

# Finer Grounds

## Mark Lesson 8: The Road to Jerusalem

### Before You Begin:

Imagine embarking on a journey, and knowing that the destination is your own, horrific, death. You are surrounded by those you love most on this journey, and literally the weight of the world is on your shoulders because if you live, everyone else dies. How do you feel? What are you thinking? This is the position that Jesus the Christ found himself in as he and his apostles began their journey to Jerusalem, only instead of fear concerning physical death, he carried the weight of the world's eternal destination.

### Take Action:

#### Read Deuteronomy 24:1

#### Read Mark 10:1-12

Jesus did not get far into his journey before he was surrounded by crowds and once again began to teach. He did not get far into his teaching before he was once again accosted and tested by the Pharisees. Other efforts had failed, and this time the Pharisees were determined to hedge Jesus in so fully that there was no way of escape without inflaming a sect of the Jews. What do people get more angry and defensive over than their family, their marriage? The solution to their "Jesus problem" was simply to make him give an answer on the issue of lawful divorce, and the rest would take care of itself. In order to understand the significance of this question we must understand the society in which this confrontation took place. Within the first century Jewish population there were two primary schools of theology: the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel (Lenski 1961). Each interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1 differently: the school of Hillel

interpreted "indecent" to mean anything that upset the husband, even burning the food (Lenski 1961). The Shammai, however, took a much stricter (and less popular) stance and taught that the "indecent" was only sexual immorality (Lenski 1961). Regardless of how Jesus answered, he would anger one of the two groups.

It is important to note Jesus' response, "What did Moses command you?" In Jesus' question and in the Pharisees' response both, the authority being discussed is Moses', not God's. Moses provided a method of legal divorce for the people, but this in no way changed God's view of divorce as Jesus goes on to demonstrate. Rather than getting caught up in the argumentation of the two primary schools of thought of the day, Jesus goes back to the ultimate authority and the creation of all things.

### Think About It:

**How does the Pharisees' public question to Jesus correlate with what happened to John the Baptist in Mark 6:14-29?**

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**What is the one allowable reason for divorce that Jesus gives?**

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**What is the consequence Jesus gives of marrying one who is unscripturally divorced?**

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**Take Action:**

**Read the parallel account in Matthew 19:1-12**

**Think About It:**

**Keeping in mind the context of Matthew 19:1-12, how would one make themselves a eunuch?**

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**Keeping in mind the context, how could one be made a eunuch by someone else?**

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**What does the apostles' reaction in Matthew 19:10 say about the literalness of Jesus' teaching in this passage?**

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Jesus' answer is short and sweet, although certainly difficult and at times painful. As humans we mess up and we sin, we get our lives into all kinds of tangled messes, yet the simplicity of Jesus' answer does not change based upon the circumstances we find ourselves in. As the Son of God he was an eloquent man, and he could have included any exceptions that he chose, yet he only listed one. The pattern his answer was based upon? The very beginning. Marriage is one of the most beautiful gifts that God has given us. When we marry and we become one flesh through the physical relationship God has given us, we are permanently changed. This relationship must come before our relationship with our parents, as stated in the text, but it must also come before our children. There is an old, yet true saying, "The best thing a parent can do for their children is love their spouse." In a world reeling with

uncertainty, we must give our children the stability of making our marriage a priority.

**Take Action:**

**Make a list of ways you can make your marriage a priority.**

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**In light of this teaching, make a list of ways we can help and encourage our children and grandchildren to make wise decisions concerning who to marry.**

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**Read Mark 10:13-16**

This passage is a beautiful portrait of our Savior. Only once in all of Scripture is he recorded as being indignant, and it is over the treatment of children. It seems that the apostles have already forgotten Jesus' teaching from Mark 9:36-37 concerning who is the greatest. Here Jesus readily reminds them of how he views children.

**Think About It:**

**What can we learn from this passage concerning how Jesus views the spiritual welfare of children?**

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**How can we better serve the children of our congregation?**

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**What are we doing to promote the spiritual welfare of the children in our home? How can we do better?**

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## Read Mark 10:17-22

We frequently refer to this passage as the story of the Rich Young Ruler, and it is one of the most heartbreaking passages in Scripture. This young man is eager to please Christ, yet unwilling to sacrifice in order to do so.

### Take Action:

**Read Hebrews 11:8-12 & Genesis 22. Jesus understood the rich young ruler's heart and his struggles, just as he understands ours. Write a brief paragraph about how things would have been if Abraham had responded to God as this young man did.**

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### Think About It:

**In what ways have we been unwilling to sacrifice for the cause of Christ?**

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**How does Mark say Jesus felt about this young man?**

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## Read Mark 10:23-31

In the first century Jewish culture, it was widely accepted that wealth was a direct blessing from God (France 2002). Therefore, when Jesus

said that it would be difficult for a rich person to enter into Heaven, the apostles equated this with someone who had been directly blessed by God (France 2002). Jesus is once again trying to turn the apostles' thinking from a worldly perspective to a spiritual one. He made it clear that he expected full devotion from those who would be his disciples. Peter quickly pointed out that he and the other apostles had done just that, and Jesus quickly assures him that this sacrifice will not be without reward.

### Think About It:

**How does Jesus' teaching here fit with Matthew 26:14-16?**

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**When taken with I Timothy 6:10, what is it about riches that makes it difficult to enter into Heaven?**

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## Read Mark 10:32-34

As they travel they are with a large group, all traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover. As they journey Jesus calls his apostles aside and tells them once again of what is waiting for him when they arrive. He is bold, direct and specific about what will happen to him, and who will condemn him to this fate.

### Think About It:

**How do you think the apostles reacted to hearing that their religious leaders would condemn the man that they followed and knew had done no wrong?**

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## Read Mark 10:35-45

Imagine that you are Jesus: you have just told the twelve people you are closest to in the world that you are about to be tortured and killed. As you finish this woeful proclamation, two of your three best friends come up and ask to be given seats of honor in your “glory”. How discouraged and heartbroken Jesus must have been in that moment.

The wording of this request implies seating at a royal banquet in places of honor, as typically in the first century ordinary people reclined on the floor to eat (France 2002). This demonstrates that even after Jesus’ dramatic proclamation, the apostles were still preparing for an earthly Kingdom.

### Think About It:

**In what ways are we like James and John in the church today? How can we do better?**

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## Read Mark 10:46-52

In true Markan style, a failure on the part of the apostles is immediately followed by an example of tremendous faith in another. There are many unique and amazing facts surrounding the healing of Blind Bartimeus as we have come to know him. First of all, this is the only healing miracle in which the recipient is specifically named. Not only do we know the name of the blind man, but his father, Timaeus. Secondly, this is the last healing miracle that Mark records. Thirdly, this is the first time Jesus is publicly proclaimed as the son of David, the Messiah, the fulfillment of thousands of years of prophecy. The Messianic Secret is no more, it is time for the world to know exactly who and what the man Jesus of Nazareth was. Not only does Jesus not silence Bartimeus, he heals him because of his

tremendous faith. It is amazing how this blind man had the clearest sight of anyone Jesus had yet encountered. And finally, where the Rich Young Ruler had gone away sorrowful, Bartimeus joins those traveling with Jesus (France 2002).

### Think About It:

**What is the significance of Bartimeus being called by name?**

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**What is the significance of Bartimeus being the last healing that Mark records? Why would he stop here?**

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## Mark 11:1-11

If the scribes and Pharisees disliked Jesus before, they must absolute hate him as he rides into town with such pomp and circumstance. The crowd has picked up on Bartimeus’ call and is now shouting “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” In fact, Jesus himself is proclaiming his Lordship by riding into town on a donkey, Zechariah 9:9-10 (France 2002).

As they prepare to enter the city, Jesus sends two of his apostles to procure the colt for him. The incredible detail with which Mark records both Jesus’ instructions and the retrieval of the donkey suggest that Peter may have been one of the two that Jesus sent ahead (Lenski 1961). While most probably consider it an insignificant detail, this passage also includes one of my favorite miracles. As someone who grew up around horses and has personally broken a horse to saddle, it is truly miraculous that Jesus was able to hop on a colt that had never been ridden with no trouble, and ride it calmly with people

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shouting and waving things all around. Jesus was the only man in the world who could pull off this minor, yet truly amazing, miracle.

## Think About It:

**As Jesus drew closer to Jerusalem the shouts and praise grew as many were caught up in the excitement. Do you think it is easier today to praise Jesus when the crowds are shouting praise?**

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**Soon, many of those shouting “Hosanna” will be shouting “crucify!” What can we do to help ensure that we, and our brethren, stay faithful even when it goes against popular opinion?**

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France, R. T. (2002). *The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

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