

THE DAILY QUIET TIME REFLECTIONS SERIES

RANSOM FOR MANY

Reflections on the Gospel of Mark

Eugene Han

Ransom for Many: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark

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The Introduction draws on the introductory notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, used with gratitude for his lay-accessible scholarship on the text of Scripture.

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Drawn from a decade of shared Quiet Time reflections at dailyqt.org, and from Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Reading, Reflecting, Together

This book was not written to be read in a single sitting. It was written to be read one day at a time, alongside an open Bible rather than in place of one. The believers in Berea were commended not simply for their eagerness to hear the Word but for their habit of examining the Scriptures every day to see whether what they had been taught was true (Acts 17:11). That daily habit, sustained over time rather than compressed into a weekend, is the entire aim of this book and of the Quiet Time practice that produced it.

To help establish that rhythm, we have included, as an appendix at the back of this book, the same daily Bible reading plan we have used at dailyqt.org for well over a decade. It walks through the whole of Scripture in a year, a few chapters at a time, and it does not need to be started in January; you are free to begin on whatever date suits you and simply follow the sequence from there. Each of the eight chapters in this book lines up with exactly one day on that plan, from Mark 1–3 on the first day to Mark 15–16 on the last, so that this book and your own Bible can move through this Gospel together, side by side, one day at a time.

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels, and it is tempting, because of its pace, to read it in a single afternoon. We would gently discourage that. The whole aim of this series is the opposite of speed — one reading, one reflection, one day at a time — and Mark's urgency is best felt the way its first readers felt it: a little at a time, alongside a life actually being lived.

Whether you are reading on your own or working through this book with a group like one of our own Sunday School classes at First Baptist Church in Dallas, we would suggest the following simple rhythm for each day, or for each session if you are meeting weekly as a group:

1. Begin and end in prayer. Ask God, before you open either Bible or book, to teach you something true about Himself that day, and thank Him, when you close both, for whatever He has shown you — even if it is smaller or slower than you expected.

2. Read the assigned Scripture. Using the reading plan in the appendix, read the day's passage directly from your own Bible before turning to our reflections on it. There is no substitute for reading the text itself first, in whatever translation you trust, and letting it raise its own questions before we offer our own.

3. Read the corresponding chapter in this book. Each chapter walks through that day's passage in the order Scripture presents it, drawing out its major movements and, where it seemed useful, the historical background behind it. Treat it as a conversation about the text you just read, not a replacement for it.

4. Answer the discussion questions. Every chapter closes with four questions sized to fill a forty-five- to sixty-minute group discussion, though they work just as well as slower journaling prompts for a reader working through the book alone. Some ask you to notice something in the text; most ask you to notice something in yourself.

If you are part of a group, we would encourage you to read both the day's Scripture and the corresponding chapter individually during the week, and then use your time together for the fourth step: praying together and working through the discussion questions as a group. This was, after all, how the material in this book first took shape — not in a study or a library, but in a room full of ordinary readers asking each other what a passage meant and why it mattered, week after week, for years. We hope it will do the same for you.

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INTRODUCTION

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels, but it moves faster than any of them. Read it in one sitting and you will notice a word that keeps driving the narrative forward: "immediately." It appears more than forty times, and it gives the whole book a breathless, on-the-move quality. Jesus is always going somewhere, healing someone, confronting someone, teaching a crowd that has gathered before He has even had time to eat. Mark does not pause often for long speeches. He shows us a Servant at work.

Mark himself never names himself in this Gospel — none of the four Gospel writers do — but the early church was unanimous and early in identifying him as John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas who traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey before turning back at Perga (Acts 13:13), and who later became useful again to Paul in his final imprisonment (2 Timothy 4:11). More important for this Gospel, Mark was a close companion of the apostle Peter, who called him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). The most consistent and earliest tradition, reaching back to a figure known as "the Elder" — probably the apostle John himself — and preserved by the church father Papias in the early second century, is that Mark faithfully recorded what he had heard Peter preach about Jesus. Mark was not an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry. He was, in the Elder's words, an interpreter of Peter's memory.

That connection to Peter explains a great deal about this Gospel's character. It reads like an eyewitness account — full of small, vivid, human details that only someone who was there would think to include: Jesus' anger and grief together in the same glance (3:5), the crowds so thick that Jesus and His disciples "did not even have a chance to eat" (6:31), a blind man whose healing comes in two stages, so that people at first look to him "like trees walking around" (8:24). These are not the kinds of details a writer invents to make a theological point. They are the kinds of details a person remembers.

Most of the earliest testimony places the writing of this Gospel in Rome, sometime in the 60s A.D., after Peter's ministry there and probably close to his martyrdom under Nero. The Gospel itself supports a Roman, largely Gentile audience. Mark explains Jewish customs that a Jewish reader would not have needed explained (7:2-4). He translates Aramaic expressions like *talitha koum* and *ephphatha* into Greek for readers who would not have known the language natively. He uses a number of Latin loanwords transliterated into Greek — the vocabulary of Roman soldiers, Roman coins, Roman courts. And he shows a marked interest in suffering and persecution, the kind of interest that would have mattered intensely to Christians living through Nero's campaign against the church in the mid-60s.

Mark's Gospel has comparatively little of Jesus' teaching compared to Matthew, and comparatively more of His action. Where Matthew shows us the King and His kingdom, Mark shows us the Servant and His work. This is the Gospel's controlling idea, and it comes to the surface most clearly in a single verse near the Gospel's midpoint, one that both summarizes what has come before and previews what is still to come: "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" (10:45). Three movements are packed into that sentence — the Son of Man *came*, which is to say, the eternal Son took on human flesh; He came *to serve*, giving Himself to the needs of ordinary, suffering people; and He came *to give his life as a ransom*, which points forward to the cross that dominates the last third of this Gospel. Nearly a third of Mark's Gospel is devoted to the last week of Jesus' life. Someone once called Mark's Gospel a passion narrative with an extended introduction, and there is real truth in that description.

Mark begins his account, fittingly, with a citation from Isaiah — the prophet who spoke more fully than any other of a coming Servant of the Lord who would suffer on behalf of others (Isaiah 53). The picture Isaiah began to paint over centuries earlier, Mark now

completes in narrative form. The Servant Isaiah foresaw suffering for the sins of His people is the same Servant Mark shows us healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and finally hanging on a Roman cross.

This has practical weight for the people who first received this Gospel, and it has practical weight for us. Mark did not write simply to record biography. He wrote to strengthen believers who were themselves facing suffering, so that they would understand what following a suffering Servant requires, and so that they would have confidence that the gospel — the good news that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for sinners — is a message worth suffering for. The last words of the book are a command: go into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature (16:15). Mark wants his reader to do more than admire Jesus. He wants his reader to believe in Him, to rest in Him, and then to serve as He served.

Eight readings carry us through this Gospel's sixteen chapters. What follows are our reflections on that journey — not a verse-by-verse commentary, but an attempt to sit with this Servant long enough to let His pace, His priorities, and His path to the cross reshape our own.

CHAPTER ONE

The Servant Begins His Work

Mark 1-3

Mark does not ease his reader into the story. His very first sentence sets the terms: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). Before Jesus has said a word or performed a single miracle, Mark has already told us who He is. Everything that follows in this Gospel is meant to be read in light of that opening confession.

The first person we meet, however, is not Jesus but John the Baptist, quoting Isaiah and Malachi, preparing the way for someone he says he is not even worthy to stoop down and untie the sandals of (1:7). When Jesus finally does appear, He comes to be baptized by John — not because He had any sin to confess, but because in submitting to a baptism meant for sinners, He identified Himself fully with the people He came to save. At that moment heaven opens, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father speaks: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (1:11). In the span of a few verses we see the fullness of who Jesus is — truly God, addressed by the Father and anointed by the Spirit, and truly human, standing in the water alongside sinners. Both truths matter for the rest of the Gospel. Only because He was fully human could He stand in our place. Only because He was fully God could that standing-in accomplish anything.

Notice, too, how thoroughly the Holy Spirit is woven into this opening scene. It is the Spirit who empowers John's baptism as a forerunner witness, the Spirit who visibly descends on Jesus at His own baptism, and — in the next verse — the Spirit who drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested. This threefold appearance of the Spirit in the space of a few verses is Mark's first extended testimony that Jesus is who the Father declares Him to be, a testimony that will

recur at the Transfiguration and stand behind every exorcism and healing that follows.

"Immediately" the Spirit sends Jesus into the wilderness, where He is tempted by Satan for forty days. Mark gives us only two verses on this, far less than Matthew or Luke, but the point is not lost: the Son who would soon be teaching, healing, and calling disciples had first to be tested, and to prevail where every other human being — beginning with Adam in a garden — had failed.

From there the pace never slows. Jesus calls His first disciples, fishermen who leave their nets "at once" to follow Him. He teaches in the Capernaum synagogue with an authority the people had never heard from their scribes, casts out an unclean spirit that recognizes Him as "the Holy One of God" even while the religious leaders do not yet recognize Him at all, and heals Simon's mother-in-law and then, by evening, what seems like the whole town.

This word "authority" is worth pausing over, because Mark returns to it again and again. The scribes taught by citing other rabbis and precedents; Jesus taught on His own authority, and even unclean spirits recognized and obeyed it instantly (1:27). That same authority is what Jesus will later claim to forgive sins (2:10), to declare Himself Lord of the Sabbath (2:28), and — after the resurrection — to claim over all of heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). And notice what Jesus does with the demon's outburst: He silences it. Throughout this Gospel, whenever an unclean spirit tries to announce who He is, Jesus shuts it down (1:25, 34; 3:12). The content of what the demon says is true — Jesus is the Holy One of God — but Jesus refuses to let that truth be attested by an unclean source. He does not need or want that kind of endorsement, and, as later chapters make clear, He has good reason to keep His identity from being associated with anything the religious leaders could use against Him.

Yet what Jesus does at the end of that remarkable opening day may be the most important thing recorded in this chapter. Early the next

morning, while it was still dark, He got up and went to a solitary place to pray (1:35). His disciples find Him and tell Him that everyone is looking for Him — surely an invitation to go back and capitalize on His growing fame. Jesus instead says it is time to move on to other towns, "because that is why I have come" (1:38). Whatever conviction sent Him from that quiet place came from the prayer, not around it. Jesus, who never lacked wisdom or discernment on His own, still made prayer the place where He aligned Himself with the Father's will rather than the crowd's expectations. If the sinless Son of God needed that unhurried time alone with His Father before He could rightly discern what to do next, how much more do we.

The rest of these three chapters trace a rising conflict between Jesus and Israel's religious leaders. He heals a paralytic let down through a roof and pronounces his sins forgiven before healing his body — provoking the first charge of blasphemy, since only God can forgive sins, which is of course exactly Mark's point. He eats with tax collectors and sinners, explaining that it is the sick, not the healthy, who need a doctor. He is questioned about fasting, and He answers with an image about new wine and old wineskins that reminds us there is a proper order and time for even good religious practices — they are not ends in themselves. His disciples pick grain on the Sabbath, and when the Pharisees object, Jesus points them to David, who in his own hunger ate the consecrated bread reserved for priests — bread the Law technically forbade him, but bread a merciful priest allowed him rather than enforce the letter of the rule against genuine need. Jesus is not overturning the Law; He is recovering its purpose, the same purpose the prophet Hosea named centuries earlier: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). Then Jesus delivers one of the most freeing statements in this Gospel: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (2:27). The Sabbath was a gift meant to serve people, not a burden people were meant to serve — and Jesus, as "even the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (2:28), was not simply interpreting that gift correctly. He was claiming the authority to define it.

By chapter 3, the conflict has hardened. The Pharisees watch to see whether Jesus will heal a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath, "in order to accuse him" (3:2). Mark tells us that Jesus looked at them "in anger" and was "deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts" (3:5) — a rare and striking window into Jesus' emotional life, and proof that righteous anger at hardened unbelief is not incompatible with perfect holiness. He heals the man anyway, and the religious leaders begin plotting with the Herodians, an unlikely political alliance united only by their shared hostility to Jesus, to kill Him.

Crowds now press in from every direction — not only from Galilee but from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the region around Tyre and Sidon (3:7-8). Jesus withdraws to a boat, and it is worth remembering that the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee forms a natural amphitheater in several places; a voice pitched from the water carries clearly up the slopes, and a voice from the slopes carries back down. Whatever the exact mechanics, it is another small sign of how well suited the setting was to the scale of the message. Out of this crowd, Jesus goes up a mountainside and appoints twelve to be with Him and to be sent out to preach and to have authority over demons (3:13-19). Luke tells us Jesus spent the whole night before this decision in prayer (Luke 6:12) — the same pattern already established at 1:35, where prayer precedes rather than follows His major decisions. And the list of twelve is a strange one: impulsive fishermen, a despised tax collector, and — included without qualification — Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Him. Mark does not soften this. Jesus chose His betrayer with open eyes, after a night of prayer, and used even that choice to accomplish the Father's purpose. It is a sobering reminder that God's plans are not derailed by including people who will disappoint Him; His plans are often accomplished through them.

The conflict with the religious leaders reaches its sharpest point yet when the teachers of the law arrive from Jerusalem and offer an explanation for Jesus' power over demons: "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (3:22).

Jesus exposes the absurdity of the charge — a kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand, and no one plunders a strong man's house without first tying him up, which is exactly what Jesus has been doing to Satan's kingdom throughout this chapter. But then Jesus says something more severe than anything else in this Gospel: whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit "will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin" (3:29). This is not a warning about some passing doubt or momentary sin. Mark tells us exactly what provoked it — the leaders were saying Jesus "has an impure spirit" (3:30), that is, they looked directly at the Spirit's own authenticating work and called it satanic. To attribute the Spirit's clear testimony to the devil is to close off, deliberately and knowingly, the very avenue by which a person comes to repentance and forgiveness in the first place. It is less a specific act than a settled, final refusal — a heart so hardened against the Spirit's witness that it has nowhere left to turn. Anyone still capable of worrying whether they have committed this sin has, by that very worry, given evidence they have not.

Even Jesus' own family, we are told, thought He was out of His mind and went to take custody of Him (3:21). John's Gospel later confirms that His brothers did not believe in Him during this period of His ministry (John 7:5). It could not have been easy to grow up alongside someone morally perfect, and it would have been harder still to watch Him embraced by crowds one day and marked for death by the authorities the next. Yet this is not where their story ends: after the resurrection, at least two of Jesus' brothers, James and Jude, came to faith and became leaders in the early church, each opening a New Testament letter by calling himself not "brother of Jesus" but "a servant of Jesus Christ" (James 1:1; Jude 1). Unbelief in a family member, even prolonged unbelief, is not necessarily the end of the story.

When His mother and brothers arrive and send word to Him, Jesus looks at those seated around Him and says, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and

mother" (3:34-35). This is not a rejection of His earthly family — Mark elsewhere makes clear that Jesus cared for His mother even from the cross (John 19:26-27 records this, though Mark does not). It is a definition of the family that matters most. Blood relation to Jesus saves no one. Doing the will of God — which, as this Gospel will make clear, begins with believing in Him — makes a person family.

Three chapters in, then, Mark has already shown us a Servant who is fully God and fully man, who prays before He decides, who forgives before He heals, who serves the outcast over the respectable, and who is already being hunted by the people who should have recognized Him first. The pattern for the rest of the Gospel has been set.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus made unhurried prayer, not the crowd's excitement, the deciding factor in where He ministered next (1:35-38). Where are you currently letting other people's expectations, rather than time alone with God, decide your next step?
2. Jesus recovered the purpose behind the Sabbath — "made for man, not man for the Sabbath" — rather than either ignoring the command or turning it into a burden. Where might you be prioritizing the letter of a rule over the mercy it was meant to serve, or the reverse?
3. Jesus chose Judas as one of the Twelve with open eyes, after a whole night of prayer. What does it mean for you that God's plans are not derailed by including people — including, at times, yourself — who will disappoint Him?
4. Jesus' own brothers did not believe in Him during His earthly ministry, yet two of them, James and Jude, later became leaders in the church. Is there someone in your life whose unbelief you have stopped praying for because it has gone on so long?

CHAPTER TWO

Parables, Power, and the Hidden Kingdom

Mark 4-5

Mark 4 is the longest sustained block of Jesus' teaching in this whole Gospel, and nearly all of it comes in parables — short stories drawn from ordinary life that carry a spiritual meaning. It would be easy to assume, as many have taught, that Jesus used parables because they made deep truths easier to grasp — simple stories for simple people. Jesus Himself tells us otherwise. When His disciples ask why He speaks this way, He answers that the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to them, but that to those on the outside "everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'" (4:11-12, citing Isaiah 6:9-10). The parables, in other words, were not primarily a teaching aid for outsiders. They were a means of concealment. Jesus explained everything privately to His own disciples, but to the crowds He gave stories without explanation.

This should make us cautious about how we handle any parable that Jesus did not personally interpret for us — the parable of the prodigal son being a famous example. We can draw real and valid lessons from such parables, but we should hold our conclusions more loosely than we hold the truths Jesus explained outright, and we should look first to the parables Jesus did explain, like the Parable of the Sower, for our controlling categories.

That parable — of the sower and the four soils — sits at the center of the chapter, and it is really a parable about hearing. The seed is the word. The soils represent different responses to it: hearts hardened like a well-worn path, hearts shallow and rocky, hearts choked by the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth, and finally the good soil that hears the word, accepts it, and produces a crop. Twice in this chapter Jesus says, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (4:9, 23).

Everyone in the crowd that day had physical ears. Not everyone had the kind of hearing that Jesus meant — hearing that leads to understanding, and understanding that leads to faith and fruit. That kind of hearing, Mark's Gospel suggests throughout, is itself a gift. Even the disciples needed Jesus to open their understanding; they did not arrive at it on their own. This should humble any of us who are tempted to take credit for our own faith. As Paul would later write, faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes through the word of God (Romans 10:17) — but only because God grants the ears to hear it rightly in the first place. There is no room for boasting in a faith we did not generate ourselves.

Two shorter parables close out this teaching, and Jesus offers no explanation for either, so any reading of them deserves to be held loosely. In the Parable of the Growing Seed, a farmer scatters seed and then sleeps and rises, day after day, while the seed sprouts and grows "though he does not know how" (4:27). The seed does the work; the farmer merely watches. If this parable is about how the kingdom grows within a single heart, it pictures conversion itself as something mysterious and Spirit-driven rather than something a person manufactures by effort — much like Jesus would later tell Nicodemus that the Spirit, like the wind, blows where it pleases, unseen and uncontrolled by human hands (John 3:8). In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, the smallest of seeds grows into the largest of garden plants, spreading its branches wide enough for birds to nest in its shade (4:30-32). If the Growing Seed pictures how the kingdom takes root in one heart, the Mustard Seed pictures how the kingdom spreads outward from that small, hidden beginning to fill the world. Together they answer, at least in outline, the two questions this chapter has been circling: how does the kingdom grow in me, and how does it grow beyond me? In both cases the growth belongs to God, working unseen, and the appropriate response is patient trust rather than anxious effort.

The chapter ends with Jesus and His disciples caught in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is asleep in the stern — worn out, no doubt, by a long day of teaching, in one of only a very few moments in this Gospel that shows His full human frailty — while the waves swamp the boat and the disciples panic. Mark records their cry in its starkest form: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (4:38). That is a different question than "Can you save us?" The disciples did not doubt Jesus' power to still a storm; they doubted His concern for them in the middle of one. It is worth noticing how naturally we do the same. We rarely doubt that God is able to help us. What shakes us, in the middle of real danger or real loss, is the suspicion that He might not care enough to bother — the same suspicion the serpent planted in the garden about God's motives, and the same one Job wrestled with under his own private storm. Jesus wakes, rebukes the wind, and says to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" (4:39). The sea obeys Him instantly and completely, and only then does He turn to His disciples: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (4:40). The faith Jesus was looking for was never merely the conviction that He is powerful enough to help. Even demons believe that much, and shudder (James 2:19). It was trust that His purposes toward them were good, storm or no storm — the same settled confidence in His character, and not merely His capability, that this whole Gospel is trying to build in its reader. The disciples, who moments before were terrified of drowning, are now "terrified" in a different sense, asking one another, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (4:41). It is a fair question, and Mark has already given us the answer in his opening verse. The One who could calm a sea with a word is the Son of God.

Chapter 5 answers the disciples' question three more times over, each time in a different arena of human helplessness. Jesus crosses into Gentile territory and encounters a man possessed by a legion of demons — so violent that no chain could hold him, living naked among the tombs. Asked its name, the spirit answers, "My name is Legion, for we are many" (5:9), and when Jesus permits them to enter a nearby herd of pigs, roughly two thousand animals rush into the

lake and drown — a number that gives some sense of just how many spirits had been tormenting one man, since a Roman legion numbered several thousand soldiers. The man is left, we are told, "dressed and in his right mind" (5:15). Power over nature in the storm; now power over the spiritual forces that had utterly destroyed a man's life and dignity.

Notably, when the man begs to go with Jesus, Jesus refuses him and instead tells him to go home to his own people and tell them what the Lord has done for him (5:19) — the opposite instruction from the one Jesus gives after so many of His other miracles. In Jewish territory, where premature fame risked inflaming both the crowds and the religious authorities against Him, Jesus consistently sought a low profile. Here, among Gentiles with no expectation of a conquering Jewish king to install, that danger was absent, and the man became, in effect, the first missionary this Gospel records.

Then Jesus is met by Jairus, a synagogue leader whose twelve-year-old daughter is dying, and on the way to Jairus's house, a woman who has suffered from bleeding for twelve years — the same span as the girl's whole life — reaches out and touches Jesus' cloak, believing that contact alone will be enough. It is. She is healed instantly, and Jesus, refusing to let her healing happen in anonymous silence, calls her forward and tells her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (5:34). He restores not only her body but her place in the community — no longer unclean and untouchable, but publicly acknowledged and sent away in peace.

By the time Jesus arrives at Jairus's house, the girl has died, and the mourners laugh at Jesus when He says she is only sleeping. He puts them all outside, takes the girl's hand, and says, "Talitha koum" — "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" (5:41). She does, immediately, and Jesus tells her parents to give her something to eat — the kind of ordinary, tender, human detail that Mark's Gospel is full of, and that only an eyewitness would have thought to preserve.

Power over the storm, power over the demonic, power over chronic and shameful suffering, power even over death — this is the arc of chapter 5, and it drives home the same point the disciples asked in the boat. This is no ordinary teacher. This is the One before whom nature, demons, disease, and death itself must yield.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** The Parable of the Sower suggests that the kind of hearing which leads to faith is itself a gift, not something we work up on our own. How does that shape the way you think about your own faith, or about someone you love who does not yet believe?
- 2.** The disciples' cry in the storm — "don't you care if we drown?" — reveals that they doubted Jesus' motive more than His power. When you are afraid, is it usually His ability to help or His care for you that you find yourself questioning?
- 3.** Jesus let the healed demoniac proclaim his testimony publicly among the Gentiles, unlike so many other times He commanded silence. Are there situations in your own life where speaking openly about what God has done is exactly right, even if a similar boldness would be unwise somewhere else?
- 4.** The bleeding woman and Jairus's daughter both show Jesus restoring dignity, not just health. Who in your life needs that same kind of public, not merely private, restoration — and what would it look like for you to help provide it?

CHAPTER THREE

Bread for the World

Mark 6-7

Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth, where the people who watched Him grow up cannot get past their familiarity with Him — "Isn't this the carpenter?" they ask — and Mark tells us plainly that Jesus "could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them" and that "he was amazed at their lack of faith" (6:5-6). It is a sobering note. Familiarity, left unchecked, can calcify into a kind of blindness that keeps us from seeing clearly what is right in front of us. It is not the first time God's own messenger was dismissed by people who knew him too well to see him clearly: when Moses' own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, questioned his unique standing before God, the Lord Himself rebuked them for their presumption (Numbers 12:1-9). Familiarity bred contempt then, too.

The word "could not" in verse 5 is worth pausing over, since on its face it might suggest a limit on Jesus' power. But Matthew's account of this same scene clarifies what Mark leaves compact: Jesus "did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (Matthew 13:58). This is not a statement about ability but about fittingness — much the way we might say "I can't help you with that" to mean not that we lack the capacity but that helping would be the wrong thing to do. Jesus' miracles were never performed at random or on demand; they served His larger purpose of confirming faith in Him as the Messiah, and where that purpose would not be served, He withheld them, whatever earthly capacity He otherwise had.

From there Jesus sends out the Twelve, two by two, giving them authority over unclean spirits and instructing them to travel light, depending on the hospitality of those who received them — and they went out, preached repentance, drove out demons, and healed the

sick, doing exactly what they had watched Jesus do (6:12-13). This is, in miniature, the whole pattern of Christian discipleship: Jesus taught them, showed them by His own example, and then sent them to do the same for others, exactly as He would later command all His followers to make disciples of every nation (Matthew 28:19) and as Paul would later instruct Timothy to entrust what he had learned to others "who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). Discipleship, in other words, was never meant to end with the Twelve. It was meant to keep reproducing itself, generation after generation.

Mark interrupts this mission narrative with the account of John the Baptist's execution at the hands of Herod Antipas — a ruler who, we are told, "liked to listen to" John and was "greatly puzzled" by him, and yet who let his own pride and a rash oath before dinner guests cost John his head (6:20, 26). John had rebuked Antipas for unlawfully marrying his brother's wife, Herodias, and Herodias, unable to secure John's death through her husband directly, used her own daughter's dance and Antipas's reckless promise to finally get what she wanted. It is one of Mark's darker passages — a window into the petty, self-serving intrigue of human power, placed deliberately alongside the deliberate, unshakeable plan of God unfolding in Jesus. John's ministry ends in a borrowed tomb; Jesus' ministry, this Gospel will insist, does not end that way at all. It is also a reminder of the cost that faithfulness to God's word can carry, and a fitting shadow to fall across the Gospel just as Jesus' own path toward suffering is coming more clearly into view.

When the apostles return from their mission, exhausted, Jesus tries to take them to a quiet place to rest — and the crowds find them anyway. What follows is the feeding of the five thousand, the only miracle besides the resurrection recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus is moved with compassion because the people are "like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34), and rather than sending the enormous crowd away to fend for themselves, He asks His disciples what food is on hand,

finds five loaves and two fish, gives thanks, and feeds everyone present with baskets to spare. The point of asking what food they had was not to praise a small act of giving, as this passage is sometimes read; it was to establish, beyond any possible dispute, just how little was actually available before Jesus multiplied it. The size of the miracle depends on the smallness of what He started with. That evening He walks on the water to His disciples in the midst of another storm, and Mark tells us something remarkable about their reaction: they were "completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened" (6:51-52). The lesson of the feeding — that Jesus is able to provide abundantly out of what looks like nothing — had not yet penetrated. John's Gospel tells us that the crowds who ate that day, still craving more free bread, would soon abandon Jesus in large numbers when His teaching grew difficult (John 6:26-66), leaving Jesus to ask His own Twelve, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Peter's answer, on their behalf, is one of the great confessions of this whole Gospel story: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68). It would take more than one miracle, and more than an abandoning crowd, for that confession to fully take root even in the Twelve themselves — but the seed had been planted.

Chapter 7 turns to a controversy over ceremonial hand-washing. The Pharisees and scribes criticize Jesus' disciples for eating with "unclean" hands, meaning hands that had not been washed according to the tradition of the elders — a tradition nowhere commanded in Scripture itself. Jesus responds sharply, quoting Isaiah: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (7:6). He points to a particularly damning example: the Pharisees' practice of "Corban," by which a person could dedicate money to the temple treasury and thereby be excused from using it to support their aging parents — technically fulfilling a religious vow while nullifying the plain command to honor father and mother. "You nullify the word of God by your tradition," Jesus tells them (7:13). It is possible to be scrupulously religious in outward form while directly disobeying God in substance, and this passage stands as a permanent warning against

that danger. Worth adding, too, is what this passage does not say. Jesus is not condemning tradition as such — every community of faith develops customs and practices that are good and useful without being commanded in Scripture — but only the specific error of letting human tradition override or nullify a plain command of God. Nor is Jesus contrasting sincere inward devotion with careful attention to God's actual words, as though the "heart" and the "letter" were rivals. The leaders' hearts were far from God precisely because they had rearranged His clear commands to suit their own convenience. Honoring God from the heart and honoring His words exactly are not two different things; they are the same thing. Jesus goes on to explain — and Mark adds the striking editorial comment that in saying this, "Jesus declared all foods clean" (7:19) — that what makes a person unclean is not what enters the body but what comes out of the heart: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, greed, deceit, envy, arrogance. The real defilement problem was never dietary. It was always a heart problem, and no amount of hand-washing can fix that.

Jesus then withdraws to the region of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile territory, and a Syrophoenician woman comes begging Him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus' initial response can sound harsh to modern ears — He tells her it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs, meaning that His mission during His earthly ministry was directed first to Israel. It is worth noting that the word Jesus uses for "dogs" here is not the ordinary, contemptuous word for a street cur but a gentler, diminutive term closer to "little dogs" or household pets — still a distinction, but not the outright insult the English can suggest on its own. The woman's reply is remarkable: "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28). She does not dispute Jesus' mission to Israel; she simply asks for a place, even the smallest place, within the reach of that mission's overflow. It is an answer of both humility and tenacious faith, and Jesus commends it, healing her daughter from a distance. The scene recalls, in its own way, the account of Jonah, sent

reluctantly to preach to Israel's Gentile enemies in Nineveh, who humbled themselves before God far more readily than Jonah expected or wanted. Whatever the exchange with the Syrophoenician woman meant to test or reveal, it shows plainly that God's grace was never confined to Israel and that humble faith, wherever it is found, receives from Jesus exactly what it asks.

The chapter closes with the healing of a deaf man with a speech impediment — Jesus puts His fingers in the man's ears, touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs, and says, "Ephphatha!" ("Be opened!"). The man's ears are opened and his tongue loosened. Notice that no two of Jesus' healings in this Gospel follow quite the same method — a word here, a touch there, mud and spit elsewhere, nothing at all in still other cases. There was no fixed technique or formula to His power, nothing that could be studied, imitated, or reduced to a ritual. He needed no method at all; whatever outward form a given healing took was simply what He chose to do in that moment. And once again, as He had done so many times already in this Gospel, Jesus orders the people not to tell anyone. And once again, the more He orders them to silence, the more they proclaim it (7:36).

Why would Jesus, again and again, try to suppress news of His own miracles? The most consistent explanation, running through several passages like this one, is that Jesus was not avoiding the miracles themselves — He performed them freely and often — but He was avoiding the kind of premature, uncontrolled fame that would provoke the religious authorities into moving against Him before His appointed hour. Later Gospel texts confirm this pattern: Jesus repeatedly withdraws or changes course specifically when He learns that the Pharisees are watching Him too closely, until, in God's timing, the hour finally comes and He no longer hides at all. There is real wisdom in this for us. Jesus was neither reckless with His life nor paralyzed by fear of it — He simply and deliberately submitted the timing of every step to His Father's plan.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of the very people who knew Him best in Nazareth. Has familiarity with the gospel ever dulled your own sense of wonder at it?
2. Before feeding the five thousand, Jesus first established exactly how little food the disciples had. Where in your life are you being asked to offer up something small rather than wait until you feel you have enough?
3. Jesus taught that defilement comes from the heart, not from external ritual. What "hand-washing" substitutes are you tempted to rely on instead of dealing honestly with what is actually in your heart?
4. The Syrophenician woman asked for only the smallest place at the table and received a full healing. Where in your own life do you need that same humble, persistent faith, rather than giving up when the first answer is not yes?

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cost of Following

Mark 8-9

Chapter 8 opens with a second feeding miracle — four thousand people this time, fed from seven loaves and a few small fish — and it is almost jarring how quickly the disciples seem to have forgotten the first one. No sooner is this miracle finished than the Pharisees arrive demanding a sign from heaven, as though the four thousand who had just eaten their fill were not sign enough. Jesus refuses them outright: "no sign will be given to it" (8:12), and Matthew's parallel adds the one exception — "the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 16:4), a veiled reference to Jesus' own coming death and resurrection, the one sign that would finally be given, and the only sign that would ultimately matter.

Then, crossing the lake again, the disciples realize they forgot to bring bread, and when Jesus warns them to "watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod," they assume He is talking about their meager provisions (8:14-15). Yeast works quietly and invisibly through a whole batch of dough, and Jesus is using it as an image for how the corrupted thinking of the religious and civil leaders — their hunger for signs, their hardness toward the plain evidence in front of them — can work the same way through a life or a community if left unchecked. But the disciples, still fixated on physical bread after two miraculous feedings, entirely miss the metaphor. Jesus, clearly exasperated, asks, "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (8:17-18) — the very language this Gospel has already used for unbelieving outsiders in the Parable of the Sower. The disciples' slowness to grasp who Jesus is and what He can provide is one of the quiet, recurring themes of this whole Gospel, and it reaches something of a turning point in the healing that follows.

At Bethsaida, Jesus heals a blind man in two stages — after the first touch the man can see, but only enough to say that people look like "trees walking around"; only after a second touch does he see everyone clearly (8:22-25). It is the only two-stage healing recorded in the Gospels, and its placement here, right before Peter's confession, seems intentional. Immediately afterward, Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say I am?" and then, more pointedly, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Messiah" (8:29). It is a moment of real clarity — Peter sees, in a sense, for the first time. But like the blind man's first touch, it is not yet complete sight. Jesus immediately begins to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected, be killed, and rise again — and Peter, who has just confessed Jesus as Messiah, now takes Him aside and rebukes Him for saying it. Jesus turns and rebukes Peter in front of the other disciples: "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (8:33). Peter could confess the right title while still completely misunderstanding what that title meant. Partial sight, like the blind man's first glimpse, can still mistake the shape of things. Notably, this striking confession does not seem to mark the moment Peter first came to saving faith — he had already left everything to follow Jesus back in chapter 1, and this same Peter would still, months later, deny even knowing Christ three times under pressure. Correct words about Jesus, however genuinely spoken, are not the same thing as a fully formed faith; both can exist together in the same imperfect disciple, at the same imperfect moment, and God is patient with the gap between the two.

From here Jesus turns to the crowd and the disciples together and lays down the terms of discipleship in some of the most demanding words in this Gospel: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it" (8:34-35). These words come directly on the heels of Jesus' own first announcement of His coming suffering, and that context matters. Jesus is not describing a general spiritual

principle detached from His own path — He is telling His followers that the road He is walking toward the cross is, in some real sense, the road they must be willing to walk as well. For the first generation of Christians, many of whom faced actual persecution and death for their confession of Christ, this was not abstract. Taking up a cross could mean exactly what it sounds like.

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a mountain and is transfigured before them — His clothes becoming "dazzling white," Moses and Elijah appearing and talking with Him, and the Father's voice again declaring, as at the baptism, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (9:7). Luke's account fills in details Mark leaves out: Jesus had gone up specifically to pray, and it was while He was praying that His appearance changed (Luke 9:28-29); the disciples, worn out from a long day, were heavy with sleep even as this glory was unfolding in front of them (Luke 9:32) — a foretaste of their far more consequential drowsiness still to come in the Garden of Gethsemane; and Moses and Elijah were speaking with Jesus about His coming "departure," which He was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31) — that is, His death. Peter, seeing Moses and Elijah beginning to leave, blurts out an offer to build three shelters, not fully understanding what he was saying (9:6) — and is interrupted by the Father's voice before he can finish the thought. It is a glimpse of the glory that lies on the far side of the suffering Jesus has just predicted — a brief, overwhelming preview meant, perhaps, to fortify three disciples for the harder road ahead, and to confirm to them, at the very moment Jesus has begun speaking of His death, that He remains the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased.

Coming down the mountain, Jesus and the three find the other disciples unable to cast a demon out of a boy who convulses and foams at the mouth. When the boy's father begs Jesus, "if you can do anything," Jesus turns the question back on him: "'If you can'? Everything is possible for one who believes." The father's response is one of the most honest confessions in all of Scripture: "I do believe;

help me overcome my unbelief!" (9:23-24). Jesus heals the boy, and when the disciples privately ask why they could not, He tells them, "This kind can come out only by prayer" (9:29). The disciples' failure was not primarily a failure of technique but of dependence — they had, it seems, begun to treat the authority Jesus had given them as something they possessed rather than something they had to keep asking for.

Twice more in this chapter Jesus predicts His coming death, and twice more the disciples respond not with understanding but with an argument about which of them is the greatest (9:33-34), and then with an attempt to stop someone from casting out demons in Jesus' name because "he was not one of us" (9:38). Jesus corrects both errors. Greatness in the kingdom belongs to the one who becomes the servant of all, welcoming even a child in Jesus' name (9:35-37); and "whoever is not against us is for us" (9:40) — there is room in the kingdom for genuine faith that does not travel in exactly the disciples' own company. Between these two corrections comes a hard warning about causing "one of these little ones" to stumble (9:42) — a phrase that, in context, reaches beyond literal children to describe any believer led into unbelief or abandonment of Christ, since the same word is elsewhere translated "fall away" (cf. 14:27, 29). Whatever person, habit, or ambition threatens to pull a believer away from Christ, Jesus says, is worth removing at almost any cost — better a maimed and faithful life than a whole and unfaithful one (9:43-48). The chapter closes with a puzzling image about salt losing its saltiness (9:49-50), which reads most naturally as an image of judgment and discernment: believers are meant to retain a kind of spiritual saltiness — clear moral and doctrinal discernment, like a compass that still points true — without which they can no longer serve the preserving, distinguishing purpose for which God made them, and are instead in danger of becoming indistinguishable from the world they were sent to reach.

By the end of chapter 9, then, the disciples have confessed Jesus as Messiah and glimpsed His glory, and they have also argued over status, tried to exclude a faithful outsider, and failed to cast out a demon for want of dependent prayer. Following Jesus, this Gospel keeps insisting, is not a matter of getting the confession right once and being done. It is a slow, humbling, repeated relearning of what it means to serve rather than to be served.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** Peter could confess "You are the Messiah" and, moments later, be rebuked for thinking like Satan. Where might you be holding correct beliefs about Jesus that have not yet reshaped how you actually think about a specific situation in your life?
- 2.** Jesus met the father of the demon-possessed boy in his honest, mixed prayer: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief." Where do you need to pray that same prayer this week?
- 3.** The Transfiguration gave three disciples a glimpse of glory right before the road grew harder. Looking back, has God ever given you an encouraging glimpse of Himself just before, or during, a hard season?
- 4.** The disciples argued about greatness immediately after Jesus' second prediction of His own suffering and death. What does your own life, not just your beliefs, actually show about what you think greatness looks like?

CHAPTER FIVE

The Way of the Servant

Mark 10–11

As Jesus makes His way toward Jerusalem, the Pharisees test Him with a question about divorce (10:2). Jesus goes past the immediate legal question to God's original design in creation: "at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' ... Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (10:6, 9). When the disciples press Him further in private, He is even more direct: whoever divorces a spouse and marries another commits adultery (10:11-12). Moses permitted divorce, Jesus explains, only "because your hearts were hard" (10:5) — a concession to human sinfulness, not God's design. Marriage, in Jesus' teaching here, is a covenant meant to last a lifetime, not a private arrangement to be dissolved whenever convenient.

This is not an easy teaching, and it was not meant to be easy. It stands as a high and unwavering call to the sanctity and permanence of marriage, precisely because marriage was designed by God to picture something enduring — the relationship of Christ to His people, as Paul would later explain (Ephesians 5:22-33). At the same time, this teaching is not the last word Scripture has to say to those who have walked through the pain of divorce, whether their own or a parent's or a loved one's. God's grace reaches even into our failures to keep His design, and the same gospel that upholds marriage's permanence also offers forgiveness and restoration to those who have not kept it. Both truths belong together: the high call and the grace that meets us when we, or others, have fallen short of it.

Immediately after this comes an account that seems, on the surface, unrelated: people bring children to Jesus to be blessed, and the disciples try to turn them away. Jesus is indignant and tells them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone

who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (10:14-15). The connection to what has come before is not incidental. Just as marriage calls for an uncalculating, self-giving covenant faithfulness, entering the kingdom calls for a childlike, uncalculating trust and dependence — not innocence or naivety, but the simple, humble reliance of a child who brings nothing to the relationship except trust.

The rich young man who runs up to Jesus next demonstrates exactly the opposite posture. He falls on his knees and addresses Jesus as "good teacher," and Jesus immediately presses the word: "Why do you call me good? ... No one is good—except God alone" (10:18). Jesus is not deflecting the compliment or denying His own goodness; He is testing whether this man has any idea who is actually standing in front of him. If Jesus is not good the way only God is good, the title is empty flattery. If He is, then the man has just addressed God to His face — and ought to obey whatever this good God tells him to do. The man, still confident, claims to have kept the commandments since his youth — though notably only the more relational commands Jesus lists, none of the first four concerning devotion to God alone, and not the tenth, concerning covetousness, which happens to be exactly where his own heart is about to be exposed. Mark alone tells us that "Jesus looked at him and loved him" (10:21) — this is not a trap being sprung but a genuine, compassionate offer, extended to a man Jesus already loved before He asked anything hard of him. Then comes the one thing the man lacks: sell what he has, give it to the poor, and follow. The man's face falls, and he goes away sad, "because he had great wealth" (10:22). And notice what Jesus does not do. He does not soften the demand, chase after the man, or offer him an easier path back. He lets him walk away and instead uses him as a teaching moment for the Twelve — a striking approach for anyone tempted to measure faithful evangelism by how many people we manage to keep from leaving.

Jesus turns to His disciples and makes the famous, deliberately impossible-sounding comparison: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (10:25). The disciples are astonished and ask who then can be saved. Jesus' answer is the hinge on which this whole passage turns: "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (10:27). The rich young ruler trusted, in the end, in his own righteousness and his own resources. The kingdom cannot be entered that way by anyone, rich or poor. It can only be received as a gift, the way a child receives one — which is exactly the point the previous passage had just made.

A third time in this chapter Jesus predicts His death, in the most explicit terms yet — He will be handed over, condemned, mocked, flogged, and killed, and after three days rise again (10:33-34). A single prediction might be dismissed as a passing remark; a second confirms it was deliberate; but a third, given this clearly and this far in advance, leaves no room to imagine that the cross somehow caught Jesus by surprise or derailed some other plan. It was, from the beginning, exactly where He was going. And a third time the disciples respond by missing the point entirely: James and John — in Matthew's account, with their mother doing at least some of the asking on their behalf (Matthew 20:20) — ask to sit at His right and left "in your glory" (10:37). Jesus asks whether they can drink the cup He is about to drink, and they say, with more confidence than understanding, that they can. Jesus tells them they will indeed share in His sufferings, but that the seats of honor are not His to grant — they belong to those for whom the Father has prepared them. When the other ten become indignant, it is worth asking why — not because they were above such ambition, but because they wanted exactly what James and John wanted. Just a chapter earlier they had been arguing among themselves about who was greatest (9:34), and Peter had just finished asking what reward the Twelve would receive for having left everything to follow Jesus (10:28). None of them, in other words, was free of this particular hunger. Jesus gathers them all and delivers what

may be the clearest single statement of this Gospel's central theme: "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and 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" (10:43-45).

This verse is the theological center of Mark's Gospel. Everything before it has been building toward this statement of purpose, and everything after it plays that purpose out. The Son of Man *came* — the eternal Word took on flesh. He came *to serve*, not to be served — reversing every human instinct toward status and self-advancement. And He came *to give his life as a ransom for many* — a ransom being the price paid to free someone from bondage. Jesus' death would purchase freedom for those held captive to sin. This is the nature of Jesus' service: not simply good deeds performed for others, but a life laid down to buy back what sin had enslaved. And it is meant to reshape, not simply extinguish, how His followers understand greatness. Jesus never tells James and John, or the other ten, that it is wrong to want their lives to count for something significant — that longing is not itself the problem, and stamping it out is not the goal. What Jesus redirects is the path to it. The ambition to matter, to be great, to spend a life well, is not condemned here; it is turned downward, toward service, rather than upward, toward status. Christian leadership, on this pattern, is not a ladder to be climbed but a towel to be picked up — and the real measure of greatness in Christ's kingdom is not a title, a following, or a platform, but how much of the impulse toward self-exaltation has been laid down in exchange for a genuine willingness to serve others.

Immediately following this teaching, blind Bartimaeus cries out from the roadside, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd tries to silence him, but he cries out all the louder, and Jesus stops and calls him over. Asked what he wants, Bartimaeus does not hesitate: "Rabbi, I want to see." Jesus tells him his faith has healed him, and Bartimaeus, we are told, "received his sight and followed Jesus along

the road" (10:46-52). Coming right after the request of James and John for glory, Bartimaeus stands as a contrast — poor, blind, without status or leverage, and yet possessing exactly the humble, desperate, unashamed faith that the whole chapter has been commending.

Chapter 11 brings Jesus into Jerusalem itself, riding on a young donkey while the crowds spread cloaks and branches on the road and shout, "Hosanna! ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (11:9-10) — the long-anticipated arrival of the Messiah into His city, and yet an arrival on a borrowed colt rather than a warhorse, a king who comes in humility even at the moment of His public acclamation. The next day He curses a fig tree that has leaves but no fruit — an acted-out parable, most naturally understood in light of what follows, since Jesus goes straight from the fig tree to the temple, where He overturns the money-changers' tables and drives out those buying and selling, declaring that His Father's house, meant to be "a house of prayer for all nations," has been made "a den of robbers" (11:17). The fig tree, all show of leaves and no fruit, pictures the temple system Jesus is about to judge — outwardly impressive, inwardly barren. When the disciples later notice the fig tree has withered, Jesus uses the moment to teach about faith and forgiveness in prayer (11:22-25), but the larger point of the acted parable stands: religious form without spiritual substance invites judgment, not blessing.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus loved the rich young ruler before asking him to give up his wealth, and let him walk away without chasing him. What might that combination — genuine love paired with a refusal to soften the truth — look like in how you relate to someone who has rejected what God is asking of them?
2. James and John wanted positions of honor; blind Bartimaeus, without status or leverage, simply asked to see. Which of these postures more honestly describes how you tend to approach God with your own requests?

3. Jesus taught that greatness in the kingdom means becoming a servant — not extinguishing ambition, but redirecting it. Where is your own ambition currently aimed: toward being noticed, or toward serving?
4. Jesus entered Jerusalem in humility, on a borrowed colt, even in the middle of being publicly celebrated. Where in your own life could you hold success, recognition, or influence more humbly?

CHAPTER SIX

Trapped Questions and Coming Glory

Mark 12-13

Jesus follows the temple confrontation with a parable that the religious leaders understand all too well is directed at them. A landowner plants a vineyard and leases it to tenants, who beat and kill the servants sent to collect the owner's share, and finally kill the owner's own son, thinking to seize his inheritance. "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," Jesus concludes, quoting Psalm 118 (12:10). The tenants are the religious leadership of Israel; the servants are the prophets who were mistreated and killed across the Old Testament; the son is Jesus Himself. Mark tells us plainly that "they knew he had spoken the parable against them" (12:12) — this is not a parable about generic Christian stewardship, however useful that application might sometimes seem. Its target, in context, is the specific and culpable rejection of God's messengers, and finally God's own Son, by the leaders entrusted with His people.

What follows is a rapid sequence of attempts to trap Jesus in His words. The Pharisees and Herodians — an unlikely alliance, since the Herodians supported Roman rule and the Pharisees generally resented it — ask whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, hoping to force Jesus into either alienating the crowds or the Roman authorities. Jesus asks for a coin, points to Caesar's image stamped on it, and answers, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (12:17). It is a masterstroke of an answer — not a dodge, but a redirection to the deeper question underneath the political trap. If Caesar's image on the coin means the coin belongs to Caesar, then whose image do we bear? The implication reaches further than tax policy: our very lives, stamped with the image of God, belong to Him entirely. The questioners, Mark tells us, "were amazed at him" (12:17).

The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, try next, posing an absurd hypothetical about a woman widowed by seven brothers in succession to make resurrection sound logically unworkable. Jesus answers that they are wrong "because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (12:24), explaining that in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage, and pointing to God's own self-description to Moses at the burning bush — "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" — as proof that the patriarchs still live, since God is not the God of the dead but of the living (12:26-27).

Finally a teacher of the law, apparently more sincere than the others, asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest. Jesus answers with the Shema — "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" — and adds a second, "Love your neighbor as yourself," concluding that "there is no commandment greater than these" (12:29-31). The teacher agrees and adds that loving God and neighbor is worth more than all the temple's burnt offerings and sacrifices put together, and Jesus tells him he is "not far from the kingdom of God" (12:34). Not far — and yet, as far as this Gospel is concerned, still short of the humble trust and following that alone brings a person into the kingdom.

Then comes the widow who puts two small copper coins into the temple treasury, "all she had to live on" (12:44), while wealthy people give large sums out of their surplus. It is tempting, and it has often been taught, to read this simply as an example of sacrificial generosity for believers to imitate. But the immediate context complicates that reading substantially. Jesus has just condemned the teachers of the law "who devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers" (12:40) — and the very next words out of His mouth describe this widow giving away everything she has to live on, to the very religious establishment He has just denounced as corrupt and exploitative. Rather than an unqualified commendation, this scene reads more

naturally alongside the Old Testament prophets who repeatedly condemned Israel's leaders for exploiting widows under a veneer of religious devotion (cf. Isaiah 10:1-2; Ezekiel 22:29). Jesus does not tell His disciples to go and do likewise. He simply observes what has happened, and leaves it standing as one more piece of evidence — alongside the barren fig tree, the den of robbers, the parable of the tenants — that the temple system of His day had become something that devoured the very people it should have been protecting. This does not empty the passage of application for us. God still cares far more about the heart and proportion of what is given than the raw amount, as Jesus' comparison of "all she had" against the leftover surplus of the wealthy makes clear. But the passage's first and primary force in Mark's narrative is prophetic indictment, not a simple stewardship lesson, and reading it that way keeps it in step with everything surrounding it.

Chapter 13 — often called the Olivet Discourse, since Jesus delivers it on the Mount of Olives across from the temple — grows directly out of a disciple's admiring comment about the temple's impressive stones. Jesus responds that not one stone will be left on another (13:2), a prophecy fulfilled with brutal literalness when the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70. Asked privately when this will happen, Jesus gives a discourse that moves between near and distant horizons: wars, earthquakes, and famines that are only "the beginning of birth pains" (13:8); persecution that the disciples themselves would face, with the promise that the Holy Spirit would give them what to say; and finally "the abomination that causes desolation" — a phrase drawn from Daniel's prophecy, which had already found one partial fulfillment in the second century B.C. under the pagan ruler Antiochus Epiphanes, and which Jesus here points forward to a still future and final fulfillment, tied to a tribulation "unequaled from the beginning ... until now—and never to be equaled again" (13:19).

After describing cosmic upheaval and the coming of the Son of Man "in clouds with great power and glory" to gather His elect (13:26-27), Jesus turns to application with the parable of the fig tree — when its branches become tender and its leaves come out, summer is near, and just so, when His disciples see these signs, they will know He is near. But He is careful to add that "about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (13:32) — a remarkable statement of the limitations Jesus, in His incarnate humanity, accepted for the sake of His mission. The chapter closes not with a date to calculate but with a command to obey: "Watch! ... What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" (13:37). Whether the end is near or still distant, the appropriate response to unfulfilled prophecy has never been idle speculation. It has always been spiritual alertness and faithful service, ready for the Master's return whenever it comes.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus answered a politically loaded trap question about taxes by pointing to a deeper one: whose image do you bear, and to whom do you therefore belong? Where in your own life have you let a smaller, more comfortable question substitute for that larger one?
2. The widow's offering is best read as a prophetic indictment of a corrupt system, not simply an example of sacrificial giving — yet God still cared about the proportion of what she gave relative to what she had. How do you evaluate your own giving: by the amount, or by what it costs you?
3. Jesus warned His disciples not to be alarmed by wars, disasters, or false teachers claiming special knowledge of the end times. What sources of alarm in the news or online tend to unsettle your own trust in God's control of history?
4. Jesus commanded watchfulness rather than date-setting as the appropriate response to His promised return. What would it look like, practically, for you to live this week as though His return could come at any time?

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Hour Has Come

Mark 14

Two days before Passover, while the chief priests and teachers of the law are looking for a sly way to arrest and kill Jesus, a woman — identified elsewhere as Mary of Bethany — breaks open an alabaster jar of expensive perfume, pure nard worth more than a year's wages, and pours the entire jar over Jesus' head. Some of those present are indignant: this could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus rebukes them and defends her: "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (14:8-9).

It is worth sitting with why this moment provoked such sharp disapproval, and why Jesus defended it so strongly. The objection sounds reasonable on its face — genuine needs of the poor set against a single extravagant, unrepeatable act of devotion. But Jesus' response suggests that not every act of costly devotion needs to be justified by its practical usefulness. Mary's gift was not calculated generosity; it was worship, offered to the only Person in history who was worth that much and infinitely more. There is a difference between calculating what is the most efficient use of resources and simply pouring out something valuable because of who is receiving it. Both kinds of giving have their place in a Christian's life, and Scripture elsewhere commands real, sacrificial generosity toward the poor. But this scene reminds us that worship is not always required to justify itself in terms of usefulness. Sometimes the only fitting response to Christ's worth is simply to give Him what is costly, without asking what else it might have accomplished.

Immediately after this act of devotion, Mark places its stark opposite: Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, goes to the chief priests to betray Jesus, and they are delighted to promise him money (14:10-11). Devotion and betrayal, side by side in the same chapter, in the same house — a reminder that proximity to Jesus guarantees nothing about the state of a person's heart.

At the Passover meal, Jesus takes bread, breaks it, and says, "Take it; this is my body." Then He takes a cup, gives thanks, and says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (14:22, 24). In instituting what the church would come to call the Lord's Supper, Jesus reinterprets the ancient Passover meal — itself a memorial of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt through the blood of a lamb — around Himself. He is the true Passover lamb, and His blood, about to be poured out, will accomplish a greater deliverance than Egypt ever pictured: deliverance from sin itself. The echo of Mark 10:45 is unmistakable — "a ransom for many," and here, blood "poured out for many." The whole Gospel has been building toward this meal.

After supper, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John further into the garden and tells them He is "deeply distressed and troubled," His soul "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (14:33-34). He falls to the ground and prays that, if possible, the hour might pass from Him — and then, in the same breath, "Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). This single sentence captures the heart of Jesus' whole life and ministry. He came to do the Father's will, and here, at the point of greatest cost, that commitment does not waver, even though it is clearly not easy — the sorrow, the sweat, the repeated, urgent prayer make plain that this submission cost Him everything a human soul can feel. Three times He returns to find the disciples asleep, and three times He tells them to "watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation," adding, with evident understanding of human frailty, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (14:38). There is something instructive in Jesus'

own pattern here: real spiritual battles are often fought, at least in part, on very physical ground — fatigue, comfort, the pull toward rest when watchfulness is called for. The discipline of staying alert and prayerful in the hour that matters most does not come naturally to any of us; it did not come naturally, in their weakness, even to Jesus' closest disciples.

Judas arrives with an armed crowd sent by the religious leaders, identifies Jesus with a kiss, and Jesus is arrested. "Everyone deserted him and fled" (14:50) — every disciple who, only hours before at supper, had insisted they would never fall away. Peter alone follows at a distance, into the courtyard of the high priest, and there, exactly as Jesus had predicted, denies even knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crows a second time. When Peter realizes what he has done, he breaks down and weeps (14:72).

Peter's collapse is not really Peter's alone. He is simply the most visible example, since Mark tells us plainly that all the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested. It would be easy, reading this account, to feel superior to Peter — to imagine we would have stood firm where he failed. But the honest and more humbling reading is to recognize ourselves in him: quick to make bold promises of loyalty, and just as capable, under real pressure, of falling short of them. What redeems Peter's story, and what makes it worth telling at all, is not that his failure was somehow less serious than it appears, but that his failure was not final. Unlike Judas, Peter would be restored, and the same grace that restored him is held out to every follower of Jesus who has ever discovered, in some hour of testing, that the flesh really is weaker than the spirit's good intentions.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Mary's gift of costly perfume was worship, not calculated usefulness, and Jesus defended it as such. Where in your own life have you held back an extravagant response to God because it seemed impractical?

2. Devotion and betrayal sit side by side in this chapter — Mary's worship and Judas's bargain happen within the same short passage. What does it look like to examine your own heart honestly enough to notice which one is closer to the surface on a given day?
3. Jesus prayed "not what I will, but what you will" at the point of greatest cost to Himself, not as an easy resignation but through real anguish. What is the hardest area of your life right now where you need to pray that same prayer?
4. Peter promised he would never fall away and then denied Jesus three times within hours. Where have you made a confident promise to God that you were not, in the end, able to keep on your own strength — and how does Peter's eventual restoration speak to that?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Crucified and Risen

Mark 15–16

Jesus is handed over to Pilate, the Roman governor, who seems genuinely puzzled by Him — "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of" (15:4) — and who recognizes that the religious leaders have handed Jesus over "out of self-interest" (15:10). Pilate offers to release either Jesus or a convicted insurrectionist and murderer named Barabbas, and the crowd, stirred up by the chief priests, calls for Barabbas and demands that Jesus be crucified. In one of the Gospel's sharpest ironies, the guilty man goes free and the innocent Man dies in his place — a small, human-scale enactment of exactly what Jesus' death would accomplish on a cosmic scale for every sinner it covers.

Mark's account of the crucifixion itself is spare, almost restrained, compared to how such a scene might be told today — no lingering description of the physical horror, just the bare facts: "And they crucified him" (15:24). The soldiers mock Him with a purple robe and a crown of thorns; passersby hurl insults, telling Him to come down from the cross and save Himself if He is really the Son of God, unaware that His staying on the cross was precisely how He would save others (15:29–32). At noon, darkness covers the whole land for three hours, and at three o'clock Jesus cries out in the words of Psalm 22, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" — "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34). It is the only recorded instance in Scripture of the eternal Son experiencing what can only be called separation from the Father, the Father's just wrath against sin falling in that moment on the sinless Son in the place of everyone who would ever believe in Him.

Jesus breathes His last with a loud cry, and at that instant, Mark tells us, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"

(15:38). This detail carries enormous theological weight. That curtain hung before the Most Holy Place, the innermost sanctuary of the temple, which only the high priest could enter, and only once a year, and only with blood to atone for sin. It marked the barrier between a holy God and sinful people. When it tore — from top to bottom, suggesting an act of God rather than of man — it announced that the barrier had been removed. Access to God was no longer restricted to one priest, one day, one room. Through Christ's own blood, offered once for all, every believer now has confident access into God's presence, as the book of Hebrews would later explain at length (Hebrews 10:19-22). Fittingly, it is a Roman centurion standing at the foot of the cross, watching how Jesus died, who becomes the first human character in this Gospel to say plainly what Mark told his readers in the very first verse: "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:39).

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the very council that had condemned Jesus, asks Pilate for the body and buries it in a tomb cut out of rock, rolling a stone against the entrance. Two women watch to see where He is laid.

Then comes Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome come to the tomb with spices, wondering aloud who will roll the stone away for them — and find it already rolled away. A young man in a white robe tells them Jesus has risen and is not there, and instructs them to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus is going ahead of them into Galilee. The women flee, trembling and bewildered, and Mark tells us they said nothing to anyone, "because they were afraid" (16:8).

The chapter continues with resurrection appearances — to Mary Magdalene, to two disciples on the road, and finally to the Eleven, whom Jesus rebukes "for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen" (16:14). It is a remarkable and humbling detail: the men who had spent three years with Jesus, who had seen Him heal the sick, feed thousands, and calm

storms, who had personally heard Him predict His own death and resurrection three separate times, still did not believe the first reports that He was alive. If Jesus' own closest followers required this much convincing, no one should imagine that saving faith is simply the natural product of firsthand exposure to enough evidence. Luke tells us, and Mark implies, that it took nothing less than Jesus Himself opening their minds before they could understand and believe (Luke 24:45) — the same sovereign work of illumination this Gospel has pointed to since the Parable of the Sower. None of us, then or now, believes in the risen Christ by force of our own unaided reasoning. Faith itself, from beginning to end, is God's gift.

Jesus finally commissions them: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (16:15), promising that signs — driving out demons, speaking in new tongues, being unharmed by dangers like snakes and poison, healing the sick — would accompany the message as it went forth to confirm it. These signs, alongside similar ones described in the book of Acts and referenced by Paul as marking a true apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12), served a specific and time-bound purpose: authenticating the message of the gospel at the foundational moment when it was first being proclaimed by the apostles, before the New Testament Scriptures existed to confirm it in written form. They were never meant to be manufactured or demanded on command, and Mark's own Gospel gives no encouragement to treat them that way; the healings Jesus performed were never partial or ambiguous, but complete and undeniable even to His opponents. The most fitting response to this passage today is not to chase after such signs but to trust the same gospel they were given to confirm.

The Gospel closes where its title promised it would: "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it" (16:20). The Servant who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many, has now been raised, and His work

continues through the ordinary, formerly unbelieving disciples He commissions and empowers to carry His gospel into all the world.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The guilty Barabbas went free while the innocent Jesus was crucified in his place. Where does that exchange feel most real and personal to you right now, rather than simply true in theory?
2. The temple curtain tore the moment Jesus died, opening permanent access to God that no ritual could have earned. Do you approach God with the boldness and confidence Hebrews says this access is meant to produce, or does some part of you still relate to Him as though the curtain were still hanging?
3. Even Jesus' own disciples did not believe the first reports of His resurrection. What does it change for you to know that doubt, even prolonged doubt, was part of the story of the very people who became the church's founders?
4. Jesus' final command was to carry the gospel into all the world. What is one concrete way you could be part of that commission in the coming weeks — in your own household, workplace, or neighborhood?

CONCLUSION

Read straight through, Mark's Gospel moves like its favorite word — immediately — from a wilderness baptism to an empty tomb, never pausing long enough for its reader to look away. But underneath that breathless pace runs a single, steady current: a Servant who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Every major figure in this Gospel is measured against that current, and most of them, at one time or another, are found moving against it. The disciples argue over greatness while Jesus speaks of servanthood. James and John ask for thrones while Jesus speaks of a cup of suffering. Peter promises loyalty and then denies Him three times before dawn. The religious leaders, entrusted with God's own vineyard, kill the owner's son rather than yield their harvest. Even the crowd that shouted "Hosanna" on Sunday would, within the week, be shouting for His crucifixion. Mark does not flatter anyone in this story, including the men who would become the pillars of the early church. He shows us, with unflinching honesty, how far even genuine faith can fall short of genuine understanding.

And yet the Gospel does not end in the disciples' unbelief on that first Sunday morning. It ends with a commission, and with those same faltering disciples going out to preach and the Lord confirming their word. The same grace that restored Peter after his denial, that opened blind eyes and deaf ears throughout this Gospel, that tore the temple curtain to open a way to God that no sinner could open for themselves — that grace is what carries this Gospel's frightened, slow-to-believe disciples into a mission that would, in time, reach the whole world.

Mark wrote first of all for readers who were themselves facing suffering and would need real courage to keep believing and keep serving in the face of it. We do not face what they faced, but we still need what they needed: a clear picture of who Jesus is, an honest

picture of how slow and stumbling even sincere faith in Him can be, and a settled confidence that His gospel is worth resting in regardless of the cost of following Him. Mark gives us all three. The last word of this Gospel's opening verse and the last word of its final scene are, in a sense, the same word: gospel — good news, worth believing, worth suffering for, worth spending a life to carry into all the world.

He came not to be served but to serve. May we, who follow Him, learn increasingly to do the same.

APPENDIX

Daily Bible Reading Plan

A one-year plan through the whole Bible, following the same daily rhythm used throughout this series.

January

1/10	Genesis 1-3	1/11	Genesis 4-7
1/12	Genesis 8-11	1/13	Genesis 12-15
1/14	Genesis 16-18	1/15	Genesis 19-21
1/16	Genesis 22-24	1/17	Genesis 25-26
1/18	Genesis 27-29	1/19	Genesis 30-31
1/20	Genesis 32-34	1/21	Genesis 35-37
1/22	Genesis 38-40	1/23	Genesis 41-42
1/24	Genesis 43-45	1/25	Genesis 46-47
1/26	Genesis 48-50	1/27	Exodus 1-3
1/28	Exodus 4-6	1/29	Exodus 7-9
1/30	Exodus 10-12	1/31	Exodus 13-15

February

2/1	Exodus 16-18	2/2	Exodus 19-21
2/3	Exodus 22-24	2/4	Exodus 25-27
2/5	Exodus 28-29	2/6	Exodus 30-32
2/7	Exodus 33-35	2/8	Exodus 36-38
2/9	Exodus 39-40	2/10	Leviticus 1-4
2/11	Leviticus 5-7	2/12	Leviticus 8-10
2/13	Leviticus 11-13	2/14	Leviticus 14-15
2/15	Leviticus 16-18	2/16	Leviticus 19-21
2/17	Leviticus 22-23	2/18	Leviticus 24-25
2/19	Leviticus 26-27	2/20	Numbers 1-2
2/21	Numbers 3-4	2/22	Numbers 5-6
2/23	Numbers 7	2/24	Numbers 8-10
2/25	Numbers 11-13	2/26	Numbers 14-15
2/27	Numbers 16-17	2/28	Numbers 18-20

March

3/1	Numbers 21-22	3/2	Numbers 23-25
3/3	Numbers 26-27	3/4	Numbers 28-30
3/5	Numbers 31-32	3/6	Numbers 33-34
3/7	Numbers 35-36	3/8	Deuteronomy 1-2
3/9	Deuteronomy 3-4	3/10	Deuteronomy 5-7
3/11	Deuteronomy 8-10	3/12	Deuteronomy 11-13
3/13	Deuteronomy 14-16	3/14	Deuteronomy 17-20
3/15	Deuteronomy 21-23	3/16	Deuteronomy 24-27
3/17	Deuteronomy 28-29	3/18	Deuteronomy 30-31
3/19	Deuteronomy 32-34	3/20	Joshua 1-4
3/21	Joshua 5-8	3/22	Joshua 9-11
3/23	Joshua 12-15	3/24	Joshua 16-18
3/25	Joshua 19-21	3/26	Joshua 22-24
3/27	Judges 1-2	3/28	Judges 3-5
3/29	Judges 6-7	3/30	Judges 8-9
3/31	Judges 10-12		

April

4/1	Judges 13-15	4/2	Judges 16-18
4/3	Judges 19-21	4/4	Ruth 1-4
4/5	1 Samuel 1-3	4/6	1 Samuel 4-8
4/7	1 Samuel 9-12	4/8	1 Samuel 13-14
4/9	1 Samuel 15-17	4/10	1 Samuel 18-20
4/11	1 Samuel 21-24	4/12	1 Samuel 25-27
4/13	1 Samuel 28-31	4/14	2 Samuel 1-3
4/15	2 Samuel 4-7	4/16	2 Samuel 8-12
4/17	2 Samuel 13-15	4/18	2 Samuel 16-18
4/19	2 Samuel 19-21	4/20	2 Samuel 22-24
4/21	1 Kings 1-2	4/22	1 Kings 3-5
4/23	1 Kings 6-7	4/24	1 Kings 8-9
4/25	1 Kings 10-11	4/26	1 Kings 12-14
4/27	1 Kings 15-17	4/28	1 Kings 18-20
4/29	1 Kings 21-22	4/30	2 Kings 1-3

May

5/1	2 Kings 4-5	5/2	2 Kings 6-8
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5/3	2 Kings 9-11	5/4	2 Kings 12-14
5/5	2 Kings 15-17	5/6	2 Kings 18-19
5/7	2 Kings 20-22	5/8	2 Kings 23-25
5/9	1 Chronicles 1-2	5/10	1 Chronicles 3-5
5/11	1 Chronicles 6	5/12	1 Chronicles 7-8
5/13	1 Chronicles 9-11	5/14	1 Chronicles 12-14
5/15	1 Chronicles 15-17	5/16	1 Chronicles 18-21
5/17	1 Chronicles 22-24	5/18	1 Chronicles 25-27
5/19	1 Chronicles 28-2 Chronicles 1	5/20	2 Chronicles 2-5
5/21	2 Chronicles 6-8	5/22	2 Chronicles 9-12
5/23	2 Chronicles 13-17	5/24	2 Chronicles 18-20
5/25	2 Chronicles 21-24	5/26	2 Chronicles 25-27
5/27	2 Chronicles 28-31	5/28	2 Chronicles 32-34
5/29	2 Chronicles 35-36	5/30	Ezra 1-3
5/31	Ezra 4-7		

June

6/1	Ezra 8-10	6/2	Nehemiah 1-3
6/3	Nehemiah 4-6	6/4	Nehemiah 7
6/5	Nehemiah 8-9	6/6	Nehemiah 10-11
6/7	Nehemiah 12-13	6/8	Esther 1-5
6/9	Esther 6-10	6/10	Job 1-4
6/11	Job 5-7	6/12	Job 8-10
6/13	Job 11-13	6/14	Job 14-16
6/15	Job 17-20	6/16	Job 21-23
6/17	Job 24-28	6/18	Job 29-31
6/19	Job 32-34	6/20	Job 35-37
6/21	Job 38-39	6/22	Job 40-42
6/23	Psalms 1-8	6/24	Psalms 9-16
6/25	Psalms 17-20	6/26	Psalms 21-25
6/27	Psalms 26-31	6/28	Psalms 32-35
6/29	Psalms 36-39	6/30	Psalms 40-45

July

7/1	Psalms 46-50	7/2	Psalms 51-57
7/3	Psalms 58-65	7/4	Psalms 66-69

7/5	Psalms 70-73	7/6	Psalms 74-77
7/7	Psalms 78-79	7/8	Psalms 80-85
7/9	Psalms 86-89	7/10	Psalms 90-95
7/11	Psalms 96-102	7/12	Psalms 103-105
7/13	Psalms 106-107	7/14	Psalms 108-114
7/15	Psalms 115-118	7/16	Psalms 119:1-88
7/17	Psalms 119:89-176	7/18	Psalms 120-132
7/19	Psalms 133-139	7/20	Psalms 140-145
7/21	Psalms 146-150	7/22	Proverbs 1-3
7/23	Proverbs 4-6	7/24	Proverbs 7-9
7/25	Proverbs 10-12	7/26	Proverbs 13-15
7/27	Proverbs 16-18	7/28	Proverbs 19-21
7/29	Proverbs 22-23	7/30	Proverbs 24-26
7/31	Proverbs 27-29		

August

8/1	Proverbs 30-31	8/2	Ecclesiastes 1-4
8/3	Ecclesiastes 5-8	8/4	Ecclesiastes 9-12
8/5	Song of Songs 1-8	8/6	Isaiah 1-4
8/7	Isaiah 5-8	8/8	Isaiah 9-12
8/9	Isaiah 13-17	8/10	Isaiah 18-22
8/11	Isaiah 23-27	8/12	Isaiah 28-30
8/13	Isaiah 31-35	8/14	Isaiah 36-41
8/15	Isaiah 42-44	8/16	Isaiah 45-48
8/17	Isaiah 49-53	8/18	Isaiah 54-58
8/19	Isaiah 59-63	8/20	Isaiah 64-66
8/21	Jeremiah 1-3	8/22	Jeremiah 4-6
8/23	Jeremiah 7-9	8/24	Jeremiah 10-13
8/25	Jeremiah 14-17	8/26	Jeremiah 18-22
8/27	Jeremiah 23-25	8/28	Jeremiah 26-29
8/29	Jeremiah 30-31	8/30	Jeremiah 32-34
8/31	Jeremiah 35-37		

September

9/1	Jeremiah 38-41	9/2	Jeremiah 42-45
9/3	Jeremiah 46-48	9/4	Jeremiah 49-50

9/5	Jeremiah 51-52	9/6	Lamentations 1:1-3:36
9/7	Lamentations 3:37-5:22	9/8	Ezekiel 1-4
9/9	Ezekiel 5-8	9/10	Ezekiel 9-12
9/11	Ezekiel 13-15	9/12	Ezekiel 16-17
9/13	Ezekiel 18-20	9/14	Ezekiel 21-22
9/15	Ezekiel 23-24	9/16	Ezekiel 25-27
9/17	Ezekiel 28-30	9/18	Ezekiel 31-33
9/19	Ezekiel 34-36	9/20	Ezekiel 37-39
9/21	Ezekiel 40-42	9/22	Ezekiel 43-45
9/23	Ezekiel 46-48	9/24	Daniel 1-3
9/25	Daniel 4-6	9/26	Daniel 7-9
9/27	Daniel 10-12	9/28	Hosea 1-7
9/29	Hosea 8-14	9/30	Joel 1-3

October

10/1	Amos 1-5	10/2	Amos 6-9
10/3	Obadiah 1, Jonah 1-4	10/4	Micah 1-7
10/5	Nahum 1-3	10/6	Habakkuk 1-3, Zephaniah 1-3
10/7	Haggai 1-2	10/8	Zechariah 1-7
10/9	Zechariah 8-14	10/10	Malachi 1-4
10/11	Matthew 1-4	10/12	Matthew 5-6
10/13	Matthew 7-8	10/14	Matthew 9-10
10/15	Matthew 11-12	10/16	Matthew 13-14
10/17	Matthew 15-17	10/18	Matthew 18-19
10/19	Matthew 20-21	10/20	Matthew 22-23
10/21	Matthew 24-25	10/22	Matthew 26
10/23	Matthew 27-28	10/24	Mark 1-3
10/25	Mark 4-5	10/26	Mark 6-7
10/27	Mark 8-9	10/28	Mark 10-11
10/29	Mark 12-13	10/30	Mark 14
10/31	Mark 15-16		

November

11/1	Luke 1	11/2	Luke 2-3
11/3	Luke 4-5	11/4	Luke 6-7
11/5	Luke 8-9	11/6	Luke 10-11

11/7	Luke 12-13	11/8	Luke 14-16
11/9	Luke 17-18	11/10	Luke 19-20
11/11	Luke 21-22	11/12	Luke 23-24
11/13	John 1-2	11/14	John 3-4
11/15	John 5-6	11/16	John 7-8
11/17	John 9-10	11/18	John 11-12
11/19	John 13-15	11/20	John 16-18
11/21	John 19-21	11/22	Acts 1-3
11/23	Acts 4-6	11/24	Acts 7-8
11/25	Acts 9-10	11/26	Acts 11-13
11/27	Acts 14-15	11/28	Acts 16-17
11/29	Acts 18-20	11/30	Acts 21-23

December

12/1	Acts 24-26	12/2	Acts 27-28
12/3	Romans 1-3	12/4	Romans 4-7
12/5	Romans 8-10	12/6	Romans 11-13
12/7	Romans 14-16	12/8	1 Corinthians 1-4
12/9	1 Corinthians 5-8	12/10	1 Corinthians 9-11
12/11	1 Corinthians 12-14	12/12	1 Corinthians 15-16
12/13	2 Corinthians 1-4	12/14	2 Corinthians 5-9
12/15	2 Corinthians 10-13	12/16	Galatians 1-3
12/17	Galatians 4-6	12/18	Ephesians 1-3
12/19	Ephesians 4-6	12/20	Philippians 1-4
12/21	Colossians 1-4	12/22	1 Thessalonians 1-5
12/23	2 Thessalonians 1-3	12/24	1 Timothy 1-6
12/25	2 Timothy 1-4	12/26	Titus 1-3, Philemon 1
12/27	Hebrews 1-6	12/28	Hebrews 7-10
12/29	Hebrews 11-13	12/30	James 1-5
12/31	1 Peter 1-5		

January

1/1	2 Peter 1-3	1/2	1 John 1-5
1/3	2 John 1, 3 John 1, Jude 1	1/4	Revelation 1-3
1/5	Revelation 4-8	1/6	Revelation 9-12
1/7	Revelation 13-16	1/8	Revelation 17-19

1/9	Revelation 20-22		
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