



7 Home Group study guides in the Gospel of Mark  
following in the footsteps of our servant-king Jesus

# LIFE: IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU (MOSTLY)

Recently it was reported that at least 250 people across the world have died in the past six years taking 'selfies.' These people weren't trying to harm themselves. They just wanted to capture a nice photo - usually in a dangerous or precarious position. While there's nothing wrong with taking a nice picture of yourself, selfies are a picture (pardon the pun) of the human condition. We are born into a world that often teaches us that we are *the star* in a long-running selfie called life. It's drummed into us that we are, quite naturally, 'number one.' It's all about us. **Welcome to the 'me world' - the kingdom of the sovereign self.**



In a way, this is completely understandable. As creatures made in the image of God living in his beautiful creation, we know deep down that we have intrinsic worth and purpose. The universe around us is filled with beauty and awe-inspiring complexity, and God calls us to play a key part in that universe. So in a way, as God's stewards in this wonderful world, we *are* stars! We are important in God's eyes.

But the Bible teaches that this sense of importance has gotten out of hand. **We have forgotten that our value and purpose are derived from, and dependent on, our loving Creator.** We are his creation, and we are made for him. We are made to put him first, and then to serve in his creation in a way that promotes human flourishing. But instead, our hearts have turned away from God. We have fallen into what the Bible calls "sin" — the self-focus that puts our self-serving desires above serving God and others.

Why do we do it? Because it feels good. For a while. But living with a self-serving heart leads to bad things happening. It's dangerous, like taking a selfie on a cliff-face. We fall into all sorts of bad habits and self-focused ways of thinking and living. It results in brokenness and disconnection. We are spiritually disconnected from God, and relationally disconnected from others. It doesn't mean we never do anything good at all, but it does mean **the general pattern of the world is one where we no longer live aligned with our created purpose.** That's why we are so often restless and discontented.

God's solution to our human heart condition is summarised in the good news we call 'the gospel'. The gospel is the good news about what God has done to get us back on track. It's his message to a wandering world to return to him, and learn what it means to serve and live under the loving rule of his Son, Jesus. That's why we're going to work through Mark's Gospel account in term 4. Mark is a good news story which showcases the ultimate servant, King Jesus.

**Our goal in this series is to learn from the example of Jesus what it looks like to serve God first in a self-focused world, and how Jesus' ultimate act of service radically realigns our priorities so that we live in a way that glorifies God, benefits others, and strengthens the church.**

May God bless the time you share together, gathered around his word. May his Spirit fill your hearts with a growing desire to serve God and others in a way that's genuine and reflects Christ to others.

*Soli Deo gloria.*

# THE BIG PICTURE OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Mark's account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is not a random collection of sayings and stories. It reflects very careful composition. While there are many ways to demonstrate this, the Gospel of Mark can be divided into two main sections connected by one key verse:

## MARK 1:1 - 8:28 "WHO IS JESUS?"

This section introduces us to Jesus and shows his ministry of astounding miracles and teaching which is centred on the kingdom of God. The main purpose of this first half of the book is to answer the question: "Who is this?" (4:41)

## THE TURNING POINT = MARK 8:29

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do **you** say I am?"  
Peter answered, "**You are the Messiah.**"

## MARK 8:30 - 16:8 "WHAT HAS JESUS COME TO DO?"

The second half of Mark answers the question, "What has God's Messiah come to do?" This section shows Jesus predicting and preparing for his death. His resurrection ends Mark's account on a note of excitement and fearful anticipation.

## HOW TO USE THESE STUDIES

There are seven studies in this booklet. Each study examines one fairly short snapshot of the ministry of Jesus. The readings (from the New International Version) are printed on the left, while the page opposite has some reflections and questions. **Here's the best way to tackle each study:**

1. Pray before you start the study. Ask that God would open your eyes to see Jesus clearly.
2. Have a person (or persons) read the printed passage carefully out loud. As everyone follows along, "Mark up" the reading using the symbols indicated at the top of the reading.
3. Begin working down the page opposite the reading, and begin with discussing the things you noticed as you read it. There might be things that we don't understand, and don't seem to have a clear answer for. And that's OK! It's worth simply discussing what we do and don't understand, and why.
4. Work through the other questions listed there.
5. Your Home Group leader will do their best to keep the group on track so that your meeting doesn't run unnecessarily late. Try to balance time for discussion with an awareness of time constraints.
6. Close in prayer, especially asking God that any insights that have been gained might translate into deeper faith and loyalty to Christ.

# STUDY ONE KINGDOM, COME

## MARK 1:1-15

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
! exclamation marks for what stands out, and 😊 smiley faces for anything that encourages you

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way”—

3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

**The good news** story of Jesus' ministry begins at a time of great expectation and frustration: people in 'Israel' are ruled over by the Romans! They are in the so-called "Promised Land," but their situation seems anything but promising. Reading the Old Testament shows us why. While God chose and saved his special people (the Jewish people, descended from Abraham), they were often stubborn and rebellious. Because they regularly disobeyed and disregarded their loving Creator, he judged and disciplined them by allowing foreign rulers to exercise power over them. And yet, through the Old Testament prophets, **God promised he would do something history-shaping and life-changing:** he would cleanse his people of their sin and send a King who would establish his rule once and for all in the world. Mark's gospel starts with expectation in the air that God's about to fulfil those promises!

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (5-10 minutes).
2. What do you think John meant when he told people to "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him"? Do we need to do this today? If so, how?
3. What do verses 9-11 tell us about who Jesus is and what he's come to do?
4. How might Jewish and Roman readers have responded to the idea that God's 'kingdom' is on the doorstep now that Jesus has arrived? How do modern people react to this idea?

In the Old Testament exodus event, God judged and tested his people as they passed through the desert on their way to the promised land. But even when they arrived in the land, they showed that they were still in the spiritual "wilderness." Over and over again they disobeyed and disregarded God. God then promised through his prophets that he would make a new start for his people — that the Holy Spirit would be poured out in the desert (Isa. 32:14-17; 44:1-3; 63:11-14).

Here in Mark chapter 1, it's clear that God is keeping these promises. God's kingdom is on the doorstep because his promised King (the 'Messiah') has arrived! Jesus is going to be what Israel, and all humanity should have been — the obedient "son" who always pleases God. Jesus takes the story of our brokenness and sin upon himself, and just as Isaiah also prophesied (Isa. 52:13-53:11), he will bring forgiveness and newness in relationship with God. **In a world obsessed with me, here is another way. Another obsession. One we were made for.**

5. "Repent and believe the good news!" (v.15). What would the impact be on our lives if we daily turned from self-determination and believed the good news of God's rule through Jesus?

# STUDY TWO KINGDOM COMPASSION

## MARK 2:1-17

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
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1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

**The King is beginning to show his power.** The story of Jesus' ministry in Mark's Gospel begins with a sequence of dramatic exorcisms, healings, and kingly interactions. Most in Israel are expecting that the arrival of God's Messiah will be amazing. They're right. But since most people don't know who Jesus really is yet, he's going to have to show them. And what he shows them *is amazing*, and also a bit surprising — because this powerful king doesn't hang around with the most popular and powerful in Israel.

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (5-10 minutes).
2. In verse 12 the crowd exclaims "we have never seen anything like this!" What do you think is most amazing about the incident with the paralytic?
3. The Pharisees call Jesus' judgement into question when he eats at Levi's house. Why is that? And why do Christians often struggle with developing good relational ties with those outside the church?
4. What is Jesus' main goal for hanging around those who are hurting or spiritually lost?

In a 'me world' we usually only associate with people we are close to, or *have to be around* (such as at work or a social function). And we usually gravitate to people who are easy for us to be around. But Jesus takes us deeper than that. He has compassion for people who interrupt him and take up his time. He especially has compassion on those who have no real hope. Over and over again, he spends time with moral and spiritual outsiders. He does it all because **the Kingdom rule he's bringing in is for people just like that — broken sinners who need love, compassion, and hope**. If we follow a compassionate king who cared for the hurting and lost, we should be looking for ways to make "kingdom connections" with people.

5. What are some of the ways we can build relational bridges with non-Christians (and also with Christians who are on the fringes of church life)?

# STUDY THREE KINGDOM FAITH

## MARK 5:21-42

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
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21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23 He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24 So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. 25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." 29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. 30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" 31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " 32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" 36 Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." 40 But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.

**We all have something we especially put our trust in.** We all have our “go-to” person or thing that makes us feel safe or valued. And it was the same in Jesus’ day. In a spiritually lost land, people needed something or someone to look to, which is why Jesus attracted so much attention. Through his miracles and parables Jesus is astounding many, exciting some, and angering others. In the midst of all this we see examples of people who deeply believe and trust that Jesus is more than just another Rabbi. Their fledgling trust in him is something we can learn from.

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (5-10 minutes).
2. In Jewish culture, an unwell bleeding woman was considered “unclean.” What is the significance of Jesus healing her? What does this mean for us, if ever we feel “unclean” or unlovable?
3. The healing of the woman on the way to Jairus’ house seems like an interruption to Jesus’ mission. In what way are life’s interruptions not strictly interruptions?
4. In an emotional situation, Jesus says “Don’t be afraid; just believe” (v.36). How do our fears and disappointments impact our ability to trust Jesus in the everyday situations of our own lives?

This passage is for us. Following Jesus will be filled with a weird mix of ups and downs. But we should see the example of Jesus who doesn’t allow life’s interruptions to stop his mission. The life Jesus calls us to is one long series of joys, struggles, and apparent interruptions. But we shouldn’t take our eyes off what matters most. And we shouldn’t be *afraid* as we try to follow Jesus, but keep on believing. In a world where life is often hard (especially when you’re a Christian), **we need to cultivate and pray for a child-like faith in the loving and powerful Christ.** In a world where we put our trust in so many things, this kind of faith is the faith we are called to in God’s kingdom.

5. How can we see our faith in Jesus grow more? What will be the result if it does grow?

# STUDY FOUR CROSS ROADS

## MARK 8:27-9:1

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
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27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

**What you really think about Jesus will affect what you do about him.** If he's just another religious teacher, you can pick and choose what you like about his teaching. If he's a myth, then you can ignore him altogether. If he's just a "nice guy up in the sky," you probably don't have to take him too seriously. So the million dollar question is 'who really is Jesus?' The answer to that question is one of the most important things you can think about. Here at this important juncture of Mark's Gospel we gain clarity on who Jesus is, and we begin to learn what that means for everyday life.

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (5-10 minutes).
2. What does verse 28 say about the reputation that Jesus was gaining? To what extent are these views accurate?
2. Peter confesses that Jesus is *the Messiah*. That means he's a king with all the authority of God. What's exciting, and what's challenging, about the fact that Jesus is THE king?
3. Referring to himself as 'the Son of Man,' Jesus teaches that it's his kingly mission to suffer and die. Why didn't Peter like this idea?
4. In verses 34-37, Jesus teaches that he requires people to 'deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' What does this mean? Try to give some real-world examples of what that looks like.

This important part of Mark's gospel shows that some people now understand (in part, at least) who Jesus is. He's God's long-promised king who's come to establish God's kingdom rule. However, Peter rejects the idea that Jesus' messianic mission should include suffering and death. It just doesn't make sense to him (at least not yet).

**Jesus' self-giving suffering and death don't just make us right with God: they are the paradigm for understanding the whole Christian life!** Life in God's kingdom is a life of giving up self-rule in order to be fully devoted to God and his king. Following Jesus isn't about ease and comfort, but a daily journey of giving oneself over to God and his purposes.

5. Everyday we have to decide what our fundamental top priority in life is. Based on today's passage, what reasons do we have to prioritise "God's concerns" (v.33) for our lives?

# STUDY FIVE FAITHFUL TO THE END

## MARK 14:27-50

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
! exclamation marks for what stands out, and 😊 smiley faces for anything that encourages you

27 “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ 28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” 29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” 30 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.” 31 But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. 41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled.

**When the going gets tough, the tough get going.** That's a popular saying that rings true. It reminds us that real strength and courage isn't shown when everything's rosy, but when life is hard. It's the same with our faith in Jesus. It's easy to say we're on board with him, but when times are tough our loyalty is tested. **In those times of testing, what can sustain us?** What will keep us going? That's something we're going to think about.

In our reading, Jesus has just shared his final meal with his closest followers. Jesus is literally hours away from the cross – and he knows it. Before he gets to the cross, he and his disciples will all be tested. As we think about how they handle things we'll consider what it looks like to be faithful followers of Jesus.

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (5-10 minutes).
2. The passage begins with the disciples pledging their loyalty to Jesus. By the end of the passage, they've deserted Jesus. Why is consistent loyalty to Jesus so hard sometimes?
3. Jesus is about to be betrayed and deserted. Why is he praying so much? Is there a correspondence between prayer and faithfulness to God? Discuss.
4. Jesus talks about a cup he is about to drink (v.36). What is in the cup (cf. Isa. 51:17; 53:5-6)? And how do you feel about that?

Having shared in a profound meal together, Jesus drops a bombshell – his so-called “disciples” will desert him soon. While they deny it, Jesus is about to be tested, arrested and tried. A brutal death on a Roman cross is the next part of his mission. There he will deliberately give himself as sacrifice to bear God's wrath against our sin.

While loyalty to Christ is hard, we can be assured his death covers all the times that we've been unfaithful! And even when the going gets tough, **we can look to his sacrificial self-giving as a model to follow.** In prayerful dependence on God, we can grow stronger in our faith to the point that we can face the most difficult of times with courage and godly conviction.

5. Jesus allows room for God's overarching will. He says, 'yet not what I will, but what you will.' In what ways is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane an example for every Christian?

\* If you have time, finish by reading Hebrews 12:1-3 and then close in prayer.

# STUDY SIX THE SERVANT KING

## MARK 15:1-39

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
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1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. 2 “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” Jesus replied.

3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, “Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” 5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

9 “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

12 “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

13 “Crucify him!” they shouted. 14 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. [28] 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, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!” 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). 35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (10-20 minutes).
2. There are three key “power players” in this account: **Pilate, the crowd, and the religious leaders.** What power do they have, and what’s driving them to use it? How does that compare with what Jesus is showing here?
3. How does this story of an apparently powerless Jesus give us power to live every day?
4. In what ways should this story shape our personal walk with Christ, our church, and our everyday relationships?

# STUDY SEVEN KINGDOM COME!

## MARK 15:40-16:8

**READ THE TEXT BELOW AND MARK IT UP USING:** ? question marks for what you don't understand  
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40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

16:1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

**They say you can't keep a good man down.** That's certainly true in today's reading. The Jewish and Roman authorities thought they'd put an end to this Jesus movement. Jesus, the trouble-making miracle worker, was finally done away with. So much for the "Messiah"! The story of Jesus' crucifixion ended with darkness coming over the land, and Jesus' limp body in a tomb. But, by the time the sun comes up on Sunday morning, something history-changing has happened! He is risen! Satan, sin, and death have met their match!

1. Begin by sharing and discussing anything you marked up on the reading (5-10 minutes).
2. Mark gives quite a few details about the burial of Jesus. What are they, and why does he mention all this?
3. What is the significance of verse 7?
4. The earliest and most reliable manuscript copies of Mark's Gospel don't go beyond verse 8. Why would Mark end his Gospel with the women followers of Jesus leaving the empty tomb surprised and worried?

Mark's Gospel is an invitation to marvel at what God has shown us in Jesus. What truth! What love! What sacrifice! And here, at the end of this good news story, we stand with the women who are stunned by the news that Jesus is alive. If Jesus is really alive, we must view the world very differently!

In this world that is so broken, broken people like us should read this story often, and be humbled by it. It should motivate us to follow Jesus faithfully. Jesus really is the Messiah, the Son of God. He really is the 'Son of Man' who will appear in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (8:38). With Mark and the women followers of Jesus here in chapter 16, **we stand in awe of a God who has defeated everything that stands between us and him.**

Now as we follow Jesus together, eternity is wide open before us. The God who calls us to repent and believe this good news, is the God who owns the future. Knowing that can motivate us to live as loving servants of the risen King. Jesus' resurrection is a new beginning. In light of the resurrection we step out into this tired and broken world with a message that Jesus really is "the Messiah, the son of God" (1:1).

5. There are people in this world know that Jesus is the crucified and risen King. And there are people who don't know that. Should there be a difference in how these two groups live their lives? Discuss.

# NOTES

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## STUDY ONE

Mark 1:2 is a quote from Malachi 3:1. Mark 1:3 is a quote from Isaiah 40:3. Mark pulls both quotes together and **cites only Isaiah**, which was a more common and well-known source of prophetic teaching in Mark's day. This is a common literary practice of the day.

We usually take '**Son of God**' to refer to Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. But this is not always how it is used in the Bible. In places like 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2, the 'Son of God' is a title used to refer to the one who is the King of Israel, the Son of David, the Messiah. We call Jesus 'God the Son' because he is the second person of the Trinity, who has been at the Father's side in all eternity. However, when the New Testament uses the phrase 'Son of God', it is often emphasizing Jesus' messiahship rather than his divinity.

The account of the '**baptism in the Holy Spirit**' is neither referring to Christian baptismal practices, nor to what some refer to as 'the second blessing'. Both mistakes try to read later church phenomena back into the Gospel. Instead, we must understand John's reference to baptism in the light of the situation in Jesus' time. Notice that John compares a symbol (what he does) with the reality (what the stronger one will do). 'Baptism' simply means a washing, which is a natural symbol for cleansing or purification. 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit' is the cleansing or purifying that God will do.

## STUDY TWO

Why does Jesus call himself the '**Son of Man**'? The 'Son of Man' is the way Jesus refers to himself. It could be that this is just a roundabout way of speaking, much as one can use 'one' in referring to oneself. It is hardly a coincidence, however, that the 'Son of Man' was also the name given to a man in Daniel 7 who came to God (v. 13) and was given the kingdom of God (v. 14; cf. Daniel 2:44). He therefore had authority over all people.

## STUDY FOUR

**Messiah** comes from the Hebrew word, *mashiach*, meaning "the anointed one," or "the chosen one." In Old Testament times, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed by oil when they were set apart for these positions of responsibility. The anointing was a sign that God had chosen them and consecrated them for the work he had given them to do. 'Christ' is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term, Messiah.

## STUDY SIX

Who are the various groups of religious people here? **Sanhedrin**: Council composed of 70 members and the ruling High Priest who presided over its deliberations. **The High Priest** at this time was Joseph, surnamed Caiaphas. His ability as a diplomat and administrator is suggested by his tenure of office over a period of 19 years in an era when the average term of office was only 4 years. **Elders**: The most influential lay families in Jerusalem, primarily wealthy landowners. **Chief Priests and elders**: The Chief Priests are in charge of the Temple. Together with the elders, they constituted the old ruling class in Jerusalem, with Sadducean leanings - they held most of the power in the Sanhedrin. **Scribes**: Consisted primarily of lawyers drawn from the middle classes who tended to be Pharisaic in their convictions.

A conviction required the unanimous evidence of at least 2 witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Numbers 35:30). In Jewish judicial procedure, witnesses functioned as the prosecution - they gave their evidence individually and verbally in the presence of the judges and accused. If their respective depositions differed from one another even in trivial details, they were inadmissible as evidence.

## STUDY SEVEN

**The sun** had risen: see Malachi 4:2: "Sun of righteousness risen with healing in his wings". **Anointing**: bodies were normally anointed before burial, but because Jesus was buried in a hurry (before sundown on the sabbath), this had been postponed. **The stone**: Typically, several strong men would be needed to roll such a stone back. A *round* tomb stone such as this could only be afforded by the wealthy, as in the case of Joseph of Arimathea. The stone represents a barrier between the living and the dead. It was rolled back, indicating that the irreversibility of death had been rolled back by Jesus' resurrection.

# NOTES

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