes time and dedication.

We see what is included in our service - it is to "preach". We are not all called to be "preachers", but we are all called to share our faith with those we come in contact with. The closer we are to him in fellowship the more effective we will be in our service. E. M. Bounds said, "To be little with God is to be little for God".

Christ was opposed by his family. We read in verses 20,21, "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that He and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of Him, for they said, "he is out of his mind." The most difficult form of opposition is when it comes from loved ones. They may have meant well. They wanted to take Jesus into their care. They thought He was neglecting Himself, and was a little fanatical in his approach. They failed to see the glory of his character and the urgency of his mission. Family members may think the same about you. They cannot understand why you are so involved with the things of God. They may think that you have taken it too far. Simply going to church every Sunday is viewed by some as taking it too far!

How do we handle this? Especially if it involves rejection by the family. The answer is found at the end of the chapter. In verse 32 Jesus is told, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you". We read Jesus' response in verse 34, "Then He looked at those seated in a circle around Him and said, 'Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother'". When family and friends oppose you, remember that you belong to a bigger and better family. You belong to the family of God. If your family rejects you because you are a believer, you have your brothers and sisters in the family of God to turn to.

Christ was opposed by the Scribes. The scribes belonged to the Pharisees. They were the writers who wrote down the Pharisaic laws. They said in verse 22, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of Demons he is driving out demons". They were guilty of the unpardonable sin which is to attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil. Christ said in verse 29, "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. He is guilty of an eternal sin".

Some forms of opposition have to be addressed sharply and sternly. We must not away of exposing sin and its consequences as we engage with the unsaved. pray the Lord will give you boldness and courage as you serve him in times of opposition.

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4 Spiritual Lessons

Today we are studying Mark chapter 4. We do not find many parables in the Gospel of Mark. This chapter contains the four that Mark included. Each parable is designed to encourage and challenge God's servants. The Greek word for parable is a word which means "putting things side by side", Jesus put a spiritual truth alongside a story. The story illustrates and teaches that truth.

The first parable is the well known parable of the sower. In verse 3 Jesus said, "Listen! a Farmer went out to sow his seed". It is important that we do listen to what Jesus has to say. The word here means "pay close attention". The best thing we can ever do is to take notice of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sower is the servant of God. The job of the sower is to spread the message of the good news of the Gospel. You are called to sow God's word wherever He has placed you.

We will meet with various reactions. In verse 4 Jesus taught, "Some (seed) fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up". There will be those who listen to what we say, but their minds are quickly distracted by Satan and other ideas influence their thinking. We read in verse 5, "Some fell on rocky places". This soil had no root and when the sun came up it withered away. There are those who are swayed to accept Jesus Christ because of a purely emotional reaction. Then when trouble comes they fall away. Verse 7 says, "Other seed fell among thorns." The hearer receives what we say about Christ but they are so taken up with this world's cares and stresses that the spiritual life is choked. They make no spiritual progress. Verse 8 tells us, "Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, and grew and produced a crop." This is the person who listens well and regularly applies the word of God to his life. He grows into a strong and healthy believer.

Which group are you in today? Is your life shaped more by the ideas of this world? Are you ready to give up the Christian life because things are tough? Maybe you are not developing spiritually because you are burdened with care and worry about this passing life. Jesus said in verse 9, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." There is a right way to hear. You must listen to Jesus with attentiveness. You must be prepared to live out what He says with your eyes set on Him. Be single-minded in his work.

The next parable is the lamp on a stand. Jesus said in verse 21, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? ". The servant of God is unashamed to shine out his Gospel light in a dark world. God has given us all we need to be saved and to know his will. Verse 22 says, "For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out in the open". God has not left us in the dark about the way of salvation. Everything needful for the soul is in the open in Christ and the Gospel. Augustine said, "The new is in the old concealed. The old is in the new revealed."

Verses 24 and 25 tell us, "Consider carefully what you hear ... with the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him". Either we use it or lose it! This passage teaches an important principle of spiritual growth. The more we give out to Christ and others in his service the more we receive from Him. The amount of attention you give to the Lord, and the greater your commitment to Him, will determine the level of your spiritual advancement. If you become negligent, then even what you have will be taken. You will lose it because you didn't preserve it and value it. Are you shining out? Is your testimony for Christ radiant?

The next parable is the parable of the growing seed. Jesus said in verses 26 and 27, "This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows". You may sometimes wonder as you serve the Lord, 'is God using my witness and work for him?' Be assured

God is at work in the world, and He is blessing the labours of you his servants. There is something quiet and mysterious about God's workings. Verse 29 says, "All by itself the soil produces corn-first the stalk, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." Although his work is unseen yet we see the results of it. Then the great harvest comes. Verse 29 says, "He puts the sickle to it". God's work is finished and his purposes fulfilled. Be encouraged! God knows your work. He is using it for his glory even when it appears there are no immediate visible results.

In verses 30 to 34 we have the parable of the mustard seed.

Again, it pictures the Kingdom of God. Jesus said in verses 31 and 32, "It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade". God's kingdom began in a small way. Who could have imagined what the birth of a small baby would bring; then, twelve men. Only one hundred and twenty disciples on the day of Pentecost. Yet out of this grew the world-wide Church of Christ with millions of adherents. Multitudes have found, salvation, security, peace and hope as they "perch in its shade"! Are you resting and sheltering in Christ? Do you belong to his Kingdom?

Christ taught many truths in the form of parables. Verse 34 says, "He did not say anything to them without using a parable". But how do we come to understand parables? We read in verse 34, "When He was alone with his disciples, He explained everything." We grow in understanding by spending time alone with Christ in Bible reading and prayer.

Verses 35 to 41 record the miraculous calming of the storm by Christ. The disciples were in a boat during a bad storm. We read in verse 38, "Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion." The disciples thought the Lord was not concerned about them. They said in verse 38, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown? ". Jesus got up, and verse 39 says, "He rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'" The storm stopped.

We might wonder why this event is recorded at the end of chapter of parables. The reason is this: as we shine for Christ, serve Him and sow the seed we will also face storms. They will be storms of opposition, persecution, trials and problems. In it all Christ will speak peace to our hearts assuring us of his presence and help. Jesus said in Matthew 28 verse 20, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Continue to serve the Lord in the strength of that promise. He will never leave you.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

5 The Authorities of the Servant

We are studying now Chapters 5 and 6 of the Gospel of Mark, and the first thirteen verses of chapter 7.

Chapter 5 shows Christ's power over demons, disease and death. These three things are the three main problems man faces. Christ shows his authority over them all. In verses 1 to 20 of chapter 5 we read about the encounter between Jesus and the demon-possessed man. Jesus and the disciples had gone over to the land of the Gerasenes in a boat. Verse 2 says, "When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet Him." Jesus asked his name. The man replied, "My name is Legion. for we are many." A Roman legion had six thousand soldiers. This man was possessed by just as many demons. Jesus commands them to go into some nearby pigs. We read in verse 13, "...the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs". The striking thing about this incident is the condition of the man after he had met with Jesus. Verse 15 says he was, "...sitting there, dressed and in his right mind". All the hosts of hell cannot stand against Christ. He is able to deliver anyone from Satan's dominion. Whenever someone meets with the risen Saviour he is never the same again.

Verses 21 to 43 record Jesus' meeting with Jairus, and the sick woman. In verse 23 Jairus approaches Jesus about his daughter. He says, "Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live". On his way to Jairus' home verses 25 and 27 tell us, "A woman was there who had bleeding for three years. She came up behind him in the crowd and touched his coat". She was healed of her infirmity. Jesus said to her in verse 34, "Daughter your faith has healed you".

When Jesus arrived at Jairus' home, He was told that the girl had died. Verses 38 and 39 tell us that, "When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler. He went in and said to them. 'The child is not dead but asleep'". And in verses 41 and 42 we read, "Jesus said to her, 'Little girl I say to you get up.' Immediately the girl stood up and walked around." Jesus brought joy and delight to that home, and earlier to the woman who stretched out and touched him.

Jairus came openly to Christ. The woman came secretly. The way you come to Jesus is not important. How you come is. You must come in faith believing he is able and willing to meet your need. If Jesus powerfully dealt with death, demons, and disease, then there is no difficulty He cannot help you with.

Chapter six of Mark's Gospel begins with Jesus as the centre of discussion and debate. We read in verse 2, "Where did this man get these things?. .What is this wisdom that has been given to him?". The people who said these things were the ones who knew Him best. They were from his home town. They said in verse 3, "Isn't this Mary's son?". Familiarity breeds contempt. It is possible to take people for granted simply because we are used to seeing them. The worse sin is to take Jesus for granted and not appreciate who He really is. Be careful of over familiarity with truths about Christ, and failing to value them because they are so well known to you.

In verses 6 to 12 Jesus commissions his twelve disciples. Verse 7 says, "Calling the twelve to Him, He sent them out two by two". As servants of God we are not to sit about idle. We must be about the master's business. Christ has commissioned us. He said in Mark 16 verse 15, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

There is a cost in following Christ. The highest cost can be laying down our lives for Him. This happened to John the Baptist. John had spoken out against the adultery of Herod. John had been put in prison. We read in verse 27 that Herod, "Sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head". Being outspoken for the Lord against the sinful trends in

society will not make you many friends in the world. The world will respond with hatred. John wanted to please God no matter what the outcome. What an example he is to us all!

Verses 30 to 44 records the well known miracle of the feeding of the five thousand Christ shows himself as the creator and provider as he takes the five loaves and two fish and divides them amongst the crowd. The disciples were called to pass the bread around. We read in verses 41,42, "Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up into heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied". There is a lovely truth here. Our Saviour is the bread of life. He is the one who satisfies the needs of men's hearts. Yet, we are involved with Him in bringing this bread to men and women. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3 verse 9 "For we are God's fellow workers." That is our privilege. Keep close to the Lord and work with Him every day.

The sixth chapter ends like the fourth. Again in this chapter the theme has been that our service for the Lord should be active, it may even cost our lives, and we are working with God as a team. Just as Christ faced hostility in his home town so we will face it as we serve the Lord.

Verses 45 to 54 records Jesus walking on the water to his disciples in the storm. Jesus says in verse 50, "Take courage! it is I. Don't be afraid". The truth is clear, Jesus will come to us, and he will be with us, as we face the storms of the worlds hatred. We need not fear.

Chapter seven verses 1 to 13 deals with the character of the Pharisees. They placed their traditional rules above God's word. They were more concerned with outward ceremonial washings than with true heart religion. Jesus said in verse 8, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." Are you a Pharisee? Is there one in your church? How can you tell? The Pharisee is known for his critical spirit. The Pharisee in Jesus' day criticised the disciples for failing to wash their hands ceremonially before eating! Do you spend your time criticising rather than praying for your fellow believers? The Pharisee holds on to tradition rather than being guided by God's word. Sometimes changes need to be made in our churches. The Pharisee opposes it not because he has a biblical reason, but because we have always done it that way! Continue to serve the Lord with all your heart, and be guided by his word in all your decisions.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

6 Meeting Other's Need

We continue in our studies of the Gospel of Mark. The theme of Mark's Gospel is service and sacrifice. We see what is involved in serving the Lord. Today we look at chapter 7 verse 14 to chapter 8 verse 26. Here we see that the servant of the Lord helps people with physical and spiritual needs.

In verses 14 to 23 Jesus shows the source of spiritual need. Someone once said, "the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart". The many problems that we face in society arise from deep within the hearts of men and women. In verse 18 Jesus said, "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from outside can make him unclean". In verses 20 and 21 we read, "What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery. "Before the sin in society can change, men's hearts need to change.

A little boy was given a jigsaw by his father. "That will keep him quiet for a while", thought his dad. The jigsaw was a picture of the world. Half an hour later the boy came to his dad, "Finished it!" he said. His father was amazed. "How did you manage to finish the jigsaw so quickly?", he asked. "Easy", said his son, "There was a picture of a man on the other side I knew that if I got the man right it would make the world right!!". It is still true, today. Get the hearts of men right and the world will be a better place. God says in Ezekiel 11 verse 19, "I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." You need a new heart if you are going to change for the better. Ask God for one!

In verses 24 to 30 Jesus meets the Syrophenician woman. Her daughter was demon possessed. We read in verse 26, "She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter". Jesus replied in verse 27, "it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs". The children here is a reference to the Jews, the chosen people of God and those whom Christ had come to seek. The Jews saw Gentiles as dogs. Jesus was not being unkind in what He said but his response was designed to see how determined she was, and to show that He was interested in the Gentiles too. She replied in verse 28, "But even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs". The Lord healed her daughter. He did so for two reasons: her persistence of faith, and her humility. You come to Christ in the same way and you will experience his blessing.

Verses 31 to 37 record the meeting between Jesus and the deaf and dumb man. He was brought to Jesus by some friends. We read in verses 33 and 34. "After He took him aside away from the crowds, Jesus put his fingers in the man's ears. Then He spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him...'be opened'. At this the man's ears were opened and his tongue was loosened." Christ's approach to healing was completely different to modern day healing preachers. Many say today that in order to get peoples attention for the Gospel you first need to perform miracles and wonders. Christ healed privately here. Jesus did not use healing to get peoples attention. The deaf and dumb man went away from Christ perfectly healed.

Chapter 8 begins with another miraculous event. In verses 1 to 10 we have the feeding of the four thousand. The pattern of events is the same as the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 6. On this occasion, Christ fed them with a seven loaves and a few small fish. We read in verse 8, "The people ate and were satisfied". The servant of the Lord is concerned to meet the physical needs of men and women. Is your church involved in some form of practical ministry in your community? Do you personally spend time with people who are hurting and suffering?

Christ was often wearied with the short-sightedness of those around him. We read in verse 11, "The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test Him they asked for a sign." Jesus refused to perform for them. He said in verse 12, "Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth no sign will be given it" Jesus had already performed great signs. Yet the Pharisees refused to believe in Him. Contrary to a popular view held by some today, signs and wonders do not always lead people to faith, nor are they necessary to give vital credence to the Gospel. Christ must be believed for who He is. His claims must be accepted in faith.

The disciples suffered with spiritual rnyopia too! Jesus warned them in verse 15, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees." The disciples thought He had said this because they had no bread. Jesus replied in verse 17, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand?". The "Yeast of the Pharisees" is unbelief. Only a small amount of yeast is needed in bread, but it spreads. So, lack of faith can spread and become bigger, and this will hinder us in our service for the Lord. It hinders spiritual growth, spiritual insight, and our general commitment to then Lord Jesus Christ.

In verses 22 to 26 we read about the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. We read in verse 22, "And some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him." Jesus took the man outside of the village. He spat on the man's eyes. Verse 24 "He looked up and said, 'I see people; they look like trees walking around'". Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes once more. Verse 25 says, "Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."

There are some spiritual lessons here. Jesus alone can give sight to the spiritually blind. Have you seen something of the wonder of this salvation in Christ? If not, ask Jesus to give you sight and understanding. We do not see everything clearly at once. Spiritual sight is progressive. Spiritual insight becomes clearer with time. The secret to spiritual perception is to experience the continual touch of Christ in our lives. This involves coming aside with Him, yielding to his guidance and leading every day.

Are you making progress in your service for the Lord? I pray that you are.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

7 The Cost of Discipleship

We are studying Mark chapter 8 verse 27 through to chapter 9 verse 50. This section deals with the challenge of being the servant of the Lord. We see the cost of discipleship and the glory of the Saviour which makes the cost worthwhile.

As servants of the Lord we must be clear about the identity of Jesus Christ. In verse 27 Jesus asked, "Who do people say that I am? ". There was a mixture of opinions. Verse 28 says, "They replied 'some say your John the Baptist, others say Elijah, still others, one of the Prophets'". Jesus then asked a critical question. We read in verse 29, "Who do you say that am? ". Peter answered, "You are the Christ". The word "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah". It means "the Anointed one". In the Old Testament God's appointed servants were anointed with oil. This anointing of the Prophet Priest or King signified that these were the only ones sent and approved by the Lord. So the Lord sent Jesus and there is no other who can bring us to God. Christ is the spokesman of the Lord. He is the servant of God. This is the God we serve. We must be right in our thinking about the uniqueness of the person of Jesus Christ. There is no other like Him. As servants of God we follow the servant of the Lord in every way.

In verse 31 Jesus predicts what will happen to Him, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders ... and that He must be killed and after three days rise again". Of course He had the sacrifice of the cross in view. He then challenges us. We read in verse 34, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me". Christ's cross speaks of suffering and death. As servants of the Lord we will endure suffering in this world as we shine for Him. To be effective we must die to self and live the cross-life. A life of full and glad surrender to the Lord. This demands the sacrifice of our own comfort and ease. Jesus calls it denying of self. We say "no" to our own self-centredness, and "yes" to the claims of Christ on our lives.

Chapter 9 begins with the account of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Verses 3 and 4 say, "His clothes became dazzling white and there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus". This dazzling whiteness was the radiant glory of the eternal Son of God. Here we see Him as the Lord of Glory. We are reminded here that we do not serve a mere human being or religious leader. Christ is God incarnate. Peter, along with James and John, witnessed this personally. This experience stayed with him for the rest of his life, and the implication of it. He said in 2 Peter 1 verse 16, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came from the Majestic glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him am well pleased'. We ourselves heard this voice from heaven when we were with him in the mount". God the creator bore testimony to the special nature of his Son Jesus Christ. This event assures us that our faith in Christ is not misplaced. He is who He claimed to be. We can serve Him with confidence.

A key element of effective service is prayer. In verses 14 to 29 we read about the healing of a boy with an evil spirit. The boy's father explains in verse 17, "Teacher, we brought my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. We asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not". Jesus rebukes the spirit and it leaves the boy. The disciples asked in verse 28, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Jesus replied in verse 29, "This kind can come out only by prayer".

Samuel Chadwick said, "The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, he mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray". That is a lesson we must learn early if we are going to win in our battle with the world, the flesh, and the

devil. It is a victory built on the victory of the cross. Jesus said in verse 31, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and after three days He will rise". The battle is won in the risen Christ. S. D. Gordon said, "Prayer is striking the winning blow ... service is gathering up the results".

Verses 30 to 41 deal with the principles of servanthood. The disciples argued who was the greatest among them. Jesus said in verse 35, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be very last, and the servant of all". The servant serves everyone. The attitude of the servant is humility. Humility is more important than status to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the true servant. He said in Matthew 11 verse 29, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart". There can be so much pride in churches today. People wanting recognition and position and to be admired. We need more humble servants. Believers serving joyfully because it is done for the Lord.

The last part of the ninth chapter, verses 38 to 50, deals with evangelism. In verse 38 John said to Jesus, "Teacher. we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us". Jesus said in verse 39, "Do not stop him for whoever is not against us is for us." As believers we may differ on some areas of doctrine that are not foundational to Christian faith. We are able to unite in seeking to win men and women to Jesus Christ. We all believe in the same Gospel. We all have the same concern for the lost. Our message is to remind people that they must deal with their sin to avoid hell. Jesus said in verse 47, "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell". Let us work together to make this message known in our sinful world.

May the Lord bless you as you serve him with humility, self-denial, prayer, and united evangelism.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

8 The Servant's Values

This time we are studying Mark's Gospel chapter 10. The theme of the Gospel is Jesus Christ the servant of the Lord. We see in Jesus what the servant of the Lord is, and how he lives. In chapter 10 we see the values God's servant holds.

Verses 1 to 12 teach us the value God's servant places on marriage. The Pharisees ask Jesus a question about marriage and divorce. They say in verse 2, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The Lord replies in verse 3, "... what did Moses command you?" Their reply is in verse 4: "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away". Their question began from the wrong starting point. Jesus reminds them of the purpose of marriage. He says in verses 5 to 7, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. but at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate". It involves a man and woman, committing themselves to one another forever until death.

Clearly marriage is for life. Divorce is not part of the divine ideal. It is only permitted as a last resort when every attempt at reconciliation has been made. It is only permissible on the grounds of adultery by one of the partners. The lesson is clear: the servant of God should hold a high view of marriage. We who serve God must maintain God's standards.

The servant of God will support family life. We read in verse 13, "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them." It is the responsibility of parents to bring their children to Jesus. You can do this by praying for them; bringing them - not sending them - to church. Be an example to them. Jesus loves families and he has a special place for children. We read in verse 13, "The disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them'".

Children are an illustration of salvation. Jesus said in verse 15, "Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it". A child is dependent. To be saved you must depend solely on Christ and his finished work on the cross. A child is trusting and looks to his parents for all his needs. To be saved you must trust Jesus Christ and look to Him to have your sins forgiven. God's forgiveness is your greatest need. A child believes what his parents tell him. So you must believe the claims of Christ that he is the Saviour of sinners and ask Him to save you.

The servant of God has a proper view of discipleship. In verses 17 to 31 we read of the rich young ruler. He had a question for the Lord Jesus. He asks in verse 17, "Good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus challenges him about keeping the law, but the young man tells him that he's done this from his youth. Jesus says to him in verse 21 "One thing you lack go, sell everything you have and give to the poor". The young man went away sorrowful. He would not let go of his material possessions.

Materialism and the desire for riches are a big stumblingblock to committed discipleship. Jesus said in verse 25, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". Why is that? Well, riches give a false sense of security. Everything appears all right. But it is a deception. Riches can be lost overnight. Then you are left with just your soul. God said to another foolish man in Luke 12 verse 20, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you." The secret of effective service for God is to have a loose grip on material things. Peter said in Mark 10 verse 28, "We have left all to follow you". Yet, God's servants do not lose out. Jesus promised in verses 29 and 30, "No-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or

mother or father or children or fields for me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age".

The work of Christ on the cross should be central to the thinking of God's servants. We must have a sense of its glory. The disciples were afraid as Jesus led them on their journey to Jerusalem. Jesus knew this. We read in verse 32, "Again he took the twelve disciples aside and told them what was going to happen to Him. The Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests, they will condemn him to death." As God's servants we emphasise the necessity of Christ's death in our witness for Him. It should be a source of joy and bring a sense of victory as we serve Him.

In verses 35 to 45 the disciples learn a lesson in servanthood. James and John approach Jesus with a request. We read in verse 37, "Let us sit one on your right and the other on your left in your glory". They missed the way of true greatness. True greatness is found in suffering for Christ and serving one another in love.

The servant of God must not be self-seeking, but God glorifying in his life, Christ asked them in verse 38, "Can you drink the cup drink, or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" The cup he spoke about is the cup of suffering, and the baptism is the baptism of suffering. Jesus identifies greatness for us in verse 43. He says, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." We are to follow His example. He said in verse 45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." Why do you want to serve God? I trust it is not for selfish gain. I trust you serve him so that your life is a blessing to others.

Chapter 10 closes with the account of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Christ the servant of the Lord shows once again his concern for the needy. We read in verse 47 that Bartimaeus cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!". Jesus will always respond positively to our cry for help whoever we are, no matter what our situation is. After he had been brought to Jesus, the Saviour said, in verse 52, "Go ... your faith has healed you". He went away seeing. Faith always brings sight, salvation and fellowship.

May the Lord enable us to be his servants showing his values in a sinful world.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

9 Characteristics of The Servant

We are studying chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel of Mark. These chapters identify for us the things that should characterise the servants of God. The first thing is obedience. Jesus said to his disciples in verse 2, "Go into the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?', tell him, 'the Lord needs it'". The disciples obeyed immediately. Verse 4 says, "They went". Are you as quick to obey the Lord when he asks you to do something? As the disciples unloosed the Colt verses 5 and 6 tell us, "Some people standing there asked, 'What are you doing untying that colt?' They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go". They obeyed willingly. There was no argument. Jesus wanted the colt. That was good enough. A colt was an expensive item. Yet the owners were happy to give it to Jesus.

How willing are we to give to Christ anything he asks for, no matter what the cost might be? We read in 2 Corinthians 9 verse 7, "God loves a cheerful giver." Christ says of the widow woman in chapter 12 verse 43, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others" She gave two small coppers. The amount was not important. The sacrificial love for God that lay behind it pleased the Lord.

The servant of God should always be careful to be right in God's sight. Jesus went into the Temple in Jerusalem. Verse 11 says, "He looked around at everything". He examined the Temple. He saw the people preparing to buy and sell in the Temple area. The next day Jesus went to Jerusalem again. We read in verse 15, "Jesus entered the Temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there". He said in verse 17, "Is it not written, My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers ".What does Jesus see when he examines your life? Is sin there that needs to be forgiven and forsaken? We read in 1 Corinthians 6 verses 19 and 20, "Do you not know that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price." Therefore, honour God with your body".

The servant of God will bear fruit. The Lord looks for fruit. He sought it from Israel. The fig tree represented Israel. We read in verse 13, "Seeing a fig tree ... he found ... nothing but leaves'. Israel, for the most part, did not believe that Christ was who he claimed to be. There was no real vital faith. In verse 14 Jesus said to the fig tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again". The next morning Jesus and his disciples travelled along the same road. Verse 20 says, "They saw the fig tree withered from the roots." Israel had withered because of unbelief. They had become barren and unfruitful. Jesus said to his disciples in verse 22, "Have faith in God". Living faith in Christ will show itself in fruitfulness. This will especially be seen in an effective prayer life. Jesus said in verse 24, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

The servant of God will be forgiving. We read in verse 25, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins". We must reflect God's grace and mercy in our dealings with one another. God's servants should not hold grudges. Could it be that your not seeing wonderful answers to prayer, because you have not put things right between you and your brother or sister in Christ?

The servant of God will recognise the authority of Jesus Christ. The chief priests were always seeking to undermine Jesus. They challenged his authority. We read in verses 27 and 28, "The chief priests the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?', they asked. 'And who gave you authority to do this?'". Jesus turned the tables and asked them about the origin of John the Baptists

authority. They would not answer because they saw the predicament they were in. Verse 31 says, "If we say from heaven, he will ask then why didn't you believe him? But if we say from men ... they feared the people, for everyone held that John was a prophet. So they answered 'we don't know'". Jesus' reply in verse 33 is this, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things". We challenge the Lord's authority when we fail to yield to his claims, and his Lordship over our lives.

We see this illustrated again in the first 12 verses of chapter 12. This passage deals with the parable of the Tenants. Here we see Israel's constant opposition to the servants God. Many were sent to speak to them. We read of their behaviour in verse 5, "Some of them they beat, others they killed". Then he sent his much loved son and they killed him. Christ's authority was rejected by Israel. We read in verse 9, "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others". The Gospel went to the Gentiles who received it with joy. Let us be sure we submit to Christ as our Lord every day.

In verses 13 to 17 Christ answers a question about paying taxes to Caesar. He identifies the responsibility we have to God and to rulers. Jesus said in verse 17, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's". We must be honourable citizens. We should submit to government providing they do not contradict God's law.

The servant of God will know the Scriptures. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Jesus said to them in verse 24, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?". We will make sure we are guided by God's word as we seek to serve Him. In verse 28 Jesus asked a teacher of the law, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Would you be able to give a biblical answer to that question? Or when Jesus referred to Psalm 110 verse 1, where we read, "The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." He asked in verse 37, "David himself calls him 'Lord' How then can he be his son?" Do you know enough about Scripture truth to answer that? Let us be students of the word of God mastering its teachings and doctrine.

May all these characteristics be found in you every day.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark 10 The Servant and the Future

We continue in our studies in the Gospel of Mark. This time we study Mark chapter 13. There is a great interest in the future today. There are horoscopes, and psychic phone lines. The Lord Jesus Christ has told us all we need to know, and all He wants us to know, about the future.

Chapter 13 deals with the end times. In this chapter Jesus uses the principle of "double-fulfilment". This means that the things prophesied by Jesus have both an immediate fulfilment and a future fulfilment. The disciples are leaving the Temple with Jesus and they make a comment. Verse 1 says, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" The Lord Jesus gives a surprising reply. We read in verse 2, "Do you see these great buildings? ..Not one stone here will be left on another, every one will be thrown down".

The disciples were inquisitive. In verse 4 they say, "Tell us when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all to be fulfilled?" Jesus answers this question in the following verses, but at the same time he uses the answer as a picture of the signs we can expect to see around us just prior to his second coming. For example, Jesus says in verses 14 and 15, "When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong, let the reader understand then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains". This literally happened in AD 70 when Titus, the Roman General, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. Those who remembered the words of Jesus fled and were saved. But it goes beyond that. Jesus says in verse 26, "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory". This did not happen in AD 70! Jesus is giving us a clue as to what we may expect to see before He comes.

The events of AD 70 are an illustration of events that will characterise the end times. What are these signs? There are spiritual signs. We read in verses 5 and 6, "Watch out that no-one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he', and will deceive many". Many will appear just before the return of Christ saying they are Jesus or some form of Messianic deliverer. We have seen people like this in recent times. Think of David Koresh and the tragic incident in Waco, Texas, to name but one.

There are international signs. Verse 8 says, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom". In AD 70 it was the Romans coming against Jerusalem. In the last days the world will be a boiling pot of warfare and international tension. There will be natural signs. Verse 8 goes on to say, "There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines". There will be a noticeable increase in these things. There will be family signs. Verse 12 says, "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child". There will be a lack of love and integrity in the last days. There will be religious signs. We read in verse 14, "When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong". This refers to the Temple and its desecration by Titus. But it applies to the desecration of anything that is holy.

Prior to the coming of the Lord the things of God will increasingly be ridiculed and blasphemed. We see this around us today in the media. The Christian message is treated with contempt. The message of the cross is trodden under foot. Someone might say, "What's new? Throughout history there have always been wars, famines, and ungodliness!" The key words in answer to this are found at the end of verse 8, Jesus said, "These are the beginnings of birth pains". When a pregnant woman is going to give birth to a child the birth pains begin. At first they are infrequent. Then they increase until they are very regular. It is true that this world has always been plagued with wars and distress of all sorts. Wars in themselves are not the sign. The sign is the frequency

of wars, and of all the other calamities Jesus listed. It is the increasing regularity of them that indicates that Jesus' coming is very near! Are you ready for his return?

In verses 24 and 25 the Lord Jesus says, "In those days, following the distress, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." Is this a literal event that will happen in the sky? Probably not. The Old Testament helps us to interpret this sort of phenomenon carefully. In Isaiah chapter 13 verse 10 the same expression is used. Its meaning is explained in verse 9 where we read, "The day of the Lord is coming, a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land desolate and destroy sinners with it." Clearly this has to do with the judgement of God on wayward Israel. Verse 17 clarifies when this will happen. We read, "See I will stir up against them the Medes." So this apocalyptic wording about the stars falling from heaven is a vivid picture of the severity of God's judgement that will come upon Israel through the Medes. It speaks of a great calamity of the most awful kind. Such will be the day of the coming of the Lord upon all those who have rejected him. Verse 19 says, "Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning".

The generation which sees these things in the way described by Jesus will not pass away until everything is fulfilled. Jesus uses the illustration of the fig tree. He says in verses 28 and 29, "As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door". The leaves and fruit are seen in good number all together. So when you see many wars and calamities clustered together be sure the end is near!

What must your response be to all this? If you are not a believer then turn from your sin and ask Christ to save you from the wrath to come. If you are a child of God then be prayerful and watchful. Be ready, prepared, and be busy in the work of God. Jesus says in verses 35 and 36, "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch!".

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

11 The Attitude of the Servant

This time we are studying chapter 14 of Mark's Gospel. The servant of the Lord will be characterised by certain attitudes. It will be clear when someone loves the Lord and wants to serve him, and when someone is opposed to Christ.

This chapter shows us the attitude of both. Certain attitudes will be apparent in those who love Christ. The events of this chapter revolve around the Passover and the betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 1 and 2 show us that those who have no love for the Lord Jesus will seek to eliminate him. We read, "Now the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to arrest Jesus and kill him". These were the religious leaders of the nation. How may we identify a wolf in sheep's clothing? Well, although they may have position in the church they seek to undermine Christ as Saviour and Lord. They attack the Scriptures. They try to explain away the miracles.

It is entirely different for those who love the Lord. They show their love by pouring themselves out in sacrificial devotion to him. We see this in verses 3 to 9. Verse 3 says, "While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of expensive ointment. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head". Others who were there criticised her and said that the perfume could have been sold for a year's wage. The woman gave all she had to Jesus. The perfume, which represented a year's wage, represents the giving of her life, totally to the Lord. Why would we want to give our moments and our days to Him? Because we love Him, and we want to show Him that we do.

Verses 10 and 11 record for us the betrayal of Christ by Judas. We read, "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money". Here we see one of the Lord's intimate companions aligning himself with God's enemies. Those who have no love for Christ will betray him. Beware of the Judas spirit arising in your heart. We betray Christ when we do not live as Christians amongst family, friends, workmates and neighbours; when we remain silent as the name of Christ is ridiculed; when we live by double standards and the world sees no difference in us.

We see in verses 12 to 16 that obedience and sacrifice are the qualities found in someone who loves the Saviour. Jesus is about to inaugurate the Lord's Supper. We read in verse 13, "So he sent two of his disciples telling them 'Go into the city'". The disciples did as they were asked straight away. That is real obedience. Jesus told them that they would meet a man there with a jar of water and they were to follow him. He said in verse 14, "Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'the Teacher asks where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'. The house owner happily gave Jesus the room. Those who love the Lord will be prepared to give what the Lord asks of them.

Verses 22 to 25 records the institution of the Lord's Supper. We read in verses 22 and 23, "Jesus took bread ... saying, 'Take eat, this is my body; afterwards He took the cup ... and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood poured out for many', He said". The servant of God will be happy and keen to observe the Lord's Supper.

Peter was a great servant of the Lord but he was a little too self-confident. He said in verse 29, "Even if all fall away, I will not". Jesus replied in verse 30, "Before the cock crows twice you yourself will disown me three times". In the Christian battle we must rely on the Lord and his strength. Peter did not say to the Lord, "with your help", or, "by your grace". We read in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 12, "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall".

The devoted servant of God will be alert and watchful in prayer. Verses 32 to 42 record Jesus' praying in agony in the garden of Gethsemane. He left his disciples and went further into the garden to pray privately. When he returned his disciples were asleep. Jesus said in verse 38, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation". Do you easily give into temptation? Maybe it is because your prayer life is lethargic? Someone once said, "seven prayerless days make one weak!".

Verses 43 to 51 contain the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. We read in verses 43 and 44, "Judas ... appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs ... now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man' "Judas was a hypocrite. He showed a hypocritical affection. The true servant of the Lord will be genuine in his devotion to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin. Verses 53 to 72 record his arrest, and Peter's denial. We read in verse 55, "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death, but they did not find any". Peter was not far away and had the opportunity to stand up for the Lord Jesus, but he did not. In Peter we see the steps of the backslider. Verse 54 says, "Peter followed Him at a distance ". The backslider does not walk as close with the Lord as he once did. Is that true of you? We read, "He sat with the guards". The servant of God, who has grown cold, is happy with the company of worldly people. Do you find yourself more in the company of worldly friends than God's people? Peter also, "Warmed himself at their fire". The backslider is taken up with the comforts of the world.

All this was while the Saviour was being mocked. The Lord Jesus is mocked and rejected openly today. Could it be that you fail to impact your friends for Christ because you're out of touch with the Lord? Is your relationship with Him better than it was a year ago, or is it worse? Are you preoccupied with worldly comforts and aims? Peter verbally denied Christ as the Lord predicted he would. Verses 71 and 72 say, "(Peter) swore to them, 'I don't know the man you are talking about'. Immediately the cock crowed a second time".

We have looked at the positive marks that should be seen in the servant of the Lord. We have seen the weaknesses we should avoid. I trust your service for Christ will be keen and commendable.

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark 12 The Servant Saviour

We are studying chapter 15 of the Gospel of Mark and looking at Christ as the servant of the Lord. We are to follow his example and serve God in the way Christ did. Jesus is the "Servant-Saviour". We can follow Him as the servant but we cannot follow Him as Saviour. This is where He is unique. Here is the heart of the Gospel. Christ is the Saviour of sinners. We should always remember what it cost the Lord to bring us salvation. This chapter vividly brings it to mind.

Chapter 15 deals with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. We see here what the Lord endured for us as the lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. In verses 1 to 15 we see that Christ faced the Roman authorities. He was brought before Pontius Pilate. Pilate had to make a decision about what he was going to do with Jesus. That is an issue everyone has to face. What have you done with Jesus? Have you accepted his lordship over your life, or have you rejected Him?

In order for the chief priests to be successful in their attempt to get rid of Jesus by the Romans, they needed to show that he was a threat to Caesar. They knew that then Pilate would have to take action. Pilate asked Jesus in verse 2, "Are you the King of the Jews? Roman law would not allow the Jews to execute Jesus. His enemies needed to accuse Him of a capital crime. If it could be proved that Jesus was asserting himself as king it would be seen as a threat to the rule of the Roman Emperor. We have an interesting insight into the politician and the people. Politicians go with popular opinion. They go with the crowd. They pacify the crowd to win support. Politicians will do what is expedient regardless of what God requires in his word. Christ is rejected on the whims of the majority. Pilate knew that Christ was innocent so he makes use of a custom hoping that Jesus would be set free.

We read in verses 6-11 "Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man named Barabbas was in prison ... who had committed murder. 'Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?' asked Pilate, but the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead" Pilate asked in verse 12, "What shall I do then with the one you call king of the Jews?", The crowd replied in verse 13, "Crucify him!"

In the exchange of Jesus and Barabbas we have a lovely picture of what the cross was all about. The name Barabbas means 'son of father'. So, we are sons of father Adam. He was our first parent. He sinned and we were born with a sinful nature. A nature in rebellion against God. We're sons of father Satan. Barabbas was a murderer Jesus said to his enemies in John 8verse 44, "You belong to your father the devil and you want to carry out your fathers desire".

At the cross Jesus took our place. He changed places with us, just as He changed places with Barabbas. He took our punishment on the cross so that all who will believe may be saved. He delivers the believer from sin, death, Satan, and the grave. Jesus loves you. He proved it by dying as your substitute on the cross. He wants to set you free! Ask Him to forgive you your sin and become your Saviour today.

In verses 16 to 47 Christ faced the Roman cross. The suffering of Jesus on the cross was three-fold. Christ experienced mental suffering. He suffered the taunts of the crowd. We read in verse 29, "Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So, you who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself". Christ experienced physical suffering. He endured the pain of scourging. A historical writer described the scourge like this "The Roman scourge was usually made of leather thongs loaded at intervals with bone or metal." In 1 Peter 2 verse 24 the words "By whose stripes we are healed", not only

indicate that Christ fulfilled prophecy, they also give us a vivid picture of how our Lord's back looked after the scourging. The word refers to a bloody stream. Our Lord's back was so lacerated by the scourge that it was open raw quivering flesh filled with blood, not a series of stripes or cuts, but a mass of torn flesh. He also suffered the physical pain of the cross itself. History testifies that the worst ever form of execution was Roman crucifixion. They nailed his hands and feet to the rugged wood. They placed a crown of thorns on his head.

Verses 23 and 24 say, "Then they offered Him wine mixed with myrrh but he did not take it. And they crucified Him". They lifted up the cross and dropped it into the socket wrenching the body. In crucifixion death came as the body weight slowly pulled down onto the rib cage. This eventually caused suffocation. He did not accept the myrrh because it was an anaesthetic. It was necessary that he bore every bit of the pain for your sin. He drank all the bitter cup, along with the dregs, for you.

Christ experienced the suffering of separation from the Father. We read in verse 34, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?', which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Why had the Father forsaken his beloved Son? We read in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us." At that critical hour Christ was the sin-bearing Lamb of God. All your sins were laid on him. W. H. Monk says in his hymn, "All my sin of every kind, all the thoughts that stain the mind, all the evil designed, laid on him".

What was the purpose for this? We read in verses 37 and 38, "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom". Now the believer may enter into the very presence of God. Christ purchased our reconciliation to God by his blood. We read in Hebrews 10 verse 19, "Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened up for us through the curtain, that is, his body, let us draw near ". He was buried in a tomb. In doing so he sanctified the grave for believers. Christ changed a dark hole into a bright open door. The cross should draw from our hearts a deep love for the Saviour who died for us. Isaac Watts puts it well, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all".

Serving the Saviour - Studies in the Gospel of Mark

13 The Conquering Servant

We now arrive at chapter 16 in our studies of the Gospel of Mark. This is the last chapter of the book. This chapter deals with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It reassures us that Jesus is risen. It encourages us to go and serve Him in his risen power. The key verse is verse 15. We read, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation". Christ died, was buried, and rose again, to provide us with this Gospel.

Chapter 16 is good news about a conquering Saviour. He conquered sin, death, Satan and the grave. He offers forgiveness, reconciliation and salvation to all who believe. Following the crucifixion and burial of the Lord, the women went to the tomb. Verse 2 records this and their conversation. We read, "Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb, and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'" When they arrived they saw that the stone had already been rolled away, they went in, and verse 5 tells us, "As they entered the tomb they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed". This was an angel. Verse 6 says that he said to them, "Don't be alarmed ... you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him".

Some have argued against the resurrection saying that the women went to the wrong tomb and the angel was directing them to another place. But the women were observant and careful, and made sure they knew where the tomb was. Chapter 15 verse 47 says, that after the burial of Christ, "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where He was laid". We are impressed by the faithfulness of these women. They stayed with Christ at the cross. Others remained at a distance. Here they are the first at the tomb. The women stuck with Him! It is always nice, and very easy to identify with Christ on the hillside and on the still lake when all is calm. It takes courage to stand with Him at the cross that place of suffering. Be careful that you are not a fair weather Christian. Stand for Christ at all times in all situations. When they arrived at the tomb they heard that wonderful message from the angel, "He is risen!" This is the message our dying world needs to hear.

Only the Gospel declares a positive message of hope and victory, and a bright future. See how gracious the Lord is with Peter. We read in verse 7, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He is going ahead of you into Galilee". Why did the Angel single Peter out by name? Well, Peter probably felt bad about denying Christ earlier. He felt ashamed. The Lord is gracious to us when we have failed Him. Christ does not abandon us when we sin. He tells us to confess our sins and return to Him. Are you backslidden? Have you failed the Lord today? The Lord gently invites you to return to Him. He will forgive you and use you afresh in his service. He calls you by your name, He says, "return to me."

We read in verse 9, "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons". This illustrates that the Gospel is for the needy and downcast. Christ did not show himself to royalty at the palace. He came to a poor downtrodden woman whom he had changed by his grace. Mary had been under the control of Satan. Now she was free. This is what Christ came to do. Jesus said in Luke 4 verses 18 and 19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" If you are a prisoner to sin and sinful habits; if you are blind and cannot see the wonder of Christ and what he has done for you; if you are oppressed and burdened by the weight of the guilt of your sin, then the Gospel is for you. You need Christ Jesus to be your Saviour today.

The Lord appeared to his disciples. Verse 14 says, "Later Jesus appeared to the eleven as they were eating". Some argue against the fact of the resurrection by saying that Jesus did not really die on the cross, He simply swooned. The cold air of the tomb revived Him and He left the tomb. Surely, it is impossible for someone who has just endured hours on a cross, bleeding and suffering, to get up and move a two ton stone from off the mouth of the tomb! Even sceptics admit that the "swoon theory", as it is called, is ridiculous.

One sceptic, David Strauss, said, "It is impossible that one who had just come forth from the grave half dead, who crept about weak and ill, who stood in need of medical treatment, bandaging, strengthening and tender care, and who at last succumbed to suffering, could ever have given his disciples the impression that He was conqueror over death and the grave and that He was the prince of life". No, something stirred the hearts of his disciples to go out with the message of the cross. It was that they had seen the conquering Saviour. His very appearance convinced them that they had met with the mighty conqueror over death and the grave, and the sin that takes us there.

Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and tell the world what he had done. He calls sinners to believe. We read in verse 16, "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned". Salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone. Baptism is not necessary for you to be saved. That is why baptism is not mentioned at the end of verse 16. Baptism is a necessary act of obedience after you have been saved. Has there ever been a time in your life when you believed on Christ and trusted Him for the salvation of your soul? If not, do it now. Be sorry for and turn away from your sin, and ask the Lord for his forgiveness. Believer, have you obeyed the command to be baptised?

Verse 19 says, "The Lord Jesus ... was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God". So the Gospel of Mark ends on a note of glory. Our Saviour rules and reigns on high. He lives for evermore! He will be with you until the end of this age. He will strengthen you and bless you as you spend your days serving the Saviour.