

The Gospel of Mark – D-Group

Content for Fall 2021

Session #7 (For October 20)
Mark 10:1-52



In this study, we're looking at the PORTRAIT of Jesus Mark provides through His Gospel. It's a perspective that is similar to the other writers (especially Matthew and Luke), yet with his own unique emphases. These guides are looking at the broader text/section we are covering each week with a more specific focus on key parts worth a closer look.

The Broader Section – Mark 10:1-52

Especially when it comes to the reflection questions in this section, these are far more for your benefit if you find it helpful to jot such things down as you're reading. What matters most here in this part is actually reading the text itself.

READ Mark 10:1-52

Some quick notes on this section:

Broadly, Jesus is on the move toward Jerusalem and what is awaiting Him there. Great crowds are gathering around Him as His popularity outside of Jerusalem continues to grow. And yet, from our vantage point, we recognize that scenes such as these are happening in the shadow of the cross. Jesus is on a march toward fulfilling His God-given role as the Messiah who suffers and dies.

More controversy with the Pharisees – teaching on divorce and marriage (10:1-12) ... This is a continuation of a theme we've seen already in Mark's Gospel: further controversy with the Pharisees (*e.g.* see 2:1ff; 2:23-3:6 and 7:1ff). It is appropriate to consider these scenes on two levels.

First, the overall conflict is helping further the basic plotline of the story as tensions increase between Jesus and His adversaries. It's what culminates in a few chapters when they condemn Him as being worthy of death and hand Him over to be crucified. On a human level, the threat Jesus represented to those in power became the reason why He had to die.

Second, the actual content of the controversy itself is worthy of attention. On this occasion, it is a question about what is "lawful." That term was used to represent a boundary question: based on God's Law, is it okay or not for His people to do this? Broadly, these were common discussions in Jesus' day; there were all kinds of categories that could be covered by the "is it lawful?" question. More specifically, this particular issue was just as sensitive of a topic then as now. Every Jewish teacher had his own opinions on the matter. Some drew a hard line, saying that divorce was only allowable for actual infidelity. Others had a much more lenient perspective that granted *a husband* the freedom to divorce without consequences for any number of reasons, including the all-so-offensive being displeased with her – *e.g.* because dinner was burned or because she was being quarrelsome. In that society, there were no real legal grounds for a woman's action in such a way; in fact, much of the divorce teaching was intended to be protective of a woman whose social status

would be ruined by such an action from her husband. Jesus deftly handles the matter by first acknowledging what the Law taught (though even then, He attributes that reality as happening because of the people's hard-heartedness). He then, however, takes the posture of the authoritative interpreter (as with the Sabbath issue in 2:23-27) as He provides the *true* intention of marriage in God's design – a permanent union between a husband and a wife as one flesh. Notice where Jesus grounds this basic teaching: **in creation itself**.¹ Jesus finds the answer to what is appropriate in God's creative design. *It's a good reminder for us: the best answer to the question of divorce is a healthy theology of marriage that becomes the foundation for healthy marriages.* Whatever might be "allowable," that should never call into question what God's ideal truly is. As has happened previously, we also see this same pattern of further teaching from Jesus to His disciples on a subject once they were alone. In this instance, He adds an even stronger tone to it (see 10:10-12; compare to Matthew's version of this event with an "exception" clause in 19:9).

Jesus and the children (10:13-16) ... This tender scene provides the occasion for Jesus to use an unlikely group of people as examples of the faith He applauds – children. In a Jewish context, kids were not given any sort of special place of significance. Perhaps that's why the disciples respond as they do; in their minds, Jesus doesn't have time for this interruption. Jesus' response shows an unexpected response: the Kingdom is not only for ones such as these, they are even the role model for receiving the Kingdom. There are any number of reasons we could surmise for what Jesus is highlighting about children: their humility, their dependence on others, their joy, etc.

Jesus and a "rich man" (10:17-31 – more on this scene below) ... We come to this encounter text between Jesus and this rich man (he's often called the "rich young ruler," combining descriptions of him here in Mark with those in Matthew 19 and Luke 18). In the first scene (vv. 17-22), we see the dialogue between him and Jesus that led to the identification of an obvious hurdle preventing him from embracing the Kingdom – his wealth. Jesus three-fold command – which came from a heart of love, according to v. 21 – to go, sell everything and give to the poor should not automatically be read as a universal teaching (though we would be wise to hear and heed Jesus' basic perspective here). It led to the man going away sad. From there, Jesus moves into further teaching about wealth and the hindrance it is for the "rich," most famously expressed through the analogy of how difficult it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. As part of this conversation, Jesus does also point to the "reward" (vv. 29-30) that comes to those who have left everything to follow Him – a reminder of how worth it discipleship is in the end. There is also the saying about the upside-down nature of Jesus' Kingdom: those who seem to be important (the "first," like the rich) are ironically "last" while those who are last in the eyes of this world will be first. This scene and topic is worthy of further reflection below.

¹ *Jesus' use here of "creation theology" is significant. On the one hand, as is the case throughout God's Word, He is affirming the basic framework of the Genesis story as true and historical (these words would seem odd if Jesus did not accept the story as what actually happened). Even more important for this discussion, He uses it as the foundation for His teaching on marriage and divorce. What the Mosaic Law established about such issues matters, what creation itself affirms shows us that this is what God has set forth as the way human life is supposed to work. In the midst of a large number of "hot-button" cultural issues, it is important that we take Jesus' cue when it comes to the perspective we are going to have: God's creative design and intention matters! How we communicate that issue and speak up for it properly in a culture like ours is another issue altogether.*

Jesus' third prediction of His death and resurrection (10:32-34) ... Once again (see also 8:31 and 9:31), we see Mark highlighting the destination of Jesus' current journey: Jerusalem and Jesus' death. This time, it's again His own words anticipating what is on the horizon – betrayal, condemnation, mockery, death *and resurrection*. The prevalence of these predictions remind us of the significance of these events to Jesus' Messianic mission.

A request from two disciples and teaching about Kingdom greatness (10:35-45) ... This is another powerful scene, again, significantly following Jesus' prediction about the road ahead of Him. Like each of the previous instances, what follows is an important discipleship text. Here, it's a bold request from James and John (notice the similarity in theme to 9:33ff) that opens the door for Jesus to highlight servant-hearted humility as foundational to Kingdom greatness. *Especially in light of the cross*, those who follow Him should be characterized by taking the posture of lowering self, not elevating self about others; that's true greatness in Jesus' Kingdom. Of course, Jesus identifies this posture as the very one He Himself has taken as well (10:45). This key verse not only reminds us of Jesus' humility, it also emphasizes the substitutionary nature of His death – His Messianic mission involves His sacrificial death in our place, even as a ransom for us. It is good to consider both what this verses teaches about the effects of Jesus' death for us *and* the example it shows us as well (as we see in 1 Peter 2:21-25). In fact, this is a point that comes up repeatedly: the example of Jesus in His earthly ministry should be an example for how we go about life as well (see John 13:12-17 and Philippians 2:5-11). This topic is worthy of further reflection below.

Another healing – of “Blind Bartimaeus” (10:46-52) ... Once again, we see Jesus' performing a miracle, this time in response to an urgent faith-driven appeal for mercy. Bartimaeus saw Jesus' identity clearly even while he was physically blind; Jesus rewards that faith which leads to another disciple added to His following. It's a paradox for what is to follows (as in John 9): those who *should* have seen Jesus most clearly, missed His true identity entirely.

In general, what questions and/or observations do you have from reading this text?

What does this section teach us about Jesus and His identity?

APPLICATION-Centered ... what does this overall section teach us about following Jesus? For example, what are some of the instructions or commands we should live out (note if these are specific to an individual or more broadly for any follower of Jesus)? What are the Christ-like attitudes and actions this text highlights as appropriate for us to model as His followers?

Theme #1 for Reflection (from 10:17-31)

The story of the rich man has important themes for us in the midst of our luxury (we have great wealth – compared to human history as well as conditions around the globe still today – even if we don't feel that measured against others right around us). It's one thing to acknowledge that Jesus' specific commands from verse 21 are not automatically applicable to all of His followers. Yet, that doesn't provide a license for us to tune-out the warnings in this text about the dangerous hurdle wealth and affluence can be (see also Matthew 6:21-24; Luke 12:13-21 and 1 Timothy 6:6-10).

When it comes to this issue, what are some ways where your “wealth” has perhaps hindered your own discipleship – i.e. ways it has hindered you from fully following Jesus?

Why is it valuable for us even to acknowledge both (a) the dangers inherent with worldly wealth and (b) our position as those who are “rich” in this world?

Check out the important instructions from Paul in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Based on these words, what are some practical ways you can combat “affluenza” in your life so that wealth doesn't hinder your discipleship journey?

Theme #2 for Reflection (from 10:35-45)

Another portion of this text that is rich in applicable materials comes from Jesus' teaching about Kingdom greatness: what matters is our willingness to serve others with humility. There is so much richness in this text even when it comes to Jesus and His example, including the powerful truth of what He has done for us. Not only does He save us by what He has done, His attitude and actions are to become a pattern for us to model in our lives.

Reflect on what practically this should look like in your life: how can you model such a Christ-like humility in different areas of your life?