

Living the Message

OPEN THE BIBLE *Make the Connection*



November 2011 Mark 9 – 16 Reading & Discussion Guide

November Dates to Note:

MEETING WILL BE HELD:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

PASTOR'S INTRODUCTION TO Mark 9 – 16:

- Mpls:** Monday, November 7, 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** No overview at West due to New Member Dinner on Nov 3

BEFORE YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

1. **Read chapters 9 – 16 of the Gospel of Mark.**
 - a) We suggest you read through “Mark 9 – 16: Theme and Purpose” on page 4 before you begin your reading of Mark 9 – 16. As you read, you also may find the glossary of terms and concepts (“Who or What Is . . . ?”) on pages 4 – 5 helpful.
 - b) Use the “To Guide Your Reading” section on pages 6 - 9 to help you think through what you have read, paying particular attention to questions in boldface.
2. If possible, **attend, listen to, or watch the DVD of the Pastor's Introduction.**
3. Read and recite **this month's memory verse** often! It is:

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” – Mark 13: 31

Our goal and prayer is that you will walk away from each study having had at least one important insight that informs your faith and your knowledge of God's Word. In other words, we hope you will discover a “message” just for you!

AT YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Welcome

Welcome to the November meeting of your *Living the Message* Bible discovery group. In order to keep to your agreed-upon time frame, place a clock where it is clearly visible or ask someone to be “timekeeper” and let the group know when 15 minutes remain for discussion and closing.

Opening Prayer

Pause to quiet your hearts and minds with a few moments of silent prayer. Then have someone open with his or her own prayer or pray the following together:

Dear Lord,

The freedom to study your Word is one we too often take for granted. We thank you for that freedom and ask that you guide our hearts and minds as we discuss and discover your Word together.

Amen.

This Month’s Memory Verse

Recite this month’s memory verse (including the book, chapter, and verse) together as a group.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” – Mark 13: 31

Getting Under Way

Take time for each person to share thoughts on the following:

- As Thanksgiving Day approaches, is there something for which you are particularly thankful this year?

Setting the Scene

Before beginning discussion, invite your small group facilitator and anyone else who attended, listened to, or saw the DVD of the Pastor’s introduction to Mark 9 – 16 to share what they learned.

Discuss Together

Go to “To Guide Your Reading” on pages 6 – 9. Discuss together the questions in boldface and/or others of the questions that particularly struck members of your group. Remember, a good discussion on fewer questions is better than rushing through all the questions. If you wish, ask if any of the questions (boldface or not) were of particular interest to someone and begin there.

Closing Remarks and Prayer

FOR NEXT MONTH

Our next meeting will be in December:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

Person to Contact with Questions: _____

December's Reading Assignment: Titus

December's Memory Verse:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us... according to his mercy. – Titus 3: 4-5

Save the date! Next Pastor's Introductions:

- Mpls:** Monday, December 5, at 7:00 p.m., Room 482-486
- West:** Thursday, December 1, at 7:00 p.m., Room 310, CFL

CLOSING PRAYER

Gather prayer concerns from the group. If someone is comfortable doing so, ask that person to pray aloud a prayer bringing these concerns to God, or take time for silent prayer during which these concerns can be brought to God. End with a prayer of your own, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, or by praying the following together:

Dear Lord,

*In these chapters, we have walked with you to the cross, and have learned much more about living in your kingdom with you as king in our lives. As we go on our way and resume our daily lives, bring our hearts and minds back often to what we have read and learned, so that in all we do, we bring honor and glory to your name. And help us to live in full awareness of the suffering you endured on our behalf so that we may know more fully, too, the joy and promise of the resurrection and the assurance of life eternal in your heavenly kingdom. When we gather this month at our Thanksgiving tables, give us grateful hearts and use us to bless others through the gifts you have given us. We ask, too, that you grant grace, healing, and peace to those in pain and sorrow. In your name we pray,
Amen.*

FOLLOWING YOUR SMALL GROUP MEETING

Ponder

If you had a day with Jesus, what would you want to do or ask?

Mark 9 – 16: Theme & Purpose

Mark's Gospel is arranged around three major events in which Jesus is declared to be the Son of God: Jesus' baptism, the transfiguration, and the crucifixion. In the first two, it is God who makes the declaration; in the third, it is a Roman officer at the foot of the cross. This progression fits Mark's purposes. From the very first verse we know Mark's purpose is to tell the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As we move through the Gospel, we learn more and more about the full nature of Jesus. It is only when we meet Christ at the cross and experience the joy of his resurrection, however, that we fully can understand the "good news of Jesus."

In addition to emphasizing Jesus' deeds more than his teachings, Mark presents a Jesus with very human emotions, including: compassion (1:41); strong displeasure (1:43); sighs (8:12); indignation (10:14); love (10:21); anger (11:15); fear and anguish (14:35-36; 15:34). This stresses Jesus' humanity, helping us to see him as both fully human and fully divine.

In this month's reading, we walk with Jesus to Jerusalem—and to the cross. Much of it may be very familiar. Sometimes familiarity causes us to read less carefully or to read assumptions into the text. An example is the story of the rich man in Mark 10:17-22. At the end, the rich man goes away, grieving because he has so many possessions. Have you ever considered the possibility that he is sad because, while it will be very hard, he plans to do what Jesus says and return? We do not know; the Bible does not tell us. If the rich man does not follow what Jesus says he must do, we have a story about how the love of wealth and the lifestyle it allows can separate us from a deeper relationship with Jesus. If the rich man does return, we move beyond that to a consideration of not only the dangers of wealth, but also the proper use and place of wealth in our lives and hearts. As you read, then, key into details and ask new questions of the familiar.

Three times in Mark, Jesus announces his coming death and resurrection (8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34), and three times the disciples misunderstand (8:32-33; 9:32; 10:35-40). In each instance, Jesus responds to the disciples' misunderstanding by explaining what it means to follow him. As you read, look for what some of those teachings are.

You will notice that there are three endings to Mark's Gospel. That is because the manuscripts we have differ in their endings. Most of the earliest manuscripts end with verse 8. Because of its abruptness, however, many scholars feel that the original ending must have been lost from or mutilated in manuscripts early on. The other endings, then, would have been composed to remedy the loss, with the longer ending perhaps pulled from parts of the other Gospels.

Who or What Is . . . ?

Chief Priests/Pharisees/Scribes. The chief priests, along with other leaders such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, formed a council that the Roman authority allowed to make decisions regarding local matters. Pharisees, believed in following God's law as closely as possible, and often set themselves apart as being more "pure" or "good" than others. Scribes were experts on the law who worked with these religious and political authorities.

Eye of the Needle. This could figuratively describe the narrow, low gate of the city walls that was used when the larger public gate was locked after dark. A man had to "lower" himself to enter that gate. A camel would literally have to kneel and crawl through it.

Hosanna. This word comes from a Hebrew phrase (*hoshiya na*) meaning *Save now!* In the Old Testament, it is used to call upon God for help and deliverance (Psalm 118:25), and is most often followed by words of praise (see Psalm 118:26-29).

Judea. When Israel was divided into two kingdoms in 922 B.C.E., the northern area was called Israel and the southern area, Judah. After Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E., it was known as Judea and its people as Judeans or Jews. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, but later lived in Galilee. John's Gospel indicates that Jesus often went to Judea and frequently taught in the temple at Jerusalem. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, however, suggest that Jesus made only one trip to Jerusalem at the end of his ministry.

Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread. The Passover Festival celebrates how God rescued the Jews from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12: -- 13:16). As part of the remembrance, Jewish men were expected to make the pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem to make sacrifices to God. The Festival of Unleavened Bread begins the day after Passover and lasts seven days. During this time, unleavened bread was eaten as a reminder that in the escape they had to leave so quickly that they could not wait for the bread to rise. The festival also became a time to thank God for the grain harvest.

Son of David. The Jews believed the Messiah would come from the line of King David (2 Samuel 7:12-16), so when Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as "Son of David" (Mark 10:47-48), he is recognizing Jesus as the expected Messiah—something the disciples have yet to completely understand.

Son of God. The demons and unclean spirits know Jesus as the Son of God. The only time in Mark that human lips confess Jesus as the Son of God is in the moment following the tearing of the temple curtain (15:39). Mark draws us to the cross throughout the Gospel where we also are called to make our confession of Jesus as the Son of God.

Son of Man. Jesus is the only one who uses this expression, and he uses it to identify himself. It has three meanings: (1) Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins (2:10), and he is the Lord of the Sabbath (2:28); (2) Jesus suffers, is rejected, is handed over for crucifixion, and after three days rises (8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41); (3) Jesus' death will be vindicated, and he will reign as Lord, seated at the right hand of God and coming in the clouds with great power and glory (13:26; 14:62).

Temple. The temple in Jerusalem was the religious, cultural, and economic center for Jews. Vendors sold animals for making sacrifices to God, and because temple tax could not be paid with coins that had images on them (Exodus 20:4), money changers set up shop. Often these vendors and money changers took advantage of and cheated their customers. Mark uses the temple as the central focus of the Passion Narrative (11:1-15:47). Jesus teaches about the temple's destruction and attending signs of the end when the Son of Man returns (13:3-37).

Transfiguration. This refers to when Jesus' appearance changes to a brilliant white, radiant glory in front of three of his disciples (Mark 9:2-8).

Four Watches of the Night. In Mark, the story of Jesus' passion corresponds to the four watches of the night: Evening, midnight, cock crow, and dawn.

To Guide Your Reading

Use the following divisions and questions to guide your reading and personal reflection, jotting down your thoughts in the space between each question. For those who wish, we have suggested a three-week schedule to help you in your reading and reflection.

Questions in boldface are the ones we suggest for consideration at your small group meeting. Groups are free, however, to focus on whatever questions are of most interest.

WEEK 1 – MARK 9:1 – 10:52

Do not be put off by the number of questions for this section. It is a particularly rich section dealing with several key issues prevalent in Mark. Many are quite simple or “opinion” questions, though, so no worries! 😊

- 1. Mark 9:2-5 tells about the “transfiguration of Jesus,” which we celebrate the Sunday before Ash Wednesday each year. Where are Jesus and the disciples? Why was Peter speechless? What happens, and who do the disciples see besides Jesus?**
- 2. In 9:7, a cloud appears and God says what? What happens next?**
- 3. In 9:14-18, what is the situation? What connection do you see between Jesus’ response in verse 19 and what the father and Jesus say in verses 22-24? Read the rest of the story in verses 25-29, paying close attention to what Jesus does and says. Does Jesus wait for the man’s “doubt” to be resolved before he heals? **To what extent do you think doubt and belief can co-exist in faith?****
4. Thinking about Jesus’ words in 9:19 and 9:29, what might this story be saying about the role of prayer in faith?
5. Read 9:33-37. How would you explain what Jesus says in verse 35? If most people lived this way, how might things be different?

NOTE: Beginning with Chapter 10, Jesus moves from Galilee in the north of Palestine to Judea in the south, as he makes his way to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die.

8. In 10:1-12, Pharisees try to trap Jesus with a question of religious law. In his answer, where does Jesus put a greater emphasis—divorce or God's intention for marriage?

9. **In 10:17-22, is the rich man speaking with humility or arrogance? What if his sad departure is because he plans to do what Jesus asks, but knows he will miss the lifestyle he is giving up? What do you think you would do?**

10. Read the entry on “eye of the needle” on page 5, then read 10:23-31. What clues do you find that indicate this passage is about the dangers of wealth more than a condemnation of wealth or the wealthy?

11. Where is Jesus traveling to in 10:32? Who is with him? What does he tell them?

12. **In 10:52, Jesus says Bartimaeus’s sight has been restored because of what? How strong do you think the connection is between faith and healing? Does a lack of healing necessarily mean a lack of faith?**

13. **Where in your reading thus far do you see Jesus’ power and kingship emerging?**

WEEK TWO – Mark 11:1 – 12:44

1. As you read 11:1-11, picture it in your mind. Where is Jesus? Who is with him? What does he tell two of them to do? Does Jesus appear at all “kingly” as he enters Jerusalem? When the crowd shouts “*Hosanna*,” imagine them shouting “Save us,” which it means in Hebrew (see page 5). How might that have added to the dismay of the religious and political leaders?
2. Read 11:15-19 and the entry “Temple” on page 5. What is your reaction to Jesus’ anger and actions? What does Jesus say the purpose of the temple is? What purposes do you think churches serve today?
3. As you read 12:1-12, consider the vineyard to be Israel; the tenants, the Jewish people; the slaves, the prophets who delivered God’s messages; and the son, Jesus. With that in mind, try to summarize what Jesus is telling his listeners in the parable.
4. In 12:38-40, what is it that Jesus condemns in the scribes’ behavior? What kind of so-called “religious” attitudes or behaviors in today’s world might Jesus condemn?

WEEK THREE – Mark 13:1 – 16:20

1. In Chapter 13, Jesus tells his disciples about God’s future kingdom. What in this chapter confuses or concerns you? Where do you find hope or comfort? How does 13:13 fit with other things Jesus has said earlier in Mark?

2. Read 14:12-25. After eating the Passover feast with the disciples, what did Jesus do with some of the bread and wine? What Lutheran sacrament is based on this “Last Supper”? Why do you think we participate in the sacrament of communion time and again instead of just once?

3. In Mark 14:32-42, Jesus wrestles alone with his fears and grief. What does he ask God to do? Do Jesus’ feelings and request surprise you? What does the fact that he felt this way say about the nature of Jesus?

4. **In 14:53-65, Jesus’ own words convict him of the crime of blasphemy in the eyes of his accusers. What are those words? Jesus suffered great pain and death for declaring his true identity. What are some things that keep us from declaring who Jesus is and the gospel message to others? Where might we find the courage and direction we need to be better messengers of the gospel?**

5. Thinking back on Chapters 14 – 16, which scenes are most memorable? Sad or disturbing? Personally meaningful?

6. **As we end our reading and discussion of Mark, what new insights have you gained into Jesus’ teachings, life, and/or purpose? What questions are you left with? Of the titles used for Jesus in Mark, which has the most meaning for you? Why?**