



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

The Gospel of Mark

LEADERS GUIDE

“The Lion of St. Mark, Symbol of Venice,” completed in the fourteenth century by artist Donato Veneziano, depicts a winged lion, the traditional symbol for Mark the Evangelist. Legend has it that a few ninth-century Venetians stole the body of Mark from his tomb in Alexandria, Egypt, and brought it to Venice, after which Mark was declared Venice’s patron saint. Relics of Mark’s body, perhaps his skeletal remains, supposedly now reside in Venice’s basilica, which is dedicated to him.

Mark records the “beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1). Powerful in word and deed, Jesus is Daniel’s “Son of Man” and Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant.” Traditionally, it is believed that Mark was a close associate of the apostle Peter, and that Mark preserved Peter’s preaching about Jesus in his Gospel. For Mark, for Peter, and for all of us, we cannot go to a place to venerate the bones of our Lord. Rather, with joyful hope in the resurrection, we believe “He has risen; He is not here” (16:6).



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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 57.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session;
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion-leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (25-30 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week.

Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places, some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study and Worship

Resources

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Jesus Begins His Ministry to Defeat Sin and Evil

Mark 1:1–1:28

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Jesus the Christ came into human history in accord with God's promise.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. understand the plan of God to bring salvation to humanity;
2. recognize some of the unique features in Mark's approach to telling this story; and
3. begin to appreciate the urgency of God's plan and Mark's account.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

O Lord Jesus, bless my study of Your life and ministry as it has been recorded and shared by Your servant St. Mark. Send Your Holy Spirit to guide me into the truth. Thank You for revealing Yourself and Your great love for me. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

1 The Gospel of Jesus Christ Is Introduced (1:1)

The kids were antsy, and understandably so. Family vacation time was at hand. It was going to start TOMORROW! For weeks, their parents had been telling them about what was in store for them on this trip. Now the time was at hand. The kids were restless with anticipation and wanting to do nothing more than jump right in for the adventure. They could not sleep a wink all night!

As the Book of Mark opens, God's promised time had arrived. He had acted in time and history throughout the years, as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. He had demonstrated His love for humanity by delivering those who trusted in His promises. Now those promises were going to culminate decisively in the person and work of His Son, Jesus the Messiah, or the "Christ." The four New Testament Gospels give the written record of the decisive entrance into human history by God Himself to save a sinful humanity and restore meaning to existence.

In the Gospel according to Mark, God reveals to people good news about His love and forgiveness. People desperately need good news, for no one wants to experience God's righteous judgment. Some people foolishly think that they can come up with other ways of avoiding God's judgment. Yet Scripture affirms that there is no other Gospel than the one that deals with the person and work of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6–9; John 14:6).

None of the four Gospels contain explicit statements naming their authors. When you stop and think about it, you can see that this is appropriate, for a number of reasons. As was printed on the back of one pastor's business cards: "If we meet and you forget me, you have lost nothing; but if you meet Jesus Christ and forget Him,

you have lost everything.” The Gospels do not mention their authors’ names so as to avoid drawing attention away from the one who is supremely important in the account. The lack of such “author credits” also shows proper humility in the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the co-author—really the primary author—of every biblical book (2 Peter 1:20–21). The books of the Bible are appropriately called God’s Word. The Holy Spirit’s authorship ensures their reliability, authority, and infallibility.

Still, it is helpful to be aware of the human author. The Holy Spirit used the distinctive God-given abilities, talents, and circumstances of each Bible writer in much the same way that a gifted artist can capture the same subject matter accurately and beautifully but also uniquely with different artistic tools, such as charcoal, watercolor, and clay. Christian leaders of the Early Church passed along traditions about the authorship of the Gospels so we today can see how they understood these matters. A number of early Christian writers—including Irenaeus (died ca. 200), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215), Tertullian (ca. 160–ca. 225), and Origen (ca. 185–254)—attribute the Gospel we are studying to John Mark, companion to the apostles Paul and Peter in the Bible. The Early Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–ca. 339) preserved a tradition reported by an early Christian writer named Papias (ca. 60–130). Papias said his information came from his teacher “John the Presbyter,” which is thought by many to be another title for John the evangelist and apostle. Papias recorded that this John identified Mark as both the writer of the Gospel and the “interpreter” of Peter.

(Apparently Peter was gifted more as a preacher than as a writer. Peter had Silvanus help him write down his first epistle [1 Peter 5:12]. In that same letter, by the way, Peter affectionately referred to Mark as “my son” [1 Peter 5:13]).

Thus, Mark was a committed Christian leader who spent a lot of quality time with Peter. Mark surely heard Peter preach on many occasions. Years had passed since the first Pentecost. The events of Jesus’ life and ministry had been seen by eyewitnesses such as Peter, but these eyewitnesses were getting older. Their testimony had to be preserved for future generations. God equipped Mark with the talent and ability to take down a “deposition,” as it were, from the leader of the apostles.

Where was the Gospel according to Mark written? To whom was it specifically addressed? The book itself does not say. However, Early Church Fathers who com-

mented on this point stated that it was written in Rome. So Mark most likely had Roman readers in mind. Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels. Compared to the other Gospels, Mark gives greater emphasis to what Jesus *did* than what He *said*. Was this due to an emphasis in Peter’s preaching that reflects a man of action? Or did it reflect the special needs of Mark’s original audience, people who had heard more promises than accomplishments from the rulers of their day? Maybe both, and perhaps these are not the only reasons! When God fulfills the greatest of His promises, you just want to jump in, don’t you?

2 God Sends John the Baptizer to Prepare for Jesus’ Ministry (1:2–8)

After verse 1, which is something of a title for his book, Mark quotes the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament). This quote comes in part from Isaiah (40:3), a prophet who had lived over seven hundred years beforehand. However, its opening words come from another prophet, Malachi (3:1).

Older translations, such as the King James Version, have Mark refer to *the prophets*, the section of Hebrew Scripture that foretold the Messiah, rather than specifically to *Isaiah the prophet*. Many modern translations, such as the English Standard Version, follow the wording of manuscripts that are more ancient but have been discovered more recently. These manuscripts mention only Isaiah. This is not really a problem, any more than when people today refer to Sears, Roebuck and Company simply as Sears. The Isaiah text can be argued to be most important for the point at hand.

This is the only place in this Gospel where Mark put an identifying flag, as it were, on an Old Testament quotation. His audience of Romans may not have cared too much about the Hebrew Scriptures. Still, Mark gives this quote pride of place at the beginning of his book. For even Gentiles in the empire understood that a religious message built on prophecies dating back a number of centuries deserved more serious consideration than something brand new. Perhaps better than we know today, they appreciated the timeless quality of truth. God had provided salvation for all people of all times and not just a few special people at a particular time of history. As an old preacher liked to say, “Give me that old-time religion; if it’s new, it’s not for you!”

The words quoted from Malachi appear to be addressed by God to the Messiah, the anointed deliverer: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare

Your way.” The words from Isaiah again mention the Messiah’s “way” and speak of the messenger preparing people for His arrival by preaching in the wilderness. Thus Mark introduces John the Baptizer, a mighty prophet of God who had a brief but very significant ministry.

The ancient historian Josephus (ca. 37–ca. 100) characterized John the Baptizer as a good man who exhorted Jews to live virtuously and practice piety. John proved to be outspoken against sin. Any thought that John was motivated by something other than a zeal for God seemed ridiculous when people looked at his simple lifestyle. John the Baptizer’s endorsement of Jesus and His ministry was notable, for John did not hesitate to speak of Jesus, His ministry, and His mission as being far greater than himself and his own role. Even so, John proclaimed “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4).

The Baptism we have received also forgives sins. This Baptism is instituted by God. It is truly God’s work rather than that of people. People submit to Baptism at God’s gracious invitation. Our part in Baptism can be likened to cashing a gift check that we have received. Luther’s Small Catechism rightly states: “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.” The emphasis falls on God’s doing.

Baptism works only because God has declared that it works. When God declares something, it surely comes to pass. Even the faith that receives the gift offered in Baptism comes about only by God’s power. Thus, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” God, not the person being baptized, remains the primary one acting in Baptism. Baptism, therefore, is a matter of Gospel, not of Law. This, by the way, is one of the many reasons why the Baptism of infants is appropriate.

3 Jesus Is Baptized and Tested by the Evil Enemy (1:9–13)

Mark’s account of Jesus’ Baptism by John the Baptizer is brief, especially compared to the more detailed account in Matthew 3:13–17. All four Gospels speak of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus as a dove. Mat-

thew and Luke join Mark in recounting the voice from heaven giving witness to Jesus’ special status with words affirming Him to be God’s beloved Son who especially pleased His heavenly Father. Here the other two persons of the triune God affirm Jesus as the genuine Messiah and as the Son of God. Thus the point about Jesus’ deity is underscored right at the beginning of Mark.

God had sent into the world the long-promised Savior from sin. Jesus’ Baptism started His three-year public ministry. The apostles did not forget this fact. Later, after Jesus ascended into heaven and ended His visible ministry on the earth, the apostles felt the need to replace Judas. The replacement had to be a man who had been accompanying Jesus “beginning from the baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us” (Acts 1:22).

As St. Paul would later declare, we are united with Christ in Baptism (Romans 6:3–9). Among other things, the Baptism of Jesus can be seen as a betrothal ceremony with His Bride, the Church. What God has joined together, let not man separate!

Then the same Spirit who had gently descended upon Jesus like a dove threw Him out into the wilderness. Not that Jesus resisted the Spirit’s work; throughout the Scriptures, the three persons in the one divine Trinity work in harmony to accomplish the mission of bringing salvation to humankind. Here, as elsewhere, the Spirit was thrusting Jesus out into the world.

Mark’s description of Jesus’ temptation is not as detailed as the accounts of Matthew (4:1–11) or Luke (4:1–13). In a way, this lack of detail makes a valuable point. It might help us not to limit our concept of Satan’s work. Yes, the devil was trying to keep Jesus from His mission to save us and, over the long haul, Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness added up to an intense time that might be likened to boot camp for beginning military personnel. In fact, Jesus battled with Satan throughout His ministry. (By the way, the Lord employed a period of “forty” days or years on other notable occasions. For example, there had been the forty days of rainfall that produced Noah’s flood, and forty years of wandering in the wilderness for Israel.)

We should be careful to distinguish between *being* tempted and *giving in* to temptation. Jesus, the Son of God Himself, was tempted. In Hebrews 4:15, we read that this is good news for us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Luther cited a book of “old fathers”

that put it this way: “You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can certainly prevent them from building a nest in your hair” (Ewald Plass, ed., *What Luther Says* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959], § 4317).

4 Jesus Begins Proclaiming the Gospel (1:14–20)

Jesus was now ready to do what God had promised to bring about the salvation of the human race. He started by proclaiming the good news of God’s forgiveness of sin. As John the Baptizer’s ministry began to wind down with his arrest, the Galilean ministry of Jesus commenced.

Jesus had grown up in Galilee, the area where some of the tribes of the Northern Kingdom once lived. Some of the people who dwelt in Jerusalem tended to look down on this area. After all, Jerusalem had the temple! It was the place where people were to gather together for the great religious festivals such as Passover. Yet Jesus started preaching in Galilee. Galilee was not as populated by ambitious climbers who would be involved in the politics of temple administration, the business of the Council (the Sanhedrin), and so forth. In Galilee, Jesus could conduct a ministry that would have more of an opportunity to define itself than to be defined by others in a place like Jerusalem.

Jesus began to proclaim the Gospel of God. This Gospel was indeed “of God” for at least two reasons. First, it was Good News that had God as its source. The Good News came about by God’s initiative. When it comes to forgiveness and the granting of eternal life, God has to initiate. No one else can. God needs no forgiveness. Further, only God can create life. Humans really have no basis to initiate a covenant with God.

Second, the Gospel is “of God” because it is all about Him. There is good news because of what *He* has done. The Gospel is the story of God and His gracious promises and actions for sinful humans. There is no real good news like this in what mankind has done or can do. God’s grace is not earned or merited. It comes freely and generously from God.

Jesus announced that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand. In previous centuries, the Gospel had been announced on the basis of God’s guarantee to Adam and Eve that He would send a deliverer. This promise had been repeated many times over the years by God’s prophets. They narrowed the focus of where people were to look for the fulfillment of the

promise, and they gave more details about the way God would bring it to pass. Now the opportune time had finally arrived!

People were to repent and believe. They were to turn from evil and self-centered thinking and trust in God’s promises. For the omniscient, omnipotent, loving God is both able and willing to keep His promises. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He has not forgotten about us, nor does He misunderstand our true needs. God is not incapable of action. He does not need our help. God will not give us excuses, then fail to deliver on His promises. He loves us more than we could possibly love ourselves, and He wants better things for us than we would know to provide for ourselves.

While the Gospel proclaims God’s own work, God graciously gives us important things to do in response to His great gift. When I was a child, my mother would give me busywork so I would not get in the way of her accomplishing things that had to be done. Later I understood that these tasks had been “junk jobs” that did not need to be finished. They were designed to keep me occupied. As I got older, I resented being assigned that kind of junk job.

In contrast, God has commissioned us to be about the task that He has nearest and dearest to His heart. It is said that God once held a conversation with the archangel Michael. Michael asked God, “What happens if your people fail to respond to Your command to reach out? What is plan B?” God said, “Plan B? There is no plan B!”

In fact, all the works that God has prepared for us to walk in (Ephesians 2:10) are good. God Himself works through them to love and care for His creation. Those who are righteous by faith in Christ can find real satisfaction in doing these works. For these are most certainly not junk jobs. Still more, these are the very ways in which we want to walk when we are in Christ.

5 Jesus Proves Himself to Be Authoritative (1:21–28)

In Capernaum on a Sabbath day, Jesus went where we would expect a sincere religious Jew to go: the synagogue. Synagogue services were not built around professional clergy. To a casual observer, Jesus appeared to be a pious Jewish man around thirty years old. As such, He read the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue and commented on them.

It quickly became apparent to the crowd that this was

an articulate man with real convictions and understanding. He was not a mere technician pronouncing all the words correctly yet with cool indifference. No, this Jesus spoke with sincerity. He was not constantly quoting one rabbi here and another rabbi there. He spoke with authority.

A demon-possessed man attended the synagogue that day too. (Demons are fallen angels. They have neither grown nor diminished in their number since the time of their great fall.) The demon in this man knew precisely who Jesus was. He was well aware of what people at the time could not see by human eyes. This demon understood that he was in the presence of the one who had made the world and who would overthrow demonic works (1 John 3:8). So the demon spoke through the man: (Mark 1:24) "I know who You are—the Holy One of God."

Jesus refused to be patronized. Just as the demon knew Jesus, Jesus knew the demon. He knew that the demon had chosen to oppose Him and no change would come about in that hostility. Demons don't repent; they just continue looking at God in vain for some Achilles' heel that does not exist.

Jesus used His superior strength and position to command the demon to be silent. Otherwise the demon would have looked for an opportunity to speak some kind of well-placed lie to undermine Jesus' mission. Jesus would not play that game and allow that to happen.

The second command Jesus gave the demon was to come out of the man. Jesus Himself is the Word (John 1:1), who was there at the beginning. Nothing was made without Him, including this demon—once a good angel now gone bad. All things were called into existence by the Word of God. Now Jesus' word was all that was necessary to defeat the demon. Notably, Jesus did not make use of any "props" or speak any incantations. At the word of Jesus, the demon came out with a last burst of evil and discomfort for the man.

The people at the Capernaum synagogue were all amazed. They talked among themselves about everything they had witnessed. They spoke to others, and Jesus' fame spread throughout the region of Galilee. The public ministry of Jesus was off to a significant and powerful start. The promises of God were being fulfilled in the world in the sight of people.

Conclusion

Our sins had separated us from the holy and righteous

God who created us. However, He looked on us with His love and mercy. In His genius, He came up with a plan of salvation that dealt with sin in perfect justice but offers sinners perfect mercy through His own great sacrifice in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to live, die, and rise for our salvation. He appeared and conducted His ministry in time and space, as it had been promised and prophesied beforehand in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Mark is fairly breathless as he tells this "greatest story ever told" because it is so very important. Notice Mark's frequent use of the word *immediately*.

(2 Corinthians 6:2) "Behold," wrote St. Paul, "now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." It's that important and that urgent—even for Christians. Thank God for Mark! He lost none of the appropriate sense of urgency as God gave him the ability and opportunity to write down Peter's recollections of Jesus' three-year ministry.

Fittingly, Mark called his book "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." This good news reverberates to our own day. I hope you can't wait to join me in the adventure as we continue our study of Mark!

Concluding Activities

Close with a prayer incorporating key thoughts from the lesson. Then distribute Study Leaflet 2 as participants leave.

Jesus Heals Those Broken by Sin and Evil

Mark 1:29–3:12

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Jesus has the power to heal the effects of sin and evil.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. understand that Jesus brought all kinds of healing, especially the forgiveness of sins;
2. analyze the self-righteous attitude that thinks it needs no help; and
3. apply Jesus' healing Gospel to themselves.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 59.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Lord, bless our study of the Gospel of Mark. Let the life, teaching, works, and atoning sacrifice of Jesus impress its life-giving power upon our hearts. Let it strengthen our spirit in faith and love toward You and toward those

You have created in Your own image, just like us. Grant that our study might equip us for enhanced service through the works in which You have prepared for us to walk, to Your glory. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

1 Jesus Heals Many, Then Prays and Preaches (1:29–39)

Jesus is the Great Physician of body and soul. He healed many people of the diseases and illnesses that sin brought into our world. He still hears our prayers and intervenes in our contemporary world by bringing relief and healing to those He chooses to bless in this manner. Sometimes God delays healing, as He did with Job. At other times, He does not heal us of bodily illnesses this side of heaven but instead uses them to shape and perfect our character, as He did with St. Paul's "thorn . . . in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). In every instance, every believer is promised perfect healing in heaven (Revelation 21:4).

As we saw at the end of our last session, Jesus could bring healing like no one else could. This would be an important aspect of His ministry. It would help people trust in Him and His message of salvation.

One of the first people to be healed was Peter's mother-in-law. We have already seen Peter's call to discipleship earlier in Mark 1:16–18. Since Mark's Gospel is thought to reflect the preaching of Peter, it is not surprising to find this particular healing mentioned here. Perhaps it is among the least spectacular of the healings brought about by Jesus, yet it was one of the most personal to Peter.

This incident also illustrates something about the character of the Gospel accounts. Peter's marital status is implied in passing here. The only other biblical information about the marital status of any of the other apostles occurs in 1 Corinthians 9:5, where Paul asserts that he should have the right to take along with him "a believing wife, as do the other apostles." If this healing episode had been omitted and Paul had not written what he did to the church in Corinth, we might have assumed that all the apostles were single. Given the requirement

of unmarried clergy enforced by the Roman Catholic Church, it is especially interesting that the man it considers to have been the first pope was the one apostle that we know for sure was married.

There will always be matters that we might find interesting but that God did not deem essential to address in the Bible. For instance, Scripture has very little to say about the physical descriptions of Jesus and most of the apostles. We need to discipline ourselves to concentrate on what God wants to tell us more than on the items about which we are curious.

Jesus brought healing to many people to help establish for them the more important healing that He wanted to provide for all, namely the healing that comes with the forgiveness of sins. Only this healing matters when we seek to be rescued from the death and separation from God brought into our lives by sin. In Mark 1, we see that Jesus carefully avoided any prospect that the ministry of healing people from diseases in this life would keep Him from the more important ministry that He came to provide: the work of atoning for our sins and bringing the good news of salvation. (Verse 39) "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also," He told His disciples, "for that is why I came out." The parallel passage in Luke (4:43) says, "I was sent for this purpose." During Jesus' three-year ministry, just as today, some people were more interested in what God could do for them in this life than in the more glorious life He has prepared for His children in heaven. Yet Jesus' interests remained consistent and steadfast.

Jesus was also careful not to let the demons speak about Him, for they could not be trusted. They would twist and pervert His message. Demons contribute nothing to healing, building, or blessing. They only pervert, destroy, and bring to ruin. They do only what they are capable of doing, and that is evil. They have completely separated themselves from God, the source of all goodness, healing, and restoration.

Politicians of today try to control who can speak for and about them. Even at its very best, their motivation cannot compare with the motivation of Jesus. Public service for constituencies cannot compare to what was and is the purpose and goal of Jesus' ministry. Politicians may supply us with benefits for a number of years, but only Jesus can provide benefits for all eternity.

2 Jesus Heals a Leper (1:40–45)

The healing of lepers was significant because lepers were

separated from others due to their disease. As termed in the Bible, "leprosy" refers to any number of serious skin diseases, including especially the bacterial disease that is today called Hansen's disease. The Bible does not link all leprosy to the personal sins of those afflicted by it. It is linked to the problems brought into the world by sin since the fall in the Garden of Eden. Sin separates us from God. Leprosy forms a prime case of how sin's effects can separate people from other people.

At the end of Mark 1, a leper approached Jesus with a wonderful statement of faith. He understood that Jesus had power to heal, and he suspected that Jesus had the loving inclination to heal. Jesus indeed healed him, then sternly charged him not to speak of his healing. Jesus told him simply to show himself to the priest and offer a sacrifice in accord with the Law of Moses (Leviticus 14:1–32).

This is not the only time in Mark when Jesus told someone to be quiet about something remarkable they had experienced from the hand of God. These commands caused a nineteenth-century critical biblical scholar named William Wrede to suggest that Mark presented a cover-up that was devised by the apostles. Wrede put forth the idea now called the "Messianic Secret." He said Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah but was later presented as such by the apostles. These apostles then needed to explain why they said Jesus was the Messiah, even though Jesus had made no such claim of His own. Wrede theorized that the commands to silence in the Gospels were invented by the apostles. He did not think these commands were genuine words of Jesus.

A simpler explanation for the commands to silence does not alter or impugn the Bible text. It is that Jesus knew people had false ideas about the real mission of God's Messiah. These misconceptions could hinder Him in doing His most essential work, ultimately dying on the cross only to rise from the dead. Just look at what happened in Mark 1. The leper disregarded Jesus' command to silence, and then the Jesus who had wanted to go and preach in the next towns could no longer enter these places openly. He had become a sensation as a miraculous healer because the healed leper did not keep quiet about the healing. This man probably thought he was doing Jesus an honor, giving credit where it was due. He thought he knew better than Jesus when he disregarded the Lord's command.

Just think of the great number of biblical instances in which people thought they could help God out with their wisdom or action. Abraham's wife Sarah (then

called Sarai) tried to help out God when she thought He had “dropped the ball” and missed the window of opportunity to provide her with a baby. She decided she would make a huge sacrifice by authorizing her servant to help her in providing Abraham with the child he wanted so badly (Genesis 16). The Lord had not asked for Sarah’s assistance, though, and she ended up preparing the way for the Arab-Israeli conflict that continues to this very day.

Similarly, Sarah’s daughter-in-law Rebekah decided to help God out in fulfilling His promise to her that her favored younger son, Jacob, would be served by her older son (Genesis 25:23). Rebekah’s husband, Isaac, favored the older son, Esau. Rebekah helped her favored son, Jacob, deceive his father by presenting himself as Esau. Feeble Isaac could no longer see clearly and was duped into pronouncing his special blessing on his younger son instead of the older one. Rebekah’s reward for lying to her husband in an effort to help God was that her beloved younger son had to flee from the wrath of his older brother. She never saw him again (Genesis 27).

Now, in the passage before us at the end of Mark 1, thanks to the “help” of the healed leper, Jesus found it necessary to conduct His ministry in more desolate places (Mark 1:45). The leper’s “help” altered the course of the public ministry of Jesus, reducing the number of people Jesus could have had contact with.

The ministry that is to be conducted in name of Jesus today can face a similar problem. Ask any pastor or church secretary how helping people with problems like food and lodging for this life can create a line of people at the church door who demonstrate little interest in the primary mission and ministry of the church. People looking for handouts can divert the church from sharing the eternal Gospel if Christians don’t fight to keep their focus and expend their time and energy accordingly.

I hasten to add that this is in no way to discourage legitimate efforts to help the needy out of Christian love. After all, Jesus did not stop healing people after His experience with the leper who couldn’t keep a secret. First things first, though—which includes bringing the Gospel to those who come wanting a handout!

3 Jesus Heals a Paralytic (2:1–12)

Jesus returned to the city of Capernaum, which served as a “home base” for Him at this time. Perhaps He had been told by Peter to treat Peter’s house as His own. In

any event, as Mark 2 begins, many people were crammed into the house where Jesus was.

Jesus was preaching to what appears to have been a mixed crowd of people. Some believed, while others hardened their hearts to Him and sought to find fault. Do you know anyone who belongs to one political party but attends the rallies of another party, or even those of another candidate in the same party, in order to cause trouble and look for something to criticize?

Jesus posed a threat to many who did not want anything to happen that could cause them to lose a position or status that they had managed to secure. The interest of such people was not in the well-being of God’s people, nor was it in the interest of their own eternal souls. Instead, it was focused on their temporal welfare and comfort.

While Jesus was preaching, four men carrying a paralyzed friend approached the house. They found the place too crowded to enter, but they were determined to present their paralyzed friend to Jesus so he might be healed. So they made their way to the roof, probably by steps set alongside the house for this purpose. Then they made a hole in the ceiling above the place where Jesus was preaching, and they lowered the paralyzed man down through the hole so that he was right in front of Jesus.

How wonderful it is when people invest their time and energy on behalf of others! The determination of these four friends caused one clever pastor to give this title to his sermon on this incident: “Four of a Kind Beats a Full House.” These four friends focused on the solution to the problem rather than letting themselves be deterred by the obstacles in front of them.

For His part, Jesus viewed the interruption positively. He announced to the paralytic that his sins were forgiven. Here Jesus was healing the paralytic of his greater and more basic root problem rather than the symptomatic manifestation of sin’s power that took the form of the man’s paralysis.

Scribes gasped, for only God could forgive sins. Jesus sensed their hostility. He openly addressed their antagonistic thoughts. Jesus asked them to determine what was easier to do: to proclaim the forgiveness of the paralytic’s sins, or to declare him healed and send him away walking? Without waiting for them to reply, Jesus healed the paralytic just as He had forgiven the man’s sins—with His word. The man walked away. This was but one instance in which Jesus used a miracle that

could be seen to support the truth of a spiritual reality that could not be seen. In this case, He demonstrated His ability to bring about the full healing of those who had been broken by the power of sin.

One more story to prove the point about what the four friends did to help the paralyzed man: “In the days of sailing ships, two evangelists were aboard a vessel crossing the Atlantic. When a fire broke out in the hold of the ship, the one said: ‘Brother, let us go to the far end of the ship and pray!’ ‘No, sir,’ responded the other. ‘We’re going to stand right here and pass water buckets—and pray at the same time!’ Prayer and action are the Christian’s two willing hands” (Donald L. Deffner and Richard Andersen, *For Example* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977], 166–67). Just so, the four friends show us the spirit of intercessory prayer. They banded together and put their friend and his problem before the Lord in the most literal way possible.

4 Jesus Calls a Disciple and Defends His Disciples and His Authority (2:13–2:28)

As Jesus continued to go about preaching, He saw a man named Levi sitting at a tax booth. (Levi is the Hebrew name of the apostle we know as Matthew; see Matthew 9:9.) Jesus called on this tax collector to follow Him, which is just what happened.

Levi (or Matthew) might well have been surprised to receive Jesus’ gracious invitation; perhaps even more surprised than the fishermen Simon, Andrew, James, and John had been in Mark 1. Tax collectors were generally viewed by pious Jews as traitors. They were too closely aligned with the hated foreign and pagan government of Rome to be considered true godly men. Still more, they were notorious for using their authority to extort money. People generally considered them to be dishonest.

Not surprisingly, Jesus’ detractors seized this opportunity to try to discredit Him. He responded by speaking of the work of a physician. Remember, Jesus was on a mission to heal. Here He identified Himself as one who came with healing for those who were sick. With a little sarcasm, He pointed out that He had not come to help people like the Pharisees. Just like a physician, Jesus was not needed by those who were “well.” Yet those who were “sick” saw their need for Him only too well.

The truth of the matter was stated at a later time by Jesus’ apostle Paul in Romans 3:10–12: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” (This is Paul’s paraphrase of Psalm 14:1–3 and Psalm 53:1–3.) The fact is that everyone needs God’s salvation, but some in their pride never admit it.

The “scribes of the Pharisees” who were present when Jesus ate with Matthew were prideful men. They trusted in their own righteousness instead of the righteousness given by God. Jesus made His point to them without getting engaged in a fruitless debate with such hard-hearted men.

The Pharisees then tried to pit Jesus against John the Baptizer by complaining about the lack of fasting by His disciples. However, Jesus refused to let the customs of the Pharisees keep His disciples from celebrating the coming of the Kingdom and the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom Himself.

In the next incident, the Pharisees sought to impose the letter of their interpretation of Sabbath-keeping on Jesus’ disciples. Jesus would not accept their criticism. The one who proclaimed the Gospel—who in many ways is synonymous with the Gospel—also taught His disciples the true meaning and spirit of the Sabbath law. The Sabbath was established to promote mankind’s health and healing, not to suppress it. The Pharisees were caught in a loveless legalism that looked for power over people instead of power to help people. The Sabbath was designed to ensure that people would have time for communing with God and enjoying quality time with family. As we know from another incident in the Gospels, even someone as positively motivated as Jesus’ friend Martha could fail to provide time for the restoration and building of the soul because of the cares of this world (Luke 10:38–42).

5 Jesus Heals with Continued Opposition by Pharisees (3:1–12)

Whether thinking about God’s blessings or His requirements, the Pharisees and others were laying themselves wide open to spiritual one-upmanship, which always stands out as ugly. It inevitably divides people by pitting them against one another in an unhealthy, critical way. It certainly does not promote a loving approach that nurtures, upbuilds, and heals!

Spiritual one-upmanship is evident in the incident at the synagogue when Jesus encountered a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Sure enough, there were those who were watching Jesus like a hawk so they could accuse Him. They wanted to put Him in His place, and

in so doing appear to advance their own standing as men superior in righteousness.

Sadly, this can happen today when people attend a worship service at some other church and look for things to criticize rather than to edify. Even when people attend the churches in which they hold membership, can't there be a tendency to have "roasted preacher" for Sunday brunch? It would be better instead to discuss applications of the Word of God from the service. Of course, such discussion would run in the exact opposite direction from spiritual one-upmanship. It would challenge us in our discipleship and comfort us after we have been convicted of sins that need forgiveness.

The attitude of the Pharisees at the synagogue service was transparent to Jesus. It caused Him both anger and grief. Yes, He was righteously angry at their self-righteousness. By this they would be known *not* to be His disciples: they were filled with hate, envy, and pride. Of even greater importance, they continued to be like those self-identified healthy people who need no physician.

None of this deterred Jesus from His mission to bring healing, restoration, and love. He healed the man with the withered hand. The Pharisees witnessed another great sign to authenticate to them that Jesus was God's promised Messiah, but they hardened their hearts toward Him.

There is a wise old maxim: "Conflict makes for strange bedfellows." The Pharisees left the synagogue and sought out a group that they normally counted as enemies: the Herodians. Instead of "iron sharpening iron" for something good, when these Pharisees got together with the Herodians there was hatred deepening hatred. Together they planned how to destroy Jesus.

Conclusion

Jesus came to heal sin and evil. In this, He has enjoyed great success, as millions of believers over the centuries can testify. However, in a great number of cases, people have hardened their hearts and want no part of His healing, for they don't think they are sick. This kind of self-righteousness existed among some of the people who saw Jesus in the flesh, and it led some of them to start seeking to kill Him. Think of this: we have barely begun chapter 3 of Mark, and the shadow of the cross is already falling on the pages.

The miraculous healings performed by Jesus served as concrete testimonies to the truth of His claim to bring a still more important healing. He does this by forgiving sins.

No one has ever healed so many people with such a variety of afflictions. All of it was done in plain sight, yet some people blinded themselves. They were blind both to the wonderful nature of Jesus' healing power and their own need for healing. By the power of the Holy Spirit, others believed what they saw. In Jesus' miracles of healing, they found a foretaste of the heart of the Gospel.

Jesus has come to triumph over sin and evil on our behalf. Before Him we must humble ourselves, for He provides healing that none of us can generate. He brings healing that is available from no other source.

Concluding Activities

Close with a prayer incorporating key thoughts from the lesson. Then distribute Study Leaflet 3 as participants leave.