

The Divine Drama

Studies in the Gospel of Mark





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A FIVE-TON TRUCK CARLYSLE FROM

The mission Land Rover careened across the road and flipped three times. Carlysle Walton lost consciousness with the first roll. When he awoke he knew at once that his legs were badly hurt.

"Dear God, I need your help," he prayed. Lie still and conserve your energy, came the unspoken reply. Trusting that help would come soon, he closed his eyes and waited.

"This one is dead too," a voice boomed from the blackness. Quickly Carlysle forced his eyes open.

"I'm all right," he murmured and noticed how labored his breathing had become. He wanted to ask who had died but could not form the words. Soon Bryan Stephens, the driver of the ill-fated vehicle, bent over the 20-year-old lad.

"Carlylsle, Philip is dead," he choked.

The evening of June 20, 1982, had begun with special promise. Philip, a Guyana-born East Indian and a close friend of Carlysle had opened a new evangelistic campaign in the predominantly Hindu community of Enterprise, Guyana. Instead of the expected attendance of one hundred, more than six hundred people came out.

"The Lord has many honest souls. Enterprise," Philip exulted on the home. And Carlysle thanked God blessing his friend's faithful effort.

But just then a speeding truck loomed out of the blackness. The driver of the Land Rover slowed to a stop, as far off the road as possible without rolling into the ditch that paralleled the roadway. But the rear of the truck had slammed it off the road out of control.

"Why this, Lord; just when Philip was making a breakthrough with Hindus?" Carlysle wrestled with the question many times, determined with God's help not to let this accident hinder his own usefulness.

When Carlysle's injuries failed to respond to the available medicine at the mission hospital, he flew to join his parents in the United States. But soon as his fever was brought under control and healing began, he returned to Guyana and his duties as assistant treasurer of the conference and spiritual leader to a congregation of 150 that he had helped raise.

Carlylsle is now 23 and completed the last year of his college education at Columbia Union College. People

EVEN A FIVE-TON TRUCK COULDN'T STOP HIM FROM HIS MISSION; WHAT POSSIBLY



COULDN'T KEEP HIS MISSION!

ask why he, a business major, would minor in religion instead of computer science.

"It's a matter of priorities," he says. "It's job satisfaction above money." Carlysle's religion courses are preventing him from serving his Lord as a lay evangelist when he returns to his homeland. With his finely tuned sense of accountability he challenges himself to become involved with missions through his friends in Guyana.

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Staff

Collegiate Publications Director:
Richard Carlson
Editorial Director: Douglas F. Morgan
Editor: Evert R. McDowell
Associate Editor: L. Rodney Colburn
Business/Advertising Manager: Chad
Seltman
Marketing: Bob Kyte
Sales Office: Shirley Sayers
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Oshawa, Canada

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THE DIVINE DRAMA

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ON THE COVER

Manuscript illumination from the "Great Lambeth Bible"—12th century England. St. Mark is depicted writing his gospel. A dove at his ear represents the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The four creatures at his feet with the heads of a lion, an ox, an eagle and a human refer to the vision of Ezekiel, who appears in a medallion at the side. The other medallion and two half-medallions, in the inset frame around, contain pictures of the baptism of Christ, of Bede, and of the prophets.

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COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY PROFILE

Pacific Union College



Lessons 1-6

Chaplain: Ted Wick

Contributors:

Lloyd Best
Ian Bothwell
Gene Gascay
Valerie Halliwell-Smith
James Kempster
Sharon Millard

Larry Mitchel
Gilbert Muth
Louis Normington
William Price
Ken Thomson
Terrence Trivett

Walter Utt
Norman Wendth
Evaline West
Pat Wick
Ted Wick

Columbia Union College



Lessons 7-9

Chaplain: Rodney Vance

Contributors:

Barry Casey
Tom Decker
Donald Jones
Trina Magi

Sherri Morgan
Jane Taylor Murray
Ken Mulzac

Atlantic Union College

Lessons 10, 12



Chaplain, Campus Editor: Rick Trott

Contributors:

William Boyd
William Cork
Alwyn Fraser

Gary Gray
Larry Lewis

George Kretschmas
James Valentine

Special Contributors: Rich Carlson, Ken Downing, Edward W. H. Vick

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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

With this issue both the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY and the Adult Sabbath School Quarterly begin a series of quarterlies based on books of the Bible. Following our study of the Gospel of Mark this quarter, we will be discussing the books of 2 Timothy, Genesis, and 2 Peter in 1985.

This series involves a shift from the topical approach to Bible study to a more inductive one. In other words, our primary question in studying shifts from, "What does the Bible say about this topic?" to, "What does this Bible passage mean and what is its significance for how we think and act today?"

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY format will remain essentially the same. But you will notice some new things, particularly on the Logos pages, designed to make the quarterly more of a tool for direct Bible study.

Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of your study of the Gospel of Mark this quarter:

1. The passage to be studied for each week is indicated on the Introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly Introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this part of the lesson, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.

3. Read the remainder of the sections of the week with the perspective gained by your own study of the gospel passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday) as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from an historical, scientific, philosophical or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most "scholarly" article of the week.

How to (Thursday) discusses the practical implications of the week's lesson.

Opinion (Friday) is a personal viewpoint on the lesson, meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

December 30-January 5

1

The Appearance of the Good News

“ ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’ ” (Mark 1:15, NIV).



The evangelist Mark with the traditional symbol for his gospel—the lion. From the Gospel Book of 1194, Germany.

An Introduction to Mark's Gospel

This Week's Scripture: Mark
1:1-34

The Author

Mark was a quitter. Maybe the strange foods a missionary had to eat didn't agree with him. Maybe Paul drove him so hard that he could hardly keep his eyes open, much less say or do the right things to "win souls." Maybe he missed his fiancée back in Jerusalem. Maybe he just didn't relish the possibility of 39 lashes in the back with a bone-tipped *flagellum* followed by a jail floor for a bed.

Maybe all or none of the above. Anyway, he quit. He deserted Paul and Barnabas in the middle of their first missionary journey and went home. It made Paul so disgusted that he refused to take Mark with him the next time, even though it meant splitting up with Barnabas. And yet only a few years later, Paul would urge Timothy to "get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11, NIV).

Mark's Purpose

What changed Mark? We don't know for sure, but one thing he apparently came to learn was that following Jesus meant, in some ways, more conflict in his life, not less. And a close look at the gospel Mark wrote suggests that one of his major purposes in writing was to help those who, like himself, needed help in dealing with that conflict.

Christians in Rome, for example, who were Mark's primary audience according to many scholars, were catching the blame for the fire that gutted a large part of Rome in A.D. 64. As Nero's political scapegoats, many who confessed Jesus as Lord, reports Tacitus, were "torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination when daylight had expired."¹

Mark's Literary Style

It was with this problem of conflict and suffering weighing on his mind, then, that Mark composed his gospel. In distinction to the Greek myths of his time or the biographies of our time, a "gospel" was a literary genre of its own. The story of Jesus was so powerful and distinctive that all previous forms of literary expression were inadequate and Mark was inspired to originate this new form. (Matthew, Luke, and John probably wrote their gospels later.) Rather than giving a complete chronological narrative of Jesus' life, Mark took the incidents from the life of Jesus that he had collected and cast them into the form of a dramatic story, designed to proclaim particular things about Jesus Christ, what he accomplished, and what he could mean in the lives of readers.

Mark's gospel can thus perhaps best be compared with a play or drama rather than a

INTRODUCTION

history textbook (though the events are true). Norman Perrin suggests that the drama is in three acts involving those who proclaim the gospel and are subsequently "delivered up" to imprisonment or death:

Act I: John the Baptist "preaches" (1:7) and is "delivered up" (1:14).

Act II: Jesus "preaches" (1:14) and is "delivered up" (9:31; 10:32).

Act III: Christians "preach" (13:10) and are "delivered up" (13:9-13).²

The significant thing for those Christians who were experiencing conflict because of the gospel was that *the third act of the drama was still being played out in their lives*. The drama reaches its climax only when the resurrected Jesus returns (13:26). Having the assurance that Jesus faced the same things they faced, that he emerged victorious in his conflict with evil, and that his victory guaranteed theirs, Christians in Rome (or wherever) could proclaim the gospel freely, no matter what the consequences.

In accomplishing his goal of evoking "personal identification with the Lord through imaginative participation in the story,"³ Mark stresses *action*. As Frederick Buechner puts it, Mark shows Jesus "scattering miracles like rice at a wedding," but includes much less teaching than Matthew, Luke, or John. And the fast-paced narrative is filled with vivid, concrete detail that

helps the reader visualize the action. No one else tells us, for example, that Jesus laid his head on a pillow in the stern of the boat that nearly capsized (4:38).

In studying the opening passage this week, note that Mark gets right into the action and conflict of Jesus' story, rather than discussing Jesus' genealogy and birth as do Matthew and Luke. Mark brings Jesus onto the scene after only the briefest report of John's preparatory work. Jesus is baptized and tempted in preparation for his ministry, makes his startling proclamation of the kingdom, gathers disciples, heals, and confronts demonic forces—all in the space of 25 verses!

Mark's Theme

Throughout Mark, Jesus is in dramatic conflict with the forces of evil and oppression. The conflict is most sharply drawn at the cross, and this is where Mark places his major emphasis. In fact over half the gospel is devoted to the final events of Jesus' life. Mark might be called, in the words of one scholar, "a passion-narrative with an extended introduction." Mark is convinced that Jesus is most clearly understood through the conflict of his suffering, death, and resurrection.

The good news that Jesus emerged victorious from that conflict eventually transformed Mark from a quitter to a faithful witness to Jesus Christ, despite the serious con-

sequences that faithfulness entailed. Though our conflicts may differ from those experienced by first-century Christians, we too are part of Act III of the divine drama. By reading the good news about

Jesus in Mark's gospel, we receive the hope, direction, and courage necessary to deal with the challenges we face, and to remain faithful until the drama concludes.

D. F. M.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK⁴

1:1-13	Introduction
1:14, 15	<i>Transitional summary</i>
1:16 to 3:6	First major section: the authority of Jesus exhibited in word and deed
3:7-12	<i>Transitional summary</i>
3:13 to 6:6a	Second major section: Jesus as Son of God and as rejected by his own people
6:6b	<i>Transitional summary</i>
6:7 to 8:21	Third major section: Jesus as Son of God and as misunderstood by his own disciples
8:22-26	<i>Transitional giving-of-sight story</i>
8:27 to 10:45	Fourth major section: Christology and Christian discipleship in light of the passion
10:46-52	<i>Transitional giving-of-sight story</i>
11:1 to 12:44	Fifth major section: the days in Jerusalem prior to the passion
13:1-5a	<i>Introduction to the apocalyptic discourse</i>
13:5b-37	Apocalyptic discourse
14:1-12	<i>Introduction to the passion narrative with insertion, verses 3-9</i>
14:13 to 16:8	Passion narrative
<i>Author: Probably John Mark (see Acts 12:12, 25; 13:13; 15:36-41; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11)</i>	
<i>Date: Around A.D. 60-70</i>	

1. Cited in Carl Walters, Jr., *Mark: A Personal Encounter*, p. 94.
2. Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction*, p. 238.
3. Walters, p. 37.
4. Adapted from Perrin and Duling, pp. 239, 240.

“The Kingdom Is Upon You . . .”

LOGOS Theme: Mark introduces Jesus of Nazareth as the authoritative Son of God who, in his own person, brings to the world the good news of God's kingdom.

1. Mark's Title Page (read Mark 1:1-8)

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way . . .’”

“And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (1:1, 2, 4, NIV).

Mark introduces his story about Jesus Christ as “gospel” or “good news.” Mark's first-century readers probably recognized this term immediately as referring to an “historical event which introduces a new situation in the world such as the enthronement of the Roman emperor.” A well-known inscription (dated 9 B.C.) from Priene on the Asia Minor coast hails the birthday of Caesar Augustus using the same Greek work that Mark uses in introducing Jesus. For Mark the gospel is “the good news that Jesus brought into the world, and that news centers in Him for *He is the good news.*”¹ Just *why* Jesus is the good news becomes apparent as Mark develops his account.

In bringing John the Baptist on the scene, Mark quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 to show that with the appearance of John the great final act of God for the salvation of humankind was about to begin.

John's rather bizarre desert lifestyle must have attracted a lot of attention (vs. 6). But there is probably a deeper theological significance to the fact that he proclaimed his message from the desert. For in the prophetic writings, the desert was the place where Israel had once been faithful to God (see Jer. 2:2-30). And in the last days, Israel would return to the desert and to faithfulness (see Hos. 2:14-16).² In calling for repentance in the desert, John was calling Israel to the point of readiness to enter the era of righteousness, peace, and justice to which the prophets had pointed forward.

Read Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 in their Old Testament contexts. How do these passages illuminate Mark's account of John and Jesus?

2. Jesus Baptized and Tempted (read Mark 1:9-13)

“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (1:10, 11, NIV).

Though he was that one whose sandals John felt unworthy to tie, Jesus identifies himself with the people he had come to save by seeking baptism from John.

The voice from heaven confirming Jesus as the one sent from God combines phrases from two Old Testament passages: “You are

my Son," from Psalm 2:7, and "with you I am well pleased," an allusion to Isaiah 42:1. "Psalm 2 is about a mighty king of Israel who conquers the enemies of Israel and, as God's representative, symbolizes the sovereignty and saving power of God. Isaiah 42:1-4, on the other hand, is a poem about 'the servant of the Lord' . . . who with the spirit (breath, life, vital power) of the Lord upon him brings forth 'justice to the nations' by non-aggressive, non-violent means. . . . This representative of God accomplishes God's will by suffering . . . in the stead of others."³

Already we are being given clues as to what sort of Messiah Jesus is going to be. He combines in one person the mighty sovereign of Psalm 2 with the suffering servant of Isaiah.

3. The Kingdom Is Now (read Mark 1:14-20)

"After John had been arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God: 'The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent and believe the Gospel' " (1:14, 15, NEB).

Whereas John had proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom, Jesus proclaimed its *present reality*. The eschatological act of God to which the prophets had pointed forward was now breaking into human history. "With Jesus' appearance, the kingdom begins to be visible. In Jesus' words and deeds, the contours of God's future take on concrete form, and our part in that future will be determined by how we react to Jesus."⁴

In verses 16-20, Jesus' call to "repent and believe" (vs. 15) finds a positive response in the lives of some fishermen. Simon, James, and John translate "repent and believe" into action words—"leave and follow." They *leave* their nets and all the security and familiarity of their old mode of existence. And they *follow* Jesus into a new adventure where nothing is secure, other than the promise that they will be made "fishers of men."⁵

Mark tells us how "repent and believe" translated into action for the disciples. How does Jesus' call translate into action for us today?

4. A Man of Authority (read Mark 1:21-34)

"The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Mark 1:22, NIV).

Jesus' teaching had distinctive authority in at least two ways. The scribes or "teachers of the law" based their opinions on precedents established by earlier rabbis. Jesus, on the other hand, "never deferred to any human 'authority,' but spoke directly out of His understanding of God's will which He, as divine Son, either knew intuitively or found in the Hebrew Bible."⁶

Second, Jesus' teaching was authoritative because it produced radical change in the lives of those he touched (see vs. 27). In the presence of Jesus, a demon-possessed man is liberated (vss. 23-27),

a woman with a fever is restored to health and usefulness (vss. 29-31), and those with many different diseases are healed (vss. 32-34). The kingdom of God is good news because it brings new hope and purpose to the lives of ordinary fishermen, healing and restoration to the sick, and liberation to the enslaved (cf. Luke 4:16-20).

Do Jesus' words have the same kind of healing and liberating power today that they had in the first century? Explain.

1. Ralph Martin, *Where the Action Is*, p. 10.
2. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark*, pp. 34, 35.
3. Carl Walters, Jr., *Mark: A Personal Encounter*, pp. 43, 44.
4. Achtemeier, p. 38.
5. Walters, pp. 104, 105.
6. Martin, p. 14.

Principles of the Kingdom

by Larry Mitchel

When Jesus announced that "the kingdom of God is at hand" he did not mean to suggest that previous revelations of God's will had been unreliable, nor that an inferior kingdom was giving way to a better kingdom. What was new in his proclamation was that he announced the actual presence of the kingdom. What the Old Testament had referred to in the future tense, Jesus proclaimed as now here!

But if the kingdom which Jesus announced was not radically different from that foreseen by Old Testament prophets, it certainly did not match in all respects the prevailing hopes and expectations. John, the son of Zebedee, and his brother James, shared those misconceptions. With effort and sensitivity Jesus sought to correct their misunderstandings.

"In the kingdom of God, position is not gained through favoritism. It is not earned, nor is it received through an arbitrary bestowal. It is the result of character. The crown and the throne are the tokens of a condition attained; they are the tokens of self-conquest through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

"The one who stands nearest to Christ will be he who on earth has drunk most deeply of the spirit of His self-sacrificing love,—love that 'vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, . . . seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil' (1 Cor. 13:4, 5),—love that moves the disciple, as it moved our Lord, to give all, to live and labor and sacrifice, even unto death, for the saving of humanity. . . .

"When the ten heard of the request of James and John, they were much displeased. The highest place in the kingdom was just what every one of them was seeking for himself, and they were angry that the two disciples had gained a seeming advantage over them."²

But "Christ was establishing a kingdom on different principles. He called men, not to authority, but to service, the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak. Power, position, talent, education, placed their possessor under the greater obligation to serve his fellows. . . .

" . . . The principle on which Christ acted is to actuate the members of the church which is His body. The plan and ground of salvation is love."³

TESTIMONY

Key text:
1 Corinthians
13:4, 5

"The crown and the throne are the tokens of a condition attained."

1. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, pp. 187-198.
2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 549.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 550.

Larry Mitchell is an associate professor of religion at Pacific Union College.

Fulfillment of the Kingdom

by George Eldon Ladd

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 1:15

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel!' " (Mark 1:14, 15.) Matthew's report is even more concise, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Our Gospels summarize the preaching of the Baptist and of Jesus in the same words: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). It would be easy to conclude that their message was essentially the same: the proclamation of an imminent eschatological event, the immediate fulfillment of the apocalyptic hope of the visitation of God to inaugurate the Kingdom of God in the age to come.

However similar the wording may be, modern scholarship acknowledges a fundamental difference between the two messages. . . . Günther Bornkamm recognizes that between John and Jesus "there is a difference like that between the eleventh and twelfth hours. For Jesus calls: the shift in the aeons is here, the kingdom of God is already dawning. . . . It is happening now in Jesus' words and deeds." Such a conclusion is not to be determined from the terminology alone but from a study of its meaning against the total message and mission of Jesus.

"This was no new theology; it was a new event in history."

The difference between John and Jesus is suggested by Mark's formulation which interprets Jesus' message to mean that "the time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15). Jesus did not merely proclaim, as did John, the imminence of divine visitation; he asserted that this visitation was in actual progress, that God was already visiting his people. The hope of the prophets was being fulfilled.

This note of fulfillment is the truly distinctive element in Jesus' message which sets him apart from Judaism. It occurs again and again in the Gospels. Luke introduces Jesus' ministry by recording his sermon in Nazareth whose main theme is fulfillment. Jesus read from Isaiah a promise which looked forward to the messianic salvation. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19). Then he amazed his audience by the assertion, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Here was an amazing claim. John had announced an imminent visitation of God which would mean the fulfillment of the eschatological hope and the coming of the messianic age. Jesus proclaimed that this promise was actually being fulfilled. This is no apocalyptic Kingdom but a present salvation. Jesus did not promise his hearers a better future or assure that they would soon enter the Kingdom. Rather he boldly announced that the Kingdom (*Herrschaft*) of God had come to them. The presence of the Kingdom was "a happening, an event, the gracious action of God." The promise

George Eldon Ladd was one of this century's leading evangelical New Testament scholars.

was fulfilled in the action of Jesus: in his proclamation of good news to the poor, release to the captives, restoring sight to the blind, freeing those who were oppressed. This was no new theology or new idea or new promise; it was a new event in history. "The wretched hear the good news, the prison doors are open, the oppressed breathe the air of freedom, blind pilgrims see the light, the day of salvation is here."

This was an unexpected and astonishing announcement, and the first reaction of the audience was a favorable one; but they marveled that one of their neighbors—one whom they had known from childhood—could proclaim such a message of the grace of God. Jesus was not trained as a rabbi; he was only a layman. How then could he presume to announce the coming of the messianic age?

The note of fulfillment is again sounded in Jesus' answer to the question about fasting. Jesus explained why he and his disciples did not follow the usual Jewish custom of fasting with the words, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast" (Mark 2:19). The metaphor of the bridegroom was not a contemporary messianic expression; but the relationship of Israel to God was described in terms of marriage (Hos. 2:20; Ezek. 16:8 ff.), and sometimes the messianic salvation was depicted in similar terms (see Hos. 2:19, 20; Isa. 54:1 ff.; 62:4 f.). The marriage feast thus became a metaphor in Judaism for the messianic consummation; and even though Jeremias believes that the messianic significance of the bridegroom metaphor does not go back to Jesus because his audience would not have understood it in these terms, he admits that Jesus did announce the presence of the messianic time of salvation. It would be meaningless for the disciples to fast "who are already in enjoyment of the New Age!" The time of fulfillment is here.

REACT

What does Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom's present reality mean for your outlook on life and style of living?

Excerpted from
George Eldon Ladd, *The
Presence of the Future*
(Grand Rapids: Wm. B.
Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 1974), pp. 110-
113. Used by permis-
sion.

How to Study the Book of Mark

HOW TO Before proceeding further in this quarter's study on the book of Mark, it would be wise to review some important principles of Bible study. Here are some steps adapted from T. Norton Sterrett's book *How to Understand Your Bible*.¹

1. Pray concerning your study. Ask God to teach you through the Holy Spirit. Without his aid your study will be fruitless. Continue to pray as you study, for help with difficult texts, to give thanks for new insights received, and for strength to apply these new insights.

2. Read. It is good to read the entire book (in this case, Mark) at least once or twice before you begin your study. Doing this will give you an overview of the book and thus help in understanding individual portions of the book. Mark, a shorter Gospel, should only take an hour or two.

For the type of study outlined in this quarterly, it is important to read the selected portions of Scripture given each week, not just the comments printed in the quarterly.

3. Observe. Don't let your mind wander. Concentrate as you read. Your understanding depends on it. What to observe? (A) The literary form of the passage. Is it narrative, poetry, prophecy, etc.? (B) Repeated words or phrases. These generally hold some significance. (C) Linking words such as *and*, *but*, *for*, *since*, and *therefore*: note how they affect meaning. (D) Time words. (E) Place words. (F) Contrasts and comparisons. (G) Unknown words. Look them up. (H) The core of each sentence. Identifying the subject, main verb and object of the verb (if any) can help you sort out the meaning of long, involved sentences. (I) Figurative expressions. (J) Logical sequences. (K) Anything strange, unusual or unexpected. (L) Related entities. (M) Grammatical elements—word choice and placement, etc.

4. Take notes. Write down what you observe, thus clarifying ideas and thoughts. Later, in reviewing your notes you may see how things in the passage of study fit together and apply to you.

5. Think, analyze, and interpret. After reading the passage several times and writing down observations, you can meditate on the meaning of the verses. Take into account what you know about the historical background of the passage and its literary context. As you analyze, questions will come to mind—and some are given throughout the quarterly. Try to answer these from the text. If some questions arise that you can't answer, don't be disturbed; the answers may come with further study.

6. Apply the meaning of the passage. This potentially is the hardest part of Bible study. When you *interpret*, you find the meaning of the text. When you *apply*, you respond to the meaning. This may be hard, but you will find that the more you study the Bible the more its principles will be incorporated into your life, for the more you behold Christ the more you will be like him. This is the aim of all Bible study.

1. T. Norton Sterrett, *How To Understand Your Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), pp. 40-45.

Man of Authority

by Terrence Trivett

Two things about Christ immediately impress me as unusual for someone entering an important public ministry. First, although Christ's informal education was rich and personal, he had no proper seminary training. Second, he spent no time as the understudy of a great rabbinical guru. There was no term of service as Assistant Messiah. Jesus clearly skirted the cumbersome educational and religious bureaucracy of his day. He entered the system as an outsider.

Jesus made his ministerial debut by reading and explaining the Scriptures in the synagogue at Capernaum. Synagoges were open to qualified laymen who would read a scripture and then offer an interpretation or application. Jesus frequently accepted the opportunity of speaking there, at least early in his ministry.¹

His first sermon was an auspicious one. Although we are told nothing of its content, it was presented so convincingly that the people were amazed and astounded. He taught with authority. So much authority that an unclean spirit or demon was stirred to reply and challenge Christ's message and his control of the meeting. Jesus' response was immediate and blunt. "Be quiet!" he said, and "Come out of him!" Although the spirit shrieked and the possessed man shook all over, the exorcism worked, and the people were mightily impressed.

To understand why the message of Jesus was so astounding, we should compare it to the typical rabbinical teachings. The scribes and rabbis served as professional interpreters of the Scriptures and generally based their teaching on tradition. They made arguments and established their views by long, learned quotations from other rabbis. Their authority, although derived from an understanding of law, was secondhand. Their teaching, occupied with the small and petty distinctions between Levitical regulations, was generally pedantic and dull.^{2,3}

Christ's sermon must have penetrated this stuffy scene like fresh air from a newly-opened window. Surely he spoke with conviction and sincerity, perhaps even charisma, but there was also something unique that the rabbis could hardly imitate—the commanding assurance of one who knew himself and his mission. Furthermore, his words were illustrated by memorable deeds. How could his declarations be ignored when within minutes and in that very place demons were cast out and the sick healed? If actions really speak louder than words, Christ's own miracles of exorcism and healing helped make his teaching irresistible and unforgettable.

REACT

Would Mark (or the other gospel writers) have recorded that Christ spoke with authority if Christ had chosen not to work miracles? Would we have sufficient basis for belief in Christianity without miracles? Explain.

OPINION

Key text:
Mark 1:22

1. 2. D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*, pp. 51, 52.
3. Sherman E. Johnson, *A Commentary of the Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 47.

Terrence Trivett teaches in the Biology Department at Pacific Union College.

Friday, January 4 19

January 6-January 12

2

Truth Confronts Tradition

“ ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’ ”
(Mark 2:27, 28, NIV).



Jesus With the Doctors. Painting by Luchino Belbello of Pavia, ca. 1430-1460.

Little Boxes

by Evaline West

**This Week's Scripture: Mark
1:35 to 3:6**

It happened on a back street in Naples. A look of sadness crossed Secunda's face as he led our tour group through a back street filled with tiny, dirty hovels. Throughout the tour, his efforts to rouse the interest of these American tourists in his country's magnificent architecture, sculpture, and art; spectacular beauty; rich historical background; and friendly, helpful people, had met with marginal success. And to some in the party, his efforts were almost a total loss. But now in this dirty back street the lethargic group suddenly came alive! With wild abandon the cameras clicked in a rash of picture-taking.

For a moment I pondered Secunda's dispirited look, but then I understood. This poor, dirty slum was the picture of Italy these tourists would take home. Was this back street what they were expecting Italy to be like and thus all they could see, or wanted to see?

It happened years ago in various settings in Galilee, this process of perception limited by preconceived notions. Jesus Christ moved among men revealing and magnifying the beauty of God's character, his love. He prayed, cleansed from

sin, forgave, healed, dined with "sinners," and kept the Sabbath in untraditional ways. Multitudes came. Some for healing. Others out of curiosity. Still others came to find fault. Undoubtedly it frightened them to have their small boxes of understanding disturbed. Many Galilean "tourists" were unimpressed by the unassuming Jesus and his unusual activities. In fact, from those acts, some were able to construct hovels—to lose all sense of the truly Great.

Sad to say, it also happens in Adventist churches today. Some focus on real or imagined hovels in the lives or philosophy of their fellow members, thus diverting attention and energy from magnifying the truth about our great, loving God.

Although it gives us security—and perhaps is necessary—to put our understanding of God into small boxes, surely the Galilean experience must challenge us to frequently re-examine our boxes in the light of Christ's life and ministry. Is our understanding limited to "our box"—perhaps a hovel of our construction, or are our views open to re-examination and revision? That is what this lesson is about—examining tradition in the light of Truth.

INTRO- DUCTION

Evaline West is an associate professor of social work at Pacific Union College.

Resistance Encountered

LOGOS Theme: In demonstrating compassion, inclusive love and divine authority, Jesus comes into inevitable controversy with the constricting forms and demands of rabbinic legalism.

1. A Matter of Priorities (read Mark 1:35-45)

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (1:35, NIV).

The importance of Jesus' communion with his Father to the success of his mission is demonstrated in two ways. First, it was the initial activity that Jesus engaged in—before any other responsibilities were undertaken. Second, the attempts made to distract him from his meditation (vss. 36, 37) underscore its importance as recognized by the adversary. Mark consistently uses the verb "search" or "looking for" (vs. 36) in his gospel to indicate either the hostile attempts of Jesus' enemies to arrest and kill him or the idea of attempting to distract Jesus from his true mission.¹ So when Peter came to Jesus while he was praying, he served as the mouthpiece of temptation—Peter's unfortunately common role. The natural inclination was for Jesus to remain in that immediate area and capitalize on his healing successes. But as a direct result of his early-morning talk with God he was able to resist human logic and move on to other villages to proclaim the message of the Kingdom.

Jesus' time of *contemplation* lead to *action*. Carl Walters comments on the significance of Jesus' remarkable display of compassion in healing the leper (vss. 40-45):

"The dreaded disease of leprosy was thought to be more than a mere physical ailment. For the Jews in Jesus' day it was an indication also of sinful contamination. And because it was believed to be a highly contagious infection, the poor leper was both a social and religious outcast. He was forbidden all the normal relations that make existence human. He was separated from the synagogue and Temple and thereby cut out of the sphere of God's presence, the realm of true Life. In response to the trustful entreaty of this wretched untouchable (1:40), Jesus, moved with pity, 'stretched out his hand and *touched* him' (1:41). In so doing Jesus 'took upon himself the dreaded contamination. He *commanded*, "be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him' (1:42). The results were restoration to real humanity and termination of deadly alienation (1:44)."²

Was Peter's apparently unconscious role as transmitter of temptation a result of his own weakness or simply a circumstance beyond his control?

2. Controversy (read Mark 2:1 to 3:6)

"And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans

and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (2:16, 17).

The upsurge in Jesus' popularity indicated by the mobs thronging to him provoked the jealous attention of the religious authorities. From this point on, every miracle, every sermon, every action was subjected to the closest scrutiny to detect and expose any signs of nonconformity to the dictates of tradition. No place was free from prying eyes and whispered accusations.

The debate seems to have centered around four major issues:

1. He claimed to forgive sins (2:5), a capability the Jews reserved for God alone.
2. He chose to consort with tax collectors and other "bad company" (2:13-17), considered outcasts by loyal Jews. Such association suggested disloyalty to the nation in the minds of the Jews, since tax collectors were considered traitors.
3. The fact that his disciples did not fast aroused serious questioning (2:18-22). Fasting was seen as symbolic of preparation for the coming of the Messiah. So the refusal of Jesus and his disciples to fast was an implied statement that the messianic age had already begun. This, of course, infuriated Jesus' opponents.
4. The Sabbath observance practiced by Jesus was hardly representative of the rabbinic guidelines for Sabbath keeping (2:23-28; 3:1-6). This drew heated criticism, especially when Jesus declared that his Lordship over the Sabbath made the Sabbath subservient to his purpose. Therefore, the work of the Kingdom held priority over rote Sabbath observance.³

Is it possible to be too "religious" in the light of Jesus' actions? Do religious rules eventually eliminate the role of mercy? Can rules and mercy co-exist? In what way?

L. R. C.

1. Ralph P. Martin, *Where the Action Is*, p. 15.
2. Carl Walters, Jr., *I, Mark: A Personal Encounter*, p. 107.
3. Martin, pp. 16, 17.

The Point

by William Price

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 2:16, 17

In our Scripture for this week, we see Jesus in an almost unbelievable situation. Here is a man healing the sick and suffering in one of earth's darkest hours. He finds himself in a society where the rich and pious reject the hungry and miserable. He tries to show his fellowmen the principle of God's loving care by forgiving sins and healing the diseased. Meanwhile, the religious leaders plot to get rid of him. He was, after all, a rebel. He broke the rules that centuries of study had formulated. The leaders were so caught up in their organization and their own salvation that they were missing the whole point, as their reaction to Jesus' association with Matthew indicates.

"The calling of Matthew to be one of Christ's disciples excited great indignation. For a religious teacher to choose a publican as one of his immediate attendants was an offense against the religious, social, and national customs. By appealing to the prejudices of the people the Pharisees hoped to turn the current of popular feeling against Jesus.

"Among the publicans a widespread interest was created. Their hearts were drawn toward the divine Teacher. In the joy of his new discipleship, Matthew longed to bring his former associates to Jesus. Accordingly he made a feast at his own house, and called together his relatives and friends. Not only were publicans included, but many others who were of doubtful reputation, and were proscribed by their more scrupulous neighbors.

"The entertainment was given in honor of Jesus, and He did not hesitate to accept the courtesy. He well knew that this would give offense to the Pharisaic party, and would also compromise Him in the eyes of the people. But no question of policy could influence His movements. With Him external distinctions weighed nothing. That which appealed to His heart was a soul thirsting for the water of life.

"Jesus sat as an honored guest at the table of the publicans, by His sympathy and social kindness showing that He recognized the dignity of humanity; and men longed to become worthy of His confidence. Upon their thirsty hearts His words fell with blessed, life giving power. New impulses were awakened, and the possibility of a new life opened to these outcasts of society."¹

During my twenty-eight years as a baptized Adventist, I have not observed people being drawn to Jesus by lists of prohibitions. I have not observed long lines of people waiting to get into the church because we don't drink, smoke, or dance! The people I see coming into the church are people who have become friends of Adventists and have seen the love of Jesus in these people's lives. They like what they see and want to become a part of it. For these people, the "DON'TS" are packaged in love. What will attract people to Christ, then, is our genuine caring for them, and loving them as Christ did.

Jesus sat with the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors and shared *Himself* with them.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 273, 274.

William Price is an associate professor of technology education at Pacific Union College.

New Wine

by Ken Thomson

"No man putteth new wine into old bottles." Was our Lord antinomian? The religious leaders of his day thought so and tried to make the charge stick. But Christ upheld the law. For example, he suggested to the cleansed leper that he present himself to the priest as the law required. The things that Christ did repudiate were the inventions of the rabbis—fastings, Sabbath rules, prohibitions against contact with sinners, and so on. These were distortions of the Scriptures, not eternal injunctions. He justified his actions, not by proposing to sweep away the old laws and introduce new, but by showing that these actions were in fact within the law, satisfying it in deed and in spirit.

But the new wine was dispensed in ways that appeared radical to the keepers of the current system. Christ was found with lepers and cripples. He ate with publicans and sinners. His disciples did not fast. Is it surprising that guests at the wedding not be found fasting? he asked. He did not deny the validity of fasting when appropriate. What he opposed was the use of such ordinances for merit. Christ's critics saw their laws as ends in themselves, their value received by obedience to the letter. But he showed the sanctity of the law to be derived from its service to man. "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?" he asked. "Keeping the Sabbath" as an end in itself must yield before the appeal of human necessity, the subject of higher law.

"The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." But man *was* made to reflect the image of his maker, to pursue and embrace truth, to worship his God. The Sabbath commandment is a practical means of achieving these higher principles of life, not an end in itself.

"No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment." The ability of any movement to survive lies in its adaptability. "Time makes ancient good uncouth," and just as the pupating insect must leave the cocoon if its life is to continue, the church of the New Testament could not function in the old garments. The old had done their job, they had been indispensable. But new insights often do not make good patches onto old cosmologies and literalisms.

The new wine could not be contained in the wineskins of ceremonies and externals, performed for their own sake. Christ appointed twelve, heralds of the tribes of a new Israel, evangelists to all nations. We find them largely freeing the Gentile Christians from the observance of externals whenever these failed to enhance life.

But the new garment must be just as sturdy as the old was in its time. The old garments wore well, the new must be no less robust, even if it does look different.

REACT

Are there any features of the Adventist church that could stand revising? Its organization, attitudes to social issues, its adaptation to other cultures, perhaps?

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 2:21, 22

"New insights often do not make good patches onto old cosmologies and literalisms."

Ken Thomson teaches physics and computer science at Pacific Union College.

Jesus' Way of Relating

by Ken Thomson

HOW TO
Key text:
Luke 15:1, 2

By a miracle, or by the faithful witness of some Christian, the publicans and sinners come to our church occasionally. They may look the same (in a Fletcher Jones skirt), or they may look different (in blue jeans), but what do they hear? ". . . A warm welcome to our members this morning. . . . And to our visitors a warm welcome also. . . ." Visitors think: "Hmm. We are not quite the same as the members. There seem to be categories. Are we sitting in the right seats?" Here are some suggestions for relating to others in a more Christlike manner:

A. How to mingle with publicans and sinners.

1. *Demonstrate to them that all people are equal in God's sight*, that a good Seventh-day Adventist is not, of himself, any better than anyone else. We all come to church to worship, we all are in need of God's grace, none of us merits his favor because of our works.

2. *Associate with them outside the church.* This is just as important as getting them into the pew. Just as the body has a variety of senses, so the body of Christ has many contact points with the world. Some members are physical, sporty. Some are social. Some are scholarly. Don't try to fight in Saul's armor, but mingle with the class you are comfortable with, letting your influence be felt. If you are in touch with Christ, those you associate with will inevitably be influenced.

B. How to relate to those who have a mold for everyone to fit into.

"If you don't believe that Turkey is the King of the North, brother, I don't see how. . . ." How reminiscent of the A.D. 30 rabbi! Just as the tourists did of Italy (see Introduction), they had a stereotype of the Messiah, and Christ did not fit. How did he relate to them? He just seemed to grin and bear it, not going much out of his way to accommodate them. He preached tolerance and did not appear to be intimidated by their precise requirements of belief.

C. How to adapt to a changing world without sacrificing the permanent values of our Christian heritage.

This was the problem Jesus faced—a system in which the heart of the matter had been largely lost sight of, covered by layers of irrelevant requirements. We too have seen the passage of time lay to rest our pioneers, and we desire to preserve the spirit of their labor. Ellen White collected many eternal principles and illustrated them for her day in testimonies. The best tribute to her, and the heritage she has left us, is to distill these principles from her writings and translate them into our times. But taking the specifics of many of her illustrations and attempting to fit them to a society a century later often results in the mentality that Jesus' critics exhibited in Mark 2 and 3.

REACT

Some scholars (Oosterwal, etc.) speak about the "fortress mentality" of the Adventist church. Are there any advantages of this posture? Are there any disadvantages?

Ken Thomson teaches physics and-computer science at Pacific Union College.

Truth-speaking Tradition

by Pat Wick

The need to establish traditions is a people thing, like a trait inherited from some long-forgotten ancestor. Traditions are good things. They are a bond with our past, a source of remembering, and symbolic of some truth. They give us a place—not of beginning—but of continuing. . . .

Our Father-God invented tradition. It is his way of play-acting, explaining, tying a string around our mental finger to help us know, understand, and remember. He whispered into the ear of John, and the rite of baptism became symbolic of repentance. By submission, Jesus confirmed this as a tradition and by his death and resurrection gave it even more meaning. Jesus etched into this tradition the ring of truth: we are bonded to him.

Peril approaches when we equate a tradition with truth. Tradition loses its teaching power when we do not know or understand the truth it is supposed to reveal. As the cup, symbolizing water, cannot slacken thirst unless it is filled with pure water, so tradition symbolizing truth cannot quench our spiritual thirst unless truth flows freely.

Some traditional baggage that we tote around with us is helpful, some a hindrance. Jesus modeled an eclectic approach for us. It was tradition that brought him to the church on Sabbath, but the content of his sermon was fresh with truth. He encouraged the tradition of giving an offering at the synagogue on being healed, but the truth was that the lepers he told to do so were already *clean*. Tradition said to stay away from people of "ill repute," but Jesus sought them out. The truth was that they needed his company.

What are some traditions of the Adventist church? There are baptism, communion, weddings, dedications, male ordinations (I slipped that one in, eh?), suits, ties, and white shirts, the order of service, the contents of a Sabbath School program, tithes, and offerings, hymns, introductions, shaking hands as you leave church, not talking in church, organ music or guitar, flowers or banners, pews, and the locations of pulpits, hymn books, and Bible translations. When you start to sift through these, your tolerance level for other people with other traditions should increase. And you have to ask, Where and what is the seed of truth that must be present in order for the tradition to be nothing more than a mirage?

I want my traditions to continue to speak the truth. So I must continue to update them, whether it be Sabbath keeping (with its accumulated customs) or Christmas (weighed down with pagan connotations or commercial propaganda). Take a look at your inheritance. Resurrect neglected traditions that speak to your soul of the truth within, and create some new celebrations. Insist that they speak to the truthfulness of a loving God.

Remember that the blind, unthinking adherence to tradition killed Jesus, at a traditional time of year, in a traditional way, to protect a tradition from truth!

OPINION

Key text:

Mark 3:4, 5

"Peril approaches when we equate a tradition with truth."

Pat Wick is coordinator of the Campus Center at Pacific Union College.

January 13-January 19

3

God's Kingdom Explained

"He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow his seed' " (Mark 4:2, 3, NIV).



The Parable of the Sower. Stained glass from Canterbury Cathedral, late 12th century.

The Kingdom Dynamic

by Gene Gasca

This Week's Scripture: Mark
3:20 to 4:34

And the kingdom of God is
like . . .

- . . . a sower
- . . . growing grain
- . . . a mustard seed

These object lessons which focus on the kingdom of God involve a variety of spiritual truths which encouraged Jesus' listeners and provided direction for their lives. Each parable was specifically designed to teach a unique concept with multiple applications. Ellen White describes Christ's method of teaching the people as simply bringing the mind of man in contact with the Infinite Mind. "Christ did not deal in abstract theories, but in that which is essential to the development of character, that which will enlarge man's capacity for knowing God, and increase his efficiency to do good. He spoke to men of

those truths that relate to the conduct of life, and that take hold upon eternity."¹

One idea that emerges from these stories is that the kingdom of God is a union of the Divine with the human. Each parable is developed to show how this takes place, and we are left to ponder the multifaceted nature of the kingdom. It develops silently, imperceptibly, and yet with power.

And the kingdom of God is
like . . .

- . . . a friendship
- . . . teachers and students in
a classroom
- . . . a game of soccer

The interaction of committed people produces a larger whole—an understanding of the gospel treasure. This union of God with people, and people with people is accomplished by ties that shall never be broken.

INTRO- DUCTION

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 23.

Gene Gasca is a professor of education at Pacific Union College.

“The Kingdom of God Is Like . . .”

LOGOS Theme: Jesus uses parables to explain his mission and to communicate essential truths about the kingdom of God.

1. Jesus' True Family (read Mark 3:20, 21, 31-35)

“And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.’” (3:33-35, RSV).

The background of this statement is found in the preceding verses. Jesus' popularity had reached such an extent that little time was left “even to eat.” Upon hearing this his family came to take him away. Or perhaps upon hearing people say, “He is beside himself,” his family came to take him away and so preserve the family reputation. Thus Jesus made this comment in an attempt to show “any blood relationship is of little consequence when compared to the real relationship with Jesus which grows out of seeing his deeds and hearing his words. . . . This passage shows to an unprecedented degree that grace is bestowed on those who are simply in the presence of Jesus—where Jesus is, there is salvation.”¹

What are the implications of Jesus' statement on family ties and responsibilities? What does this statement reveal about the kingdom of God and our responsibility to it?

2. Charge and Response (read Mark 3:22-30)

“And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul.’” (3:22, RSV).

With Jesus' popularity growing extensively in Galilee, the religious leadership in Jerusalem sent “observers” to report back to headquarters and also attempt to dampen enthusiasm for Jesus. Thus the charge that Jesus was possessed by “Beelzebul.” Jesus met this attack with two points. First, if the charge is true, Satan is divided against himself, therefore powerless, and this is obviously untrue. Second, Satan is strong, but one stronger has come, evidenced by the ability to throw Satan out (vs. 27). Then Jesus countered with, “But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin’” (vs. 29, RSV).

What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

3. Parables of the Kingdom

Parables are used as a tool to illustrate and clarify a point by using the familiar and obvious. This method was a favorite of Jesus. He started with the here and now to lead people's thoughts to heaven. He used something everyone knew to point toward something not yet realized. In the ordinary and common things of life he would point out the mysteries of God. Thus the point of a parable is

designed to be obvious and does not require a close study to determine meaning (for a discussion on Mark 4:10-12, see Evidence). It is wrong to attach meaning to every detail of the illustration. Rather, it is better to ask, "What point first comes to mind when this story is heard?"

A. The Sower and the Soil (read Mark 4:1-20)

"He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: 'Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed'" (4:2, 3, NIV).

Four kinds of soil, four kinds of people. There are those upon whom Christianity can make no impression. They see it as irrelevant and unnecessary—the seed along the path. Others find Christianity interesting and appealing but never let it get beyond the surface of their lives. They fail to realize that Christianity is a case of all or nothing—the seed sown on the rocky places. It is all too easy to fill one's life with a multiplicity of interests and leave no room for Christ. Priorities become warped, and if Christ is given any room at all it is small indeed—the seed sown among thorns. Then there is the group upon whom Christianity makes a profound impression. It becomes the center of their lives. They put its principles into practice—the seed sown on good soil which produced an abundant harvest.

Which group do you fit into? Do you fit totally into one category or do you see a part of yourself in all? How can you change?

B. The Lamp and Seeds (read Mark 4:21-34)

"What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed . . ." (4:30, 31, NIV).

To the disciples, the rejection of Christ by the religious elite must have been cause for doubt, confusion, and discouragement. This, in turn, probably caused them to question Christ's methods. These three parables help explain the kingdom of God in regard to these concerns. First, truth is not something to be hid. It is openly displayed no matter what the consequences. "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" (vss. 24, 25, NIV). Second, we may never see how God's kingdom works, but the results of its working will be evident. And third, the beginnings of God's kingdom may be small, but the end result is immeasurable.

From the study of the week's passage how would you describe what the kingdom of God is like? What are the contemporary implications of these metaphors?

E. R. M.

1. Eduard Schweizer,
The Good News According to Mark, p. 87.

From a Kernel to a Kingdom

selected by Terrence Trivett

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 4:30-32

Christ illustrated the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God in numerous parables. Here let us focus on Ellen White's development of just one of them, the parable of the mustard seed.

"The germ in the seed grows by the unfolding of the life-principle which God has implanted. Its development depends upon no human power. So it is with the kingdom of Christ. It is a new creation. Its principles of development are the opposite of those that rule the kingdoms of this world. Earthly governments prevail by physical force; they maintain their dominion by war; but the founder of the new kingdom is the Prince of Peace. In His plan of government there is no employment of brute force to compel the conscience. The Jews looked for the kingdom of God to be established in the same way as the kingdoms of the world. To promote righteousness they resorted to external measures. They devised methods and plans. But Christ implants a principle. By implanting truth and righteousness, He counterworks error and sin.

"As Jesus spoke this parable, the mustard plant could be seen far and near, lifting itself above the grass and grain, and waving its branches lightly in the air. Birds flitted from twig to twig, and sang amid the leafy foliage. Yet the seed from which sprang this giant plant was among the least of all seeds. At first it sent up a tender shoot, but it was of strong vitality, and grew and flourished until it reached its present great size. So the kingdom of Christ in its beginning seemed humble and insignificant. Compared with earthly kingdoms it appeared to be the least of all. By the rulers of this world Christ's claim to be a king was ridiculed. Yet in the mighty truths committed to His followers the kingdom of the gospel possessed a divine life. And how rapid was its growth, how widespread its influence! When Christ spoke this parable, there were only a few Galilean peasants to represent the new kingdom. Their poverty, the fewness of their numbers, were urged over and over again as a reason why men should not connect themselves with these simple-minded fishermen who followed Jesus. But the mustard seed was to grow and spread forth its branches throughout the world. When the earthly kingdoms whose glory then filled the hearts of men should perish, the kingdom of Christ would remain, a mighty and far-reaching power.

"So the work of grace in the heart is small in its beginning. A word is spoken, a ray of light is shed into the soul, an influence is exerted that is the beginning of the new life; and who can measure its results?"¹

REACT

Ellen White indicates that the mustard seed of the kingdom has already to a large extent grown and "spread forth its branches throughout the world." But are there any ways in which the kingdom is still at the mustard-seed stage today?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 77, 78.

Terrence Trivett is a professor of biology at Pacific Union College.

The Secret of the Kingdom

by Norman Wendth

Mark's gospel presents conservative Bible students with a real problem in the passage we are studying this week. We do not usually have any trouble with Christ's parables themselves, but Christ's *theory* of parables is another matter altogether. Listen: "When he was alone, the Twelve and others who were round him questioned him about the parables. He replied, 'To you the secret of the kingdom of God has been given; but to those who are outside everything comes by way of parables, so that (as Scripture says) they may look and look, but see nothing; they may hear and hear, but understand nothing; otherwise they might turn to God and be forgiven'" (Mark 4:10-12, NEB; emphasis supplied).

The problem lies in the italicized "so that" and "otherwise." It sounds very much as if Christ were speaking in parables in order to exclude everyone except a select few, a sacred clique. Worse yet, he seems to have been hiding truths necessary for salvation so that these undesirable outsiders would be eternally lost! And lest we miss the apparent unfairness of it all, Mark rubs it in by ending this week's passage with the comment that, "With many such parables he would give them his message, so far as they were able to receive it. He never spoke to them except in parables; but *privately* to his disciples he explained everything" (vss. 33, 34, NEB; emphasis supplied).

This almost sounds like Calvin's doctrine of the elect, doesn't it? It at least sounds like the similar "Once saved, always saved," with its terrifying corollary, "Once lost, always lost." Furthermore, we must admit that Mark has been insisting all along that the Messiahship of Christ was a secret (see Mark 8:30). For Seventh-day Adventists, who have strongly maintained that Calvin was wrong, and who have a picture of a Christ who loves every sinner and forgives all who accept his forgiveness, this passage is one we would rather ignore.

Other Christians have faced the same problem, of course. And most modern scholars have a solution. It is a simple one: Mark (as we have him) is wrong! Of course, this answer comes in a variety of versions. Some argue that Mark misunderstood Christ's explanation of why he used parables, and so misreported the theory. Others argue that Mark's command of Greek wasn't very good, and his "so that" (the Greek *hina*) should have been "in that" (perhaps *hoti*, as in Matthew's version). They have Christ saying "I have to speak in parables, because otherwise they would not understand." Many modern scholars argue that the text was corrupted. Perhaps some later scribe inserted a gnostic interpretation into Mark's account. In each of these explanations, however, Mark cannot be trusted.

We can certainly understand the motive behind these scholar's arguments; they and we feel deeply that Christ *couldn't* have meant to exclude the masses. That is too unlike him, and anyway, the parables seem more like clear illustrations than dark riddles. However, most Seventh-day Adventists can't find much comfort in mod-

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 4:10-12,
33, 34

"It sounds as if Christ were speaking in parables in order to exclude everyone except a sacred clique."

Norman Wendth is an assistant professor of English at Pacific Union College.

ern explanations, because the cure seems almost worse than the disease. In order to evade Mark's harsh report, they destroy our faith in the text we have received. And so we seem to be left with the impossible dilemma of having to accept either an exclusive Christ or an untrustworthy Gospel.

In my opinion, one possible way out of this dilemma is offered by Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians. Please read the second chapter. Did you notice how similar to Mark parts of this chapter are? Paul speaks of a *hidden* wisdom (vs. 7, NEB); those who are not spiritual *cannot* understand spiritual things (vs. 14). Paul is clearer than Mark, however, in explaining that those who have received the Holy Spirit *are* able to understand.

Paul permits us to clarify how parables work. The parable as told, though absolutely necessary, is in one sense incomplete. Its meaning is hidden until it has been interpreted—completed. It is the Holy Spirit that completes the parable, that permits the individual to interpret it. And without both parts of the equation, without both text and interpretation, we are left in the dark.

This understanding of parables does two things. First, it lets us better grasp in what way Christ was exclusive. He told his parables to all who would listen, in the hope that all would understand (Mark 4:22). He sounds dismayed when his disciples don't understand the parable of the sower (Mark 4:13). However, in any crowd there would be "outsiders"—those who had no Holy Spirit to help them. In fact, just before this week's passage we have Christ's explanation of the unforgivable sin—and that is to slander the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28, 29). I believe that those who have committed the unforgivable sin are Mark's outsiders, and it is because they have lost forever the Holy Spirit that they have lost forever the chance to understand the parables. They are, perhaps, the pathway in the parable of the sower. Mark's account remains harshly expressed, but, in this context, understandable.

Second, if this understanding of how parables work is correct, we can better understand why Christ used them so much. Like the poems that I teach in literature classes, they are sometimes hard to grasp at first. But like the best poems, the parables therefore speak to a wider audience, and speak of subjects that could not otherwise be covered. Had Christ taught us using only rational discourse and theological propositions, he would have probably been much more successful with the scribes and Pharisees and theologians of his day. By using parables, on the other hand, he can speak to all who will let the Holy Spirit complete the parable in their minds and hearts. The unsophisticated will understand better, because the Holy Spirit can explain the parables to them where they are. As the centuries pass and our cultures change, the parables can still speak to us, because the Spirit can complete them according to our imme-

"Christ seems to have been hiding truths necessary for salvation."

iate and sometimes very different needs. Straight doctrine may get lost when people can no longer understand the context; parables speak to a much wider audience, and teach all who are willing to be insiders, including you and me today. The use of parables has made our apparently "exclusive" Christ all the more inclusive.

"It is the Holy Spirit who completes the parable."

REACT

If the Holy Spirit completes the meaning of Jesus' parables in our minds, then might the Spirit lead different people to different conclusions about the meaning of a particular parable?

The Unpardonable Sin by Gilbert Muth

HOW TO
Key text:
Mark 3:22-30

When Christ displayed ability to cast out devils, the scribes attributed his power to his being in league with the devil himself. Christ's response was, "Believe me, all men's sins can be forgiven and all their blasphemies. But there can never be any forgiveness for blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That is an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28, 29, Phillips). Christ in effect said that when we attribute the works of God and his kingdom to the working of Satan, we are cutting off our connection to the drawing power of the Holy Spirit. Permanently driving away this power is thus the unpardonable sin.

When we become embroiled in theological controversies, it is easy to take sides and assert that the theology, beliefs and actions of those with whom we disagree are satanic. There is a very good chance that the Lord is trying to lead us to new understandings of his kingdom through these controversies as well as remove rough spots from our character. It is therefore quite possible that we could be cutting ourselves off from the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit by taking the position that only we have the TRUTH and all other interpretations are of satanic origin. This error can be avoided by the following:

1. **Take a tolerant attitude toward others.** Remember that all Christians are united by their faith in Christ's power to save and forgive sins. Some may not have the depth of understanding of the kingdom of God that we have. Others may have discovered some insights new to us. One method of the Spirit's leading is through others. It is imperative that we not form our interpretations in a vacuum.

2. **Read and study.** Our Father leads us in a rational and logical manner. He gave us minds to use for the processing of information. Thus if one reads widely, obtaining the full spectrum of thought on a given topic, and at the same time compares this with what the Bible says on the topic, he is using his God-given faculties for drawing conclusions relative to God's kingdom and salvation. And he is putting himself in a position to be led by the Holy Spirit.

3. **Pray.** The Holy Spirit takes our groanings and presents them to the Father in perfect language. Tell the Lord what is giving you difficulty in understanding the kingdom. Ask for wisdom and vision to be led to new insights. God has promised to show us the way through the agency of the Holy Spirit working with our minds. Prayer will not result in a "memory dump" from him to us; rather it gives the Holy Spirit permission to work with our minds in a more direct and powerful way.

In summary, we are in danger of committing the unpardonable sin as did the Pharisees by attributing the leading of the Spirit to the Prince of Darkness, even in the midst of our great biblical knowledge. This danger will be circumvented by keeping our communication lines open so the Spirit can get through to show us the kingdom of God.

Gilbert Muth is chairman of the Biology Department at Pacific Union College.

The Sower

by Archibald M. Hunter

I. In our industrial society so familiar are we with packaged goods that Jesus' story of a farmer and his fortunes no longer makes quite the impact on us that it once did. Once upon a time, before the coming of mechanized farming, the figure of the lone farmer handcasting his seed was about as commonplace in the West as in the East. Some of us, who were country-bred, remember first hearing Jesus' parable about the Sower in Sunday School, even if our appreciation of it seldom went further than the 'picture' part and we never got to the 'reality' part—the truth about the kingdom of the Great Sower it was meant to teach.

Why, where, and when did Jesus tell this tale of the farmer and the varied fortunes that befell the seed he sowed?

A glance at its setting in Mark's gospel will help us to an answer. This is no townsmen's tale—it smells of the country and clearly belongs to the open-air phase of Jesus' ministry. But before Jesus had moved from the towns and made the Lake of Galilee the *milieu* of his ministry, opposition to it had been mounting. The 'doctors of the law' had turned hostile; the Pharisees were ganging up against him, in unholy and unwonted alliance with the Herodians; he had been driven from the synagogues; there had been setbacks and discouragement; and his own family had shown misgivings about him. I shall wonder that even his disciples and followers began to show signs of discouragement also. Was the great kingdom of God a surprise to which Jesus had called them foredoomed to failure?

This parable was the answer to such forebodings. Perhaps, as Jesus spoke to them, there appeared on a nearby hillside a man handcasting his seed. Here was an image from real life, ready for his purpose. So the parable of the Sower was born.

Some of the sower's seed, said Jesus, fell on the footpath running through the field, only for the birds to swoop down and devour it. Some seed fell on ground where there was only a thin dusting of soil on top, and, below it, shelving rock. Up shot the young seeds; but when the sun pierced the shallow soil, it became a hot-bed where the young plants soon withered. Other seed fell on 'dirty' soil full of thorns which shot up quickly and choked the growing corn-crofts. But this was not the end of the story. Some seed fell on good ground and yielded the crop we all remember—'some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred-fold.' If, as our experts tell us, tenfold was reckoned an average crop in Palestine, this was a bumper harvest, a harvest to gladden any farmer's heart and make him forget his losses.

Jesus' parables normally follow the rules of popular story-telling, one of which is 'the rule of end stress.' What this means is that the spotlight falls on the last item in the series—in this case, the abundant harvest. Lift, then, the whole story from the natural to the spiritual level, and its point becomes clear. 'In spite of all hazards and losses,' Jesus is saying, 'the farmer reaps a splendid crop. Even so, in spite of all frustrations and failures, God's rule ad-

OPINION

Key text:
Mark 4:3-8

"What we have to keep in view is the harvest, and not the failures."

Archibald M. Hunter is a leading Scottish New Testament interpreter.

vances, and his harvest exceeds expectation.' To be sure, the kingdom of God is no juggernaut; it encounters opposition and experiences failures; but it triumphs over and amid both. As unproductive pockets of soil belong to sowing, so opposition and failure belong to history and sinful human nature. But God's kingdom belongs to the eternal realm, and what we have to keep in view is the harvest and not the failures.

Originally, then, on Jesus' lips the parable was a *Ni Desperandum*—a ringing 'Have faith in God'—to despondent followers. It is still a clarion call to 'fearful saints.' Not a few Christians are like the one who, in the spiritual doldrums, wrote:

God's Word made a perfect beginning;
Man spoiled the creation by sinning;
We know that the story
Will end in God's glory,

But at present the other side's winning!

Doesn't the last line of that limerick describe how most of us feel in our black moods, about God's cause in the world? We note how many foes are ranged against God's kingdom in the world; we see the church's setbacks and failures; around us are empty pews and dwindling congregations; and spiritual apathy seems endemic in our land. It is then we must learn from Christ that, however gloomy the outlook for the church may seem to be, God's kingdom 'stands and grows for ever,' that God's Spirit, like a great wind, is invisibly but unceasingly at work in the affairs of men, that the 'little flock' (Luke 12:32) which the Good Shepherd gathered in Galilee is now the greatest society on earth, and that the God who has already done so much for men in Christ may be trusted to finish his work. Jesus is still saying to us his followers, 'Have faith in God. His victory is sure.'

"We see the church's setbacks and failures, and spiritual apathy seems endemic."

II. But this was not the only purpose Jesus had in mind when he told this story about the sower and the soils. Make no mistake about it, that circumstantial description of the various soils is not accidental. It reflects Jesus' own experience of preaching the gospel of the kingdom and his awareness of the need for attentive hearing. It is therefore also a parable about hearing the gospel—about the need for a hearing which issues in decision and action. If it says, 'Have faith in God,' it says also, 'God depends on you.'

Let us consider this matter of how we hear the gospel. There are various ways of hearing. We can listen only with our ears, as often happens in a polite conversation. Then it is a case of in one ear and out of the other. This suggests the seed that fell on the footpath. Or we can listen with our minds only, as we do to a great speaker. While he speaks, we are thrilled and profess ourselves persuaded but the fine impulses evoked by his words evaporate as quickly as the moisture from the shallow soil. Or, again we can listen—on radio or TV—to a moving appeal for a good cause; but, well—we re-

member the state of our overdraft or a friend rings up about a business deal, and the appeal goes unanswered. The thorns have choked the young shoots. But one day, maybe, the announcer interrupts the programme with, 'Here is an SOS message for . . .'; we hear our own name, learn that a loved one is desperately ill; and now we hear not with our ears only, or with minds only, but with our whole being, and we act at once. It is a matter of life or death—a truly existential situation.

This is the kind of hearing the gospel calls for. Momentous issues are at stake; they concern us; we must listen and decide.

If you read the parable again, and let it put questions to you about yourself, will they not be something like these? 'What kind of soil am I? Am I hard soil, shallow soil, dirty soil, or good soil?' Of course you may brush these questions aside with, 'I'm just the way God made me, and there's nothing to be done about it.' But this sort of fatalism is really a denial of the truth of the gospel. The grace of God can change men, and Christian history abounds with examples of changed men. The real truth is that in each of us there is something of all four soils, and what the parable says is: 'Don't let the seed fall on hard ground. Don't be so shallow that it can't take root in you. Weed out those thorns. Be good soil—give God his chance to do his gracious work on you—even if it means altering your whole life.'

Yet for us, if not for those who first heard the parable, there is a yet deeper meaning. For we who stand on the far side of the cross and the resurrection know, as they hardly did, who the speaker of the parable is. He is 'the Word made flesh,' God's saving purpose embodied in a man. And, by the Spirit's work, the living Christ still confronts us with his challenge, as on our response to it our destiny depends: 'Whoever will acknowledge me before men,' says this Jesus, 'I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; and whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.'

What we do with Jesus and the gospel is of eternal moment. All turns on our response.

Excerpted from *The Parables Then and Now*, pp. 35-39. Published in the U.S.A. by the Westminster Press, 1972. Copyright © SCM Press, Ltd., 1971. Used by permission.

January 20-January 26

4

Christ the Liberator

“And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39).



Christ on the Sea of Galilee. Cologne, early 11th century.

A Two-Fold Miracle

by Valerie Halliwell-Smith

INTRODUCTION

This Week's Scripture: Mark
4:35 to 5:43

As I knelt down in a circle along with about twenty friends, I realized I was about to witness a first for me—a twentieth-century anointing. I wasn't quite sure what to expect. My best friend's five-month-old son had recently been diagnosed as hydrocephalic. Only a week before, the apparently healthy infant had been taken in for a routine check-up. In one week's time, the parents' thoughts and emotions had journeyed through stages of anxiety, guilt, and a questioning of faith common to those who abruptly must confront serious questions about their dear child's future.

Bryan and Carole's week had been spent at Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. Tests and multiple consultations with several specialists confirmed the need for a shunt in Brandon's lower brain to relieve the pressure from fluid building up in that region. The operation would occur the coming Monday, immediately following one final set of X rays.

My thoughts quickly returned to the present as Pastor Hanna spoke about the innocence of this young child, the love we all had toward this family, and Jesus' power to change anything. The quiet, serious setting of this Sabbath afternoon in the family room where we all gathered was broken occasionally by Brandon's gentle cooing

sounds and by the sniffles from those of us who found it difficult to hold back expressions of our sympathetic emotions. Brandon lay on blankets in the middle of our circle while Pastor Hanna and his associate kneeled closely beside him.

Pastor Hanna reached into the pocket of his dark suit to pull out a small glass vial filled with a golden oil. Pouring a small amount on Brandon's head, the pastor prayed for God's healing touch and a strengthening of faith for all of us. Following the prayer we sang a few hymns of Jesus' love and lingered briefly before going our separate ways.

Only in recent years have I realized the fullness of the miracle performed eleven years ago. When X rays were taken the following Monday just prior to the surgery, the specialists could not scientifically explain how the infant's brain could normalize so quickly. The surgery was cancelled.

I continue to remember Christ's dramatic healing of this small child as I watch Brandon's life unfold with fullness and beauty. Each time I receive a thank-you note from Brandon or learn of his accomplishments through the reports of his proud parents, I can't help but return in memory to that wintry Sabbath afternoon. More importantly, I find the fuller miracle of that day within my own heart, recognizing that God renewed my faith as well as Brandon's physical well-being.

Valerie Halliwell-Smith is a mother and English and career education teacher/ guidance counselor at Pacific Union College Preparatory School.

Sunday, January 20 41

The Power That Liberates

LOGOS Theme: Jesus exerts liberating power over the forces that threaten human peace and happiness.

1. Jesus' Power Over the Elements (read Mark 4:35-41)

"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

"He said to his disciples, 'Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?' (4:39, 40, NIV).

The lake's responsiveness to Jesus' command of "peace" (vs. 39, KJV) reveals his divine authority over elements beyond human control. In the Old Testament, the sea represents the primordial chaos which God overcame by speaking the created order into existence (see Gen. 1:1, 2; Psalm 74:13-17). Troubled waters also represent the conflicts and persecution experienced by the faithful (see Ps. 69:1, 2, 14) in which they find deliverance only in God (see Isa. 43:2; Ps. 107:23-32).

The disciples were "terrified" after Jesus calmed the storm (vs. 41). Does Christ's delivering power elicit a similar reaction in us today? Should it? (Note also the reactions in 5:15, 33 and 42).

2. Jesus' Power Over Demons (read Mark 5:1-20)

"As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, 'Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you' " (5:18, 19, NIV).

Having exerted power over external forces, Jesus now displays his power to liberate those dominated by internal forces. His allowing the demons he cast out to enter a herd of pigs and drive them into the lake (vss. 11-13) may perplex our modern sensibilities. But from the standpoint of Mark's story line, this incident only underscores the totality of Jesus' liberating power. Here is a demonic force so powerful that it is called "Legion" (a Roman legion had 6,000 soldiers) and can cause 2,000 pigs to destroy themselves. Yet it is no match for the word of God's Son.

The people of the area were afraid of the further upheaval Jesus' presence might bring and asked him to leave (vs. 17). The man who had been possessed, on the other hand, wanted nothing more than continual fellowship with Jesus (vs. 18). Though this privilege was deferred, he became one of the earliest witnesses to Christ, sharing the remarkable story of what Jesus had done for him (vss. 19, 20).

Does demon possession exist in our society today? If so, what forms does it take?

3. Jesus' Power Over Disease (read Mark 5:21-34)

"'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering' " (5:34, NIV).

Returning to the western shore of the lake, Jesus again encountered desperate human need. The woman with continual hemorrhages suffered not only physical pain but the social/religious stigma of being ceremonially unclean (see Lev. 15:25-27). All human resources proved inadequate to meet her need—various doctors had tried and failed for twelve years (vss. 25, 26).

Jesus' words to her indicate that the healing he provided meant more than just relief from physical suffering. In addressing her as "daughter," Jesus was including her in the messianic family whose members find their primary identity in following Jesus (cf. 3:33-35). The word translated "healed" or "made you well" (RSV) in vss. 28 and 34 can also be translated "saved." It connotes not only physical healing but salvation in the broadest sense. "Peace" in vs. 34 also suggests restoration and harmony that involves one's entire being.¹ So, this woman is not just liberated from physical malady; she is brought into an entirely new context where she can find wholeness.

Healing through touching a garment strikes many modern readers as involving more superstition and/or magic than faith. But clearly, in this case, Jesus didn't regard it so. Why?

4. Jesus' Power Over Death (read Mark 5:21-24, 35-43)

" . . . Jesus told the synagogue ruler, 'Don't be afraid; just believe' " (5:36, NIV).

In this incident Jesus reveals that not even death, the ultimate threat to human peace and happiness, is outside of his control. The men from the house of Jairus assumed that the girl's death made the matter hopeless (vs. 35). But Jesus said, "Don't be afraid." With these words, he was offering much more than glib reassurance. He was using a phrase that the Old Testament frequently uses in conjunction with an appearance of God (see Gen. 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 46:3; Judges 6:23; Dan. 10:12, 19). In Jesus, God's presence and kingdom are breaking into history in a decisive new manner, and not even death can stand in the way.

In the four stories in this week's lesson we see that humanity's great enemies, both in our world and in ourselves, "are powerless before the strong Son of God. Whether the foes we face are turbulent human nature in the grip of demonic elements, or the vexing, mind-bending issues of unruly and explosive natural forces that sweep across our planet earth, or the existential dread of facing the specter of death, the church's bold assertion is:

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son
Endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won."*²

Why do you think those who witnessed the raising of Jairus' daughter were asked to keep quiet about it, whereas the former demoniac was told to tell others what Jesus had done? D. F. M.

1. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark*, p. 86.
2. Ralph P. Martin, *Where the Action Is*, p. 40.

The Safeguard

selected by Gilbert Muth

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 5:1-20

The two restored demoniacs [see Matt. 8:28-34] were the first missionaries whom Christ sent to preach the gospel in the region of Decapolis. For a few moments only these men had been privileged to hear the teachings of Christ. Not one sermon from His lips had ever fallen upon their ears. They could not instruct the people as the disciples who had been daily with Christ were able to do. But they bore in their own persons the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. They could tell what they knew; what they themselves had seen, and heard, and felt of the power of Christ. This is what everyone can do whose heart has been touched by the grace of God. John, the beloved disciple, wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." 1 John 1:1-3. As witnesses for Christ, we are to tell what we know, what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt. If we have been following Jesus step by step, we shall have something right to the point to tell concerning the way in which He has led us. We can tell how we have tested His promise, and found the promise true. We can bear witness to what we have known of the grace of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing. . . .

"They bore in their own persons the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah."

The encounter with the demoniacs of Gergesa had a lesson for the disciples. It showed the depths of degradation to which Satan is seeking to drag the whole human race, and the mission of Christ to set men free from his power. Those wretched beings, dwelling in the place of graves, possessed by demons, in bondage to uncontrolled passions and loathsome lusts, represent what humanity would become if given up to satanic jurisdiction. Satan's influence is constantly exerted upon men to distract the senses, control the mind for evil, and incite to violence and crime. He weakens the body, darkens the intellect, and debases the soul. Whenever men reject the Saviour's invitation, they are yielding themselves to Satan. . . . Through his specious temptations Satan leads men to worse and worse evils, till utter depravity and ruin are the result. The only safeguard against his power is found in the presence of Jesus.

REACT

Which should take the most prominent place in our witnessing: what God has done in our lives or what God did in Christ 2,000 years ago?

Excerpted from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 340, 341.

Gilbert Muth is chairman of the Biology Department at Pacific Union College.

Triumph Over Any Sort of Evil

by Norman Wendth

EVIDENCE
Key text:
Mark 4:35-41

When was the last time you heard a sermon about Christ's rebuking the storm on Galilee? I can't remember having heard one for years, yet I've heard reference to the other miracles covered in this week's lesson rather often. I've heard the story of the woman with a hemorrhage, for example, discussed twice in the last few months alone. It's an interesting discrepancy, and one which I believe shows us something about ourselves. Mark uses these miracles to show us a Christ actively fighting evil, a Christ who triumphs over four significantly different manifestations of evil. However, our understanding of Christ's triumphs is likely to change as our interpretation of the evil he is fighting changes. And one result is that our twentieth-century imaginations have trouble with the miracle on Galilee.

Let us compare some possible images of evil. Many people in Mark's original audience imagined the world populated with supernatural beings. To them, good meant benign angels and spirits; evil meant hostile devils and demons. Mark shows Christ's power over this kind of evil in the story of the man who dwelt among the tombs. To make sure we realize that this is no ordinary exorcism, Mark even helps us number the "Legion" of demons by estimating the number of swine that jumped into the sea—about 2000. In this light, Christ's power was overwhelming. In fact, the townspeople were afraid of him, and begged him to leave the neighborhood.

Readers of Mark who saw evil as malignant spirits would not have our trouble with the miracle of the storm. Some would see the storm as created by hostile sea spirits; more, perhaps, would see it as Lucifer's awesome hatred of Christ unleashed in the elements. Christ's rebuking the storm (notice a personification of the storm granted by that word "rebuke") is therefore a dramatic example of his power over evil spiritual forces, and a figure of God's final, complete triumph over Satan and his legions.

However, many in Mark's audience throughout the ages, especially those educated in Greek and Roman thought, have had a more philosophical image of evil. They have seen good as order, and evil as chaos. The world was originally created when God spoke order into primordial chaos; the Fall returned nature to partial chaos. The original world was perfect. Sin brought irregular mountains, change and decay, and man-made farms and cities imposing a precarious order on fallen nature. To these readers Mark offers the raising of Jairus' daughter. To raise the dead is not merely a physical miracle; by restoring life to the little girl, Christ restored order to the individual body, to the family, and to the community.

Christians through the centuries who have seen the storm on Galilee as an example of the chaos of fallen nature, have found that Christ's stilling of the storm fits easily into their understanding of a triumph over evil. Even as the raising of Jairus' daughter points forward to the day when God will restore eternity and banish death and decay, so the miracle on Galilee points forward to the time

Norman Wendth is an assistant professor of English at Pacific Union College.

when God's power to restore order will be extended to the very elements, and we will be returned to the earth made new.

But we in the twentieth century cannot see the storm as evil, and therefore see no point to this miracle beyond Christ's calming his disciples or perhaps saving them from danger. There are two reasons for our difficulty. First, our understanding of storms has changed. We now see neither the devil nor disorder in the tempest. Lions, oaks, and seas are not spirit-controlled; earthquakes and tidal waves obey orderly laws we are now beginning to understand. In fact, far from imagining nature as evil, we now tend to see it as good. We feel *closer* to God while listening to the rolling thunder.

Second, our metaphor for evil has changed, and we now tend to think of evil as a disease. John Dean did not tell Nixon that his government was in chaos, nor that demons were responsible for Watergate. Instead, he spoke of a "cancer growing on a Presidency." No wonder I have heard more sermons on the woman with a hemorrhage—that miracle fits our current image of evil wonderfully. Christ, the Great Physician, heals our physical diseases and our moral illnesses. We call demon possession "mental illness" and see resurrection as the ultimate cure for the ultimate disease. But can we so easily translate Christ's calming the storm on Galilee? Can we seriously think of the storm as a disease?

No, we can't. And that means that it is difficult to make the miracle on Galilee meaningful to most twentieth-century audiences, except perhaps for a few minutes now and then when a gifted preacher pulls our imaginations into another era. But that difficulty can itself direct our attention in new and meaningful ways. First, our Bible study is clarified when we become aware of how much our human habits of thought color our understanding of God's Word. Second, our attention is forced away from the miracles to the miracle worker, away from the "magic" to Mark's message about Christ's purposes. We can identify with the fear shown in each of the four miracle stories (sometimes fear of Christ himself). We can notice how Christ always chides those weak of faith, but blesses those who demonstrate faith in him. And, however human our interpretation of evil may be, we can share Mark's faith in Christ's power to triumph over evil in every incarnation.

REACT

1. Are there ways in which some modern readers might find the miracle on Galilee just as meaningful as the others studied this week?

2. If the biblical understanding of evil, and its understanding of reality in general clashes with that of our modern society, should we not fully accept the biblical view?

Freedom From Fear

by Louis Normington

In Mark 4:35 to 5:43 the record of Christ's ministry shifts from teaching and preaching to action—from parables to miracles. But his message remains the same: Follow me and I will give you the freedom you crave.

HOW TO

Key text:
John 8:36

How did he give this freedom? Re-read the four stories that comprise the lesson. You will find that Christ acted to free his disciples from five fears—fears that to some degree still torment each member of the human race. Let me list them:

1. The fear that God doesn't really care about us. ("We are sinking! Do you not care?" 4:38, NEB).

2. The fear of external threat—the dangers and uncertainties of life (the storm stilled).

3. Internal conflict and the fear that we will never be able to overcome the forces of evil inside us (the healing of the man possessed).

4. The fear of pain and sickness (the healing of the bleeding woman).

5. The fear of death (the raising of Jairus' daughter).

Did the disciples understand and accept the freedom offered? Only partially, the record shows.

More to the point, however, how can we grow in our sense of freedom from these same five fears?

I would suggest six steps.

1. **Make, or remake, a decision to trust in God's leading in your life—the leap of faith, the act of surrender.**

2. **Seek daily, in prayer and in meditation, to know what God's will is and to have the power to carry it out.**

3. **Learn to change your inner dialogue from one that weakens (I'm afraid it's not going to work out, etc.) to one that strengthens (If it's God's will for me, somehow I'll find the way and the strength to do it).**

4. **Do God's will as well as possible and leave the consequences to him.**

5. **Repeat the process regularly, reminding yourself of the times things have worked out in spite of fears and hesitation.**

6. **Share with others, as opportunity permits, the good news that God's way of freeing us from fear will work—if we work with it. Such sharing may help others, and it will certainly help you grow.**

Louis Normington is professor emeritus of Pacific Union College and a marriage and family counselor.

God's Problem

by Ted Wick

OPINION

Key text:
John 20:30, 31

God has been frustrated. His communication with human beings has been severely impaired. God, with all knowledge, wants to tell heavenly things to earthly minds. How does the infinite God break through the communication barrier?

To get a grasp of the problem, a couple principles of communication will be helpful. A word is a *symbol*. Five letters of the alphabet grouped together form the following symbol, and it is only a symbol which refers us to a concrete object: *chair*. Those letters do not look like an item to sit on. But to the English-speaking mind, those letters, written or spoken, conjure up in the mind a picture of a specific item—something you use to rest your body from continual standing. The actual chair, not its alphabetic symbol, is called the *referent*. The sound of the spoken word, or a sight of the written word transcend the symbol and take the mind to the referent. It is true that there are a great variety of mental pictures, each of which could correctly describe a piece of furniture designed for human repose in a sitting position. Nonetheless, they all have a specific use in common.

Jesus performed a series of symbolic acts in the realm of human sight and limited faith and understanding. Each act had its referent in matters relating to the invisible realm of the angels and of God.

“How does the infinite God break through the communication barrier?”

1. He calmed a ferocious storm on Galilee that threatened the lives of his disciples and of passengers in nearby boats. While the lives of these persons were extended in this world, they still eventually died and were buried. Christ is capable of far more than this, but he accommodated himself to the limited understanding of mankind. Certainly this was an actual miracle. But it was limited in scope to what man could see and believe.

What was the *referent* in this *symbol*? By this act of controlling the storm, the very elements of this earth, Christ demonstrated that he was the same one who spoke the world into existence. To grasp this referent demands faith.

2. By casting out the demons from the man (men) of Gennesaret, with the concrete consequence of 2000 porkers running pell-mell into the sea and drowning, Jesus provided action in the realm of human sight. This action demonstrated he had power over unseen spirits of devils. It was he who cast out the first devils from the courts of heaven.

3. When Jesus was approached by Jairus, an influential churchman who asked for the healing of his very ill daughter, Jesus took enough time in getting to the girl's bedside to allow her to die. He wanted to “say” more than just another healed illness could say. He desired to show even greater truths about himself than a resurrection from the dead would bring. It is true that Jesus limited the spectators to three disciples and two family members. Nonetheless, there were witnesses. That is an important part of the communication process.

Ted Wick is the campus chaplain at Pacific Union College.

The truth about Jesus is that he had the power to call all the dead of all the previous ages to life that day. Even more, if he had chosen to raise them from an earthly grave immediately into their heavenly home, he could have done that also! It was necessary for him to name that one child or all the dead would have responded to the voice of the Life-giver. He spoke quietly, bringing life to a twelve-year-old girl in a small Palestinian bedroom. It was a *symbol* to all who would believe that had as its *referent* the overwhelming fact that Jesus had power over death, had power to give life.

Now this young girl lived out her life and finally was laid to rest as were all the other people who received the miracle-working power of the human Christ. The act of resurrection in the human sphere symbolized the great resurrection when all the redeemed will be raised from death, not back into the same old human existence, but into glorified bodies to live forever. That, my dear reader, is the *referent*!

God's problem of how to speak heavenly things to earthly minds was beautifully met in the "symbolic" act of Jesus' miracles. God wants to say more; and to the believer, these symbols in the arena of human sight and consciousness throw open the gates of heaven.

4. Even the woman who was cured by touching the hem of his garment was not allowed to slip away anonymously. The symbolic act would be lost to all but one, the lady herself. Our God wanted to say more! So he called the attention of all around him to the faith of this fearful but desperate woman. The event was preserved for you and me, to help us to hear heavenly things.

Yes, Jesus did more than calm the sea, cast out demons, raise the dead, cure an incurable disease—he tore away the veil that separates the earthly from the heavenly. Jesus, creator, life-giver, destroyer of demons and death invites trust from the heart of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam. He speaks with thunderous tones.

**"These symbols
throw open the
gates of
heaven."**

REACT

Can we find concrete symbols of divine referents in our world today, or do we find them only in Scripture?

January 27-February 2

5

The Response in Galilee

“ ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty’ ”
(John 6:35, NIV).



The Feeding of the 5,000. From the Gospel Book of 1194, Germany.

Lessons From Rejection

by William Price

This Week's Scripture: Mark 6

Gandhi, religious and political leader of India for many years, has become the hero of millions of people in this decade. Both books and cinema on his life have revealed a man of tremendous dedication to the principles in which he believed. Gandhi possessed an unswerving commitment to the masses of his country. His dedication to the attainment of unbridged rights for his people in their own land demands admiration and respect. Gandhi gave his life for his country and his people.

In the end he paid the supreme price, dying at the hands of an assassin. Gandhi had accomplished so much good. How then could anyone possibly consider murdering him? It was the strife and turmoil between the religious factions that precipitated this violent act. Even Gandhi, in his own culture, had been misunderstood. He faced those who could not and would not share his dream of a unified India—an India where all could love and tolerate one another, regardless of religious convictions. Here was a great man, perhaps not a prophet, but a great leader who knew that it meant to be rejected by some of his own people.

In our lesson this week we find Jesus lamenting similar circumstances. "A prophet is honored everywhere except in his home town and among his

relatives and by his own family" (Mark 6:4, Living Bible).

Jesus, like Gandhi, was a man filled with compassion and love for his people. He was crushed when his own people rejected him. When Jesus sent his chosen twelve to heal and tell the good news of the kingdom, they fared no better than their Lord. They paid the full price.

A number of Christ's disciples had been disciples of John the Baptist, who also knew rejection. His death was among the most senseless and brutal in the history of Christianity.

Rejection. Who needs it? Yet those who are truly Christian have always lived with it. But suppose we escape rejection and persecution. Should we rejoice or mourn? Or suppose we are persecuted for going to church on Saturdays, or for being "plain" people in a flashy world. Are these the marks of authentic Christianity?

It seems to me that those who paid the full price for their faith did so not because of their self-directed asceticism, but rather because they reached all the way down into the bowels of earth's most desperate needs. We cannot know Christ's kind of rejection until we suffer for giving to the have-nots, for loving the unlovely, and for persisting in a faith that always challenges the existing order.

INTRO- DUCTION

William Price is an associate professor of technology education at Pacific Union College.

Of Misunderstandings, Missionaries, and a Martyr

LOGOS

Theme: Jesus' immense popularity as a teacher and healer is tempered by misunderstanding of him and those identified with him.

1. Misunderstandings (read Mark 6:1-6, 30-56)

"Jesus said to them, 'Only in his home town, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.' . . . And he was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mark 6:4-6, NIV).

Jesus' visit to his hometown of Nazareth was among the most tragic events of his career. He should have returned in triumph to a civic celebration proclaimed "Jesus Day," for his fame had spread throughout Palestine. Instead, his fellow townspeople met him with insults and derision. Referring to him as "Mary's son" (v. 3) they questioned the legitimacy of his birth. Rather than accepting his success as a corporate benefit to their community, they reacted with petty resentment to his rise from humble beginnings. Familiarity had bred contempt. Their smallness, is, however, reminiscent of our modern technological age, in that they too preferred to ask the mechanical question "how" rather than the theological question "why."¹

Unfortunately, such shortsightedness was not limited to the Nazarenes. Christ's very own disciples demonstrated grave misunderstandings concerning his nature and mission. They saw his miraculous act in feeding the multitude (vss. 41-43) as a prelude to a popular mobilization against the Romans and his ascension to the Jewish throne. To them he was a new Moses providing manna in the desert, rallying the true Israelites to victory. This misunderstanding became even more evident following the storm experienced on the lake and Jesus' walk on the water (vss. 45-52). Mark alludes to this when he comments, "They [the disciples] were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened" (Mark 6:51, 52, NIV). Not until after the resurrection would the disciples finally come to realize the dimensions of Christ's mission.

What attitudes caused the people of Nazareth to react to Jesus the way they did? How do we deal with those attitudes today?

2. The First Missionaries (read Mark 6:7-13)

"Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits" (Mark 6:7, NIV).

Jesus had no illusions about doing the work of the kingdom all by himself. Therefore, his dispatch of his disciples to serve as missionaries was the logical multiplication of his own ministry. In fact, a primary purpose of his close association with them had been to prepare them for effective outreach.

The thrust of Christ's parting instructions was complete reliance on God for every need. "Missionaries who provide against every anticipated adversity (money, extra clothing, and the like) are

scarcely believable when they announce the nearness of God's kingdom."² Even 2,000 years ago the sense of urgency in the message was paramount. Today it should be infinitely more so.

What other activities and attitudes might render our message of God's love unbelievable? How literally should modern missionaries and evangelistic workers take Jesus' instruction in these verses?

The First Martyr (Read Mark 6:14-29)

"So he [Herod] immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter" (Mark 6:27, 28, NIV).

Elsewhere, Jesus brought special attention to the greatness of John the Baptist. Both in life and in death he is indeed a great inspiration. Barclay offers this eulogy:

"John the Baptizer stands revealed before us. He stands as the man of courage. He was a child of the desert and of the wide open spaces, and to imprison him in the dark dungeons of Machaerus must have been the last refinement of torture. But John preferred death to falsehood. He lived for the truth and he died for it. The man who brings to men the voice of God acts as a conscience. Many men would silence his conscience if he could, and therefore the man who speaks for God must always take his life and his fortune in his hands."³

Do men of John's character exist today? Are such people born or made? If the latter, which characteristics of John's upbringing were significant factors?

L. R. C.

1. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 107.
2. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark*, p. 94.
3. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 154.

Good Man, Bad End

By Donald G. Jones

TESTIMONY

Key Text:
Mark 6:14-29

"I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist . . ." (Matthew 11:11 NIV).

These powerful words of Jesus, a clear testimony to the quality of the life and teachings of John the Baptist, set the scene for the enigma of John's death. Why was this man, who was so important to the establishing of the ministry of Jesus, allowed to suffer so ignominious a fate?

The life, imprisonment and death of John the Baptist are discussed in *The Desire of Ages*, chapters 10, 18, and 22, and it is well worth the time spent reading them. The basic ideas regarding this whole affair can be summarized as follows:

1. John's usefulness as a forerunner of Jesus had come to an end. His mission had been fulfilled. "God calls a man to do a certain work; and when he has carried it as far as he is qualified to take it the Lord brings in others, to carry it still farther."¹

2. John's imprisonment and subsequent execution were the direct result of the machinations of Herodias, the illicit and iniquitous wife of Herod. "For a time Herod feebly sought to break the chain of lust that bound him; but Herodias fastened him the more firmly in her toils, and found revenge upon the Baptist by inducing Herod to cast him into prison."²

"Did John the Baptist die because he was a good man . . . or because he was a man of great political influence?"

A rather different view is given by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus: "Now, when (many) others came in crowds about him for they were greatly moved (or pleased) by hearing his words Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise rebellion (for they seemed to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death to prevent any mischief he might cause."³

So now, did John the Baptist die because he was a good man who reproved sin forthrightly and publicly, or because he was a man of great political influence and hence a threat to the government? The best answer is undoubtedly a combination of both points. His outspoken criticism of Herod and Herodias was made intolerable by his great political popularity.

Since John was so important to God, why didn't Jesus intervene in his behalf? A close examination of the record indicates that God intervenes in miraculous ways only in those cases where the intervention will have a direct bearing on his work, and then only in extreme cases. These criteria were not met in this situation.

Our God allows the laws of cause and effect to operate fully and freely. This predictability allows us to live our lives with the confidence that things will turn out as they should. As much as we think we may want divine intervention, the actual granting of our desires would throw our lives and expectations into turmoil. The fact that effect follows cause represents one of the happiest things that God does for man.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 182.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
3. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book XVIII, chap. V.

Donald Jones is chairman of the Department of Biology and Chemistry at Columbia Union College.

The Risk of Being Misunderstood

by Lloyd E. Best

After all Jesus had accomplished, even raising a dead girl to life (Mark 5:41, 42), you would think his hometown would treat him like a hero. Instead, after hearing his Sabbath sermon, they questioned his credentials (Mark 6:1-6).

Imagine the disappointment that Jesus must have felt because his own people "stumbled" (vs. 3, RSV footnote) over who he was. These Nazarenes could not accept that one of their own, a son they had known since his childhood, could be greater than themselves.

Jesus could have forced their acceptance through powerful miracles. (A visit to the local cemetery perhaps?) He instead preserved their option to exercise faith (see vss. 5, 6). Christ never performed miracles to force acknowledgment of his Messiahship, but rather to believe suffering and to nurture growing faith. Christ risked being misunderstood so that at a later time the Nazarenes might respond in the "still, small voice."

Herod's unwillingness to risk disapproval stands out in naked contrast. His "blank check" offer to Salome in the presence of his guests was made in a drunken fog (vss. 21-23). The sobering reply which came back from Herodias' daughter cut into his consciousness. Even though he must have realized how he was being manipulated, Herod could not admit his error. His perverted sense of honor would not allow him to risk being misunderstood by his friends. Ever after, the death of John the Baptist haunted Herod's conscience; his guilt made it easy for him to fear that Jesus was John, risen from the dead (vss. 14-16).

Jesus' concern for the well-being of a hungry crowd led him to risk being misunderstood again. After the apostles returned from their journeys, Jesus withdrew with them to a remote place. When he saw the "sheep without a shepherd" (vs. 34, NIV) who found the place of retreat, he had compassion on them. He filled their hungry minds with parables and later their hungry mouths with food. Jesus must have known that this miracle would multiply the likelihood of the crowd's acting on their limited understanding of his mission and try to make him king by force (see John 6:14, 15, 26-30). Nevertheless, he met their physical needs and planted within their minds a miracle which, even if misunderstood at the time, might later grow and blossom into deeper understanding.

EFFECT

How might fear of being misunderstood inhibit Christians from faithfulness today?

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 6:3

"Christ never performed miracles to force acknowledgment of his Messiahship."

Lloyd Best is principal of Pacific Union College Preparatory School.

Keeping an Open Mind

by Louis Normington

HOW TO

Key text:

Mark 6:52

In Mark 6 we read the reactions of three groups of people to Christ's work and message: the hometown people he grew up with, the crowds who followed him everywhere, and the little group of especially favored disciples—the twelve.

Let's look first at the reactions themselves. As we do, let's keep in mind that Christ had an overriding objective in all he did: To help men and women accept his divinity, trust in God's love and wisdom, and commit themselves to his leading.

First, the hometown people who had known him as the carpenter's son. They were astonished, admiring, then offended, and finally wanted no part of him. Why? It was simply incredible to them that the man whose humble origins they knew so well could possibly be the Son of God. They were "offended" (KJV) by the very thought. The Greek word means, literally, "tripped up!"

The masses who surrounded him on every possible occasion were curious, excited, and eager to see miracles. They ate the food he miraculously provided, and many of them even accepted him as "that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14, KJV). But in the main, as Matthew records it, they remained unmoved by his appeal, and impenitent (see Matt. 11:20, NEB).

Even the disciples, who had accepted the call to follow Christ and who had themselves already worked miracles, found it difficult to comprehend his divinity. They had watched him feed a multitude out of compassion for the people's hunger. And yet, when they saw him walking in the storm on the Sea of Galilee the night following they were confused and afraid. "They were completely dumbfounded, for they had not understood the incident of the loaves," writes Mark. "Their minds were closed" (Mark 6:52, NEB).

How can we avoid getting "tripped up" by similar reactions? If you look carefully, I think you will find that in all three cases the failure arose from minds that were closed. Closed by prejudice, self-interest, or human inability to grasp the divinity of Christ.

So how can we keep our minds open to his guiding? Here are three suggestions:

1. **Start by acting on what you already know to be God's will for you.** If there is something you believe God wants you to do that you are avoiding, ask for God's help to do it.

2. **Keep re-reading what Jesus Christ actually said and did.** Use different versions and try to keep your mind open to something that speaks to problems you are facing in your life today.

3. **Learn to meditate.** It's similar to prayer, but it concentrates on stilling the endless chatter that goes on in your brain and listening to the still small voice of the God within.

Louis Normington is a professor emeritus of Pacific Union College and a marriage and family counselor.

Who Does Not See Through Glasses Darkly?

by Walter C. Utt

It is shocking that the mission of Jesus Christ could have been so badly misunderstood. His own people turned on him within hours of his great triumph on Palm Sunday. Dazzled by free meals, exorcism, and healing services, the people had mobbed him. His authority convinced them. (If *we* had been there, we would have stayed convinced, right?) What went wrong? Much of the answer is in the preconceptions, the a priori assumptions which gripped all minds, not just those of the ordinary people.

Preconceptions blinded Christ's disciples, John and his disciples and, surprisingly, the Pharisees. The Pharisees compel our reluctant admiration. Over 140 years have been nowhere near long enough for us to elaborate such detailed interpretations or codes of conduct. They were the best informed students and most conscientious of the lot, yet it was impossible to convince them to adjust an idea. Following the logic of their assumptions, these pillars of the church saw it as their duty to kill the Son of God. Less steeped in the assumptions of the "chosen people," a Gentile army officer and a Syrophenician woman glimpsed truths most of Christ's people missed.

If God's Son himself could be so fatally misunderstood, does that say first-century Palestinians were obtuse beyond people of today? Hardly. An all-wise and just God has given his messengers, then and now, the difficult problem of reaching people through barriers of environment and conditioning. A momentary glimpse of Truth may be further distorted as preconceptions may discredit a messenger as weird or lacking credentials. Even those who pride themselves in examining evidence may have a hard time—though there is no security in being gullible either. Some, as in the parable of the sower, accept novel ideas readily but have little staying power. How many have come to our church in response to SAWS, the medical work, or the mission system of education, yet did not develop a permanent relationship with the church?

Even more perplexing, what does it take in 1985 to reach middle-class America? In an age when communication is almost total, how does the church reach and hold the kind of people who a century ago were a majority of the membership?

Considering all the filters, some in the environment, others self-installed, we should be very tolerant of those the Holy Spirit reaches in ways which are "different" or who, in the hubbub, get only a portion of the Word. Christ died for us and also for them. To the extent that we, in our half-blind ways, can work for others, we should do so. So much must depend on the power of the Holy Spirit. In our smug assumptions and obliviousness to the filters of our own understanding, we must not block off what little light may reach a soul, deafened, blinded and narcotized by the twentieth century—a soul perhaps no harder to reach and keep than were the tickle mobs who dogged Jesus' footsteps one day and had vanished the next.

OPINION

Key text:

1 Corinthians
13:9, 12

"These pillars of the church saw it as their duty to kill the Son of God."

Walter Utt teaches history at Pacific Union College.

February 3-February 9

6

Conventional Outlooks Challenged

“ ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob. . . . I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth’ ” (Isaiah 49:6, NIV).



Jesus and the Samaritan woman. From the prayerbook of St. Hildegard, 1179.

The Garden

by Ian Bothwell

INTRODUCTION

This Week's Scripture: Mark 7:1 to 8:26

He knew what it was he must have—a multi-million-dollar garden. Oh, he knew his friends would call it strange, bizarre, or unusual. Some might even question his mental balance. Nevertheless, he would proceed. Leaving no stone unturned, he found the garden of his dreams and paid for it right down to the last cent. It was his!

Being a man of organization and detail, he knew what must be done next. So he began to search for quality people—gardener's gardeners, if you please. They must be special. And not wishing to assume anything, he then proceeded to make certain that they received all the knowledge, training, equipment, and supplies they would need. With solemn admonitions, his gardeners were sent to love and care for his garden. Secretly he hoped that others would look at his garden and be inspired to make places of beauty themselves.

However, it wasn't long before some problems arose. The gardeners began to spend long hours debating the application of some of the information they had. They all knew and agreed upon the fact that the plants could be overwatered. They knew also that each species of plant needed a different kind of care. It was then that one especially bright gardener suggested what was to be hailed

as a brilliant plan. To guard against over-watering they would only water the gardens semi-annually. To guard against accidental watering in the intervening months all hoses would be kept locked in the supply barn. To guard against unauthorized access to the supply barns and hoses only the gardener and his assistant would have keys. Solving the problem of care required by a variety of plant species was easy—cultivate only one species! And so it was decided. The gardeners selected the species of plant that they would cultivate and water semi-annually. Thus they were assured of quality, because their cultivation and care would be designed just for that species. And there was definitely no danger of over-watering.

It wasn't long before the effects of their decisions began to be visible. Plants began to wilt, then wither, and some even died. The garden soon had no variety, the few remaining plants were sad to behold, the hundreds of admiring visitors were gone, and no one came to the greenhouses to buy choice or rare species with which to start gardens of their own!

Sadness poured from the man's heart until one day when his son volunteered to go with a group of his friends and show the gardeners how to truly care for a garden. As the son and his friends moved through the gardens, they gently trimmed, staked, and carefully watered with

Ian Bothwell is a teacher in the Education Department of Pacific Union College.

watering cans the wilted and dying plants. Almost miraculously, plants that had appeared lifeless began to bloom again. Daily, against much opposition from the gardeners, the son and his friends moved among the plants carefully checking and supplying all the needs of each plant.

It wasn't long before the

visitors began to return, and when they did they discovered something new—a lush garden filled with a wide variety of plants. There were all sorts of flowers, shrubs, and trees. The gardeners had argued that a garden with such variety could not and should not be grown. But the son had patiently cultivated the plants and the added dimension was superb!

A New Vision

LOGOS

Theme: In contrast to the legalism and exclusiveness of the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus presents a religion that transforms the inner person and transcends the barriers which traditionally alienate human groups.

1. Vital Religion vs. Hollow Ritual (read Mark 7:1-23).

"You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men" (7:8, NIV).

The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day centered on the role of the "tradition of the elders" (vs. 5, NIV). In the fifth century B.C., Jewish experts in the law of Moses began systematically to formulate detailed applications of the law to everyday life. These regulations were an established oral tradition by the time of Jesus.

The hand washing which the tradition of the elders prescribed and Jesus' disciples failed to practice was for the purpose of ceremonial or ritual purity, not hygienic cleanliness. When asked why his disciples didn't observe this regulation, Jesus gave a two-fold response:

A.) In applying Isaiah's indictment of false religion to his questioners (vss. 6, 7), Jesus was charging them with hypocrisy. Their zeal for rituals and regulations implied intense religious devotion, but in reality their hearts were completely unresponsive to God.

B.) The religious leaders were giving greater priority to human application of God's eternal law than to the law itself. And rigid, legalistic adherence to the tradition actually resulted in violation of God's will.

The "Corban" regulations were a prime example of nullifying God's word for the sake of tradition (vs. 13). Apparently an individual could designate money or property as "Corban" by pledging it to the Temple treasury, and still retain personal use of it while he was alive. It could not be given away, however, for any other charitable purpose. Thus one could avoid using his means to fulfill the fifth commandment's principle of honoring parents, in the name of scrupulous fulfillment of a religious vow. Jesus emphatically denounced this inversion of priorities, which made the law an instrument of cruelty and injustice rather than an enhancement of life—it's intended function. It is not following a set of man-made rules that counts with God, it is the attitude and affections of the heart (vss. 14-23).

Are there ways in which we today substitute the mechanical function of our religious tradition for the Word of God?

2. Spheres of Exclusion Repudiated (read Mark 7:24 to 8:10)

In the three incidents in this passage, Jesus reached out to Gentiles and thereby concretely demonstrated his revolutionary principle that love is more important than ritual purity. The rabbis regarded such contact with Gentiles contaminating. But Jesus

broke out of the sphere of exclusion drawn by the rabbinic tradition, setting a precedent for the breakdown of all racial barriers in the subsequent Christian community.

In responding to the Syrophenician woman's request (7:27) Jesus gives the answer one might expect of a bigoted, self-righteous Pharisee. He was probably speaking "tongue-in-cheek." He saw a special perceptiveness in this woman, and he wanted to draw it to expression by lightly giving the standard putdown. In her reply the woman impressed Jesus with both her quick wit and her faith (cf. Matt. 15:28) that somehow, despite the prevailing prejudice, she could share in the blessings of the Jewish healer.

How can Christians avoid being exclusive without losing their distinctive identity? What does Jesus' example suggest?

3. The "Yeast" of the Pharisees and Herod (read Mark 8:11-21)

"Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it" (8:12, NIV).

Unconvinced by the reports of Jesus' miracles, the Pharisees wanted him to do something really spectacular to prove that he was the Messiah. If he would only split the waters of the Jordan and leave a pathway through it, or bring down the wall of a city with a word, or perhaps leap off the temple parapet and float safely to the ground (cf. Matt. 4:5), then they would believe.

Jesus called this sort of addiction to the spectacular and displays of power the "yeast," or evil influence, of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15, NIV). The disciples couldn't understand why Jesus refused to take advantage of golden opportunities to assert his power or provide the miraculous sign he was capable of doing. But Jesus warned them against being tainted by the sort of thinking that equated God's purposes with dazzling power and nationalistic supremacy.

4. A Two-stage Healing (read Mark 8:22-26)

"Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly" (8:25, NIV).

It may strike us as odd that it took Jesus two tries to heal this man. But the placement of this incident in Mark's narrative suggests that the point has to do with Jesus' difficulty in getting his "blind" disciples to see clearly who he was and what it meant for them to be his followers (cf. 8:18), rather than healing technique. The disciples saw the significance of Jesus but only in a fuzzy, hazy sort of way. Only an understanding of the cross and resurrection would bring clarity to their sight. In the passage that follows in Mark (to be studied next week) Jesus gives the disciples' spiritual vision a "second touch" by predicting the cross and explaining true discipleship.

D. F. M.

Beware of the Leaven

by Sharon Millard

A major focus of Jesus' ministry was to destroy artificial barriers between people and to eliminate practices which caused people to hurt each other. The Jewish leaders fought him every inch of the way, and even his disciples, who knew him best and had seen him in action, didn't understand him. The problem was that Jesus was operating from a different frame of reference than the others. He was totally others-oriented, while the Jewish leaders, and yes, even the disciples, were self-centered. The basis of the problem was hypocrisy. Jesus tried to warn the disciples about this when he told them, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1, NIV).

"The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was the product of self-seeking. The glorification of themselves was the object of their lives. It was this that led them to pervert and misapply the Scriptures, and blinded them to the purpose of Christ's mission. This subtle evil even the disciples of Christ were in danger of cherishing. Those who classed themselves with the followers of Jesus, but who had not left all in order to become His disciples, were influenced in a great degree by the reasoning of the Pharisees. They were often vacillating between faith and unbelief, and they did not discern the treasures of wisdom hidden in Christ. Even the disciples, though outwardly they had left all for Jesus' sake, had not in heart ceased to seek great things for themselves. It was this spirit that prompted the strife as to who should be greatest. It was this that came between them and Christ, making them so little in sympathy with His mission of self-sacrifice, so slow to comprehend the mystery of redemption. As leaven, if left to complete its work, will cause corruption and decay, so does the self-seeking spirit, cherished, work the defilement and ruin of the soul."¹

Might our discipleship today be marred, as was that of the Twelve, by self-interest? Are we hanging on to long-held ideas and practices that may alienate others from us and Jesus? Do we treasure these traditions and theories because in some way they give us power over others?

"Among the followers of our Lord today, as of old, how widespread is this subtle, deceptive sin! How often our service to Christ, our communion with one another, is marred by the secret desire to exalt self! How ready the thought of self-gratulation, and the longing for human approval! It is love of self, the desire for an easier way than God has appointed that leads to the substitution of human theories and traditions for the divine precepts. To His own disciples the warning words of Christ are spoken, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.'"²

REACT

What kinds of theories or practices do we see today that cause people to be separated from each other? Can you identify a self-serving basis for these?

TESTIMONY

Key text:

1 John 4:7-11

"Are we hanging on to long-held ideas that alienate others from us and Jesus?"

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 409.
2. *Ibid.*

Sharon Millard is an assistant professor of nursing at Pacific Union College.

Real Religion

by Larry Mitchel

EVIDENCE

Key text:
James 1:27

Study of the Gospels in the past several decades has clearly shown that these documents are much more than biographical records of Jesus' life. In their choice of material (cf. John 21:25), and even in their varying arrangement and treatment of that material, the evangelists also address their own times and the problems faced by their own readers.

From the controversy passage in Mark it is obvious that Judaism's requirements still hung like a heavy blanket over some new Christians. The question of the relationship of newly-born Christianity with its rabbinic-Jewish matrix was still in the process of being settled (cf. Acts 15:1-21).

Our passage (Mark 7:1 to 8:26) continues the dialogue, and enlarges the sphere within which the question of tradition must be addressed. Jesus has already called into question traditional concepts of sin (2:1-12), fasting (2:18-22), Sabbath observance (2:23 to 3:5), good and evil (3:20-30), election (4:1-25), and death (5:35-43). And throughout his early chapters, Mark has emphasized Jesus' absolute authority over nature, demons, death, and sin in order to underscore Jesus' absolute authority (and thus his right) to radically criticize rabbinic legal expansions (7:8-13; cf. Matt. 23:4).

"To the rabbinic concern, 'Is it lawful?' Jesus responded, 'Does it meet human need?'"

At the point of our present study the controversy is over ritual cleanness/uncleanness. The "Pharisees and scribes" (a generic label covering hostile hearers) have to listen to Jesus once again diminish the value of their tradition, and instead emphasize the weightier matters of justice and mercy. How trite their concerns about ritual defilement must have seemed, even at the time, when juxtaposed with premeditated neglect of the elderly (7:10-12).

And so by his new teaching Jesus laid the ax to the root of Jewish *legal exclusivism*. For indeed the principle function of rabbinic law had become to distinguish between Jew and non-Jew. The law had ceased to protect the rights of people and the honor of God. No longer was its interpretation aimed at relieving want and suffering and injustice. The law, as enlarged and distorted, now served a narrow sectarian purpose: to define who was *truly* a Jew and who was *not*—regardless of individual profession or protestation. A quick reading of any part of the Talmudic tractate *Shabbat* will amply demonstrate this fact.

But Jesus' opposition to this exclusivist mind went beyond words. He took to the roads of Palestine (7:24-37), walking up to the coast as far as Tyre and Sidon (modern southern Lebanon), and then inland to the Decapolis (south Syria and northwest Jordan—east of the Sea of Galilee). Mark's purpose in including the story of this missionary journey beyond the borders of Judaism is clear: the barriers that Jesus faced were not simply legal or religious—they were ultimately social barriers. And these barriers between people Jesus was committed to demolishing!

The root of Jewish legal exclusivism was unmasked by Jesus' life and ministry as a crass *social exclusivism*. The people of God had

Larry Mitchel is an associate professor of religion at Pacific Union College.

misread his intention in electing them and making a covenant with them. The covenant with Israel was not a merit badge, but a summons to serve. To the rabbinic concern "is it lawful?" (Mark 3:4 and elsewhere), Jesus responded, "Does it meet human need?" or worse, "Does it thwart the meeting of human need?"

The terrible fact is that in the end God's covenant people chose to cling to their traditions and send Jesus to the cross. Even worse is the realization that a tradition is being misused, and ill-served, if it is made the excuse for not meeting actual and legitimate human needs.

James would agree: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27, RSV). In their desire to achieve the latter, Jesus' hostile hearers failed at the former.

Mark's church was coming to grips with the real meaning of Jesus' life and teachings. The social exclusivism that ruled their religion had to bow to the new order, an order in which there was neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; an order in which no distinction existed between Jewish Christians with all the concerns stemming from their rabbinic background, and Gentile Christians for whom rabbinic ideals were simply a non-issue.

REACT

If a tradition is to be judged by how well it meets human need, what criteria determine what true human need is?

Imaging and Imitating

by James Kempster

HOW TO
Key text:
1 John 3:1, 2

As we compare the way the Pharisees related to people with the way Jesus related to people, most of us would rather imitate Jesus. *Whom* to emulate is not the question for most people. *How* to be like him is another matter.

There is a self-improvement technique that is currently enjoying some popularity. While it may be advertised under a variety of catchy names, this technique essentially involves a process of "imaging." If you wish to learn to ski well, for example, you watch a video tape of a flawless skier, over and over, while you imagine you are that skier. You develop an "image" in your mind of the total act of skiing—you feel yourself going down the slope with him. According to the proponents of this method, this will enable your mind and muscles to imitate the professional on the video screen. Could this be similar to how we might imitate Christ? Possibly. But I think a few things need to happen before this can occur.

1. **We need to open our eyes . . . and our ears!** The Pharisees saw Jesus, but they didn't see him as he really was. They were expert in the Old Testament, they had a highly developed ethical system; they made a science of choosing between "good and evil." Yet, Paul tells us, there was a veil that prevented them from seeing or hearing (2 Cor. 3:14, 15). They were not ignorant. They were simply blind!¹

We are all naturally blind. But the removal of the "veil"—to see to hear—is not a do-it-yourself project. Only Christ, through the Holy Spirit, can heal our blindness. And we must want to be healed just as much as the deaf man in Decapolis or the blind man in Bethsaida.

2. **We need to have a "right spirit."** Maybe we don't recognize "unclean spirits" today. Could a spirit of pride, jealousy, or criticism be "unclean"? To the extent that this keeps us from really seeing Christ and imitating him, they are. But the one who healed the Phoenician girl can give us a "right spirit." Notice: The girl was unable to seek Jesus. The "unclean spirit" had incapacitated her. Her mother's faith was a healing link. What linking takes place for us today as parents, teachers, and friends?

Jesus still has the power to open eyes, to unstop ears, and to remove "unclean spirits." When we sense our need and ask him to do this, he will. Another step then naturally follows.

3. **We will speak well of him!** Not even Jesus could stop the people around Galilee from telling what he had done. Those that he healed became living advertisements of his love, pity, and power. When we truly see him and focus our minds on him (imaging), then follow him (imitating), we too will be living advertisements.

REACT

If you were offered the chance to place a one-page ad in *Time* magazine for God, what would it say? Or show?

1. John. R. W. Stott, *Understanding Christ*, p. 146.

Jim Kempster is professor of music and director of Pro Musica at Pacific Union College.

Don't Belong

by Helmut Thielicke

In the following excerpt from his sermon on the Syrophonecian woman's encounter with Jesus, Thielicke discusses one of the reasons her attitude was pleasing to the Lord.

I remember the many roads I have marched with good comrades during the war and many an evening we have spent in camps. Or I remember meditative periods on deck under silent southern skies. Time and again the evening conversations about the person of Jesus concluded with those words, "I don't belong." I can see those good companions in my mind's eye. One could tell that, when speaking about Jesus of Nazareth, they were gazing from afar into a land from which they considered themselves excluded. "You are not now," one of them said, "it's not for me; I'm not the type. I would like to believe what you believe; I feel that the road you are taking is the right one. But you must leave me behind; I'm made out of different stuff. I don't belong." At this moment I can see them all—those companions of many conversations. Many people of a similar spirit may read this and say, "I don't have the 'gift.' I don't belong." If you think or feel this way, take note of the readiness of that woman—that woman who not only *thought*, but was *told* by a final authority, "You don't belong." How did she manage? Where did that woman find the "great faith" to conquer that rebuff? In no way did it come from the fact that she had a special talent for swallowing difficult dogmas and compulsory articles of faith (we hear nothing about that). Nor did the faith consist in a special religious or metaphysical talent that she possessed. Nor was she so uncritical and intellectually innocent that she simply dropped all her misgivings or repressed them.

Her faith consisted in nothing else than her firm confidence, and when the contrary was proved, that Jesus could help her; she could not do otherwise than to call upon him and to hunger and thirst for him as Saviour.

To discover something of this hunger and thirst for that high and helpful figure, to give in to it and follow after Jesus—that is already faith. Aren't precisely the hungering, the thirsting, and the homesick praised by Jesus and called "blessed"? Didn't he cry out in "woes" over those who, because of the fullness and certainty of their correct beliefs, were no longer ready to confess, "Nothing in my hand I bring"? Persons who have a hungering heart and a broken spirit are the favorites of God.

OPINION

Key text:
Matthew 15:28

"Persons who have a hungering heart and a broken spirit are the favorites of God."

Excerpted from Helmut Thielicke, *How To Believe Again*, trans. by H. George Anderson, pp. 84, 85. Copyright © 1972 by Fortress Press and Collins, London. Used by permission of Fortress Press.

Helmut Thielicke is professor emeritus of systematic theology at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

February 10-February 16

7

The Call to Discipleship

“ ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’ ” (Mark 8:34, NIV).



The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew. Painting by Duccio di Buoninsegna.

Painful Discipleship

by Jane Taylor Murray

INTRO- DUCTION

This Week's Scripture:
Mark 8:27 to 9:50

Raised walls.
Frigid indifference.

Rejected, lonely, and hurt-
ing,
He slumped in his pickup
Recklessly speeding to an
unknown destination.

Aware of only the blinding
sun
torturing his eyes,
and an occasional bang
as a piece of gravel
hit the underside.

His thoughts turned toward
the past year . . .

Deciding to be a task force
worker:
Not very glamorous,
but a sure way to be a
"disciple."

He thought.

Then came the endless
hours,
and no thanks
for all the dirty jobs
he ended up doing.
Rarely having time to en-
joy
what little money he
made.

The criticism,
the dirty jobs,
the thanklessness
piled up.

Then the explosion hit.
Angry words.

The gravel sounds
jarred his thoughts to the
present . . .
"Take me away from this.
This living for only You
(and not for myself).
I took up my cross,
Just like You said.
And all I got in return
were cold slaps.
I'm just tired of it all!
Are there no rewards?"

No rewards?!

Suddenly it came back to him.
A story he thought he'd never
forget.
A story about someone who
gave
everything,
with few rewards.

Someone who lived through
the worst suffering
the ultimate rejection
the utter hopelessness.
And then died for the ones
who gave him the most pain.

The truck coasted to a stop.
The sun no longer glared.
No racing engine.
No noisy gravel.
Silence.

He slowly shifted to reverse,
and through blurred vision
maneuvered the truck around,
and focused again
on what being a disciple
really was.

Jane Taylor Murray is a nursing student and wife of the men's dean at Columbia Union College.

Suffering in Service

LOGOS Theme: Jesus reveals that the suffering of the cross is essential to his role as Messiah and that his true disciples must share that suffering, taking the stance of servanthood and commitment.

1. Peter's Affirmation (read Mark 8:27-30)

"Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.'

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone" (8:29, 30, NIV).

To first appearances Jesus' reply to Peter's statement of faith is somewhat surprising. Since the people were confused about Christ, thinking him to be Elijah or John the Baptist, why keep his identity as the Messiah a secret? The reason was the erroneous popular expectations of "messiahship." False hopes and narrowed concepts surrounded the designation of Messiah. He was perceived to be a victorious conqueror who would establish a glorious Jewish kingdom. These expectations Christ could not fulfill, and if the populace saw him as a Messiah with their misconceptions, Christ's work would be greatly impeded.

Do we have false expectations regarding Christ's coming kingdom? Do we see it as an escape from oppression (in whatever form it takes) as the Jews saw the coming of the Messiah?

2. True Service (read Mark 8:31 to 9:1)

"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, . . . and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. . . .

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' " (8:31-34, NIV).

Peter's affirmation was correct, but behind it there was the same misunderstanding shared by the other disciples and the rest of the Jewish people. It was imperative that the disciples be given clearer insight into the Messiah's role. Christ's questioning (8:27-30) led into a lesson to correct these misconceptions. But the lesson of a suffering, rejected Messiah was radically new and inconceivable. Peter raised objections, but Christ promptly and sharply corrected him (vss. 32, 33). Sharpness was necessary to refute cherished but erroneous ideas, and also because Peter had expressed in words the very temptation assailing Christ—to take the easy way and avoid having to suffer. Calling the disciples and the crowd together, Christ told them what discipleship entailed. To follow Christ costs a great deal, even life itself (vss. 34-37). But when the Son of Man comes in his kingdom, he will not be ashamed of those who have been willing to surrender all (8:38 to 9:1).

Is suffering, or the lack of it, an indication of discipleship, of commitment? How do you relate this passage to Matt. 11:28-30? Are there times when you are ashamed of following Christ, and act indifferent to Christian principle?

3. Jesus Transfigured (read Mark 9:2-29)

"Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" (9:7, NIV).

Christ's response to the cherished misconceptions surrounding his role as Messiah must have been a shattering blow to the disciples. All that they had been taught and had hoped for, Christ declared to be wrong. And when something new contends against the old, doubt of the new is inevitable. The transfiguration helped to remove this doubt. Indeed, the transfiguration seems to have been geared to the disciples (vs. 2—"before them," vs. 4—"appeared before them," vs. 7—"This is my Son." "Listen to him!"). In the midst of this event Peter, in his impulsiveness, suggested building three booths. His comment reflects his failure to understand the transfiguration and his desire to find fulfillment of promised glory in the present. Peter failed to realize that the display of glory was to strengthen commitment and prepare for future sufferings—his, the other disciples, and Christ's.¹

But the display was also for Christ. It gave him the fortitude to go on to Jerusalem and accept the fate that awaited him there. Through Moses and Elijah he was comforted and encouraged, and from his Father he received approval.

Coming down from the mountain Jesus again requests silence of his disciples for the same reason as before (9:9; 8:30). Then upon reaching the foot of the mountain they met with the other disciples who were trying to cure a possessed boy. In the absence of Jesus, the disciples stood in his place; therefore, it was legitimate to expect them to help the boy. But their efforts were fruitless. Seeing the situation, Christ let out an exclamation, not of judgment but of loneliness and anguish. "How long . . . ? How long . . . ?" (vs. 19). Then Jesus healed the boy, but only after his father removed his limiting ideas on the power of God (vss. 22-25). "In its struggle with temptation, faith must always free itself from the disastrous presumption of doubt, in the certainty that with God nothing is impossible, and that his majesty becomes most visible when human resources have become exhausted."² And how is this faith achieved? The answer is found in vs. 29.

Instead of requiring absolute faith from the boy's father, why didn't Christ heal the boy right away? Why do you think Mark places this story of the disciples' discouraging results after the transfiguration (other than chronological order)? Does vs. 24 suggest anything about the sort of faith that is acceptable to Jesus?

4. True Greatness Defined (read Mark 9:30-50)

"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all' " (9:35, NIV).

After healing the possessed boy, Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem. Knowing the fate that awaited him there, he again warned the disciples. This time the warning was more poignant. Not only was he going to suffer, he was going to be betrayed (vs. 31). Still the disciples did not understand, and they continued to argue amongst themselves as to who would hold the greatest position in the messianic kingdom they expected. They did not understand what Christ was trying to tell them, and they were afraid to ask more because they suspected that to understand was to bring pain.

Christ tried to show them what true greatness is. Greatness is serving all (vs. 35), accepting all (vss. 36-41), and being willing to sacrifice all (vss. 42-50). True greatness does not come by position or worth, but by committing one's life to Christ and thus to a servant's vocation. When Christians do this, strife is resolved and all can be at peace with one another.

What does this passage have to say for church strife? Do we, like the disciples, fail to understand God's requirements and then fail to seek a solution?

E. R. M.

1. William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, p. 319.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

Last to Be First

The Saviour gathered His disciples about Him, and said to them, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." There was in these words a solemnity and impressiveness which the disciples were far from comprehending. That which Christ discerned they could not see. They did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom, and this ignorance was the apparent cause of their contention. But the real cause lay deeper. By explaining the nature of the kingdom, Christ might for the time have quelled their strife; but this would not have touched the underlying cause. Even after they had received the fullest knowledge, any question of precedence might have renewed the trouble. Thus disaster would have been brought to the church after Christ's departure. The strife for the highest place was the outworking of that same spirit which was the beginning of the great controversy in the worlds above, and which had brought Christ from heaven to die. There rose up before Him a vision of Lucifer, the "son of the morning," in glory surpassing all the angels that surround the throne, and united in closest ties to the Son of God. Lucifer had said, "I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:12, 14); and the desire for self-exaltation had brought strife into the heavenly courts, and had banished a multitude of the hosts of God. Had Lucifer really desired to be like the Most High, he would never have deserted his appointed place in heaven; for the spirit of the Most High is manifested in unselfish ministry. Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character. He sought for himself the highest place, and every being who is actuated by his spirit will do the same. Thus alienation, discord, and strife will be inevitable. Dominion becomes the prize of the strongest. The kingdom of Satan is a kingdom of force; every individual regards every other as an obstacle in the way of his own advancement, or a steppingstone on which he himself may climb to a higher place. . . .

Very tenderly, yet with solemn emphasis, Jesus tried to correct the evil. He showed what is the principle that bears sway in the kingdom of heaven, and in what true greatness consists, as estimated by the standard of the courts above. Those who were actuated by pride and love of distinction were thinking of themselves, and of the rewards they were to have, rather than how they were to render back to God the gifts they had received. They would have no place in the kingdom of heaven, for they were identified with the ranks of Satan.

REACT

Does Jesus' teaching about greatness have any implications for church administration and organization?

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 9:35

"Lucifer desired God's power, but not His character."

Selected from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 435, 438.

Ordinary Men With Extraordinary Perspectives

by Donald G. Jones

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 8:34-36
NEB

The definition of discipleship found in Mark 8:34-36 seems to raise the requirements to an unreachable level. Certainly there is no evidence to indicate that any of Jesus' disciples ever achieved this lofty state. Absolute selflessness is impossible for a human being, and it may well be undesirable. What, then is desirable? The answer is "extraordinary commitment."

On Christmas Eve, 1944, the German army, freshly amassed and equipped, led by several armored divisions, struck furiously at the center of the Allied line in Europe. What ensued was the Battle of the Bulge. In the initial stages of the battle, the Allied soldiers were completely surprised and overrun. The roads leading away from the fighting were clogged with thousands of bewildered, discouraged men trudging out of the fight; many without their battle gear, which they had discarded in their haste.

Against this great tide of soldiers-turned-refugees were a few men walking into the battle, often alone with their weapons, sometimes in small groups. These men were going back, against the crowd, toward a fate they couldn't know. They simply went with the knowledge that the job to be done was in front of them, and they felt compelled to do it. It is reasonable to assume they weren't too concerned about their own futures.

Now, what sort of men were these who walked against the crowd? They were good men and bad men, some who would later achieve great things in life and some who would never be much at all. What united them briefly in this magnificent venture was uncommon commitment to the goal that lay at hand. For a while, at least, they were a very special group.

"Absolute selflessness may well be undesirable."

So it was and is with discipleship. The whole business of the thing is an uncommon commitment to a task. But the disciples seem to have gotten into it with the wrong ideas. Jesus was constantly trying to get them on the right track: "But the disciples did not comprehend His words. The glory seemed far away. Their eyes were fixed upon the nearer view, the earthly life of poverty, humiliation, and suffering. Must their glowing expectations of the Messiah's kingdom be relinquished? Were they not to see their Lord exalted to the throne of David?"¹ They had the wrong goals and as a result much grief lay in store for them as the days and years went by. Little by little their ideas changed until, finally, they were committed to the idea of God's powerful love. Then these ordinary men turned the world upside down; they had become an extraordinary group.

You and I are just ordinary people, we're just plain folks. Can it be possible for us to become disciples in the true sense of the word? The answer is yes, if we have the same drive toward a goal that the Twelve came to have. This means a sincere and genuine attempt to properly represent the way God's love works in the lives of people. It means giving others our best efforts, caring for them when we would rather not, and loving them when indifference is easier. Only then can we become an extraordinary group.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 417, 418.

Donald Jones is the chairman of the Department of Biology and Chemistry at Columbia Union College.

The Call To Serve

by Tom Sine

HOW TO
Key text:
John 12:23-26

In Jesus Christ every believer—lay and clergy alike—has a vocation that should be reflected in every dimension of his or her existence—as it was in the lives of the first disciples. Every Christian has a ministry calling. And yes, that may mean some will feel challenged to change jobs, cut back working hours, or begin to challenge unethical practices where they work. But above everything else, it should mean that every area of the life of a believer centers around God's kingdom call. . . .

Even though the way God may choose to call an individual is totally unpredictable, be very sure he has a vocation for every life—he has a vocation for you! He wants to use your life to make a kingdom difference in his world. Let me outline one way of listening for God's call. If you are not sure of God's vocation for your life, I encourage you to give it a try.

This pathway to vocational calling has seven steps. Before you begin, I would encourage you to purchase a journal—a dream book—as a place to record what God is saying to you as you go through the process. And be warned! If you sincerely follow this process and listen for the kingdom call of God on your life, your entire life could be changed. You just might be plunged into an adventure from which you can't turn back.

(1) *Listening for his call in his present and coming future.* We begin our right-side-up search for the will of God with the question, "What does God want for his world and for his people?" To answer this question, I would encourage you to join with a group of other Christians who are determined to put his kingdom first in an intensive study of his Word. . . .

As you study together ask yourself, "What are God's intentions for the future, and how does he want to use my life to be a part of his intentions?" "How does he specifically want me to be an agent of righteousness, justice, reconciliation, peace, and love, working with him to change his world?" . . .

(2) *Listening for his call in the lives of needy persons.* The Scriptures teach that Jesus is uniquely incarnated in the lives of the poor and forgotten ones. Therefore, if we listen, I am convinced we can hear God calling us through the pain and suffering of the hungry in Brazil, the alienation and loneliness of seniors in a retirement home in Atlanta, the hopelessness and despair of drug addicts in San Francisco, and the fear and hopelessness of neglected children right in your own community. . . .

Read newspapers, news magazines, and mission newsletters together. Watch films and TV specials on human conditions. What areas of human suffering and need particularly grip your heart? List them in your journal. Discuss them. Pray over them. It may well be that Jesus is calling you through a specific area of spiritual, emotional, or physical need into an area of compassionate service you have not yet dreamed of. . . .

(3) *Listening for his call in your brokenness and giftedness.* Not

Tom Sine is on the faculties of the University of Washington and Seattle Pacific University and is a prominent Christian writer.

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only can we hear God call us through the brokenness of others; his call can also come to us through our own brokenness. While many writings on Christian calling emphasize the importance of identifying one's gifts and abilities, virtually nothing has been written on the amazing ways God works through our failures and weaknesses. Yet the Bible is full of surprising ways God acted to turn human failure and defeat into his own glory. We are told he chose the "weak things of the earth to confound the mighty." Somehow God is able to take even our messups, our failures, and our inadequacies and use them to advance his kingdom.

Make a list in your journal of those areas in which you struggle—of your failures and weaknesses, the areas in which you are broken. Wait on God and discuss with your study partners ways in which God can transform each of those areas into a tool for the fabrication of his kingdom . . . and perhaps a vehicle for his calling.

After we focus on brokenness, let's also listen to God call us through our giftedness. . . .

Take time in your group to let each member list his or her natural and spiritual gifts as well as the personal heritage out of which those gifts are manifested. Affirm the gifts you see in others in the group. Keep a running list of the gifts that seem to be evident in your life. Also keep a list of major areas of life accomplishment in which you have used your gifts.

(4) *Listening for his voice in dreams for his Kingdom.* Now open yourselves to dreaming new dreams for your vocation and your future—inviting God's Spirit to invade your imagination. Set aside all your preconceived notions about Christian vocation and service, about your own life situation. God wants to open you up to surprising new ways he could use your life to make a difference in his world. Imagine wholly new ways everything you have written in your journal could be orchestrated together into new vocational opportunities.

Begin with the kingdom. In meditation focus on the present and coming kingdom of God. Picture in your mind the specific ways God's new future of righteousness, justice, peace, reconciliation, wholeness, and love is transforming the suffering, darkness, and injustice of our present age. In your heart and mind, celebrate the inbreaking of God's future. Now picture yourself as being part of the inbreaking of his future in specific new ways. . . .

Then, take time to begin researching your dreams. Prayerfully evaluate your present situation to determine if you can follow the vocation of God within the context of your present job and geographical location. Learn which Christian organizations are working in the arena of your interest; research how they are carrying out their service and what they require of those they enlist in their ministry.

At the same time, explore the possibility of creating your own

program of kingdom service in conjunction with your church or a Christian organization. Since we will need to dramatically increase our capability for Christian response with declining resources in the eighties, try to imagine creative ways to reduce your needs and find your own independent support if your vocational call is fulltime; check into the possibility of "tentmaking." Finally, explore with your group, your family, and your friends the feasibility of your plans and draw up a timetable for a transition toward investing a greater part of your leisure time and working hours in the vocation to which God is calling you.

(5) *Confirming his call through Christian community.* Once God's sense of kingdom call begins to crystallize in your life, it is essential that it be submitted to a group of brothers and sisters for confirmation. . . .

While you may choose to submit your kingdom call solely to your study group, I think it might be a good idea to present it to your larger community of faith for confirmation. However, I have one caution. I strongly urge you to tie in your life directly with Christians who share your urgency for the kingdom. If you submit your vocation for confirmation to a group of people who are simply interested in maintaining the status quo, they probably won't even understand what you are talking about, let alone be an instrument for God's corporate guidance in your life.

(6) *Listening for his call in lives of service.* Once we have given ourselves fully to his vocation, we will discover the call of God is never static. Like conversion, it isn't solely an event; rather, it is a dynamic ongoing process. As we seek first his kingdom in our lives and world and as we learn to listen to his voice, he will continue to call us. He may continue to shape our sense of mission in the situation in which he has placed us, or he may lead us through a series of situations in which he uses our lives to manifest his new future. In any case, I can promise you that your life will never be the same again. God will present you with challenges, opportunities, and not a few frustrations as you join his adventure.

(7) *Listening for his kingdom call in every dimension of our lives.* . . . Once we have a clear sense of God's call on our life, we have the best criterion possible for deciding where we should work, whom we should marry, and where we should live. If we genuinely seek his kingdom first, I think the message of Matthew 6:33 is clear: he will provide for our essential needs. He will be with us in our decisions and in our lives.

Excerpted from the book *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy* by Tom Sine, pp. 137-147. Copyright 1981; used by permission of Word Books Publisher, Waco, TX 76786

The Call to Suffer

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

OPINION

Key text:
Mark 8:31-38

Here [in Mark 8:31-38] the call to follow is closely connected with Jesus' prediction of his passion. Jesus Christ must suffer and be rejected. This "must" is inherent in the promise of God—the Scripture must be fulfilled. There is a distinction here between suffering and rejection. Had he only suffered, Jesus might still have been applauded as the Messiah. All the sympathy and admiration of the world might have been focused on his passion. It could have been viewed as a tragedy with its own intrinsic value, dignity and honour. But in the passion Jesus is a rejected Messiah. His rejection robs the passion of its halo of glory. It must be a passion without honour. Suffering and rejection sum up the whole cross of Jesus. To die on the cross means to die despised and rejected of men. . . .

Jesus must therefore make it clear beyond all doubt that the "must" of suffering applies to his disciples no less than to himself. Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross. . . .

To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. It is not the sort of suffering which is inseparable from this mortal life, but the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life. It is not suffering *per se* but suffering-and-rejection, and not rejection for any cause or conviction of our own, but rejection for the sake of Christ. If our Christianity has ceased to be serious about discipleship, if we have watered down the gospel into emotional uplift which makes no costly demands and which fails to distinguish between natural and Christian existence, then we cannot help regarding the cross as an ordinary everyday calamity, as one of the trials and tribulations of life. We have then forgotten that the cross means rejection and shame as well as suffering. . . . The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest. Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross. The cross is there, right from the beginning, he has only got to pick it up; there is no need for him to go out and look for a cross for himself, no need for him deliberately to run after suffering. Jesus says that every Christian has his own cross waiting for him, a cross destined and appointed by God. Each must endure his allotted share of suffering and rejection. But each has a different share: some God deems worthy of the highest form of suffering, and gives them the grace of martyrdom, while others he does not allow to be tempted above that they are able to bear. But it is the one and the same cross in every case.

The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a Lutheran theologian who was executed by the Nazis in World War II.

result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther's, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time—death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call. Jesus' summons to the rich young man was calling him to die, because only the man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ. In fact every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life. The call to discipleship, the baptism, sets the Christian in the middle of the daily arena against sin and the devil. Every day he encounters new temptations, and every day he must suffer anew for Jesus Christ's sake. The wounds and scars he receives in the fray are living tokens of this participation in the cross of his Lord. . . .

Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact it is a joy and a token of his grace. The acts of the early Christian martyrs are full of evidence which shows how Christ transfigures for his own the hour of their mortal agony by granting them the unspeakable assurance of his presence. In the hour of the cruellest torture they bear for his sake, they are made partakers in the perfect joy and bliss of fellowship with him. To bear the cross proves to be the only way of triumphing over suffering. This is true for all who follow Christ, because it was true for him.

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

REACT

In what ways do you think Christ is calling the church today and you as an individual to more authentic discipleship?

Excerpted from *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pp. 95-101. Reprinted by permission of Macmillan Publishing Co.

February 17-February 23

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The Kingdom Encountered

“ ‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many’ ” (Mark 10:45, NIV).



Christ Teaching in the Temple. From the Queen Mary Psalter, 14th century.

Who Cares?

This Week's Scripture: Mark 10

"One day back in the counter-culture of the 1960s," writes Tony Campolo, "I was lecturing to my 'Introduction to Sociology' class (which numbered several hundred students) when in the middle of the lecture a 'way out' looking student stood up and shouted, 'Bull! Bull! Bull! Bull!'

"I yelled 'Sit down, fella! Sit down or you're in serious trouble!'

"He shouted back, 'Who cares?'

"I said, 'Fella, if you don't sit down I'm going to throw you out of this class.'

"He yelled back, 'Who cares?'

"I said, 'You don't seem to understand. If I throw you out of class, you're not getting back in.'

"He yelled, 'Who cares?'

"I didn't push it. I'm sure that if I had said, 'You get thrown out of this class, you're going to be tossed out of this university,' he would have yelled, 'Who cares?' And if I had told him that if he got thrown out of the university, he wouldn't be able to get a job, he would have yelled, 'Who cares?' And if I had said that without a job he wouldn't have money to buy all the stuff that America says he ought to have, he would have yelled back at me, 'Who cares?'

"You can't really be a revolutionary agent for Jesus, un-

less you can look at this world and what it's trying to sell you and yell at the top of your lungs, 'Who cares?'

The incidents in Mark 10 call us to a "who cares?" sort of distinctiveness from the world's way of thinking and doing: Who cares about what society says is "right" regarding sex and marriage (vss. 1-12)? Who cares about society's criteria for power and prestige (vss. 13-16; 35-45)? Who cares about the material luxuries that the world places such supreme value on (vss. 17-31)?

Campolo goes on to say, "I control my students because they want good grades. I can give them good grades; therefore, I have control over them. I can make them read books they don't want to read and write papers they don't want to write. I can even make them stay up all night studying for tests they don't want to take. That's my power. And do you know why I have that power? Because they want what I can give them.

"The American society will control you and you will be its slave until you can say to this society and everything that it has to offer, 'Who cares!' The cars, the houses, the whole shooting match. If you have them, enjoy them—but if you're going to be a revolutionary for Jesus you must be the kind of person who can do without any of these things."

INTRODUCTION

1. Tony Campolo, *You Can Make a Difference* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984), pp. 67, 68.

Principles of the Kingdom

LOGOS

Theme: As the time for the cross began to draw near, Jesus, through several encounters with people, gives further insight on the nature and principles of God's kingdom.

1. God's Design for Marriage (read Mark 10:1-12)

"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.' . . . Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate'" (10:6-9, NIV).

Once again the Pharisees tried to tempt Jesus, this time on the question of divorce. Jesus answered by setting Gen. 1:27 and 2:24 above the allowance for divorce in Deut. 24:1. To the question "what is allowed?" Christ responded, "God has commanded." His meaning is clear. Sexual union in marriage was ordained by God at creation. Thus it is not sinful, yet it is not to be treated lightly. Marriage is willed by God and neither husband or wife are exempt from the serious duty of maintaining the union. Marriages entered hastily and frivolously mock the seriousness of the institution. Those who enter it only for pleasure or to gratify their passions need to be reminded that it is also a responsibility and a spiritual unity.

Are Christ's standards for divorce too stringent? Are there ever reasons for divorce other than adultery?

2. An Attitude for Receiving the Kingdom (read Mark 10:13-31)

A. Except as Little Children (Mark 10:13-16)

"I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (10:14, NIV).

This passage acquires a little more significance when its context is remembered. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, knowing he was walking to his death. The disciples could see the tension he was under, though they had not grasped its cause. So it was not because they were hard and unfeeling that they drove the children away. They simply didn't want Jesus disturbed. Yet Christ took time from his internal struggle to make the children smile. And it is of them that he said, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (vs. 14 NIV).

What attributes of a child entitle one to the kingdom of God?

B. The Rich Young Man (Mark 10:17-31)

"A man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' . . .

"'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor.' . . .

"At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (10:17-22, NIV).

This story has much to say about emotional Christianity. The

young man came *running* and *fell* on his knees before Christ, eager to follow him. "Good Teacher!" he begins, but Christ stops him cold. "Why do you call me good?" (vs. 18, NIV). Rather a startling response to one who wants to join with Christ. But following Christ is not based on an emotional decision. It is a serious undertaking that requires cost—everything you have and more. And this Jesus wanted the young aristocrat to understand.

The young man went away sorrowful, and the disciples were left confused. Jesus had turned their Jewish understanding of salvation upside down. Prosperity, they thought, was a sign of God's blessing and therefore a man's goodness. But Jesus showed that salvation has nothing to do with a man's wealth or his goodness but rather with God's grace.

Does God call us to be poor? What is a Christian attitude toward wealth?

Leadership in God's Kingdom (read Mark 10:32-45)

"Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 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" (10:44, 45, NIV).

Christ's mission was clear, but his disciples were still confused. They continued to argue amongst themselves as to who would attain the coveted positions. To get a jump ahead of the others, James and John outrightly asked Jesus for the positions of honor. Needless to say, when the other disciples found out they were upset, fearing they might have lost out on some of the glory. But Jesus made it clear that discipleship does not entitle one to seek any special reward. Rather, the one who aspires to greatness must be a servant and slave to all.

What is the proper way to deal with those who always insist on their rights and push their interests ahead of others'? How are glory seekers in the church to be dealt with?

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus (read Mark 10:46-52)

"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you!" Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road" (10:52, NIV).

There is much to learn from Bartimaeus. First, he was persistent. His was not a sentimental wish to be with a good teacher like the rich young ruler. He had an earnest desire and was not discouraged by others' trying to keep him away. Second, his response to Jesus was immediate. "Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus" (vs. 50, NIV). And third, after he received his sight he "followed Jesus along the road" (vs. 52, NIV). "He began with need, went on to gratitude, and finished with loyalty— and that is a perfect summary of the stages of discipleship."¹

E. R. M.

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 262.

The New Kingdom

selected by Ken Mulzac

TESTIMONY

Key text:

1 John 3:11, 16

When the ten heard of the request of James and John, they were much displeased. The highest place in the kingdom was just what every one of them was seeking for himself, and they were angry that the two disciples had gained a seeming advantage over them.

Again the strife as to which should be greatest seemed about to be renewed, when Jesus, calling them to Him, said to the indignant disciples, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you."

In the kingdoms of the world, position meant self-aggrandizement. The people were supposed to exist for the benefit of the ruling classes. Influence, wealth, education, were so many means of gaining control of the masses for the use of the leaders. The higher classes were to think, decide, enjoy, and rule; the lower were to obey and serve. Religion, like all things else, was a matter of authority. The people were expected to believe and practice as their superiors directed. The right of man as man, to think and act for himself, was wholly unrecognized.

Christ was establishing a kingdom on different principles. He called men, not to authority, but to service, the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak. Power, position, talent, education, placed their possessor under the greater obligation to serve his fellows. To even the lowliest of Christ's disciples it is said, "All things are for your sakes." 2 Cor. 4:15.

"In Christ's kingdom there is no lordly oppression, no compulsion of manner."

"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many." Among His disciples Christ was in every sense a caretaker, a burden bearer. He shared their poverty, He practiced self-denial on their account, He went before them to smooth the more difficult places, and soon He would consummate His work on earth by laying down His life. The principle on which Christ acted is to actuate the members of the church which is His body. The plan and ground of salvation is love. In the kingdom of Christ those are greatest who follow the example He has given, and act as shepherds of His flock. . . .

. . . In Christ's kingdom there is no lordly oppression, no compulsion of manner. The angels of heaven do not come to the earth to rule, and to exact homage, but as messengers of mercy, to cooperate with men in uplifting humanity.

The principles and the very words of the Saviour's teaching, in their divine beauty, dwelt in the memory of the beloved disciple. To his latest days the burden of John's testimony to the churches was "This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." 1 John 3:11, 16.

Excerpted from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 549-551.

Ken Mulzac is a theology and psychology major at Columbia Union College.

The Suffering Messiah

by Barry L. Casey

The Gospels are essentially stories told about Jesus and his message of the kingdom. They have structure, plot, characters in action, and conflict. Each "evangelist" (or Gospel writer) tells the story in his particular fashion, emphasizing different elements about Jesus, while remaining faithful to the central core of understanding that Jesus is sent of God to proclaim the kingdom present and future.

It is generally believed today that a central motif in Mark is conflict—conflict between Jesus and the powers of evil, conflict between Jesus and the authorities, and especially, conflict between Jesus and his disciples. Simply put, the conflict with the disciples arises because Jesus calls them to follow him and expects so much of them. The disciples do their best to remain loyal to him, but are stunned by Jesus and his expectations. "Everything overwhelms them; everything happens too quickly. The final depiction of Peter, sobbing after his third denial of Jesus, is a stark portrayal of how much the disciples want to succeed and how utterly, at the end of the gospel, they fail."¹

The key text for today, Mark 10:32-34, is the third of three "prediction units" in which Jesus tries to prepare his disciples for his coming death (Mark 8:29-33; 9:30-32) and to instruct them on discipleship. The conflict between Jesus and the disciples is over the true nature of Messiahship. Jesus' concept differs radically from their expectations of power and glory, and so he must teach them the way of suffering. They resist, they object, they reject his Messiahship when it is put in those terms. Even more significantly, they reject the idea that true disciples follow their Lord, even to suffering and death.²

Each of these three "predictions" or warnings is embedded in contrasting incidents of people seeking power and advantage over others. Jesus refutes this attitude by his steadfast insistence that the ultimate Jewish figure of apocalyptic power and judgment, the Son of Man, must first suffer and die. In this Jesus is telling us here is no dawning without the night and no resurrection without a crucifixion. For Jesus, authentic Messiahship is linked to suffering, just as authentic discipleship is linked to following Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus struggles to show his disciples that suffering Messiahship is the way ordained by God, the way that will ultimately, but not immediately, establish the new order of the kingdom.

In the way that Mark arranges his narrative *he* is telling us to listen to Jesus, not to repeat the disciples' failure of understanding, and to realize that Christ's way of exercising power is through suffering and service.

EVIDENCE

Key text:

Mark 10:32-34

"A central motif in Mark is conflict."

1. David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, p. 93.

2. Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark: Traditions in Conflict*, pp. 52, 53.

Barry Casey is assistant professor of religion at Columbia Union College.

The Kingdom's Circle of Love

by Sherri Morgan

HOW TO

Key text:
Mark 12:30, 31

What does the kingdom of God have to do with me today? God's kingdom is just a reward I'm looking forward to in the future, right? Wrong! The kingdom of God is a community of people who live out God's love in their lives every day and who look forward to the time when that community will include God in the flesh.

My conception of the kingdom includes three steps to achieving harmony. Each is interdependent on the others and cannot exist alone.

1. **Love Yourself.** To love yourself you must accept the fact that you have worth as a unique individual because the God of the universe, out of love, created you in his own image. In other words: The fact of your existence gives you worth. What you do with his sense of worth is studied in the next two steps.

2. **Love those around you.** A person's self-worth is easily evidenced by his or her treatment of other people. As you learn to value yourself you will begin to recognize that *everyone* is worthy of dignity, respect, and an equal chance for normal development, not just your circle of friends and acquaintances.

Jesus ministered to the homeless, the unemployed, the prostitutes, the aged, the socially rejected—all those who could not defend themselves. As members of God's kingdom we must joyfully reach out to touch the lives of the downtrodden in a meaningful way. This may mean literally feeding and clothing someone, protesting unfair laws, finding someone a job, or providing a home for a child. Or it may mean being willing to listen to and talk with people without talking down to them or assuming that you are more right than they, simply because they come from a different racial, economic, or religious background.

This was the problem both James and John and the rich young man faced in Mark 10. They all somehow felt their piety made them better, and they expected to be rewarded accordingly. The rich young man depended on his wealthy status to give him self-worth. And this he felt he could not give up. James and John depended on someone else's overt approval for their feelings of worth instead of allowing themselves the innate pleasure of doing good for others.

3. **Love God.** Loving yourself is based on loving God enough to have faith that he knew what he was doing when he made you and later felt you were worth dying for. So the three steps come around to a circle.

We show our love to God indirectly by caring about our own maturity and growth and by concerning ourselves with the needs of the humanity around us. We express our love for God directly by praying to him and worshiping him individually and corporately. For most of us, this is the easier part, because it doesn't demand that we change our way of thinking.

All three steps must be integrated into our personality and lifestyle if we are to hasten the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

At the time of this writing, Sherri Morgan was a senior psychology major at Columbia Union College.

True Servanthood

by Donald B. Kraybill

Servanthood sounds nice. But we must be careful not to throw it around glibly as "professional service," "human service," or "service is our first and last word." Such slogans and words are tossed around to create a pleasant service image. We need to distinguish between pseudo service and the way of Jesus. Much of modern service rhetoric falls short of the way of Jesus. Many times it does not truly seek to meet the needs of others but is used to manipulate persons into buying additional products or "services" which they really don't need. When this happens, the so-called servant is not a servant at all but an artful manipulator or adman using the language of service to his own ends. Many of the "professional service" people are quite high on the social status ladder and look at their clients from a top down perspective. They will "serve" their clients as long as it pays well for them both in dollars and prestige. But when the needs of their clients run counter to the "servant's" own financial and status interests, the "service" abruptly ends. Such self-serving "service" is not Christian service.

In sharp contrast, the servanthood of Jesus ended on the cross. He was willing to serve the needs of the sick on the Sabbath even when it meant jeopardizing His very life. He announced forgiveness of sins even when such blasphemous words were sure to trigger His death. The Jesus style of service brought neither personal financial gain nor social prestige. In fact, quite the opposite. His service was rewarded by outrage from the authorities and a violent death. For Jesus, serving did not mean catering to the well-to-do who could make substantial financial repayment. Rather, His instruction is to serve the "least of these," those at the very bottom—the least of the least who certainly will not be able to pay back. In fact, serving such social throwouts will undoubtedly tarnish the "professional reputation" of the professional community. After all, only incompetent lawyers, doctors, and teachers will serve the stigmatized as a last resort if they can't develop a profitable practice among the respectable. The disciples of Jesus give a cup of cold water in His name to the little ones who have no political clout or social prestige (Matthew 10:42).

REACT

Is it possible truly to serve the Jesus way and at the same time be a professional success?

OPINION

Key text:

Mark 10:43-45

"The Jesus style of service brought neither personal financial gain nor social prestige."

Excerpted from Donald B. Kraybill, *The Up-side Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1978), pp. 276-278. Used by permission.

Donald Kraybill teaches sociology at Elizabethtown College.

February 24-March 2

9

Challenges to Christ's Authority

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey' " (Zechariah 9:9, NIV).



Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. Ca. 1400, Italy.

Candid Camera and Christ

by Trina J. Magi

INTRODUCTION

This Week's Scripture: Mark 11 and 12.

Take a candid snapshot of the Jesus who wanders around in your brain. Now, what have you got for a picture? A Tom Selleck? a Martin Luther King, Jr.? an Alan Alda?

Christ may not have been a Tom Selleck look-alike, but he was no weakling either, especially not mentally and spiritually. He didn't slink unobtrusively through Jerusalem, adorning the city's front porches with literature. He didn't exclude himself from the sinful and hungry and limit himself to leisurely "potlucks" with his twelve friends. He prepared a meal for 5,000 hungry people, and while sharing it with them, he shared himself.

Jesus entered Jerusalem mounted on a donkey in kingly splendor. He refused to tolerate the desecration of God's house and threw out the businessmen and moneychangers. Confronting Jesus with controversial questions, the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees lined up against Jesus in a theological firing squad. But he was bullet-proof! Jesus was *not* a wimp. He was a confident man, assertive in maintaining his claim of Messiah-

ship (at the appropriate times), aggressive in declaring the truth and protecting it.

How does your snapshot compare with these images? Do you see these character traits in your Jesus? Do you see an omnipotent God in your picture of God's Son? A God with some pretty strong feelings and uncompromising attitudes about sin, life, death, and their relationship? Or have you limited your depth-of-field to include only a passive picture of Christ—possibly to avoid admitting that Christianity should be a bold, public, and conspicuous life-style?

Jesus' actions on earth exhibited godly fervor and intensity, and he is our example. Jesus entered Jerusalem in regal display—do we demonstrate our Christianity as publicly? He cleansed the temple—are we as ambitious about preserving reverence and holiness in our worship places? Jesus dealt with the sparrings of the Jewish leaders with tact and surety—are we as confident in our spiritual knowledge?

If some of these ideas clash with your image of Jesus, could your snapshot be underexposed or possibly underdeveloped? Maybe you need to spend a little more time with your mind shutter open to the Holy Spirit's light.

Trina Magi is a media-journalism communication major at Columbia Union College.

Final Confrontations

LOGOS Theme: By his entry into Jerusalem, his cleansing of the temple, and his answers to the challenging questions of the religious leaders, Jesus asserts himself as the Messiah of Israel, despite his rejection by official Judaism.

1. The Kingdom Proclaimed (read Mark 11:1-11)

"When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mark 11:7-9, NIV).

It is a misnomer to refer to this event as the "Triumphal Entry." For Jesus' major purpose in this exercise was to provide his disciples with a supreme lesson in humility. Jesus intended to give himself every opportunity to be proclaimed an earthly king, but then to decisively turn away from that action. Thus, his entry into Jerusalem bears some resemblance to that of a conquering king, but also demonstrates marked contrasts. His choice of a mount was subtly significant. "The whole impact is that the King was coming in peace. In Palestine the ass was not a despised beast, but a noble one. When a king went to war he rode on a horse, when he came in peace he rode on an ass. . . . [W]e must note what kind of king Jesus was claiming to be. He came meek and lowly. He came in peace and for peace. They greeted him as the Son of David, but they did not understand. . . . His action was a contradiction of all that men hoped for and expected."¹

Indeed this was the "Entry of Humility" by the King of Peace.

Why do you think Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, knowing that his action would be misunderstood?

2. The Kingdom Purified (read Mark 11:12-26)

"On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. . . . And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written:

'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?" (Mark 11:15-17, NIV).

Mark inserts his account of the temple cleansing in the middle of his report on the fig tree (vss. 12-14, 20-26). This is most intriguing and significant. He must mean for them to be interpreted together. The fate of the fig tree and the temple are the same. Both are doomed. The fact that the fig tree dies the same day indicates that the fate of the temple is similarly certain.²

In cleansing the temple, Jesus was indicating the termination of the significance of its functions. His removal of the buyers, sellers, and money changers actually crippled the whole sacrificial system,

for without them the people would no longer be able to obtain sacrificial animals or pay temple taxes. It is indicative of the corruption of the temple and its whole system that its purification in effect completely halted its function.

The specific reason for this symbolic "destruction," which portended the reality in A.D. 70, is given in vs. 17. Coming from Jeremiah 7:11, the phrase "den of robbers" refers to the place where robbers retreat for safety *after* they have done their evil deeds. In this sense, Jesus is not so much criticizing the commercial activity as the broad misuse of the temple's role as an absolute sanctuary, where people are safe no matter what they do. Jesus is actually attacking the whole concept of cheap grace—whereby men use religion as a continual whitewash for their actions. This was the cause of the destruction.

How can the church avoid the type of corruption that was in the temple?

3. The Kingdom Defended (read Mark 11:27 to 12:44)

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And they were amazed at him" (Mark 12:17, NIV).

Mark describes a number of attempts by the religious authorities to entrap Jesus and make him appear to be a lawbreaker—either to the people or to the Roman authorities. Each begins with an apparently innocent question put forward by one of his hearers. They deal with various issues: Jesus' authority (11:27-33), paying Roman taxes (12:13-17), the resurrection (12:18-27), and the commandments (12:28-34). Without exception Jesus avoids incrimination by putting his opponents on the defensive. He even goes on the offensive in relating the parable of the tenants—a veiled yet penetrating rebuke of his persecutors.

The end of the passage possesses more significance than all the debates and entrapments. Mark skillfully draws attention away from the Pharisees and Sadducees with their loaded questions and blatant challenges. He focuses on one apparently insignificant action that in reality gives the simple answer to all of the complicated questions. We see one poor woman drop in two coins amidst all of the flaunted magnanimity of the rich. It is all she has. And truly she sums it up best: God's kingdom is not the kingdom of hair-splitting explanations and obscure theology, but rather the kingdom of giving.

Do we respond to God with a compelling desire to know and understand all the facets of our commitment, or with a simple giving of ourselves?

L. R. C.

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 264, 265.

2. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark*, pp. 164, 165.

Thy King Cometh

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 11:9, 10

Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. . . .

As they proceeded, the multitude was continually increased by those who had heard of the coming of Jesus and hastened to join the procession. Spectators were constantly mingling with the throng, and asking, Who is this? What does all this commotion signify? They had all heard of Jesus, and expected Him to go to Jerusalem; but they knew that He had heretofore discouraged all effort to place Him on the throne, and they were greatly astonished to learn that this was He. They wondered what could have wrought this change in Him who had declared that His kingdom was not of this world.

Their questionings are silenced by a shout of triumph. Again and again it is repeated by the eager throng; it is taken up by the people afar off, and echoed from the surrounding hills and valleys. And now the procession is joined by crowds from Jerusalem. From the multitudes gathered to attend the Passover, thousands go forth to welcome Jesus. They greet Him with the waving of palm branches and a burst of sacred song. The priests at the temple sound the trumpet for evening service, but there are few to respond, and the rulers say to one another in alarm, "The world is gone after Him."

Never before in His earthly life had Jesus permitted such a demonstration. He clearly foresaw the result. It would bring Him to the cross. But it was His purpose thus publicly to present Himself as the Redeemer. He desired to call attention to the sacrifice that was to crown His mission to a fallen world. While the people were assembling at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, He, the antitypical Lamb, by a voluntary act set Himself apart as an oblation. It would be needful for His church in all succeeding ages to make His death for the sins of the world a subject of deep thought and study. Every fact connected with it should be verified beyond a doubt. It was necessary, then, that the eyes of all people should now be directed to Him; the events which preceded His great sacrifice must be such as to call attention to the sacrifice itself. After such a demonstration as that attending His entry into Jerusalem, all eyes would follow His rapid progress to the final scene.

"He desired to call attention to the sacrifice that was to crown His mission."

Excerpted from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 570, 571.

Should We Love Ourselves?

by Leon Morris

... The command to love one's neighbor [in Mark 12:31] is linked with the love of self in the quotation from Leviticus 19:18. Very different conclusions have been drawn from this association. Some think all love of the self is evil, and thus feel that love for one's neighbor arises only when it is overcome. Anders Nygren offers this comment about Luther's perspective: "On the basis of Christ's words in John xii. 25, it is a fundamental principle for him that: 'To love is the same as to hate oneself.'" Nygren amplifies this point in a longer comment:

Luther has departed so far from the traditional idea, which discovers a *commandment* of self-love in the commandment of love to one's neighbour, that he finds this latter to contain a direct *prohibition* of every kind of self-love. Love to one's neighbour, he holds, has the task of completely dispossessing and annihilating self-love. . . .

A second view is that the love of self is praiseworthy or even, James Moffatt puts it, obligatory: "The true love of self is a duty." M. C. D'Arcy thinks this is essentially what Thomas Aquinas proposes. After quoting Aquinas, he explains, "The point of this is that the duality set up by love of self and love of God is a false one; a true love of oneself is a love of God, and a true love of God means that one cherishes oneself as part of God's purposes." . . .

It seems that "self-love" is being given more than one meaning in these discussions. Some of those who advocate it seem to be saying that everyone should have a proper self-respect. With this there can be no quarrel, because people only harm themselves if they have a poor self-image. On the other hand, when people have a deep and genuine concern that they be the best that they can be, their lives are enriched. But the question is whether this should be called "love" for themselves. Paul Tillich holds that love "presupposes a separation of the loving subject and the loved object," and wonders accordingly "whether self-love is a meaningful concept at all." Love as the New Testament understands it includes a giving of oneself (perhaps a passionate giving of oneself) to the other. Without this, it is not easy to see that the term *love* applies. And with it self-love is excluded. How can one give oneself to oneself (have a passion for oneself?) and not be selfish and self-centered?

We should always bear in mind, as we noticed earlier, that the New Testament does not command self-love. The command to love one's neighbor as oneself is spoken of several times (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). But the love of self is always stated as a fact, not as something that should be sought after.

... It would seem that the best position to hold is that a genuine self-respect is praiseworthy, but love for the self is another matter. People do love themselves, but nothing in Scripture leads us to regard this as something Christians should seek.

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 12:31

"Love presupposes a separation of the loving subject and the loved object."

Excerpted from Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), pp. 198-203. Used by permission.

Leon Morris retired as principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia, in 1979. He has written several major works on theology and biblical studies.

Wednesday, February 27 93

Where Do You Draw the Line?

HOW TO
Key text:
Mark 12:13-17

At the high school I attended interschool sport competition was not allowed. So, through a desire to add more interest and spirit to the regular intramural games, my friends wanted to have interclass games of hockey and basketball. They reasoned that since the school choir could enter community musical contests, they should at least be able to have interclass competition. However, the faculty saw things differently. The line on competition, they said, had to be drawn somewhere. Interclass sports were not allowed. In a frustrated protest, our class dictum soon became, "Where do you draw the line?"

For Christians this question and others like it are omnipresent, with answers that seem omniscience. Where do the so-called white, gray, and black areas start and end? What are the boundaries beyond which one should not go? How much is too much? Where does responsibility start and end? The list goes on.

It was this type of question that the Pharisees asked Jesus. "Do we pay taxes to this foreign power that rules over us?" Christ's simple answer astounded the Pharisees. "Render to Caesar that which is Caesar's." But is this answer really that simple? What does "rendering to Caesar" involve? Is it only money, or is it time (i.e., military service and appropriations) as well? Where do you draw the line?

I'm not going to be pretentious and suggest answers to these deep questions. However, there are principles by which you can make your own decisions.

1. Don't think less of someone who takes a stand different from yours. Allow for differences in culture, heredity, upbringing, and environment. These factors shape each individual differently, thus creating different outlooks, perceptions, and opinions.

2. Be sure your stand can be biblically supported. You might balk at this one. After all, there are groups who believe that it is biblical to "drop the bomb" while others at the same time believe it is biblical to have "the bomb" dropped on themselves rather than drop it on others. The Bible is interpreted in vastly different ways by people who are equally good Christians. But you shouldn't allow the fact that it may be impossible to find a position on an ethical issue that is universally accepted as biblical to discourage you from doing your best to base your decisions on biblical principles.

A biblical view will put the needs of others above personal needs. A biblical view means not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought, honoring others above yourself (see Romans 12). Such a view inspires moderation, unselfishness, and cool tempers.

3. Render to God the things that are God's, first. Responsibility to God comes above all other concerns. When taking a stand on a particular issue, this is the primary consideration to make. God requires Christian service, sharing the love he has given you with others. Rendering to God means that no position you take, no belief you hold, can stand in the way of this service. E. R. M.

Only Irreverence?

by Tom Decker

The events described in Mark 11 took place in Jerusalem during the week preceding Passover—one of the most important Jewish celebrations. Many visitors had already begun to arrive from all over the Roman Empire. Christ had begun the week by riding into Jerusalem on a young colt. People's spirits were high, and no doubt many had heard of this Jesus. They shouted blessings at him, the one they hoped would reestablish David's kingdom. But Christ's support group was not in Israel's power structure. Rather, he identified with the tax collectors, the harlots, the poor, the oppressed, and the social outcasts. Could it be that Christ was killed because he picked the wrong friends?

At the end of this triumphant entry he went to the temple and "looked round about upon all things" (Mark 11:11, KJV). Evening had come, so he went to Bethany. The next day Jesus returned to the temple and performed one of the most significant acts of his life by throwing the money changers and traders out of the temple.

The Interpreters Bible says that in this act, "Jesus came into conflict with the greatest money-making power of His time." In other words, the scribes and priests had a very good racket going.

People saved money for years to make the long and arduous pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Some brought their sacrificial lambs from home, some bought them on the way. In either case, the priests often would not accept these lambs because of blemishes. The pilgrim's only alternative was to sell his lamb at a loss and buy a new one at a high markup. Later, the blemished lamb would be sold as an unblemished lamb. The temple, and those who operated it, were making an incredible profit.

Christ was reacting to the irreverence within his father's house. But he was also acting against the injustice being done to the poor and oppressed around him. He could not idly stand by watching these people get "ripped off." A week later he was killed.

In Matthew's account of this story, Christ, after expelling the money changers, began healing the lame and blind there in the temple courtyard. Throughout his life Christ had an overriding concern for the mourning, the mistreated, and the poor. We as Christians have a strong tendency to spiritualize away Christ's actions. We want to avoid the responsibility that comes with realizing the significance of Christ's acts.

Christ calls us to oppose the acts of oppression and injustice around us. Christ is concerned about people. It is our privilege to share that concern. We should pray for the insight to see the injustice around us. And we should pray for the courage and wisdom to make right the injustice we see.

REACT

Does Christ's cleansing of the temple suggest that Christians should work for economic justice in society? Or does such activity detract from the church's primary mission?

OPINION

Key text:
Mark 11:11,
15-19

"He could not idly stand by watching these people get 'ripped off.'"

Tom Decker is a senior theology student at Columbia Union College.

March 3-March 9

10

A Look Ahead

“ ‘At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory’ ” (Mark 13:26, NIV).



The Last Judgment. From the Gospel Book of 1194, Germany.

A Reason for Watching

by George Kretschmas

INTRODUCTION

This Week's Scripture: Mark 13

Jesus is coming soon! *Jesus* is coming soon! *Jesus is coming* soon! *Jesus is coming soon!* As any "good" Adventist can tell you, those four words are the mainstay of his spiritual diet as an SDA Christian. The different emphases are left to the individual's interpretation, but the exclamation point can *never* be left out!

Jesus' word to us regarding his coming is "Watch!" (Mark 13:37, NIV). But watching has the annoying tendency to become very boring. So, we bring up little disputes in our Sabbath School classes and make major points out of them in an attempt to "prove" that we have been the more careful watchers. Perhaps this both relieves our boredom and gives us the salve we need when our conscience tells us we "haven't done enough."

Still, we must watch. What, however, do we do about the inevitable confusion over this joyous news of Christ's return? Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ would like us to drop all of our human hopes and plans and give our resources and energies entirely to the evangelistic work of the church. They feel that the spirit of sacrifice which the pioneers had was but a mere foreshadowing of the sacrificial spirit which is required of us now. As a result, all that we do that isn't directly and/

or immediately beneficial to the Lord's work is evil, in their view.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that there really is nothing we can do in and of ourselves to bring about the second coming, so we should go forward with our earthly plans and hope that somewhere along the way God can use us. These people find the urgency and intensity of the previous view amusing and slightly annoying. As a result of this divergence, our church resounds with charges and countercharges of "fanatic" and "worldly."

No quick solution to this dilemma is available, obviously, but the dilemma is one that has to be carefully considered. The importance of discussing and re-discussing the topic of Christ's coming lies not in whether you can bring up a point that hasn't previously been argued over and "settled," but in bringing up and arguing about a point that has to be settled for *you*. The discussion is for *your* benefit, not for settling church doctrine. Does Christ demand that you immediately be employed by the church, or does he want your professional skills elsewhere? Who can say? It is only as you study and re-study the teachings of Christ and the perceptions and experiences of others in Christ that you can understand what God wants from your life.

George Kretschmas is a theology and English major at Atlantic Union College and at the time of this writing, was president of the Student Association.

Sunday, March 3 97

The End of Time

LOGOS Theme: Jesus provides his followers with an outlook for the future which reveals God's plan for the final outcome of history, and suggests how that future outcome should affect the lives of his followers in the present.

1. Impending Destruction (read Mark 13:1-4)

"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down' (13:2, NIV).

This was a shocking statement to the disciples. The temple was one of the architectural wonders of the world. Constructed of white stone, some of which was covered with gold, it created a dazzling display in its mountaintop setting. Some of its stones were up to forty feet long and twelve feet wide, so to the disciples it was inconceivable that it be thrown down. The temple represented the summit of human achievement and Jewish identity. So vast, so solid, so central to the Jewish existence—it had to stand forever. But in less than forty years the tragic prophecy came true.

2. Warning Against Deception (read Mark 13:5-8)

"Jesus said to them: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, "I am he," and will deceive many' (13:5, 6, NIV).

The imperative to "watch out" is a call for vigilance that runs through the entire chapter. There is an ever-present danger that God's people will be led astray by false heresies and religious leaders who claim the authority of Christ. Deceptive heresy can arise from overstressing a particular truth, be it perfection, the law, grace, the second coming, or whatever. Inversely, heresy can be a result of undermining the importance of some truths.

What are some "false Christ's" that are prevalent today? On what basis does one determine heresy or a false Christ?

3. Remaining Steadfast in Persecution (read Mark 13:9-15)

"Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit' (13:11, NIV).

In this section comes the promise of persecution. Jesus never allows anyone to follow him blindly. He leaves no room for doubt as to what it means to be a Christian. Being a Christian means being willing to give up all (remember the rich young ruler?), facing rejection (vss. 9, 12, 13) and pain (vs. 9). But although there are these pains to be faced, the Christian is never left without hope (vs. 11).

What are the benefits of persecution? Does persecution ever come from within the church? How are we to respond to this type of persecution?

4. Abomination of Desolation (read Mark 13:14-23)

"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains'" (13:14, NIV).

Here Jesus borrows terminology from the book of Daniel to warn of the "appalling sacrilege" (a literal translation of the borrowed phrase) that was to come. Many Jews saw the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (168 B.C.) as a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. Jesus' use of this expression indicates that the fulfillment was yet to come. In A.D. 70 Jerusalem fell to the Romans after a horrific siege. The temple was destroyed and, according to Josephus, 97,000 Jews were taken captive and 1,100,000 died of starvation and sword.

5. The Coming of the Son of Man (read Mark 15:24-27)

"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory'" (13:26, NIV).

Jesus now switches from the immediate future—the destruction of Jerusalem—to the ultimate future—the coming of the Son of Man. It is important to note here that this chapter is not a map or timetable of the last days. The imagery used was common Jewish eschatological language. The terminology was a familiar literary tool used to describe the coming day of the Lord. And the events predicted in verses 5-8 were fulfilled within a few short years.¹ So Mark 13 does not give us a precise timetable of last day events. But it does give us a general outline of what takes place between Christ's first coming and his return. And as we see these things happening, we may live day by day in the assurance that he will come again.

Why didn't Christ give a timetable of eschatological events?

6. Watch! (read Mark 13:28-37)

"Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come'" (13:33, NIV).

Christ calls for vigilance and watchfulness. We see today the events predicted in Mark 13 being fulfilled with greater intensity than ever before in Earth's history. Therefore, watch—the fig tree that blossoms indicates that summer is near (vss. 28, 29). Precisely when the final resolution will take place no one knows, so be ready—the house owner who leaves may return any time (vss. 34-37).

Christ's imminent return has been expected since the time of the disciples. Why so? Did Christ "lead them on"? What if Christ doesn't come for another 1,000 years? How would this affect your Christianity? Would you be more slack? More vigilant? More active in social concerns, world hunger, nuclear war, etc.?

1. Barbarians threatened the borders of the empire, Laodicea was devastated by an earthquake, Pompeii was buried, and there was an extensive famine during the reign of Claudius.

E. R. M.

The Crisis— Stealing Gradually Upon Us

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 13:32, 33

The world, full of rioting, full of godless pleasure, is asleep, asleep in carnal security. Men are putting afar off the coming of the Lord. They laugh at warnings. The proud boast is made, "All things continue as they were from the beginning." "Tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." 2 Peter 3:4, Isa. 56:12. We will go deeper into pleasure loving. But Christ says, "Behold, I come as a thief." Rev. 16:15. At the very time when the world is asking in scorn, "Where is the promise of His coming?" the signs are fulfilling. While they cry, "Peace and safety," sudden destruction is coming. When the scorner, the rejector of truth, has become presumptuous; when the routine of work in the various money-making lines is carried on without regard to principle; when the student is eagerly seeking knowledge of everything but his Bible, Christ comes as a thief.

Everything in the world is in agitation. The signs of the times are ominous. Coming events cast their shadows before. The Spirit of God is withdrawing from the earth, and calamity follows calamity by sea and by land. There are tempests, earthquakes, fires, floods, murders of every grade. Who can read the future? Where is security? There is assurance in nothing that is human or earthly. Rapidly are men ranging themselves under the banner they have chosen. Restlessly are they waiting and watching the movements of their leaders. There are those who are waiting and watching and working for our Lord's appearing. Another class are falling into line under the generalship of the first great apostate. Few believe with heart and soul that we have a hell to shun and a heaven to win.

"There is assurance in nothing that is human or earthly."

The crisis is stealing gradually upon us. The sun shines in the heavens, passing over its usual round, and the heavens still declare the glory of God. Men are still eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying, and giving in marriage. Merchants are still buying and selling. Men are jostling one against another, contending for the highest place. Pleasure lovers are still crowding, to theaters, horse races, gambling hells. The highest excitement prevails, yet probation's hour is fast closing, and every case is about to be eternally decided. Satan sees that his time is short. He has set all his agencies at work that men may be deceived, deluded, occupied and entranced, until the day of probation shall be ended, and the door of mercy be forever shut.

Solemnly there come to us down through the centuries the warnings words of our Lord from the Mount of Olives: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

Excerpted from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 635, 636.

This Generation?

In Mark 13:30 Jesus seems to be predicting that the signs of his return, the fall of Jerusalem, and the second coming itself would all take place in the generation of his first-century listeners. Since the second coming obviously did not occur, how should we understand Jesus' words that seem to directly associate first-century happenings with his return?

Hans K. LaRondelle of Andrews University offers this explanation:

"... The solution that seems to be the most adequate and defensible to most interpreters is called the prophetic perspective view. In this view, the fall of Jerusalem as God's judgment on the Jewish nation is a foreshadowing of His final act in world judgment. 'The long ages between are telescoped in the prophetic perspective to a negligible length, and in the events of A.D. 70, the Parousia, though clearly conceived as a distinct and more distant event, is already in essence present.'

"The convincing power of this approach is that it continues the pattern of Old Testament prophecy with its dual focus on both the immediate national judgment and also on the final, universal judgment of God. Israel's Old Testament prophets consistently placed their predictions of God's impending judgment on the wicked nations in the eschatological context of the day of Yahweh with its characteristic cosmic imagery (see Eze. 32:7, 8; Hab. 3:11; Isa. 34:4; Joel 2: 10, 31; Amos 8:9). Because the same Yahweh would be the judge in both the present and the final crisis, contemporary history was viewed in an eschatological perspective. H. Ridderbos explains the typological principle involved. 'In the judgment upon Israel, God has provided the world with an example. At the last day the world of the nations will stand before the very same judgment.' No line of separation is drawn, no differentiation in time is made, between the impending, contemporary judgment and the last judgment at the end of the world. Both are depicted as taking place at the same time. The chronological distance is deliberately omitted as irrelevant.

"Isaiah's oracle against Babylon is a case in point. The prophet made the following prediction in the year 716-715 B.C., as chapter 14:28 indicates:

"Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. . . . The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. . . . Her time is at hand' (Isa. 13:6-22).

"This prophecy of doom for Babylon was first fulfilled during the lifetime of Isaiah, when the city of Babylon was utterly destroyed by the Assyrian army under Sennacherib, in the year 689 B.C. Nevertheless, Isaiah's prophecy of the day of the Lord did not find an exhaustive and permanent fulfillment in this historical fall of the city. Babylon was rebuilt soon afterward to become one of the most

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 13:30

"The long ages between are telescoped in the prophetic perspective to a negligible length."

beautiful cities of the ancient world under Nebuchadnezzar. Only many centuries later, at the end of the first century A.D., did it become permanently 'like Sodom and Gomorrah' (see vss. 19-22). However, the cosmic imagery of Isaiah 13:10 still had received no literal fulfillment.

"The New Testament emphatically applies Isaiah's prophecies of doom for Babylon and Edom to the future day of the Lord. This is the developed apocalyptic perspective in Christ's discourse (Matt. 24:29) and in John's Apocalypse (Rev. 6:12-14). Just as Isaiah blended the imminent historical day of judgment for Babylon with the eschatological judgment of the day of the Lord, so Christ's prophetic perspective refers first to the immediate historical destruction of Jerusalem during the time of His contemporary generation (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30), but focuses likewise on the ultimate cosmic-universal judgment at His parousia in the unknown future (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32). In basic continuity with Israel's classical prophecy, Christ blended the two great judgments—on Jerusalem and on the world—into one comprehensive prophetic perspective."¹

REACT

Other solutions to the problem of Mark 13:30 have been suggested. What is your reaction to the following?

- a. Mark 13:30 is comparable to Jonah's conditional prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh. If the church in the first century had fulfilled the task of proclaiming the gospel to the whole world, Christ would have come during the generation that saw the destruction of Jerusalem. It is the worldwide proclamation of the good news of the gospel with clarity and power that will precipitate the second coming.
- b. Jesus was simply mistaken. After all, he was human.
- c. The "these things" in vs. 30 refers only to the general signs in vss. 5-23, not the second advent in vss. 24-27.

1. Hans K. LaRondelle, "Did Jesus intend to return in the first century?" *Ministry*, May 1983, pp. 11, 12.

Preparation and Proclamation, Not Calculation

by Alwyn R. Fraser

HOW TO
Key text:
Hebrews 9:28

At the close of the 18th century and extending into the 19th, an intense interest developed in studying those scriptures which deal with the second coming of Christ. Students of prophecy placed particular emphasis on the timing of his return. The Millerite movement, from which the Seventh-day Adventist church sprang, was part of this worldwide second advent awakening.

One of William Miller's early books was entitled *Evidences from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ About the Year 1843*. Miller rightly drew a lot of criticism from contemporary students of the Word who stressed Christ's teaching that only God knows the time of the advent. But he pressed on, arguing that the signs of Christ's return pointed to its imminence. He was, as we now know, wrong about the date 1843. And in his subsequent time refinements, culminating (accurately) in October 22, 1844, he was incorrect about the event predicted to take place.

Following their disappointing experience with the Millerite movement, many individuals, though not Miller or the "little flock" of Sabbath-keeping Adventists, lost faith in the whole concept of Christ's return. This experience teaches some sobering lessons:

1. It is more important to know the Person who will return than to have a precise timetable of the steps that lead to the advent. We should be alert to signs of the times and be sure that we personally know Jesus.

2. In our evangelism we should stress that the Christ who is coming soon is the One who already lived a sinless life on earth and died on the cross for our behalf. That is, we should link the second coming with the first coming. Thus we look forward in eager anticipation to meeting the One who made our place in the kingdom possible, not in fear of missing out on a place because we are not ready. It is a question of motivation.

3. The most significant point is that time and signs are not the most crucial aspects of Christ's coming, after all. When the disciples asked about these, Christ's reply indicated that they had asked the wrong question. Ignoring their quest for a specific timetable of events, he virtually told them, to put it in today's language, not to try to locate the coming by means of events described in the news media. Through his Olivet discourse, Christ's main stress was on the need to "watch"—to be on the lookout for deceptions. Those preoccupied with signs as chronological indicators are often easily deceived. Observing the signs does have its place, not so much as a warning of an imminent end, but as assurance of a victorious end which may be enjoyed by Christ's followers.

But how are we to account for the obvious tension between such signs as earthquakes, famines, persecution of Christ's followers, and false messiahs that Christ referred to and the unknown moment when the end will suddenly take place? These events have recurred with varying frequency and degree in human history since Christ's ascension. For example, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 and

Alwyn Fraser is chairman of the History Department at Atlantic Union College.

the meteor shower of 1833 created great excitement among students of prophecy at the time but the end did not come as quickly as these believers expected.

What Jesus was telling his disciples must be understood in the context of redemptive history. Jesus linked his second advent with the redemptive purpose of his first advent. He had come to save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). He will have accomplished his mission on earth when his followers have finished their mission of proclaiming the good news of Christ's finished salvific work. Then he will return for them (Heb. 9:28).

Thus the signs assure that God's program is going forward, rather than pinpointing the time of Christ's return. And if, in fulfilling their mission, the followers of Jesus experience difficulties, they are to look back to Christ's experience and persevere in their mission, remembering the gospel promise that his victory over sin and Satan is theirs too (John 16:33).

REACT

What is the purpose and value of the signs Christ gave in Mark 13?

Has Prophecy Failed?

by Jonathan Butler

Every generation that has hoped for the world's end has winced with embarrassment and sighed its disappointment. When the war ends without mushrooming into "armageddon," when the fascist rules without turning into antichrist, when 666 turns out to be the number of letters in the president's name—Ronald (6) Wilson (6) Reagan (6)—but not a tattoo on our foreheads or hands, when crime and disorder does not disintegrate into the "time of trouble," then apocalyptists appear like crackpots, and paperback bestsellers on Bible prophecy like the psychic miscalculations in the *National Enquirer*.

With a history riddled with failed expectations, why do Christians continue to believe in a soon end to the world? Why was the number one non-fiction seller of the 1970s not a diet plan or a sex manual but Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (over 15 million copies sold)? Why expect an event that has never taken place? Why wait for a bus—whatever the printed schedule says—that never comes? Why wait hopefully for a father who, night after night, year after year, never comes home? Because Christians are bull-headed? Or stupid? Or unrealistic? What in the world does such a belief "do" for believers? . . .

Taking our clue from the sociologists, we need to look for answers to these questions beneath the abstraction of Christian belief to the Christian way of life itself. Christian belief can never be understood apart from the community that holds to and lives by that belief. Any exploration of Christian eschatology must probe the nature of the eschatological community. How does belief in a soon end to the world effect the life of Christians in this world? How does the belief that the whole world will be transformed by the coming of Christ transform individual Christians in this life?

The Christian community makes no sense at all, of course, without Christ at the center of it. Christianity is a profoundly personal religion. Christians believe in Christ's second coming because they believe so unalterably in His first coming. Jesus Christ gave history its center and "centered" the personal lives of so many Christians that generations wait for His return because He is worth the wait. An eschatology that does not inspire this faith in Jesus is hardly a *Christian* eschatology.

But if Jesus of Nazareth was the ordinary child of poor Palestinians who was immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures and apocalyptic prophecies and mistakenly assumed an inflated messianic self-image, then not only Jesus but countless generations have been misled. Christianity is like just another U.F.O. cult. Without a belief that Jesus is the Christ, the prophetic charts have no meaning. The prophetic time-tables are arcane numerological systems with no relation to reality. With a belief in Christ, not only the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation but all the Scriptures are illumined with meaning.

For biblical prophecy is not supported ultimately by "signs of the

OPINION

Key text:
Matthew 10:23

"Why was the number one non-fiction seller of the 1970s not a diet plan or a sex manual but Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth*?"

Jonathan Butler teaches church history at Loma Linda University.

times" in nature or politics or social disorders; it collapses completely if Jesus was not who He claimed to be. *His* claims, *His* miracles, *His* life—and indeed *His* followers—mark the beginning of the end of time. For above anything or anyone else, Jesus Himself is *the sign* that the end of the world is coming. He told His disciples that whenever they went into a town and were taken in and fed, and they healed their sick, they should tell them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:8, 9, RSV). When the Pharisees asked Him about when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20, 21, RSV).

With the coming of Jesus Christ, the new age had dawned. It grew like first sprigs of life among craggy rocks. It was greening Palestine with a bloodless revolution. Something new was breaking in: a new covenant, a new priesthood, a new Israel. Miracles were happening. Cripples walking. The blind seeing. The demons that haunted men's minds were not "bugging" them anymore. Christ had come and brought with Him the first glimpse of His kingdom.

The glimpse was not a full view, the first-fruits not the harvest. The kingdom was partially here, but not entirely here. The kingdom was *within* them—the beggars and longshoremen and accountants—but it was also a *coming* kingdom. Jesus rode the burro into Jerusalem but He will ride down from the sky from heaven. "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father . . ." (Matt. 16:27, RSV). Christ is both the "Once and Future King."

To say the kingdom of God is "coming," however, is to imply that it is already on the way. It is already unveiling itself before our eyes. The future is even now breaking in on the present. Christians are not simply biding time here waiting for events to begin as in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In the play, two bums listlessly bide their time on stage waiting for the arrival of Godot—a thinly disguised allusion to God—and they do nothing but wait. It takes one of them fifteen minutes to pull off a shoe. Then they wait some more. Godot never comes, and life for the bums who wait is meaningless. Christians, on the other hand, do not wait vacantly for Godot, as they tug aimlessly at a shoe, but are already caught up in the coming kingdom. The end is already happening. That "rough beast, its hour come round at last, / slouches towards Bethlehem to be born."

The end has begun to happen in God's people, the Remnant, the eschatological community. As God's people reflect the character of Jesus Christ they are pulled toward the second coming. The love and joy and peace that have begun in the Christian community, the miracles in body and spirit, the broken lives, shattered marriages and families that have been restored, are first peeks at the kingdom of God. Christians are a new people, a new humanity, that show

"Jesus Himself is the sign that the end of the world is coming. Christians are a new people that show the world what the future will be like."

the world what the future will be like. In authentic Christian communities, a few are living now the way everyone will live then in God's future. It is in their marriages and households, good health, race relations, and service for others that Christians declare the coming kingdom is already in their midst. . . .

Why did Christianity succeed where a myriad of first century religions failed? Why did it last? For one thing it demanded so much of its adherents. Christians abandoned labor guilds, cults, and families to join the absolutely exclusive society of other Christians and their one God. The polytheistic religions expected only divided loyalty, and that was the most they received. Christ, on the other hand, had said bluntly, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, RSV). Once one had made such a radical commitment, there was less of a chance of turning back or turning away. And this uncompromisingly revolutionary millenarianism went on to experience the most dramatic of spiritual successes in the world. Had prophecy failed? Hardly.

To be sure, Christ has not yet come. Why, then, do we continue to believe in the nearness of His second coming, despite generation after generation of failed expectations? Because we are part of His family, like every generation of Christians has been. And a family, like the Christian family, full of love and radical commitment, could not exist without a divine Father. We look forward to the Father's return because we are His sons and daughters.

REACT

1. Are there any prophetic "signs" that will give us absolutely certainty that the world is about to end?
2. After reading this week's lesson, what are your thoughts about the second coming? Do you believe it is still going to happen, despite the long delay and history of failed expectations? Why? Is there reason to believe that it is imminent?

March 10-March 16

11

Messiah-The Passover's New Meaning

“ ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many’ ” (Mark 14:24, NIV).



The Last Supper. Umbro-Sienese School, early 15th century.

Holy Waste

by Paul Tillich

This Week's Scripture: Mark 14.

Paul Tillich makes the following comments on the first episode in this week's Scripture.

What has she done? She has given an example of a waste, which, as Jesus says, is a beautiful thing. It is, so to speak, a holy waste, a waste growing out of the abundance of the heart. She represents the ecstatic element in our relation to God, while the disciples represent the reasonable element. Who can blame the disciples for being angry about the immense waste this woman has created? Certainly not a deacon who has to take care of the poor, or a social worker who knows the neediest cases and cannot help, or a church administrator who collects money for important projects. Certainly the disciples would not be blamed by a balanced personality who has his emotional life well under control and for whom it is worse than nonsense, even criminal, to think of doing what this woman did. Jesus felt differently and so did the early church. They knew that without the abundance of the heart nothing great can happen. They knew that religion within the limits of reasonableness is a mutilated religion, and that calculating love is not love at all. Jesus did not raise the question about how much *eros* and how much *agape*, how much human passion and how much understanding was

motivating the woman; He saw the abundant heart and He accepted it without analyzing the different elements in it. There are occasions when we must analyze ourselves and others. And certainly we must know about the complexity of all human motives. But this should not prevent us from accepting the waste of an uncalculated self-surrender nor from wasting ourselves beyond the limits of law and rationality. . . .

By His [Christ's] death the reasonable morality of the disciples is turned into a paradox: the Messiah, the Anointed One, must waste Himself in order to become the Christ. And the ecstatic self-surrender of the woman is tested by the ignominious perishing of the object of her unlimited devotion. In both cases we are asked to accept an act more radical, more divine, more saving than either ecstatic waste or reasonable service. The Cross does not disavow the sacred waste, the ecstatic surrender. It is the most complete and the most holy waste. And the Cross does not disavow the purposeful act, the reasonable service. It is the fulfillment of all wisdom within the plan of salvation. In the self-surrendering love of the Cross, reason and ecstasy, moral obedience and sacred waste are united. May we have the abundance of heart to waste ourselves as our reasonable service!

INTRODUCTION

Excerpted from Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 46-49.

Paul Tillich was a leading Protestant theologian of this century.

Cup of Covenant, Cup of Suffering

LOGOS Theme: In the events leading up to the cross, Jesus interprets his impending death in the light of the Passover: his vicarious suffering will bring deliverance and hope for a new Israel.

1. Jesus Anointed (read Mark 14:1-11)

"She has done a beautiful thing to me. . . . She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial" (14:6, 8, NIV).

With the Jewish leadership having determined to kill Jesus (vss. 1, 2) and having arranged his betrayal with Judas (vss. 10, 11), the final events in Mark's drama are about to begin. Those events are preceded with a story that highlights the true nature of Jesus' mission and identity (vss. 3-9).

By pouring the costly perfume on Jesus' head, the woman was affirming Jesus as the Messiah, God's anointed one (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13), while at the same time symbolically preparing his body for burial (vs. 8). For Jesus it was a "beautiful thing" that this woman had faith that somehow he would accomplish his messianic mission despite the impending danger, and that she would express her faith in such a lavish, courageous, and loving way.

Does the woman's act of anointing suggest anything about how we should relate to Jesus today?

2. The Passover's New Meaning (read Mark 14:12-26)

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.'"

"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them" (14:22-24, NIV).

The Passover was a celebration of the central redemptive event of the Old Testament—God's liberation of the Israelites from Egypt (see Ex. 12; Deut. 16). This event led to his establishment of a covenant with them. As Jesus and his disciples celebrated their last Passover together, the Saviour took the elements of the meal and infused them with new meaning. His death would be the new redemptive event for a new Israel, and the basis for a new covenant.

The unleavened bread of the Passover made a saving event that had taken place in the past vivid and contemporary for the faithful Jew (Deut. 16:3). So the bread Christ offers his disciples is a tangible representation of their share in the saving event of his sacrificed body.

In the covenant made at Sinai, blood was used to symbolize the binding of God and Israel together through the law (Ex. 24:8). The cup Jesus offers his followers means a share in the new covenant which is sealed by his own blood, vicariously shed "for many" (vs. 24; cf. Isa. 53:7, 8). In this new covenant it is the person of Jesus,

rather than the law, which binds God and his people together.

The bread and the wine not only point us to the saving event of the past but also to the future when Christ's vow of abstinence from the cup will end and he will drink with us in the consummated kingdom of God (vs. 25).

Has studying the story of the Last Supper in its context given you any fresh ideas on what our commemoration of that event can mean?

3. The Struggle in Gethsemane (read Mark 14:32-34)

"'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will'" (14:36, NIV).

As he entered Gethsemane to pray, the specter of having the sin of all humankind laid upon himself caused Jesus to be "deeply distressed and troubled" (vs. 33, NIV). Greek scholars tell us that it is difficult to convey through translation the intensity of Jesus' feeling here. Attempts include "horror and dismay" (NEB) and "horror-stricken and desperately depressed" (Phillips). Clearly, no anxiety, terror, or turmoil that we may face can be alien to Jesus, for as he grappled with his destiny as Suffering Servant, he experienced the worst that can afflict the human psyche.

Jesus was enabled to remain faithful to his mission through dependence on and acquiescence to the God whom he knew as *abba*. Jesus' use of *abba* (the intimate term for a loving, caring father) to address God was unprecedented in the history of religious thought. In that desperate moment, Jesus clung to God as one who has all power and who is *abba*, one who cares about his children in a personal way (vs. 36).

What issues were at stake as Jesus struggled with his cup of suffering?

What do you find most significant about the Gethsemane experience?

4. Jesus Before the Sanhedrin (read Mark 14:43-65).

"Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?'"

"'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (14:61, 62, NIV).

Betrayed by one of his disciples and deserted by the others, Jesus was arrested and brought before the highest Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. Though there is considerable scholarly debate over the precise nature of Jesus' trial, it seems likely that this appearance before the Sanhedrin as Mark records it was a sort of preliminary or "grand jury" hearing, called for the purpose of formulating charges against Jesus to be presented to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. Under Roman occupation, the Jews were not allowed

to execute the death sentence through their own courts.

Mark's concern is to show the unfairness of the trial in contrast to Jesus' innocence. The religious leaders had already decided the verdict (14:1), and their contrived witnesses gave false and conflicting testimony. Jesus, on the other hand, remained silent in the face of their accusations, like an innocent lamb being led to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7).

However, when asked directly, Jesus forthrightly affirmed that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that he was destined to be enthroned at God's right hand (cf. Dan. 7:13; Ps. 110:1). This close association of himself with deity was clear blasphemy in the eyes of the Sanhedrin. The high priest responded with the obligatory gesture of horror (vs. 63), though it was this very "blasphemy" that clinched the Jewish leadership's "sly" (14:1, NIV) plan to eliminate Jesus.

5. Peter Disowns Jesus (read Mark 14:27-31, 66-72).

Throughout Mark, the disciples continually fail to understand Jesus' mode of Messiahship or his will for them (8:31-38; 10:35-45). Now, in contrast to Jesus' faithfulness under trial, they all fail spectacularly by deserting him. And Peter, the most outspoken and prominent disciple of all, is too weak to pray for spiritual strength (vss. 27, 31) and then flagrantly denies affiliation with Jesus three times (vss. 66-72).

One important lesson here seems to be that without an understanding that the way of Jesus is the way of the cross followed by the resurrection, there can be no true discipleship. Without an understanding of the cross, one cannot know what faithfulness entails. Without the hope given by the resurrection, one cannot have the strength to remain faithful, not even Peter.

Yet there is hope for the most blind, dull, and ineffective disciple if, like Peter, his heart is open enough that he can weep when the truth finally begins to sink in (vs. 72).

How can we, in our own situation, avoid the mistakes made by the disciples?

D. F. M.

Gethsemane

"Tarry ye here," He said, "and watch with Me."

He went a little distance from them—not so far but that they could both see and hear Him—and fell prostrate upon the ground. He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man's sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression.

Christ was now standing in a different attitude from that in which He had ever stood before. His suffering can best be described in the words of the prophet, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." Zech. 13:7. As the substitute and surety for sinful man, Christ was suffering under divine justice. He saw what justice meant. Hitherto He had been as an intercessor for others; now He longed to have an intercessor for Himself.

As Christ felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that in His human nature He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness. In the wilderness of temptation the destiny of the human race had been at stake. Christ was then conqueror. Now the tempter had come for the last fearful struggle. For this he had been preparing during the three years of Christ's ministry. Everything was at stake with him. If he failed here, his hope of mastery was lost; the kingdoms of the world would finally become Christ's; he himself would be overthrown and cast out. But if Christ could be overcome, the earth would become Satan's kingdom, and the human race would be forever in his power. With the issues of the conflict before Him, Christ's soul was filled with dread of separation from God. Satan told Him that if He became the surety for a sinful world, the separation would be eternal. He would be identified with Satan's kingdom, and would nevermore be one with God. . . .

Behold Him contemplating the price to be paid for the human soul. In His agony He clings to the cold ground, as if to prevent Himself from being drawn farther from God. The chilling dew of night falls upon His prostrate form, but He heeds it not. From His pale lips comes the bitter cry, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Yet even now He adds, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

REACT

Why was it necessary that Christ *as man* "suffer the consequences of man's sin" and "endure the wrath of God against transgression"?

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Mark 14:34-36

"Christ was suffering under divine justice."

Selected from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 686, 687.

The Power of the Weak

by Ken Downing

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 14:38

In Mark 14 we find striking illustrations of the truth that weakness may be ultimately strong and apparent strength really a façade for underlying weakness. Here we find the events leading up to the crucifixion, all centering around the Passover experience. The events were fulfillment of the original Passover symbols. Israel was a nation of tired, unarmed slaves living under a world superpower. The lamb, symbol of their strength, was the weakest object imaginable. Their only active part in the whole drama was to take this unsuspecting, unresisting lamb, kill it, eat it, and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts.

As the ultimate Exodus from sin unfolds in Mark 14 we find four characters who stand out in sharp contrast to each other, profoundly illustrating the eternal principle of strength being found in weakness. Judas, pushed on Jesus by the other disciples because of his apparent intellect and worldly ways, went down in history as a supercilious coward who not only needed an unruly mob to feel strong but actually was so weak that he resorted to the most extreme form of running away—suicide. Peter boldly declared he was man enough to stand by Jesus even if everyone else ran away. And he did take an errant whack with his sword at one of the mob that apprehended Jesus. But after Jesus removed the weapon Peter ran like a chicken and was later reduced to a cursing, blubbing fool while disowning the closest friend he ever had.

“Judas resorted to the most extreme form of running away—suicide.”

In sharp contrast we find Jesus and the woman with the evil reputation (compare Luke 7:36-50 with Mark 14:3-9). Both are found on their knees in the posture of servitude. The woman appears to have lost all control and good sense as she weeps at the feet of Jesus. She has apparently spent her suspect wages on an embarrassing show of infatuation at a very dignified affair. Jesus kneels in the garden sweating blood, begging pitifully for “Abba,” the English equivalent of our “Daddy,” to alleviate his suffering. Yet both in childlike awareness of their weakness have found the inner strength to conquer overwhelming force—self-hate and its consequent promiscuity for her; fear of eternal separation from God for him.

In a fascinating postscript at the end of Mark 14 we find Peter, for whom being tough has been all-important, making a dramatic change from being truly weak to genuinely strong. We are told simply that in a very unmanly way “he broke down and wept” (Mark 14:72, NIV). From there he went on to lead the early Christian church and fearlessly follow the Lamb to his own cross.

Ken Downing is director of the Teaching Learning Center at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Passing the Faith

by Rich Carlson

At the first Passover God, with his one hand, was warning the Egyptians for the last time, through a miraculous sequence of events, that his mercy had run out. And with his other hand, he was seeking to prepare his people for soon-to-come struggles and to help them learn the lesson of complete dependence and obedience.

To prepare for the Passover, God requested that each household eat a lamb, apply its blood to the top and sides of their doorframe, and that everyone have shoes on their feet. The lamb they could understand. Physical nourishment was necessary for all. The blood, especially on the doorposts, made no sense whatsoever. And the shoes—well, after 400 years it might have seemed illogical to suddenly be in a state of readiness. But had the Israelites followed their logical reasonings, they would have been left behind.

In Mark 14 Jesus celebrates his own Passover. A lamb, blood, and shoes again were present. The Lamb was more than nourishment; the blood was soon to be shed; the shoes were removed that we might learn the lessons of humility and service. But Judas did not understand this. Using his own logical reasoning, he tried to bring about the kingdom of God without the lamb, blood, or shoes. And he was left behind.

We are counseled, as the Jews and as the disciples were, to remember and recount to our children the meaning and purpose of the Passover:

1. **The lamb**—such an unreasonable request, to kill a lamb for my sins. I can try my own way to atone for my sins, or I can accept Jesus as my Lamb and his death as the all-sufficient sacrifice. My ways of doing Adventist penance seem so right, but God's way, through the Lamb, *is* right.

2. **The blood**—that red substance, from an animal no less, to cover my sins and make me white as snow—totally illogical. But God didn't ask me to understand. He asked me to believe. When I understand, then it is my decision; when I believe, then God is in control.

3. **The shoes**—ready to move in the middle of the night. It is not reasonable for God to ask me to be ready at any minute to go where he directs me to go. I do have my life to live, you know. But it worked for the Jews, it worked for the disciples, and it will work for us if we can believe. While God is demonstrating to a wicked world the consequences of sin, he is also teaching us the lessons of obedience—not because it makes sense to us, but because it makes sense to God. And my faith is in God, not in my understanding. Therefore, what saves me and what I can pass on to my children and their children is not my intellectual understanding of God's ways, but my faith and belief that God knows what he is doing.

How To
Key text:
Exodus 12:1-11

Rich Carlson is the campus chaplain at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, and director of Collegiate Publications.

Thursday, March 14 115

Together in The Lonesome Valley

by Ken Downing

OPINION
Key text:
Mark 14:37

The lines of an old spiritual, remembered from childhood, come to mind while reviewing the events of Gethsemane.

Jesus walked this lonesome valley,
He had to walk it by himself;
For nobody else could walk it for him;
He had to walk it by Himself.

You must walk this lonesome valley,
You have to walk it by yourself . . .

Jesus' experience in Gethsemane involved much more than is found in Mark's brief account. Mark includes the facts of Jesus' taking Peter, James, and John with him part of the way, pleading with his Father to take the cup, and turning to the sleeping disciples for assurance. But beyond that his experience is a dark kaleidoscope of all the pain and loneliness and separation *ever* portrayed in song, prose, or poetry. We catch glimpses of it only briefly as it touches our own aching loneliness when we lose someone we love deeply.

**"Nobody could
walk it for him,
but someone
could walk it
with him."**

It *is* indeed true that "nobody else could walk it for Him," or for us. There are moments in our lives, most dramatically at the point of death, when we must "go it alone." Elisabeth Kübler-Ross points out that it is even easier for dying patients "if they are allowed and helped to detach themselves slowly from all the meaningful relationships in their life."¹

But having acknowledged the intensely personal nature of our loneliness in whatever life crisis we may face, it troubles me to see the way this concept has been elevated at times to an isolationist ideal. In my own classes I have caught myself echoing the sentiments of my Adventist upbringing in Sabbath Schools and church schools that teach that conversion and victorious living are so personal that "it's just between you and God," forgetting that Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross up the hill of Golgotha for him.

In Gethsemane we find that Jesus, the God-man himself, feels the separation from his Father with incredible intensity. In blood-sweating agony he calls out, "Abba, Dad! please don't!" and hearing nothing he turns to mere men, looking for human companionship to walk *with* him through this morningless valley. Nobody could walk it *for* him, but someone could walk it *with* him.

In Jesus' turning to the disciples I find a powerful lesson for us today. If Jesus himself looked to his fellow man for support, how can we dare suggest that any of us should somehow be strong enough to face every crisis by ourselves. Christ died for individuals, and each person must make a very personal decision to accept that sacrifice. But he also died for the church (Eph. 5:25) and for the world (John 3:16). Surely it must be in fellowship with other believers within the world community that I will find the support I need

Ken Downing is director of the Teaching Learning Center at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska.

to go through the deeply personal experience of being both Christian and human.

In Gethsemane Jesus is suspended in a powerfully symbolic way between heaven and earth—even more so than on the cross, for the decision to physically hang there is irreversibly made in the garden. The true suspension occurs after he has turned to both God and man three times, and three times failed to hear any words of approbation, or to feel any touch of assurance that he can go through the blackness.

It is in that darkest moment, when human destiny hangs in awesome balance, that in my imagination I see a change begin to happen. His flared nostrils, gasping for life itself, catch a faint scent of expensive perfume from his dusty feet and the image of an adultress' love once again touches his life. Then he feels the angel's hand on his shoulder, sent with a message from his Father, and with the united touch of the divine and the human he faces the mob with peace.

“His nostrils catch a faint scent of expensive perfume.”

REACT

1. Is Christ's power alone sufficient to help us through our most difficult problems, or do we all inevitably need human help in some way?

2. Do you agree with the author's suggestion that recollection of human love was part of what helped Jesus face the cross as he struggled in Gethsemane?

March 17-March 23

12

The Day of the Ransom

“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God’ ” (Mark 15:39, NIV).



Christ crucified between two robbers, the word on the cross to the Virgin and St. John, and the dead Christ. Detail enlarged from the Book of Hours, 1240.

The Ultimate Act of Unselfishness

by Gary R. Gray

This Week's Scripture: Mark 15

In spite of doctrinal differences, they shared a couple of things. One was they were all clergy—two Protestants, a priest, and a rabbi. Yet on a bitter cold night during World War II on a troop carrier headed for Europe, they had something else in common—the same fate. Struck by a torpedo from a prowling German U-boat, their ship started to go down. In the ensuing confusion, several on board didn't get their life jackets. Quickly the clergy handed over theirs. For the few sailors and soldiers who looked back from the safety of their lifeboats, it was a sight forever frozen in their minds. As the doomed vessel sank beneath the frigid waves, the four clergy were standing on the deck with arms linked together.

Though their religious views differed, the clergy had found the essence of true religion—unselfishness. They had given their lives so others might live.

But there is another example of unselfishness that is even greater—the death of Christ. If we understand the battle between good and evil correctly, then somehow the death Christ died is not the same death we will die on this earth. He experienced the final separation from the source of life so that

others might live.

Christianity teaches that this is a profoundly true statement about the very essence of God's nature. Though we have rejected God and chosen evil, he nevertheless took the blame and absorbed the punishment of evil himself.

Perhaps this truth about God also explains the essence of life where no evil exists. C. S. Lewis thinks this is one way to describe what heaven will be like. He says, "The golden apple of selfhood, thrown among the false gods, became an apple of discord because they scrambled for it. They did not know the first rule of the holy game, which is that every player must by all means touch the ball and then immediately pass it on. To be found with it in your hands is a fault: to cling to it, death. But when it flies to and fro among the players too swift for eye to follow, and the great master Himself leads the revelry, giving Himself eternally to His creatures in the generation, and back to Himself in the sacrifice, of the Word, then indeed the eternal dance 'makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.'"

But that Friday afternoon in Palestine, 2000 years ago, Christ threw away the apple of selfhood. It was the ultimate act of unselfishness.

INTRODUCTION

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 153.

Gary Gray is director of admissions and recruitment at Atlantic Union College.

The Sacrifice Made

LOGOS Theme: Jesus consummates a life of self-giving love by making the supreme sacrifice at the cross.

1. Jesus Before Pilate (read Mark 15:1-15)

"'Crucify him!' they shouted. 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'" (15:13, 14, NIV).

Early in the morning Jesus was taken before Pilate. During the night the Sanhedrin sentenced Jesus to death on the charge of blasphemy. But they didn't have the power to carry the sentence out. The death penalty came under Roman jurisdiction. And since blasphemy wasn't a Roman crime, a political crime had to be invented. The charges were a lie and Pilate knew it.

After listening to the priests' trumped-up charges, Pilate challenged Jesus to defend himself, but Jesus refused. Surrounded by the babbling hostility of the priests, his silence spoke eloquently, and Pilate understood its meaning. Christ was innocent. To get himself out of the situation Pilate offered Barabbas as an alternative and thus free Christ. But, at the insistence of the watching crowd, Barabbas was freed and Christ was sentenced to crucifixion. In this the truth about Jesus is portrayed. Though himself sinless, Jesus submitted himself to a criminal's death so that all sinners might live.

Why do you think Jesus was silent at his trial? What light does this shed on the way God relates to the unpardonable sin?

2. Jesus Mocked and Crucified (read Mark 15:16-32)

"It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left" (15:25-27, NIV).

After sentence was pronounced, Jesus was led away to face the torments of the soldiers. These were probably non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, among which anti-Jewish sentiments ran high. And now they had a chance to vent their hostility on a "Jewish king." Jesus had been convicted as a rival of Caesar's, and the soldiers mocked him accordingly. A purple robe was placed on him—the insignia of royalty, and a crown of thorns—to replace an absent crown of jewels, the insignia of kingship. The beatings with fists and rods were the expressions of base brutality.

The irony is painfully clear. The soldiers, in their sadistic play, in spite of themselves acknowledged in word (vs. 18) and deed (vs. 19) Jesus' identity as king.¹

After this and the long trek to Golgotha, came the crucifixion. Crucifixion was one of the cruelest and most degrading forms of punishment, even to hardened pagans. Thus suspended and exposed in his agony, Christ faced the insults and abuse of the priests and

rulers. Ironically, some of their insults, like those of the soldiers, were truths. "He saved others . . . but he can't save himself" (vs. 31, NIV). To fulfill his mission to save the human race Christ could not save himself from the pain and suffering inflicted upon him.

Why did Jesus die on a cross? Couldn't there have been an easier way? Is God responsible for suffering? What implications are there from the manner of Christ's death for a suffering world?

3. The Death of Jesus (read Mark 15:33-41)

"With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last" (15:37, NIV).

During his life Jesus continually felt the presence of his Father. But to pay the penalty for sin, he had to die the second death, which is complete separation from God. It was this and not the nails or the insults that caused the greatest pain and ultimately his death. So it was that Jesus called out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' (vs. 34, NIV). Without his Father's presence, Christ could neither live nor see the hope of resurrection.

When Christ died the curtain of the temple was torn in two (vs. 38). This symbolized two things. First, the sacrificial system was now fulfilled, type had met antitype. Christ's sacrifice nullified the need for lesser, symbolic sacrifices. And second, free access to God was now possible. The curtain, a wall of separation, was now gone. No longer did a priest have to intercede. The way to God was made wide open to all.

What hope does Christ's death inspire among suffering Christians?

4. The Burial of Jesus (read Mark 15:42-47)

"So Joseph brought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock" (15:46, NIV).

Crises often bring decisions to light, but they never determine decisions. Choices made under stress usually follow the pattern of habits already formed. Pilate's moral weakness at the trial of Jesus was not a sudden response to the pressure of the priests and people. It had been cultivated through the years, and his lack of firmness merely came to fruition at the trial. Joseph's decision to assist in the burial of Jesus and no longer be a secret follower of Christ's was also no sudden impulse. Christ's death called for a stand, and the stand taken was the result of previous choices made. Joseph of Arimathea chose to bury a convicted criminal and face the contempt of his colleagues rather than turn and look away from injustice.

In a time of crisis or stress, what pattern will your choices follow?

E. R. M.

1. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark*, p. 217.

Immeasurable Love

selected by Larry Lewis

TESTIMONY

Key text:
1 Peter 2:24

Before Pilate.

"In fear and self-condemnation Pilate looked upon the Saviour. In the vast sea of upturned faces, His alone was peaceful. About His head a soft light seemed to shine. Pilate said in his heart, He is a God. Turning to the multitude he declared, I am clear of His blood. Take ye Him, and crucify Him. But mark ye, priests and rulers, I pronounce Him a just man. . . .

"Pilate longed to deliver Jesus. But he saw that he could not do this, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. How many, to escape loss or suffering, in like manner sacrifice principle. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another. The current sets strongly in the wrong direction, and he who compromises with evil is swept away into the thick darkness of guilt."

On Calvary.

"And now the Lord of glory was dying, a ransom for the race. In yielding up His precious life, Christ was not upheld by triumphant joy. All was oppressive gloom. It was not the dread of death that weighed upon Him. It was not the pain and ignominy of the cross that caused His inexpressible agony. Christ was the prince of sufferers; but His suffering was from a sense of the malignity of sin, a knowledge that through familiarity with evil, man had become blinded to its enormity. Christ saw how deep is the hold of sin upon the human heart, how few would be willing to break from its power. . . .

"Pride cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary."

"Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God."²

"When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the great sacrifice which was made by the Majesty of heaven in dying in man's stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian's heart. Praises to God and the Lamb will be in their hearts and upon their lips. Pride and self-esteem cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. This world will appear of but little value to those who appreciate the great price of man's redemption, the precious blood of God's dear Son. All the riches of the world are not of sufficient value to redeem one perishing soul. Who can measure the love Christ felt for a lost world as He hung upon the cross, suffering for the sins of guilty men? This love was immeasurable, infinite."³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 738.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 752, 753.
3. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 212.

Larry Lewis is president of Atlantic Union College.

Why Jesus Was Silent

by James Valentine

It is important to know *why* Jesus made no reply (Mark 15:5; Matt. 27:14) to the false yet serious charges brought against him. Surely if he had just spoken a few words confirming his innocence, Pilate would have set him free. We know the Roman governor was eager to release Jesus. But Jesus remained silent. Why?

The death sentence pronounced upon Jesus by Caiaphas the high priest was the true, visible verdict of the Father upon Jesus as the sin-bearer (2 Cor. 5:21). This divine verdict condemning Jesus as our substitute was rendered in the heavenly courtroom. The trial in Jerusalem was its earthly counterpart.

As our substitute, Jesus must be *found* innocent, yet *declared* guilty. He must *in reality* be sinless, yet *for our sakes* be made a criminal deserving the death penalty. He must be *proven* sinless, yet *treated* as a sinner. Jesus therefore did not reject, nor deny the death sentence pronounced by Caiaphas and Pilate because *in God's sight* it was true, and even just! In his role as representative of sinful humanity, Jesus willingly accepted the guilt and condemnation for sin which had fallen on the human race. We are told that in the end every mortal will confess his sin (Phil. 2:11) and every mouth will be stopped (Rom. 3:19) from denying God's just charges of first-degree sin. But the believer has a substitute who took his place in the cosmic trial, and who also—by his silence—confessed his (imputed) sin, and whose mouth was stopped on this occasion from confessing his first-degree holiness (contrast John 8:46).

In Mark 15:14 Pilate publicly declares that Jesus is guilty of no evil. And yet in the very next verse he delivers him up to be crucified. What a paradox! The Roman judge finds Jesus innocent but condemns him as if guilty. And yet, in spite of so gross a miscarriage of justice, in the heavenly court the same verdict was being handed down by one who judges righteously! Thus it is no wonder that Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NIV).

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Mark 15:5

"As our substitute, Jesus must be found innocent, yet declared guilty."

REACT

1. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be declared guilty of our sins and treated accordingly? Was God unable to forgive us otherwise? (Compare Evidence and Opinion in discussing this question.)

2. Is there a difference between saying, "Jesus died for me," and "Jesus died for my sins"?

James Valentine teaches biblical theology at Atlantic Union College.

The Advantages of Silence

by William Boyd

HOW TO

Key text:
Isaiah 53:7

There is something honorable about one who, having to face complaints, accusations, and harsh comments can remain silent, offering no response or retort. This kind of silence is powerful and can completely disarm an opponent. I remember a scene from a John Wayne movie in which "the Duke" had to face a threatening opponent. At the height of the mockery and abuse coming from his opponent, John Wayne suddenly and quite uncharacteristically turned and walked away without saying a word. His opponent had been beaten without a blow.

The description Mark gives of the trial of Jesus is the best example of dealing with opposition through silence. Through the questioning, accusations, and torturing Christ didn't utter a word. In silence he suffered all. This characteristic of Christ is something we need to put into practice. Doing this will lead you to:

1. **Think before you speak.** So many times in our daily lives we are faced with challenges or accusations from other people, and often our immediate response is to lash out in self-defense. Christ, however, has shown us a way of dealing with these situations that is better than retaliating. Think before you speak. In doing this you may realize it's better not to say anything at all.

2. **Listen to the Spirit.** Being silent and giving time for thought allows the Holy Spirit to speak to you, and thus give guidance on how to handle the situation. When one's mind is crowded with thoughts and words that give expression to angry feelings and emotions that call for revenge, God's Spirit can not speak. But in quiet, through a still small voice, he will be heard and give direction.

How does one overcome the initial impulse to retaliate or give a retort? This too is evidenced by Jesus.

3. **Live in the Spirit.** Part of the little Jesus did say to Pilate was, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36, NIV). He could look beyond this world, the things people accused him of, their hate and insults, the injuries they inflicted on him, and see their need. His kingdom was not of this world, so he could see the greater conflict. He could look beyond the petty bickerings of the priests and see the controversy involving the universe where the salvation of mankind was at stake. With this view he was able to do more than control the impulse to revenge or retort. With this view he could love. Living in the Spirit we too can have this same perspective. Living in the Spirit we too can love.

William Boyd is a history and religion major at Atlantic Union College.

In Search Of a Theory

by William J. Cork

For nearly two millennia Christians have tried to explain why Christ died. Though many theories have been proposed, two major ones that developed in the Middle Ages have had the most popularity.

Anselm (1033-1109) stressed that God's justice demanded satisfaction. Adam disobeyed—therefore he must die, or someone must die in his place. Since it was God's law which was broken, an infinite sacrifice was required—therefore Christ had to become man and die to atone for humanity's sin, appeasing God's justice. This view has become the predominant view in Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. It is known as the "objective" or "substitutionary" theory.

Abelard (1079-1142) opposed this view, feeling that it left out God's love and mercy. He suggested that Christ died as the ultimate expression of unselfish love. By thus beholding God's love in action, we would see our sin and would be drawn to God. Thus the atonement, according to Abelard, is something that occurs in us in response to seeing God's love. This has become known as the "subjective" or "moral influence" theory.

The problem we must face is that the New Testament never explains the meaning of the death of Christ in as much detail as theologians have. No theory can explain God. In fact, the implications of our theories can turn God into quite a monster, especially the Anselmian theory. Do we do justice to God by picturing him as requiring a bloody sacrifice to meet the demands of a cold stone law? Is he a cosmic Shylock who must have his pound of flesh before he is appeased?

Our God very soon becomes indistinguishable from one who would punish unrepentant sinners in the flames of hell for eternity. Such a conception of God may be good for scaring up converts during weeks of prayer, when speakers inevitably make great efforts to vividly depict the blood and gore of the crucifixion scene (much more explicitly, by the way, than any of the Gospel writers). But what happens to the New Testament counsel that love "keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Cor. 13:5)? Where is the teaching of Christ that we should repay evil with good (Matt. 5:38-48)?

The Abelardian theory has its problems as well. The atonement becomes something that happens within us when our hearts soften to the rays of love shining from Calvary. This would be like two lovers being in a canoe on a lake: the woman falls in and is drowning and instead of making efforts to rescue her, the man jumps in and drowns himself. Would we call this love, or stupidity?

All atonement theories have some truth to offer. But all can also cause distorted understanding if pressed to their logical extremes. We would be much safer to stick with what the New Testament says about the death of Christ, as little as it may say in the way of theological explanation, and not attempt to impose a rigid theory about the meaning of the event on other believers.

OPINION

Key text:
Acts 2:32-36

**"No theory can
explain God."**

At the time of this writing, William Cork was a history and religion major at Atlantic Union College.

March 24-March 30

13

The Drama Lives On

“ ‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here!’ ” (Mark 16:6, NIV).



Initial M with the Resurrection, Mainz, ca. 1260.

Why the Cross Is a Focus for Faith

by Edward W. H. Vick

INTRODUCTION

This Week's Scripture: Mark 16

Jesus died. How is it that Christians give thanks to God for this death? We can put that question in two ways.

(1.) How *did* it come about that a new community came into being after the death of Jesus (who is, of course, not the "founder" of Christianity as Mohammed is the founder of Islam or as Nanak is of Sikhism)? (2.) How is it that *now*, so long afterward, the death of Jesus continues to become the focus for faith in Christ, that the symbol of the cross still means Christian faith, life, community?

One important answer to the first question comes from our passage. This contains the promise that Jesus who had died will appear to "his disciples and Peter" (in Galilee). The "longer ending" of Mark 16 (see below) hints that there were several such appearances. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, to two of them, to the eleven. In each case the text stresses that they did not believe (vss. 11, 12, 14). There was initial skepticism, then a passing from unbelief to belief. At some point in the mysterious events of "appearances" following the death of Jesus, they came to believe that his death was not a defeat, but a victory. They came to believe that God was now revealing himself to them through the event that had discouraged and frightened them the most in their immediate past, the death of Jesus. That was the

beginning of Christian faith.

There came a time, not long after the coming of faith, when Jesus' appearances ceased. There was a last appearance to the disciples. Jesus "was taken up into heaven" (v. 19, RSV).

Let us go to the second question. We, *now*, come to have faith in Jesus Christ, because we hear the spoken word of witness to Jesus. As there are those who speak the word of witness about God's action, his coming to us, his love for us, in the death of Jesus, so Christian faith ever and anew comes to be. The word of witness is the occasion for the faith of the believer.

Ascension From a Round World?

Jesus "was taken up into heaven." Christians call it the ascension, and connect it with the exaltation ("sat down at the right hand of God," v. 19, RSV). The two moments (or are they one?) appear in the early confession we now call the apostles' creed: "He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father almighty."

What follows the last appearance of the resurrected Christ to the group of disciples is their conviction that he is one with God, enthroned with God. And that is no mean conviction. I must certainly not take it for granted, either for them or for myself. It is the most daring thing the Jewish monotheist could do for Jesus, the crucified Jesus:

Edward W. H. Vick has written several books on theology and is chairman of the Department of Religious Studies at Forest Fields College in Nottingham, England.

come to believe and then to proclaim that he is one with God in God's activity, like the co-regent in an eastern court.

Ascension is not simply a matter of geographical relocation. Did anyone ever think that that constitutes or exhausts what *ascension* means? Even if they might have done so, we cannot.

Look at these diagrams:

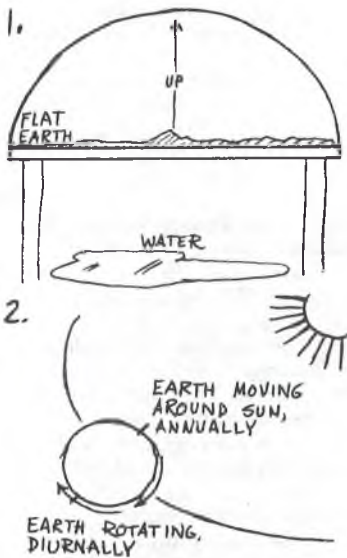


Diagram #1 is the flat earth, the vault of the sky above it. In the languages of the Bible (as in others) "heaven" means "sky." There is only one word. The sky for the ancients was above a flat earth. God dwells above the earth, above the firmament which is above the earth. On this cos-

mology to ascend means to go to where God is. It could readily express one's faith in the ultimacy of Jesus.

Diagram #2 is the spherical earth, moving on its axis as well as moving around a central sun. What do "above" and "ascend" mean now, in view of this double motion? We must take the confession as a whole: "Ascended . . . and sitteth." The ascending and the sitting at the right hand are aspects of a single confession of the status of Jesus, the crucified.

A Literary Problem

In the most reliable early manuscripts, the book of Mark ends in the middle of a sentence, "for they were afraid" (v. 8). There are several reasons why this is noteworthy, even striking. First, Greek sentences don't usually end as the text of Mark ends, with that particular word. Second, Mark is rather obviously leading up to a climax. But he does not reach it if he ends there. Third, some manuscripts have supplied other endings.

So we have a *literary problem*. Quite simply, what happened to the ending of Mark? Probably the answer is that a chunk got ripped off the scroll of papyrus which contained the original Gospel. Or, perhaps, less likely but possible, Mark did not quite finish the task of writing. Did a Roman soldier or official apprehend him, or someone else who had his book? Rome, in the latter part of the sixties, was not a

pleasant place for Christians to live. We cannot understand the New Testament unless we read it aware of the threat and fact of constant persecution.

So the original ending is lost.

But someone later supplied what we now call the "longer ending." It (vss. 9-20 in some versions) tells the story of Mary Magdalene (cf. John 20:11-18); reminds us of Luke's long account of the Emmaus disciples (cf. Luke 24:13-35); recalls the gospel commission and the promise of signs (cf. Luke 24:36-49 and Matthew 28:16-20). It finally mentions the last of Jesus' appearances and his assumption to the right hand of God (cf.

the ascension story of Acts 1:9-11).

That later longer ending is a mosaic. Someone drew on Luke (in particular) and brought Mark's manuscript to a climax. In doing so, he caught the spirit of Mark, who intended the writing to end in triumph and not in fear.

REACT

Some scholars believe that Mark purposely ended his gospel with vs. 8 of chapter 16—the women's reaction of fear to this supreme demonstration of Jesus' power culminates a series of similar reactions throughout the gospel (4:41; 5:42; 10:32). If Mark did choose to end his gospel in this way, what do you think was his purpose in doing so?

He Has Risen!

LOGOS

Theme: Jesus rises from the dead and ascends to God's right hand, thereby validating his claim to be Messiah and Lord. He leaves his followers with the mission of proclaiming the good news and with the hope that he will return to grant them life eternal.

1. Women Discover That Jesus Has Risen (read Mark 16:1-8).

"You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here" (16:6, NIV).

Mark's gospel has made some startling claims about Jesus of Nazareth. It declares that this unpretentious carpenter's son is the Son of God, the one in whom God's kingdom is realized on earth. If this man was to be found among the dead, as the women who went to anoint his body expected to find him that Sunday morning, such claims would be meaningless. Mark's drama would have had about as much impact as a pebble on the Pacific Ocean. But Mark proclaims that even though Jesus literally died and was buried (15:37-47), the tomb was not the place to find him: "He has risen!"

Mark thus presents the resurrection as the *vindication* of Jesus' claims. The resurrection is "God's clear yes to his faithful Son (1:1; 14:61; 15:39). It is the ratification of Mark's gospel."¹ It is God's confirmation that in Jesus his character is revealed and his purposes accomplished.

While we cannot empirically prove the truth of Mark's report of the resurrection, it bears signs of authenticity. For example, if the story had been invented, Mark would never have given women such a prominent role as the initial discoverers and proclaimers (see 16:9-11) of the resurrection. In the Jewish thinking of the time, women were not to be trusted as witnesses. In fact, their testimony was ineligible as evidence in court.² Thus, a contrived attempt to prove the resurrection wouldn't have used women as primary witnesses.

The prominence of women in the story is also evidence that in Christianity women were to a large degree elevated from the low status given them by the culture of the time.

Would Jesus' life and death have had meaning without the resurrection?

2. Jesus Appears to His Followers (read Mark 16:9-14).

"Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating: he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen" (16:14, NIV).

Like the Eleven, we are confronted with the witness of those who saw Jesus "after he had risen" (16:14). Note the variety of individuals, groups, and settings in the following list of appearances by the risen Lord reported in the New Testament.

1. To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:13-17).
2. To the other women after they had left the tomb (Matt. 28:9, 10).

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3. To Peter prior to the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
 4. To two disciples on the way to Emmaus (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-32).
 5. To the disciples in the upper room while Thomas was absent (Mark 16:14; John 20:19-24).
 6. To the Eleven, Thomas being present, in the upper room a week after the resurrection (John 20:26-29).
 7. To seven of the disciples as they were fishing on the Lake of Galilee (John 21:1-3).
 8. To about 500 on a mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16; 1 Cor. 15:6).
 9. To James (1 Cor. 15:7).
 10. To the Eleven immediately prior to the ascension (Mark 16:19, 20; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:4-12).
 11. To Paul (1 Cor. 15:8).

Ralph Martin points out that the single common feature that runs through these diverse appearances is that "the reality of Jesus is known in a way that inspired devotion, trust and obedience." But can we, living 2000 years later, with a view of reality totally different from that of the first century, truly believe these reports?

Certainly it is difficult to deny that the witnesses really believed they had seen and heard the resurrected Jesus. And Martin goes on to say, "However we may want to 'explain' the appearances and try to find a basis for what the disciples saw in terms of controlled visions and auditions, natural phenomena used by God, or even ESP, the most important element is the objectivity of the appearances—there was something there or, better, someone there for them to see, and touch, and listen to (as Luke says, Luke 24:39, and as John expressed so well, 1 John 1:1)."³

Until they had a personal encounter with Jesus, however, the disciples did not have faith that he was risen. For us today, faith must be without sight. Yet it is not without the personal encounter which the living Christ seeks to initiate with each of us (Rev. 3:20).

Is your belief that Jesus was resurrected from the dead based on the witness of the disciples or on your personal experience with him?

3. Jesus Commissions the Disciples and Ascends to the Right Hand of God (read Mark 16:15-20).

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.'

"Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them" (16:15, 20, NIV).

Most of the miraculous signs which Jesus declared would accompany believers (vss. 17, 18) were manifest in the apostolic age (see Acts 2:4; 3:1-7; 16:16-18; 28:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:10; 14:8). How do we relate

to these signs today? Barclay suggests that the essential point here is that "the church has a source of power. . . . We need not think that the Christian is literally to have the power to lift venomous snakes and drink poisonous liquids and take no harm. But at the back of this picturesque language is the conviction that the Christian is filled with a power to cope with life that others do not possess."⁴

Mark's divine drama now draws to a close. And yet the drama lives on in the lives of believers who, like their Lord, proclaim the good news of the kingdom (vs. 15; 13:10) and consequently experience conflict and persecution. They can remain faithful until the drama's completion because in Christ the decisive "Act" has already occurred. Their lives are charged with hope, courage, and purpose because the one who was raised from the dead and exalted to the highest position in the universe (vs. 19) is "working with them" (vs. 20, KJV).

What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make in your life?

D. F. M.

1. Carl Walters, Jr.,
I, Mark: A Personal Encounter, p. 135.
2. Ralph P. Martin,
Where the Action Is, p.
151.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 154.
4. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 370.

The Demanding Presence

by Edward W. H. Vick

"As the disciples returned from Olivet to Jerusalem, the people looked on them, expecting to see on their faces expressions of sorrow, confusion, and defeat; but they saw there gladness and triumph. The disciples did not now mourn over disappointed hopes. They had seen the risen Saviour, and the words of His parting promise echoed constantly in their ears."¹

So there has been a great transformation. It began with the disciples. They had despaired, sorrowed, doubted. Each of the Gospels in its own way provides evidence of that. That was only what you would expect. The death of the Master produces the despair of the disciple. But in this case the death of the Master was the beginning and not the end. In the beginning was despair and fear. But something happened to turn disappointment and mourning into joy, even to an active celebration of triumph.

What is the formula for the change from defeat to triumph? What is the formula for the transition from confusion and despair to confidence and hope? They did not have one. There was no formula. It was not a case of thinking the matter carefully through and coming to a reasonable conclusion. It was not a matter of long committee work which eventually produced a satisfactory statement, which a spokesman for the group could then give out as unanimous. It was not a matter of one of the more articulate of them making a convincing presentation and all agreeing to its conclusion.

They "saw" the risen Jesus.

It was the real presence of God himself: not a formula, but a meeting with him. A presence! A confrontation! In that encounter they found succor, challenge, courage, life. They discovered purpose as they discovered task. Both purpose and task sprang from a demanding presence. "I am with you. Go into the world!"

Now they will go back and let the transformation of the meaning of that death sink into their consciousness. They must now think through all of Jesus' teachings in the light of the death of Jesus. That was a beginning. They will then get ready for the fulfilling of the task—to speak about that death, over and over and over again. They will speak about it with confidence, and what will happen over and over and over again will be that their new joy and freedom will come to be shared by those who hear their words. The presence of the resurrected Christ will ever and anew become contemporary. For God is God of the living and not of the dead.

Through the words which they will speak, words of witness, of explanation, of exhortation, the miracle will happen again and again. The dying Jesus becomes the resurrected Christ, and faith and community emerge.

Then too the formulae emerge.

TESTIMONY

Key text:

1 Corinthians
15:3-8

"It was not a matter of long committee work which eventually produced a satisfactory statement."

1. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 35.

Evidence for the Resurrection

by Ronald J. Sider

EVIDENCE

Key text:

Mark 16:6

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is surprisingly strong. Of the many points that are often made, I will briefly mention four: (1) the change in the discouraged disciples; (2) the empty tomb; (3) the fact that the first witnesses were women; and (4) the very early evidence in 1 Corinthians 15.

What gave rise to the "resurrection faith" and the disciples' willingness to risk their lives to spread it? Professor Reginald H. Fuller, formerly of New York's Union Theological Seminary, has underlined the fact that this total transformation demands explanation: "Even the most skeptical historian has to postulate an 'X', as M. Dibelius called it, to account for the complete change in the behavior of the disciples, who at Jesus' arrest had fled and scattered to their own homes, but who in a few weeks were found boldly preaching their message to the very people who had sought to crush the movement launched by Jesus." If one rejects the New Testament explanation that Jesus arose and appeared to his disciples, one is left with the extremely difficult task of proposing other grounds adequate to explain the dramatic transformation of very discouraged people. Professor Robert Grant of the University of Chicago has said, "The origin of Christianity is almost incomprehensible unless such an event took place."

There have been a number of attempts to explain the empty tomb. The old one of theft is no longer accepted. It has been suggested that Joseph of Arimathea, or the Romans, or the Jewish leaders, removed the body before the women arrived; but, if so, the Jewish leaders would obviously have conducted guided tours to the real burial place as soon as the disciples claimed Jesus had risen. . . . Both the Christians and their Jewish opponents agreed that the tomb was empty.

The fact that women were the first people to visit the tomb and allegedly see the risen Jesus speaks in favor of the authenticity of the accounts. . . . [See explanation in Logos.]

The oldest evidence for the resurrection is in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. Many scholars have pointed out that the words used in verse 3 (*delivered* and *received*) are the technical terms used to refer to the careful handing down of oral tradition. Paul apparently taught this to all the churches. Furthermore, Paul says he received it, presumably, soon after he became a Christian just a few years after Jesus' death. That means that this witness to Jesus' resurrection received a fixed form very soon after the actual events.

As a historian, I find the evidence surprisingly strong. The most unbiased historical conclusion is that Jesus was probably alive on the third day.

It was a resurrection which dramatically transformed the life and thought of the discouraged disciples. Everywhere in the New Testament it is clear that it was the resurrection which convinced the discouraged disciples that Jesus' claims and his announcement of the messianic kingdom were still valid.

Excerpted from "Resurrection and Liberation," *College People*, May 1982, pp. 40, 41.

Ronald J. Sider is a well-known Christian lecturer, writer and professor at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

How to Find Hope

by Edward W. H. Vick

HOW TO
Key text
Romans 15:13

1. Should you go in despair, consider it possible that faith will intervene, and with it hope.

The women are active, and as soon as possible. Their task is a task of affection and a very practical one. They will perform the last rites. They kept the law through the long hours of Sabbath. They wait out the darkness of the long night. But at dawn they are on their way to the grave.

But it's all changed.

They go to care for the dead, and life is never, never the same again.

Mark 16 is the story of the reversal of expectation, the irrelevance of the good intentions (we must anoint him) and the genuine apprehension (how shall we get the stone shifted?).

They expect the dead and seek to preserve it.

They find themselves in the middle of the big event that somehow is transforming the death, and it scares them. They don't know what's happening. They are beside themselves with amazement and fear (vss. 5, 8). It won't be long before they will come to have faith. Then they will understand and rejoice.

2. **Anticipate.** Be open to the mysterious and unexpected revealing of the Christ. If it's God who reveals himself, does it matter how?

The message of the resurrected Christ leads the women forward to the next event. He will appear to Peter and the others. They (the women) are to bear the message and so set up the conditions for the event (vss. 6, 7). Without the bearing of the message, there will be no such meeting. The message of Jesus Christ leads on to an event. In Christianity, message and event are inextricably woven into one. Witness, proclamation is a condition for faith.

3. **Be a bearer, an instrument.** Bring the words. Speak them. The message of Christ is a remembering and an anticipation. In both it is an event, a happening. Mark looks back, and by looking back he makes it possible for others to remember. You can remember what is handed down to you of what is past. The interpreter is also mediator of the past, and God comes to us through the remembering of what he has done. Words about the past are God's instrument for the contemporaneous event of his presence. It's given to us. It's always given. It's grace. We can make our words the instruments of God's revelation. But our words without the revealing presence may be empty.

4. **Remember that the very center of Christian faith is here.** All else is in extension. God has come to us through Jesus, who died and who is risen.

5. **To hope, believe.**

Faith is the source of hope.

Resurrection represents the passage from the old life to the new. We have then a powerful hope. Jesus is set free from the limits of his human life. He now enters a new life. So there is hope. As it was

with him, so it may be with us, his human fellows.

The earliest disciples passed from despair to faith and then to hope. We too may hope.

REACT

1. God reveals himself through human witness. Do the actual words we say make a difference to the effectiveness of that witness? How do you decide which are the right words?

2. Do you think these statements represent extremes?

a. "Nothing the New Testament says that Jesus did is ever a problem."

b. "If it's incredible, it's meaningless, even if the sources say Jesus does it or says it."

Which statement is closer to your own view. Explain why.

Instruments for Resurrection Faith

by Edward W. H. Vick

We should sometimes ask ourselves the question, What do the writings of the New Testament tell us about the people who wrote them, and about the church from whose context they have come? We normally, and rightly, often raise a different kind of question, namely, What can we learn from these writings about God, Jesus, Holy Spirit?

The interesting thing is that when you start talking about faith, these two kinds of questions converge.

The unbeliever does not say that Jesus has become the exalted Christ. The believer does. To come to say that, and the other very central thing we have been discussing, that Jesus is risen, is to confess that God did something that made a difference to those people who confess that he did it. "Jesus is risen. Jesus is ascended." For believers, such statements say something about what happened to *them*. It's the believer *not* the unbeliever, not someone in a neutral position, who says that, who knows about resurrection and ascension. Those events are inseparable from faith.

So when I make such statements, it is to confess, to bear witness to something that has happened to me. Jesus of Nazareth has become for me the one who reveals God to me. So I can now say, "Jesus is Christ. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is at God's right hand." I can testify to what I have experienced.

So the ascension is the story of what God has done for me and for my community. It is story and it is symbol. It tells of the exalting of the human Jesus. Thus, it promises the transformation of *our* lives and *our* futures. Indeed it has meaning because something of transformation is taking place.

It's not a question of demonstration, of proof. You can't coerce a person into believing that Jesus reveals the love and the demand of God. You can't produce a nice, knock-down argument and then say, "So you see you must believe!" It's not like that at all. (That does not mean you don't produce an argument—preferably a good one.) Do not try to prove resurrection. Testify to it.

By bearing witness to the experience of resurrection faith, by using words confessing that faith, words about the death, resurrection, ascension, exaltation of Jesus, you put yourself at risk. In doing so you make your words, your experience, yourself an instrument for resurrection faith for your hearer. You also nurture your own faith.

That's the very good reason why Mark wrote his Gospel. That Gospel is the expression of *his* faith. The Gospel of Mark helps to make *my* faith, *your* faith possible. And as the story gets told, the message about faith gets communicated and faith happens—even now!

REACT

Can the resurrection be proved by historical evidence, or must our belief be based on faith?

OPINION

Key text:
Mark 16:19

"The ascension is the story of what God has done for me and for my community."

You could always count on family to share the adventure . . .



Susan
Vester

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Homeward Bound



It's going-home day for Tabatha Weber. She is one of over 2400 children who will have been patients in Porter Memorial Hospital's pediatric unit by the end of this year.

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