

The Weekly Word

Dec 21-27, 2020

Hello Reading the Bible readers. This week we enjoy the honor of celebrating Christmas, the birth of the Savior. How wonderful! We also continue our read of Mark's gospel, reading chapters 9 and 10. Happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, December 21: Mark 9:2-13 NIV2011

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

¹¹ And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

¹² Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? ¹³ But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The transfiguration of Jesus happens on a mountain with Peter, James and John in attendance. Elijah and Moses appear with Jesus who shines in a dazzling brilliance unknown in the world. Stunned by the event, Peter babbles and then a voice from a cloud announces, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

After this certainly strange event, Jesus instructs them not to say anything until after His resurrection, which they did. But the trio really didn't understand what rising from the dead meant.

More dialogue continues in which Jesus again says that the Son of Man *must suffer much and be rejected*.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Mark's gospel narration is on a trajectory toward Jesus' death and resurrection coupled with the proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God (recall Mark 1:1). So Jesus is ramping up what the disciples see Him say and do.

This miraculous event has a few important elements. First the presence of Moses, the author of the Pentateuch and the great leader of the Exodus of the ancient Israel and Elijah, possibly the greatest OT prophet and the one who prophesied the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 and the virgin birth (Isaiah 7) and the one who will have the government on His shoulders (Isaiah 9). That these OT kingpins would meet with Jesus is incredible affirmation of who Jesus is.

Then there is the voice from the cloud, understood to be from God the Father, saying, *"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"* This statement is similar to what was spoke when Jesus was baptized, *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* (Mk 1:11). It is worth noting that both statements affirm Jesus is the loved Son. At his baptism the voice expresses God's pleasure in Jesus. Now the voice bids Peter, James and John to *listen to Him*. This is another affirmation of Jesus' standing before God Almighty.

So this passage is yet another affirmation of Jesus, God's anointed, the Son of God... the greats of the OT meet with Him and God affirms His love and bids the world to listen to Jesus

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit is bidding me to listen to Jesus... will I truly make Jesus' words the guiding directing voice in my life.

Tuesday, December 22: Mark 9:14-29 NIV2011

¹⁴ *When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.*

¹⁶ *"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.*

¹⁷ *A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."*

¹⁹ *"You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."*

²⁰ *So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.*

²¹ *Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"*

"From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

²³ *"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."*

²⁴ *Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

²⁵ *When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."*

²⁶ *The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.*

²⁸ *After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it*

out?”

²⁹ He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Jesus returns from the transfiguration to find a problem down with the rest of the disciples. Unable to heal a young boy, the disciples found themselves in a row with the teachers of the Law. Two striking moments occur as Jesus arrives and handles the problem.

One, the father of the boy asks Jesus if he can heal his son. Jesus responds, “*If you can? Everything is possible for one who believes.*”²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*”

The second is when Jesus pulls His disciples aside privately after the boy is healed and tells them, “*This kind can come out only by prayer.*”

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Jesus’ healings often contain a teaching element. In His narration of this account Mark makes two points. Affirming that faith is often an ingredient in healings, Mark reminds us that our faith need not be perfect. The father speaking with Jesus says, “*if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.*” Jesus reacts to His qualified request jumping on the ‘if’ in the father’s ask. “*If you can? Everything is possible for one who believes.*” Understanding his faith is lacking, the father responds immediately, “*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*” How many of us could answer Jesus similarly. We have a measure of faith but it is not close to perfect. In this situation we, like the father, need only to ask Jesus to help us overcome any unbelief in our lives. What comfort this bring to everyone who realizes that her or his faith is weak or not fully present. We can ask Jesus for the faith we need to believe!

A second teachable moment comes at the conclusion of the account when Jesus pulls His disciples aside to talk about why they couldn’t heal the boy. “*This kind can come out only by prayer,*” says Jesus. As disciples we do not have perfect connection with the Father. Sin mars our connection with the Father. We don’t hear God perfectly nor do we obey perfectly when we do hear. As Lord Jesus is in perfect communion with the Father when Jesus speaks He speaks as one who is one with the Father. We on the other hand sometimes need first to be in pray, tuning our lives to God’s frequency, hearing from the Father that His will is to heal or we need to ask God to help us overcome our unbelief so healing can take place. Prayer is a disciples’ lifeline with God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

The Spirit is emphasizing for me the father’s line, *I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.* I am a mixed bag; sometimes full of faith and belief and at other times not believing. Sometimes I am full of faith where obedience flows quickly and naturally others times not so much. God invites me to recognize my mixed self and to ask him for the belief when I feel unbelief rising in me. God will grant me everything I need to do His bidding and to live for Him, even supplying the faith I need when I lack faith in a given situation of time or season... Thank you, Lord.

Wednesday, December 23: Mark 9:30-50 NIV2011

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

³⁸ "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

³⁹ "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

⁴² "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ^[44] ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ^[46] ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where

*"the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched."* ^d

⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

In this entire passage Jesus is teaching His disciples. These words are not for the masses per se; they target disciples specifically. Jesus begins reinforcing that He will suffer and die and after three days rise to life again. This has been a theme repeated since the time in Caesarea Philippi. Jesus is preparing His disciples for what will happen in Jerusalem. I can easily understand that without this preparation, the disciples could have crumbled at His death.

After this basic instruction, Jesus touches pointedly on a number of discipleship issues in rapid-fire succession:

Being 'first' by being servant of all

Welcoming children is welcoming Jesus and the Father

Allowing others to do ministry in Jesus' name
The reward for caring in Jesus' name
The penalty for causing those who believe in Jesus to stumble
A call to root out or cut off that which causes one to sin
And so on...

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

There is a number of one liners and brief teachings in this passage. I notice that since these are all directed to disciples, Jesus is intent on teaching His disciples (then and us today) that following Jesus is a significant decision with any number of ramifications for those who will follow Jesus. Living rightly and cutting off that which causes us to sin; welcoming children and others in Jesus name; living in such a way that our life is not a stumbling block to others; and understanding that there are others who are working for God in Jesus' name.

In all this I see a word about personal ethics... living a life that honors Jesus and welcomes others into the fold and into ministry in Jesus' name. How we live matters. Purging sin and living with salt –inviting flavor –is part and parcel of disciple living.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Hold up a mirror to my life... am I living worthily for Jesus. Is my life welcoming to others to come follow Jesus and to join in ministry for Jesus even if their way is different than my way?

Thursday, December 24: Mark 10:1-16 NIV2011

¹ Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. ⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' ⁹ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

As Jesus makes His way toward the cross He emphasizes teaching. I love the phrase ‘as was his custom,’ *Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.* It shows how important teaching was to Jesus.

Two teaching themes show up in this passage. The first teaching regards marriage and divorce, with no provision for divorce mentioned. [Note this text must be paired with other teachings on divorce and remarriage for a fuller Biblical understanding.]

The second topic is children’s access to Jesus. The disciples wanted to limit children’s access to Jesus, but Jesus would have none of it. In fact Jesus uses children to make a significant statement about faith in Jesus. ¹⁵ *Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*”

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Considering verse 15 Jesus makes a profound statement about faith. ¹⁵ *Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*”

Jesus is not opting for childish faith but child-like faith.

I have the great joy of watching my granddaughter grow. Presently she is 28 months old. She is a sponge of learning and much of what she does mimics mom or dad. My daughter is an excellent mom, nurturing and loving. If my granddaughter falls or hurts herself, my daughter comforts her and helps her express her feelings. My granddaughter is very verbal. The other day ‘baby’ my granddaughter’s doll fell during a walk with grandma. My granddaughter picked up baby and held her close saying something like, “I’ve got you.” Like mother like daughter.

Jesus wants us as disciples to be sponges of His behavior like my granddaughter is of her mom’s. Would that we all learn to mimic Jesus in how we live and act toward others...

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

As I read through today’s gospel lesson, the Spirit reminds me that my goal is to be a little Jesus... to mimic and live as Jesus did... loving others, helping those in need and sharing God’s good news with others...

Friday, December 25: Mark 10:17-34 NIV2011 MERRY CHRISTMAS

¹⁷ *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

¹⁸ *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”*

²⁰ *“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”*

²¹ *Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

²² *At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

²³ *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”*

²⁴ *The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to*

enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

²⁹ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Merry Christmas... the Lord is born!

This passage could easily have been subdivided into 3 sections. If I were preaching that is likely what I would do. But today I am reading for devotion and spiritual enrichment.

The longest section is about the young man who wants a formula to inherit eternal life. At least in his own eyes he has been a commandment keeper since a boy. Still he has this nagging feeling—which is undoubtedly why he came to Jesus with his question—that he has not done enough, that something is still lacking. Jesus offers a tough response... sell everything and come follow me. At this point the man goes away sad *because he had great wealth*. It is sad and sobering that money is an obstacle to following Jesus. Jesus goes on to say how hard it is for the rich to enter heaven, to which Peter cries, *who then can be saved?* Suggesting we needn't think of wealth as in uber wealthy but even people who are, say 'comfortable financially'. God is then declared as the only one who can save.

The conversation with the rich man leads directly to Peter, seemingly nervous maybe for himself, saying, *We have left everything to follow you!*” as if he were saying, “remember, Jesus, we already left everything to follow you. To which Jesus says in effect, “don't worry you will get way more following me than you gave up—*along with persecutions*. The addition of persecutions is curious, not what one would expect to hear. It is a line that likely brought comfort to the Christians in Rome, to whom Mark is writing, to realize that the persecutions they are facing are part and parcel of following Jesus. Still persecutions are only part of the story. The people also have the blessing this side of eternity, of the friends, family and church along side of them.

In the third section Jesus gives His most detailed description of what will happen to Him in Jerusalem.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Again each section has a meaning for Christians. Since a person does not need to be sensationally wealthy for money and wealth to be a stumbling block in following Jesus, every person in every culture must beware of how financial security can be a block to following Jesus. Again, all things are possible for God. God alone bring people to faith.

Persecution remains a possibility for any Christ follower in anytime. Some persecutions might be 'unto death' others could be ostracization from family or being made the brunt of with jokes in the cafeteria. It is not the severity but potential reality of persecution that is possible for any disciple.

How loved we are by Jesus. He knew what He would have to endure; undeterred Jesus walked Calvary for us. That is how much He loves us.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I cannot expect to live this life without facing some pain, some consequences, some persecution and difficult times because of my faith in Jesus. I might not face the ultimate persecution of Christians in Rome under Nero or the apostles but some level of persecution is a potential reality for me even living here in the USA.

Saturday, December 26: Mark 10:35-52 NIV2011

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Two stories complete this section. First there is James and John's request to have the seats of honor in Jesus' coming kingdom. Not surprisingly Jesus will not grant this request. Interestingly the other disciples are indignant at the brothers' request. Because of this Jesus responds to the whole group. It seems that the other disciples' indignance is at least partially due to the fact that James and John asked what they all longed for. All of them wanted seats of honor in Jesus' coming kingdom. Jesus grabs this teaching moment to inform them and us today that Jesus' kingdom has a different ethic... a servant rather than dominance ethic. *Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.* At Living Hope Church we give each newly ordained elder and deacon a towel with this verse printed upon it... Leadership in Christ's church is a matter of service not superiority. Jesus Himself modeled this.

Next comes the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Hearing Jesus was walking by he began calling out to Jesus. Rebuked and shushed by many he continued. Jesus takes notice and asks what he desires. When Bartimaeus says he wants to see, Jesus heals him instantly. Jesus notes Bartimaeus' faith as a key factor in his healing.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

My eyes and heart focus on the first story. The kingdom of God is an upside down system compared to the way people live in the general world. In our world the more important a person is the more they boss and direct others. But in Jesus' kingdom it is not a matter of bossing; it is about serving. We crave authority and the seats of honor, power and prestige... Jesus bids people to serve. This is true in every culture I have seen in our world. In West Africa where I have some experience, they speak of the Big Man syndrome. The important person expects to be catered to. Not so says Jesus... for Jesus' greatness is defined by service. *Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.* Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Lloyd Raney, George Dawson are 'saints' who come to mind. In their own way each one of these people epitomized for me a servant's heart and lifestyle.

Everywhere this is how it should be in the church... service is the distinction of greatness.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Simply stated, will I serve? Serve people I don't know, don't like... will I serve? There is no other measurement that matters more to God. *Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Sunday, December 27, 2020 - Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for an audio link to my sermons, <https://livinghopect.org/resources/audio-sermons>. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days. We also livestream our full services which are up on our YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKURRsBX92qqIFgDF1iRWA>