

Finer Grounds

Mark Lesson 4: Jesus' Power Proven

In the next two chapters, we are going to see Jesus' divine nature and power displayed in magnificent ways. While Jesus the Christ has been gaining in popularity, standing up to the Scribes and Pharisees and performing miracles, what He is about to do will leave even his apostles dumbstruck with awe. Jesus is about to truly set himself apart from anyone and anything the world has ever seen, or will ever see again.

Before You Begin:

Read Luke 8:4-56 and be prepared to compare Luke's account with Mark's.

Take Action:

Sit down and make a list of times in your life when you have been in awe of God's power. How did this affect you?

Read Mark 4:1-9

What we often refer to as the "Parable of the Sower" is probably one of the most frequently taught of the parables. This passage begins with Jesus once again teaching beside the sea, surrounded by followers. However, this is the first time that Mark records in detail what Jesus was teaching.

Think About it:

What were the three "bad" soils that the seed fell upon?

How can we apply Jesus' teaching regarding these "bad" soils to ourselves and those we are striving to evangelize?

What were the three "good" soils that the seed fell upon?

What can we learn from these different "good" soils, and how would that apply to our personal Spiritual lives?

Take Action:

Sit down and honestly evaluate; are there any areas of your life in which your heart is rocky or thorny? If so, what steps can you take to soften it to God's will for your life?

An irony that cannot be missed is that Jesus is teaching the people about themselves, yet they do not understand. At this point, Jesus is constantly surrounded by adoring followers, who all want something from him. Some who are there

listening will be like the seed along the path, and as soon as Jesus begins doing more teaching than healing they will be gone. Some will be like the seed that fell upon the rocky ground, and they will stay until Jesus' teachings get hard, and then they will wither away. And some, even his specially chosen apostles, will inevitably be choked out by thorns as Jesus begins his journey to the cross. Thankfully, as we see with the apostles and many others, we serve a merciful God and our hearts can change.

Read Mark 4:10-20

It was not only the masses that did not understand Jesus' teaching, as soon as they were alone the apostles asked Jesus to explain the meaning of the parable. The Jewish people as a whole were not yet ready for the truth regarding the Kingdom of God, and while Jesus had done many mighty works, they were not yet prepared to actually receive him as the Messiah. Even the apostles, whom he chose to enlighten upon their request, would remain baffled regarding Jesus' true mission on the earth until God's plan had been seen through to fruition.

Another interesting note here is Jesus' response to the apostle's question, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" This demonstrates the fact that some aspects of Scripture are more foundational and easier to understand than others. This is important for older Christians to keep in mind when studying/working with newer Christians. Delving into a deep, complex, or even highly personal matter with a new Christian before establishing the basic tenets of the faith with them can be incredibly detrimental to their spiritual growth.

Read Mark 4:21-25

Keep in mind that Jesus has just shared a truth with the apostles that no one else is being told about yet; the secret of the Kingdom of God. Now Jesus is telling them what he expects them

to do with that secret. He's telling them to pay attention because they have not been chosen to hear for no reason, they are to be storing these truths away to bring the truth to light when the time comes.

Read Mark 4:26-29

This is one of the shortest parables we find in Scripture, and it is only found here in Mark's account.

Think About It:

How does this parable fit with Mark's goal of proclaiming the Messiah?

Read Mark 4:30-34

Jesus is once again teaching about the Kingdom of God, he is trying to slowly prepare the Jews for the idea that his kingdom is not of this world. On this earth, the kingdom appears as small as a mustard seed, rather than the vast earthly kingdom that they were expecting. Yet, when it is full-grown, it will dwarf every kingdom the world has ever known.

Although brief, this passage also gives us some insight on teaching from the mind of Christ himself: when teaching Jesus met his students where they were, and was very conscious of what they could handle when (Swete 1898).

Take Action:

When you are teaching, either a class or a particular individual, take the time to get to know them. Spend time with them outside of class to find out what their struggles are and what their background is. Then when you teach them, you will have a better idea of how to approach them and how to deliver the teaching in the most beneficial way possible.

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Read Mark 4:35-41

Here we see the first of three major demonstrations of the power of Jesus the Christ. Even after all the miracles the apostles had witnessed firsthand, they were terrified when the storm came upon them while out to sea. Mark doesn't give a lot of details concerning this storm, but considering the fact that four of the apostles were professional fisherman and still terrified, it had to have been massive. Yet when he is awoken, Jesus rebukes the apostles for their lack of faith, and with three small, spoken words, completely silences the wind and the waves. Ironically, the apostles trade one fear for another as the tremble in awe at our Savior's power. Finally, they are beginning to see that Jesus is not a mere prophet as they question among themselves, "Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Think About it:

Are there times in our lives when Jesus is probably looking at us and asking, "Have you still no faith?" Have we repented of those times?

What can we do to strengthen our faith?

Read Mark 5:1-13

After Jesus quiets the storm, he and the apostles are able to complete their travel across the sea and land in the area of Decapolis, which means "region of ten cities," and specifically to the area of the Gerasenes (Lenksi 1961). He has already had a long day of teaching and travel, but his day is far from over. Once again Mark uses his beautiful talent with words as he paints a picture for us of what is transpiring.

Think About It:

What are some of the specific words Mark uses to make this sequence come to life?

How could this demon-possessed man have recognized Jesus as the "Son of the Most High God" from afar?

What is particularly interesting about verses 7-8 is the dialog transpiring between Jesus and the demons within the man. First of all, we need to fully picture what is going on. When asked his name the demon responds, "Legion, for we are many." Scripture, never tells us exactly how many demons Jesus was dealing with, but a legion of Roman soldiers was typically about 6,000, and soon the demons will go into 2,000 swines. For us as human beings, I think often times this doesn't fully compute because, in our minds, we picture Jesus talking to a single man. Yet stop and imagine it: Jesus is standing beside the sea, and he is completely surrounded by what may have been as many as 6,000 enemy soldiers, and he is taking them on singlehandedly. We get a brief glimpse at the power these demons possessed when we read verse 8, because Jesus has already told the demons to come out of the man, yet they were allowed to resist. I say they were allowed to resist because it is clear that the demons knew that they would be leaving, they knew they could not stand against the power of the Son of God, yet they were holding on long enough to plead with Jesus about where they would go. Finally, Jesus gives them permission and the demons flee into the 2,000 swines grazing on the hill, which then rush into the sea and drown.

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In this time (and even today!) 2,000 swine were worth a lot of money! Many critics have mentioned Jesus' perceived callousness at never acknowledging the loss of income caused by this particular demonic showdown, and indeed when the townspeople arrive they are not happy! Some scholars, however, point out the fact that under the Law of Moses pigs were unclean, and therefore not to be owned by Jews (Lenski 1961). It has been suggested (although of course there is no way to know) that perhaps Jesus did acknowledge this loss because the owners of the swine were Jews who were living in violation of the law (Lenksi 1961).

Read Mark 5:14-20

Almost instantly, thanks to the herdsmen, news travels throughout the city and the country about what has transpired, and everyone comes running to see for themselves. The very first thing they see is the man formerly known as Legion sitting, clothed and calm, and they react with fear. They had seen the power of Legion, they had tried and failed repeatedly to even contain him, they couldn't fathom the power it would have taken to heal him. Everyone is milling around trying to figure out what just happened, and slowly they piece it all together: Legion, the pigs, and Jesus of Nazareth.

Think About It:

How did the people respond to Jesus' miracle and why?

Have you ever had to choose between a job and Jesus?

When you are confronted with the power of the Gospel, how do you respond?

Why did Jesus tell the man to proclaim what had been done for him when he had commanded so many others to be quiet?

Take action:

What is something in your life that you need to get rid of?

Come up with a concrete plan to remove it from your life. Share your struggle and your plan with a trusted Christian and ask them to help you and keep you accountable.

Read Mark 5:21-34

Think About It:

In verse 22, who is it that falls at Jesus' feet?

Why is this significant considering what Mark's gospel account has recorded for us so far?

After casting out the Legion and being asked to leave, Jesus immediately sets sail back across the sea, only to be met on the shore by a great crowd. One person, a desperate father, pushes through the crowd to fall at Jesus' feet and beg him to come heal his little girl who lies on the

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brink of death. Regardless of what the Jewish leaders are saying about Jesus, Jairus is clinging to the hope that Jesus can save his little girl.

Even with such an emergency Jesus cannot escape the crowd, they just follow him as leaves with Jairus. There are people pressing in on every side, Jairus is panicked and trying to get back to his little girl when suddenly Jesus feels power flowing out of him and stops. When he asks “Who touched me” the apostles almost mock him, treating him almost like the child who calls out, “he touched me!” from the backseat of a crowded vehicle. Yet timidly, shaking with fear, the woman comes forward and explains to Jesus what she did and why. Imagine the apostle’s reaction as they processed what had just transpired!

Another important note here is the fact that Jesus did feel the power leaving to heal the woman. This means that every miracle he performed cost him something personally. Imagine the power it must have taken to take on Legion, and how exhausted he must have been feeling at this point in time. Yet how did he respond to this desperate woman of faith?

Think About it:

Undoubtedly, Jesus knew who touched him and exactly what happened, so why did he ask?

What did Jesus say made the woman well?

What does Jesus’ ministry teach us about giving of ourselves?

Take action:

Look at your congregation and find one person who needs some healing, either physically or emotionally. Get to know them, what their needs are, and begin to serve them.

Read Mark 5:34-43

Alas, while Jesus is delayed by the crowd and the woman, a man approaches and tells Jairus that it is too late, his little girl is dead. Before moving on, let’s take a minute to process how Jesus responds to this news: he doesn’t tell Jairus, “at least she isn’t hurting anymore,” and he doesn’t say, “well, she’s in a better place,” he only tells him not to fear, acknowledging that the loss of his child would be a terrifying idea for Jairus. While these statements are entirely true, sometimes I am afraid that as Christians when a family experiences a loss we rush in with our platitudes and deny the family their right to mourn and experience their God-given emotions. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he was there when the world was created, he lived in Heaven, he knows exactly what is waiting for us after death, yet both here and in John 11 he acknowledges, and even experiences, the devastating pain of loss. While Heaven will be a majestic place with no sickness, pain or tears, and while it is certainly a better place than the sin-filled world we live in, that doesn’t make it any less painful for family and friends to live without their loved one. There is a time and place to offer words of comfort to those who are mourning, but there is also a time and place to simply be with them and allow them to grieve.

After giving Jairus hope, Jesus sends the crowds away and takes Peter, James and John with him to Jairus’ house. And then, after displaying his power over nature and legions of demons, Jesus performs his greatest demonstration of authority yet, his power over death itself. It is interesting to note that when

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Jesus first enters the house he tells those gathered that the little girl is only sleeping, and then after raising her from the dead he strictly charges those who witnessed this miracle not to say anything.

Think About it:

Do you think that perhaps the reason we are so quick to offer words of comfort to those who are grieving is that we are uncomfortable with their pain?

How can we work towards overcoming this?

After so many miracles, why do you think Jesus charged Jairus' family to keep this one a secret?

What significance, if any, is there is Mark recording Jesus exact Aramaic phrasing?

Take Action:

The loss of a loved one is a tragic and life-changing experience. There truly are no words that will take away the pain of that loss. However sometimes after losing a loved one people just need companionship. Find someone who has lost a loved one and become a companion for them.

In the last two chapters we have seen Jesus teach that different hearts will respond to the truth of the Gospel in various ways, and we have seen him charge his apostles to pay attention to what is going on and be prepared to be a light in this dark world. Immediately following that, he performs the three greatest acts of power the world has ever, or will ever see, save for his own resurrection from the dead. How does all of this proclaim Jesus the Messiah, and how does it, and should it, affect each of our lives?

Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Swete, H. B. (Ed.). (1898). The Gospel according to St. Mark. The Greek text with introduction, notes and indices. London; New York: MacMillan and co.; The MacMillan Company.