



The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 5

Lesson 5 Commentary **Mark 8:31 – 10:52**
Lesson 6 Questions **Mark 11:1 – 13:37**

Introduction

As I outlined in the first session, the four major sections of the Gospel According to Mark were:

- Prologue: Preparations for the Coming Messiah and His Forerunner (1:1–15)
- Public Ministry: The Messiah’s Secret and His Widespread Ministry (1:16–8:30)
- Passion Narrative (8:31–15:47):
- Resurrection Epilogue: The Risen Messiah and Easter Narratives (16:1–20)

We are half way through the course and about halfway through the Gospel. The first half concludes with Peter declaring that “You are the Messiah.” In the second half, the meaning of “You are the Messiah” will be revealed. It did not mean what most Jews of the time thought it would mean.

Mark 8:31 – 9:1

Mark 8:31 – 9:1 consists of one section titled “Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection” in the NRSVCE. Just prior to this section, Peter has made his very short messianic declaration. He simply states, “You are the Messiah.” This is typical for Mark. Remember, time is of the essence. Mark has no time for flowery language. In Matthew, as we stated last week, the exchange between Jesus and Peter is more colorful.

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and

whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.”

So, after the declaration, the Apostles now get it. But what happens next? The first of three predictions (all of which we will see in this lesson) of His passion and resurrection occurs. In verse 8:31, we read, “Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.” Peter rebukes Christ and Christ refers to him as Satan. That seems to be quite a fall for Peter – going from the founder of the Church to Satan in matter of a couple of verses. Why was Peter and, for that matter, everyone else confused at this point about the role of the Messiah? There were differing opinions over what the Messiah would be like. Some thought a King; some thought a warrior that would free them from Rome.

Christ clears this up. What Christ was describing was that the Messiah was the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. What exactly is that? Scholars generally split Isaiah into three sections. The middle section, Chapters 40 – 55, is generally referred to as Deutero (or Second) Isaiah. Within Second Isaiah, a figure appears called the “Servant.” The Hebrew word used is עֶבֶד (transliterated ‘*ebed*). ‘*Ebed* is used some 799 times in the Old Testament, the clear majority of which (78.6%) are translated as servant, servant’s or servants. Other uses of the word in the Old Testament are translated as slave, official, officer, envoy and minister. According to Dr. Scott Hahn, the term ‘*ebed* “was used for a person of trust and honor who was the special servant to the king; this title was then applied to certain persons who held this post in relation to God, who were chosen by God to accomplish a specific task or mission.”¹

Scholars have labeled certain subsections where the Servant appears as the four Servant Songs. The locations of these “Songs” are (1) Isaiah 42:1-9, (2) Isaiah 49:1-7, (3) Isaiah 50:4-11 and (4) Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.² Hahn describes the first Servant Song as God calling his servant, “whom he has prepared and has received the Spirit. He will bring forth justice to the nations.”³ The first Servant Song is spoken in the third person with respect to the servant (that is, from the perspective of God calling his servant). In the second Servant Song, the servant speaks in the first person saying “The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away.” (Isaiah 49:1-2). In Isaiah 49:6, it is not enough that the servant will “raise up the tribes of Jacob.” He will also be “a light to the nations, that my [God’s] salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” It seems apparent that the servant will also “raise up” the Gentiles. In the third Servant Song, the servant also speaks in the first

¹ Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2009), 830.

² Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 829.

³ Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 829.

person and “will endure suffering, but he will remain steadfast in his obedience and trust in the Lord.”⁴

The fourth Servant Song is the longest of the four. Hahn provides a summary that would be difficult to improve upon, as follows:

“The first part (Isa 52:13–15) expresses almost brutally the full weight of what it will mean to be a Suffering Servant: “his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men” (Isa 52:14). Yet in the midst of his agonies, the Lord declares that his Servant will “prosper” and “be exalted” (Isa 52:13). The second part (Isa 53:1–12) says that “he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2), and expresses his rejection, condemnation, and death despite his innocence. The language in this passage is vivid: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows”; “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities”; “he was oppressed, and he was afflicted.” But the Lord is bringing salvation out of this suffering: “Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand” (Isa 53:10; cf. Dan 11:33–12:10).”⁵

Many scholars cite the importance of the fourth Servant Song. F. Duane Lindsey points out that if the fourth Servant Song were lost, this passage could almost be reconstructed from its quotations in the New Testament.⁶

Mark 9:2 – 50 (The Remainder of Chapter 9)

Mark 9:2 – 50, in the NRSVCE, has seven sections.

- The Transfiguration
- The Coming of Elijah
- The Healing of a Boy with a Spirit
- Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- True Greatness
- Another Exorcist
- Temptations to Sin

⁴ Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 829.

⁵ Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 829.

⁶ F. Duane Lindsey, “The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 139 no 556 (O-D 1982), 312 & footnote 2.

One of the rare times that Mark's rendition of an event is more detailed than Matthew's or Luke's is the healing of the boy with the spirit. The point here is that it was not the Apostles' lack of faith, but the peoples' lack of faith in the Apostles. There is no need to spend any more time on the prophecy of the passion and resurrection as we covered the "suffering servant" in the prior section. The argument among the Apostles about true greatness also relates back to being a servant like the suffering servant. Lastly, the other exorcist is reminiscent of the story of the Moses in Numbers 11:26-30 related to the selection of the seventy and Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp.

Returning now to the transfiguration, given that the transfiguration occurs directly after the prediction of His passion and resurrection, you almost get the feeling that Jesus is trying to assure the Apostles (at least Peter, James and John) that even though he must suffer, he will be glorified. Why was it Elijah and Moses that appeared? Moses and Elijah represent the "law" and the "prophets," respectively. In Matthew 5:17 we read, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." What did they discuss? Mark does not take the time to tell us, but Luke does. Luke 9:31 says, "They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure [exodus], which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." Next, we hear the voice from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" This echoes the statement made by the voice from Heaven in Mark 1:11.

In the next section, Peter, James, and John are still confused on what "rising from the dead" meant? Really? It does not seem all that confusing. Elijah returning was based on the prophesy from Malachi 4:5, "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes." Remember back in session 2, when we compared John the Baptist to Elijah. Jesus explains that Elijah has come.

In the last section, Jesus is using hyperbole to make a point. Intentional drowning, amputation of body parts and the plucking of eyes is not meant to be taken as a practical approach to avoiding sin. However, it should be taken seriously. We need to avoid those things that cause us to sin.

Throughout the Bible, originally written in Greek, there is sometimes confusion over the meaning of such words as hell, *Hades* and *Gehenna*. This confusion is compounded in the Apostles' Creed where we say Jesus "descended into hell..." Let's begin by discussing *Sheol* (transliterated from שְׁאוֹל). This was where Israel believed that the dead went. There are several thoughts about the characteristics of *Sheol*. It was a place of gloom for both the righteous and the wicked.

"The Hebrew name for the place of the dead, where they dwelt in utter silence and gloom (Ps 89:48; Prov 5:5, 7:27). Their existence was without "work or thought or knowledge or wisdom" (Eccl 9:10). It was a place where there was neither worship of God nor memory of him (Ps 6:5, 115:17; Isa 38:18). Nevertheless, God's power extended over Sheol (Ps 139:7-8; Prov 15:11; Job 26:6; Wis 16:13) even if his presence was not felt there. There was also the genuine hope that God would not

abandon his people (Ps 16:10) and that God would bring redemption for the people who were there (Ps 49:16; cf. 1 Sam 2:6).

In the New Testament, “Sheol” was translated by the Greek word *Hadēs*, which likewise denotes the underworld of the dead (cf. Phil 2:10; Acts 2:27; Rev 1:18; Eph 4:9). Sheol was a state for both the evil and the righteous while they awaited the Redeemer (Gen 44:31; Ps 9:17; Luke 16:22–26; *see also Abraham’s bosom*). The lot of those in Sheol, however, was not identical, because on Holy Saturday Jesus descended into Hades to deliver the righteous souls of Old Testament times; he did not deliver the damned (cf. Council of Rome [a.d. 745]; Benedict XI, *Cum dudum* [a.d. 1341]; Clement VI, *Super quibusdam* [a.d. 1351]; Council of Toledo IV [a.d. 625]). (CCC 632–35.)⁷

Sheol is normally translated into Greek as “*Hades*” and this is where Christ went on Holy Saturday to deliver the righteous. *Gehenna* is what we think of as Hell, the home of Satan and the damned. Depending on your translation, it may use the word “hell” for both of these places. In the discussions in “Temptations of Sin,” Mark is referring to *Gehenna*.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10, in the NRSVCE, has six sections.

- Teaching about Divorce
- Jesus Blesses Little Children
- The Rich Man
- The Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection
- The Request of James and John
- The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

The last four events provide several insights:

- Jesus clarifies in Mark 10:23 that it is not “having riches” that is the problem, it is “trust in riches.” If you put your trust in anything but God, you are committing idolatry.
- James and John’s request seems arrogant. Jesus uses the opportunity to, again, stress the “servant” role. When Jesus talks in Mark 10:40, when Jesus speaks about the those prepared for his right and left, one wonders if he is talking about the two thieves who will be crucified with Christ.
- In the story of Bartimaeus, Mark, for the only time, uses the term “Son of David.”

⁷ Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2009), 838.

It should be noted from Mark 10:1 that Jesus and his Apostles are now headed to Jerusalem. He goes to the “region of Judea beyond the Jordan.” It is interesting that Mark would site this area because this is the same area that John the Baptist preached (Luke 3:1-3). Remember in Lesson 4, we talked about the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas and Herodias. Now Jesus is teaching where John condemned Herod and Herodias for their adulterous relationship. Herodias was once the wife of Herod’s half-brother Phillip, who is still alive and well (Luke 3:18-20). The Pharisees are trying to get Herod to do the same thing to Jesus that he did to John the Baptist!

What is Jesus referring to related to what Moses said about divorce? There was not explicit discussion of divorce until Deuteronomy 24:1 – 4, which reads as follows:

“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man’s wife. Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession.”

There was a great deal of debate, even at the time as to what “but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her” meant. There were two major schools at the time, the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel. They did not always agree.

“The House of Shammai say, “A man should divorce his wife only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity, “since it is said, *because he has found in her indecency in anything* (Dt. 24:).” And the House of Hillel say, “Even if she spoiled his dish, “since it is said, *because he has found in her indecency in anything*. R. Aqiba says, “Even if he found someone else prettier than she, “since it is said, *and it shall be if she finds no favor in his eyes* (Dt. 24:1).”⁸

Under the “second law” of Deuteronomy, there was grounds by which divorce, and remarriage could happen. In fact, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, several certificates of divorce were found. At the end of this section, Jesus clarifies that it is the “remarriage” that causes the adultery. Lastly, under Jewish law, only the man could initiate divorce. However, under Roman law, either could initiate the divorce. This is another reason why it appears that Mark is writing to a Roman audience. It should be noted that Jesus follows up this teaching on marriage with the blessing of children, the natural result of a loving marriage.

⁸ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah : A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 487.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6
Mark 11:1 – 13:37

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read Mark 11:1 – 11.

Reread Mark 10:46 – 52. Read 1 Kings 1:38, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 21:2, Luke 19:30, and John 12:14. What is Mark trying to convey? What are the differences in these verses?

Day 3 – Read Mark 11:12 – 33.

In the cursing of the fig tree, what is Jesus doing and what is he conveying?

Read Jeremiah 19 and Ezekiel 4 – 5. How might these relate to the cursing of the fig tree?

Day 4 – Read Mark 12:1 – 27.

Who do the characters in the parable of the wicked tenants represent?

Reread the introduction portion of Lesson 3 related to the Sadducees. Why do you think that “the Question about the Resurrection” is the only issue where the Sadducees are involved in Mark?

Why did Jesus bring up the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Day 5 – Read Mark 12:28 – 44.

Read Exodus 20:1 – 17, Deuteronomy 5:1 – 22 and Deuteronomy 6:4-5. How do these relate to Mark 12:28 – 34.

Day 6 – Read Mark 13:1 – 37

What is Jesus prophesying about?

Read Micah 3:12 and Jeremiah 26:18. What are they prophesying about? How might the these and Mark 13:1 – 37 be related?