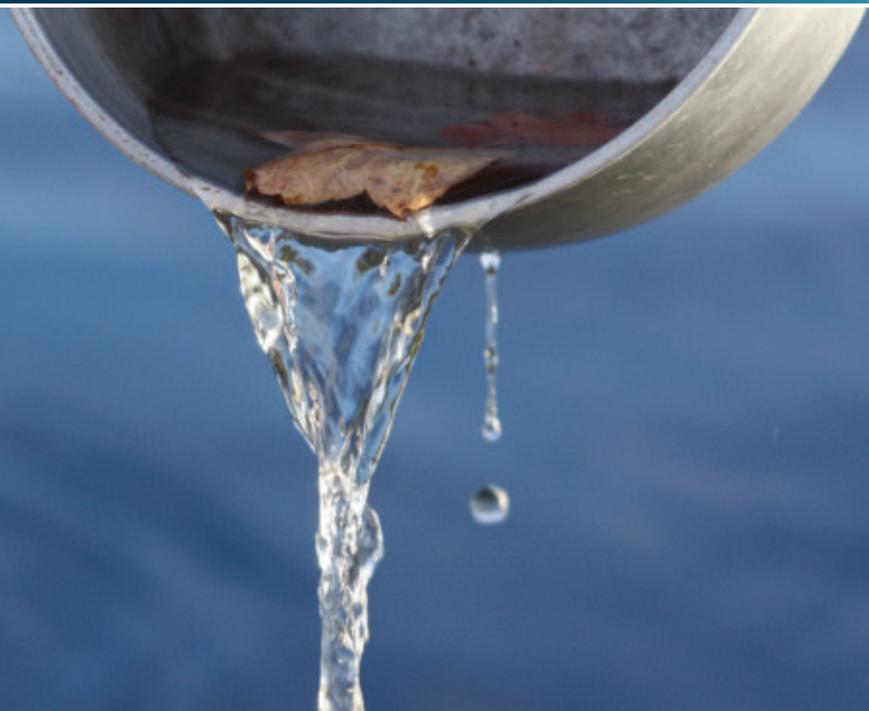


AUGUST 2019

TODAY IN THE WORD™



*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Mark 10:45

SERVANT DISCIPLESHIP: The Gospel of Mark

TODAY WITH MARK JOBE

President of Moody Bible Institute

Counting the Cost



In our car we have an auto pass that allows us to charge the cost of tolls. Even better, it means I do not have to stop at the toll booth. This

works well, most of the time. But one day, I realized that one of our kids had borrowed the pass, and it was nowhere to be found. I pulled into the change part of the tollway and began fumbling for coins. Ignoring the looks from drivers behind me, I searched our car and even the ground below the basket. Clearly, I wasn't prepared. I hadn't counted the cost of driving on that tollway.

Some people are like that in their spiritual beliefs. They appreciate the idea of Christianity but haven't considered what it costs to follow Jesus. In Mark, chapter 10, a wealthy young man approached Jesus. He admired Jesus, calling Him "Good teacher," and asked how he could be guaranteed eternal life. Jesus gave him a challenging command, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (v. 21). In essence, Jesus said this: If you follow me, it's going to cost you something. This wasn't what the man wanted to

hear. Jesus' answer demanded much more than he was prepared to give. Verse 22 records: "He went away sad, because he had great wealth." Jesus drew a line between being a fan and becoming a true follower.

I knew a young man who, at 17, decided to get baptized. When he told his mother, she said, "I'd rather have you be dead than be one of *those* people." This young man went ahead and was baptized, not out of disrespect, but because he had to choose God over his mom. His decision to put Christ first cost him something.

The disciples, after watching the rich young man leave, asked Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 26). Jesus explained that there is a cost to following Him. "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:38–39).

Martin Luther said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." When we follow Christ, there's a price to pay. Are you ready to follow? If so, you must count the cost. Decide today to make Him number one in your life. Choose Him. Follow Him. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

Jesus Our Ransom

One notable feature of Mark's Gospel is his portrayal of Jesus as the servant of God. The theological center of this theme is found in Mark 10:45: "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." Although Jesus was Israel's promised King and Messiah, He did not come to reign but to serve by offering His life as a *ransom*. This New Testament word speaks of exchange. In other Greek writings, it refers to the price paid to buy back a prisoner of war or a slave. The prophet Isaiah predicted that Israel's Messiah would come as a suffering servant. According to Isaiah 53:10 it was the Lord's will to make Christ suffer because this suffering was "an offering for sin."

Two important theological terms are used to explain what it means that Jesus gave His life as a ransom, *penal* and *substitutionary*. To say that Jesus' suffering was penal means His suffering was neither an accident nor a tragedy. He voluntarily gave His life to satisfy our deserved punishment. He shed His blood to pay the ransom God's justice demands for our sin. When we describe His suffering as substitutionary, we emphasize that

Jesus did not do this for His own sake but for ours. Those for whom He died have been buried and are risen with Him (Rom. 6:4).

God is both the initiator and the recipient of this spiritual transaction, but we are the beneficiaries. God sent His Son into the world (John 5:36). He accepted Christ's suffering as a satisfactory payment for our sin. Yet the reward is given to us. Paul expresses the essence of Christ's substitutionary work on our behalf in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In Mark 10:45 Jesus points to His suffering as an example. But before we can serve we must be served. When we trust in Christ, we exchange our sin for His righteousness. Only then are we fit to serve Him. ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more about the penal and substitutionary nature of Christ's work, read *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* by Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach (Crossway).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

MBI Professors: Milestones of Service

Dr. Rosalie de Rosset

You may recognize Dr. Rosalie de Rosset as a *Today in the Word* Q&A columnist. She's also a writer, conference speaker, frequent guest at Moody Radio programs, and book club host. But her life's passion is teaching. In May, she celebrated 50 years of service at Moody Bible Institute as a professor of Communications and Literature. What a remarkable achievement!

In May, Moody honored Dr. de Rosset at President's Chapel, where former students and colleagues spoke of her influence on their lives. As a pillar of the Communications and General Education department at Moody, she has taught scores of students to be better thinkers, readers, writers, and speakers.

Dr. de Rosset is known for challenging her students (and our *Today in the Word* readers) to dig deeper into God's Word, to love God and follow His leading, and to think theologically about personal and political issues. She keeps in touch with many of her former students who thank her for the role she played in their faith journey. Dr. de Rosset says, "I've had more than eight thousand students.

I love my students! I love talking to them about their lives, their struggles, and the way Jesus meets them. I've grown up with my students." After 50 years, Dr. de Rosset is thankful for what teaching has taught her. "The most important thing you can do is to be humble and teachable and to encourage both qualities in your students."

"The most important thing you can do is to be humble and teachable and to encourage both qualities in your students."

—Dr. Rosalie de Rosset

Dr. Eric Redmond

This year, Eric Redmond authored *Today in the Word* devotionals on 2 Chronicles (March 2019) and the Gospel of Mark (August 2019). In April, Dr. Eric Redmond successfully defended his doctoral dissertation and earned his PhD! Moody students honored their

professor for his accomplishment with showers of silly string and balloons.

Dr. Redmond is an associate professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute. He began teaching at Moody in 2015, after attending Washington Bible College and Dallas Theological Seminary. He earned his PhD from Capital Seminary and Graduate School. He and his wife, Pamela, live with their five children in the Chicago suburbs where he also serves as an associate pastor at a local church. ■

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Servant Discipleship: The Gospel of Mark

We who follow Christ want to be His wholehearted disciples. At the end of our journey we all would like to hear the words of our Lord: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:23). But with today’s emphasis on being strong, empowered, visionary, and influencer, the biblical call to live like a servant, may feel out of touch. How do we live as faithful servants?

The Gospel of Mark, our study with *Today in the Word* this month, will help us find the answer. The theme of the book is Christ the Servant, and Christ Himself shows us who the true servant is and how to become one. As we go through the book chapter by chapter, we’ll see how Christ leads His disciples, teaching them to be true servants by His own example. They “must be the very last” (Mark 9:35); they “must deny themselves and take up their cross” (Mark 8:34); they serve, and shouldn’t expect to be served (Mark 10:45).

We pray our study this month will reveal to us in a new way that discipleship is first of all servanthood. Our prayer is that the message of Mark’s Gospel will take us back to the simple truth of faithfulness and obedience to God’s guidance. Thank you for studying the Bible with us! And thank you for supporting the ministry of *Today in the Word*. ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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THURSDAY
AUGUST

1

*You are my Son, whom I love;
with you I am well pleased.*

Mark 1:11

He Came to Serve as God

The right start is important for a successful journey. This holds true whether you start your morning with a nutritional breakfast so you can have the mental capacity and energy for the rest of your day, or it can mean enrolling your child in the right school so they can become an outstanding learner and a productive, capable adult.

From the very first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, the disciple paints a portrait of Jesus that shapes the way we read and understand the rest of his gospel. In order to affirm Christ's deity as the Son of God from the very beginning of His ministry, Mark begins with the fulfillment of prophecy and divine witness to the identity of Jesus Christ. Mark portrays the work of the One who has come to serve humankind as the work of God Himself.

Both Isaiah and Malachi prophesied the coming of John the Baptist, the

one who would come before the Lord to make a way for His arrival (see Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3). John came from the wilderness. He baptized in order to “prepare the way” for the Lord to come to people and free their hearts from sin.

John baptized Jesus not because Jesus needed repentance, but so that He could stand in the place of “the many” in need of a ransom for sin (Mark 10:45). At that incredible moment, right at the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, Heaven responded with so much affirmation and excitement that the sky ripped open. The Holy Spirit alighted on Jesus, coming down like a dove, and the Father's voice from Heaven audibly identified Jesus as His Son. This passage presents a beautiful picture of the Trinity, similar to the picture in Genesis 1 during Creation.

APPLY THE WORD

If you have time, begin your study of Mark's Gospel by reading straight through the entire book. Mark's account of Christ's earthly ministry is brief and fast-paced. With a little discipline you can finish the whole book quickly and learn a great deal about our Savior who came to serve and who calls us to serve as well.

PRAY WITH US

Thank you for joining us on this month's journey of Bible study and prayer with *Today in the Word!* Let's ask the Lord to give us a teachable spirit and open our hearts to the lessons He wants us to learn from our study of the Gospel of Mark.

*“Come, follow me,” Jesus said,
“and I will make you fishers of men.”*

Mark 1:17

FRIDAY
AUGUST

2

Fishers of Men

In the opening chapter of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, we can read a memorable exchange between the novel’s hero Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf the wizard. Gandalf imposes an adventure upon Bilbo, the unsuspecting hobbit. Bilbo says, “I beg your pardon, I haven’t asked for anything!” Gandalf’s reply is direct and challenging, “Yes you have. Twice now. My pardon. I give it to you. In fact, I will go so far as to send you to this adventure. Very amusing for me, very good for you—and profitable too, very likely, if you ever get over it.”

When Jesus called ordinary fishermen to become fishers of men, He gave them a kind and challenging invitation. The calling of these ordinary working men demonstrated the power of Christ that could change lives, even the most ordinary and cast down.

After the initial calling of the disciples, Jesus and the four fishermen

encountered Simon’s mother-in-law who was ill. By the time they left, she was well and serving Christ and his followers. The rebuke of the demon in the synagogue and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law drew all Capernaum to hear about Jesus, as they brought all their afflicted to Him. The disciples learned an important lesson—following Jesus would be the adventure of a lifetime.

In today’s Scripture reading, Mark challenges us as well: “Are you willing to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and let Him be in charge of your life?” Mark’s Gospel records Jesus’ calling of four men—Simon, Andrew, James, and John—away from their livelihoods. These former fishermen immediately witnessed that the scribes did not have innate authority to teach; they depended upon the authority of others. Jesus had all authority to teach and show the ways of God.

APPLY THE WORD

The challenges of daily life can dull us to the grand adventure to which Christ invites us. We are called to journey with the great King who promises His love both now and forever, in a kingdom without end! Our sins have been forgiven. His righteousness is ours. And we have power from the Spirit to live this life with joy! Hallelujah!

PRAY WITH US

Please uphold in prayer MBI’s system administrators: Joseph Kessinger, Joseph Straw, Kyle Sparrow, Michael Paniak, Paul Walker, and William Eyerdom. In our time of digital communications, we couldn’t do without their computer expertise.

SATURDAY
AUGUST

3

Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed.

Mark 1:35

A Prayer-Dependent Life

A. C. Dixon (1854–1925) was a pastor, a Bible expositor, and an evangelist. He published a book series called *The Fundamentals* with Moody Bible Institute president R. A. Torrey. Dixon wrote on the importance of prayer, “When we depend upon man, we get what man can do; But when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do.”

In today’s passage, we experience a day in the life of Jesus. Many were coming to hear and see Him. In fact, Mark records that “the whole town gathered at the door” (v. 33). Everyone in this town had come to see Jesus! What an overwhelming response to our Lord, a great revival of souls. It is the sort of response to Jesus we hope to see in our churches every week!

Yet, rather than relish this victory or even return immediately to revive many more souls, Jesus rose the next day to spend time alone with His Father in prayer.

Here Jesus sets an important pattern for His disciples as they began the important work of fishing for men.

It was because of the needs of the people, and because of the demands of preaching and casting out demons that Jesus spent time alone in prayer. He prayed ahead of his schedule, when others were still sleeping, and in a place where He would not be interrupted. This was His practice of prayer, a model for His followers (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; 22:41–45).

As a result of His disciplined habit of prayer, Jesus was able to meet the coming demands of serving the most challenging needs. He would travel from town to town, preach in synagogue after synagogue, encounter crowds of people—including many possessed by demons. But the demands of preaching, crowds, and demons were no match for a God-infused, prayer-dependent life.

APPLY THE WORD

Our schedules may seem to fight against developing a prayer habit like Jesus.’ And unfortunately, it may seem like we can accomplish much even without a faithful prayer life. However, serving others with love, wisdom, patience, kindness, faithfulness, forgiveness, and strength requires great power from God through great prayer.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers Moody’s vice president of Human Resources, Debbie Zelinski. Her leadership, along with her team’s dedicated service, helps every employee use their professional expertise for God’s glory.

*The Son of Man has authority
on earth to forgive sins.*

Mark 2:10

SUNDAY
AUGUST

4

Persistence Is Rewarded

In 2019, Marine veteran Micah Herndon ran the Boston Marathon to pay tribute to his fallen fellow Marines, Mark Juarez, Matthew Ballard, and Rupert Hamer. The three men had lost their lives during a bombing in Afghanistan in 2010. Herndon wore their names across his shoe laces as he ran. After 22 miles, Herndon's legs began to give out. He continued to run, but his legs gave way near the finish line and the Marine collapsed. Yet Herndon, age 31, would not be stopped. He crawled the last several yards to cross the finish line.

Persistence. For Micah Herndon, it meant finishing his third marathon. For the four men in today's passage it meant helping their paralytic friend see Jesus. It would have been easy for these friends to give up when they saw the enormous crowd surrounding Jesus. But their persistence paid off, and Jesus healed their friend. Jesus also said something that surprised the people who were

watching. To the paralytic man, Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (v. 5).

The religious teachers who were scrutinizing everything Jesus said and did declared His words blasphemous. But throughout this passage, Jesus demonstrated that He was not about following religious tradition. Instead, He was doing something new. He was forgiving sin. He was calling a tax collector to be His disciple (vv. 13–17). He was eating with sinners. He and His disciples were not fasting like others.

Jesus clearly demonstrated that He was about something different. He was not limited to human tradition that would keep someone like the paralytic from coming to Him. With everything He said and did, He was presenting grace. Jesus refused to put the new wine of His truth into the old wineskins valued by the Jewish authorities.

APPLY THE WORD

Today, remember our country's wounded and fallen veterans and their families, as well as those with physical health challenges. Pray for the grace, mercy, and strength of Christ to fill their lives. Ask God to give your church wisdom on how to serve wounded and physically challenged saints in your midst, so they can experience His love for them.

PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, please join us in prayer for the Human Resources staff. Today, we are thankful for the service of Peter Miller, Rachel Paul, and Erica Loring as they oversee employee benefits at Moody.

MONDAY
AUGUST

5

*Whoever does God's will is
my brother and sister and mother.*

Mark 3:35

Family Disciples

Society has little place for those deemed to be insane. The history of America's mental institutions—"insane asylums," as they used to be called—gives a small glimpse into the handling of those who have lost their abilities to reason soundly. John Hinkley Jr. was sentenced to an asylum for his attempt to assassinate President Ronald Reagan and spent 36 years in a mental institution.

So it is no small thing when Jesus' family accused him of being "out of his mind" (v. 21). They believed the schedule He was keeping, which even prevented Him and His disciples from eating, was far too taxing. Eighteenth century English Baptist pastor and scholar, John Gill, says that Jesus' family, in what they perceived as an act of kindness, wanted to take Him home and confine him as a madman! Some accused Jesus of being insane while others declared Him demonic.

The teachers of the Law said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul" (v. 22). They attributed the casting out of demons to the ruler of demons. Jesus responded to these accusations and recognized that acknowledging the true origin of His works is a matter of eternal importance. It distinguished true family members of Jesus from those who would be eternally condemned as blasphemous.

Jesus explained that He could not be demonic, for a kingdom cannot fight against itself and be victorious. With such a serious accusation, the teachers of the Law were ascribing the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan. Jesus gave immediate judgment to the teachers of the Law, members of the only generation who could accuse Jesus directly, but the force of His warning still applies today. It is important to understand that Jesus serves in the power of God. We need God's power too, if we are to do His will.

APPLY THE WORD

Few understand the pain of loving someone with a brain injury or debilitating mental illness. Few are sensitive to the struggles faced daily by spouses, parents, children, siblings, and caregivers. One way to live out the truth of being a part of God's family is to be a respite giver. Ask an affected family at church how you might serve them.

PRAY WITH US

Please add the rest of the Human Resources team to your prayer list: Vecia Ricks, Mia Gale, Joseph Bolz, Karla Olson, and Darric Obinger. Ask God to bless them for the help and guidance they provide for MBI's faculty and staff.

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.

Mark 4:20

Good Growing Soil

How casually we listen to the Word of God! If we don't like a biblical teaching on spiritual gifts, remarriage, submission, reconciliation, justice, election, or the like, we reject the teaching as false, insensitive, not applicable to our situation, or only half of what the Word of God is saying.

In Jesus' time, everyone was interested in what He had to say, so much so that Jesus had to step into a boat in order to teach with enough spatial clearance for everyone to hear him (v. 1). But Jesus realized that having a crowd of followers did not mean He had a crowd of true listeners. Not everyone was ready to fully understand or to follow faithfully.

The Parable of the Sower focuses on the different soils rather than the seed or the sower. Notice that the seed and sower remain the same in each scenario. Jesus distinguishes the purposes of the parables in verse 11. "The secret of the

kingdom of God has been given to you." Some simply do not have the soil of a good heart necessary to receive and understand the word of God.

This parable is instructive for us today: We have an enemy who seeks to snatch away what the Word of God will produce in our lives almost as soon as the Word is heard! Persecution has the potential to lead us to fall away from our initial, joyous reception of the Word of God (v. 17).

Daily cares and concerns and the deceitful promises of money and material goods fight against the Word and limit the production of Christlikeness in us. Only a heart that receives the Word of God in meekness will yield the fruitful, maturing Christian life the Lord intends and desires for each of us, producing a crop of "some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown" (v. 20).

APPLY THE WORD

Prepare your heart even today to receive the preached Word of God. If your pastor is preaching through a book of the Bible, read the coming passage every day this week, asking Jesus to speak to you and your church. Or, reread daily the passage you heard preached last Sunday, asking the Lord to impress His truth on your heart.

PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for professors in the Bible department: Andrew Schmutzer, Benjamin Wilson, Eric Redmond, and Ernest Gray. May the Lord strengthen them as they train Christian leaders of tomorrow, with their love, wisdom, and dedication to teaching.

WEDNESDAY
AUGUST

7

*Why are you so afraid?
Do you still have no faith?*

Mark 4:40

The Hidden Kingdom

In the classic fairytale *Jack and the Beanstalk*, a poor boy named Jack acquires magic beans in exchange for his family's cow. His mother, upset by the trade, throws down the bean in anger. But that night, a great beanstalk grows, enabling Jack to climb it where he finds and steals golden coins, enough to provide for his family's needs.

Those small beans, that seemed ordinary at first glance, held amazing potential. In today's reading, seeds are used to illustrate the kingdom of God. For now, the kingdom of God is hidden from our full sight and understanding. We are able to see glimpses of it in the works of believers, but the final and full expression is invisible to us.

In the second half of chapter 4, Mark records Jesus' parables focused on the kingdom of God. The kingdom is compared to an ordinary seed, planted in the ground (v. 26). In a mysterious

transformation, that seed sprouts and grows "all by itself" (v. 28). Jesus also compared the kingdom to a mustard seed, which when planted, became the "largest of all garden plants" (v. 32). Scripture tells us that while the parables were confusing to most of those who listened, Jesus privately explained their meaning to His disciples.

If the disciples had any concern over the nature of the kingdom, their fears quickly were laid to rest. Jesus, asleep in their boat, suddenly and dramatically revealed Himself as the awesome God of power and might (vv. 39–41). In that moment when Jesus calmed the storm, they were shown what the kingdom held for them. God's promises of righteousness, peace, and joy are certain (see Rom. 14:17). One day we'll experience God's kingdom in its fullness, and it will far outstrip the seed of its currently unseen presence.

APPLY THE WORD

When Scripture says, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" about the things God has prepared for those who love Him, it promises us that we will not be disappointed by our future hope in any way! Today we understand the future in part; only at the return of Christ will we understand completely.

PRAY WITH US

Please continue to mention in your prayers the Bible department faculty at Moody: John Goodrich, Matthew Monkemeier, Michael Wechsler, Ronald Sauer, and Steven Sanchez. We honor their faithful ministry to the students!

*Go home to your family and tell them
how much the Lord has done for you.*

Mark 5:19

THURSDAY
AUGUST

8

Tell Your Story

When something incredible happens to you, who do you tell first? Maybe you rush home to report the good news to your family. Or maybe you pick up the phone to call your best friend. Some of us snap a photo and declare the good news on social media.

It's natural to want to share the good things in our life with those we love. And in today's passage, we read an incredible story of life transformation, one too amazing to keep quiet for long. When Jesus encountered the Gerasenes demoniac, he met a man who was being torn apart from both outside and inside. He had been living in the dark among the tombs (v. 3). He displayed uncontrollable strength (vv. 3–4). Daily, he screamed for relief and was a danger to himself (v. 5). He was living with thousands of demons inside him (v. 9). He was an outcast as a threat to society, and Jesus now was his only hope.

Jesus received the man and cast the demons out of him. But the townspeople were not happy about it. Mark described the people as pleading with Jesus to leave their region in the same vein as the demons begged Jesus to go into the pigs rather than be cast into a far country. Certainly, the demons thought, Jesus would leave them alone to possess pigs. Certainly, the townspeople thought, Jesus would leave the town alone. He could welcome and heal the wretched elsewhere.

Interestingly, the healed man also begged Jesus—that he might remain with Him. But the same way Jesus deals with everyone whose life He transforms, He sent the man away to live righteously. The man received by Jesus, now in his right mind, would proclaim what Jesus had done.

APPLY THE WORD

It's important to tell your faith story to others. The demoniac left the presence of Jesus to tell people in ten cities how Jesus had changed his life! Those cities heard a man formerly possessed by thousands of demons tell them how Jesus rescued him. Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to share your story with people in your own city.

PRAY WITH US

Janet Stiven, vice president and general counsel at Moody, welcomes your prayers for the team she leads at the Legal department. Ask the Lord to grant them wisdom and insight as they advise the MBI leadership on legal and public policy issues.

Don't be afraid; just believe.

Mark 5:36

Healing Faith

When someone we love is ill, we want them to get the very best treatment possible. We may travel a long distance to find exactly the right doctor and give hope to our loved one. Such was the case in Jesus' time when many who followed Him were seeking healing.

Here Mark intertwines two stories, a dying girl and a sick woman. The woman had heard about Jesus' miracles and most likely understood Him to be the Messiah. She had the simple faith to believe that power of God was not limited by clothing and reached out to touch his cloak (v. 27).

Jesus asked who had touched Him and sought out the woman who displayed such faith. He told her, "your faith has healed you" (v. 34). But there was another desperate person in the crowd. The passage began with Jairus, who requested healing for his 12-year-old

dying daughter (v. 23). In a great act of submission, he fell at the feet of Jesus even though he was the ruler of the synagogue (v. 22).

After Jesus healed the woman, the news came that Jairus's daughter had died. Jesus took into the house only those who needed to witness the power of God (v. 38), possibly due to their future roles in the church. He also excluded those who did not have faith, possibly so that they would not become scoffers at the resurrection of the little girl.

Mark seems intentional in intertwining the 12 years of life of the girl and the 12 years of illness of the woman. These two stories show how simple faith sustains us during great suffering, even in the face of death. When others doubt the power of God, we should keep trusting Him to do the impossible.

APPLY THE WORD

We don't like our schedules to be delayed or interrupted. Imagine how Jairus felt when his request to Jesus was interrupted by the woman seeking healing. Even so, it did not prevent the Lord from saving his daughter. Trust today that God hears your prayers and sees your situation. Give thanks for His timing to answer prayers!

PRAY WITH US

As we read today about Jesus' healing ministry in Mark's Gospel, let us thank the Lord for His compassion for the sick and the suffering, then and now. Let's also pray for patience to wait for God's timing and to accept it with gratitude.

*I have set the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.*

Psalm 16:8

SATURDAY
AUGUST

10

Rough Terrain

On March 20, 2019, Turkish Airlines Flight 1 hit severe air turbulence while about 40 minutes away from landing in New York City. The airlines said the flight “encountered an unusual turbulence” and some 30 people were severely injured after being lifted out of their seats and hitting the ceiling. For the passengers, everything seemed smooth on the flight from Istanbul to New York . . . until turbulence hit.

The newly-appointed ministry of the disciples had been without significant incident to this point. Jesus had granted them authority over unclean spirits and the ability to heal the sick. They were told to “take nothing for the journey” (v. 8), to leave the place that would not listen to them, and to shake the dust off their feet “as a testimony against them” (v. 11). It seemed, as they preached a message of repentance, they found success. Mark tells us that they “drove out many demons and anointed many

sick people with oil and healed them” (v. 12).

Despite these successes, turbulence arose in Jesus’ ministry too. The beheading of John the Baptist was certainly a sobering wake-up call. John’s ministry was as faithful as the disciples’ ministry. He had proclaimed a message of righteousness to king Herod. Yet because of the king’s pride and cowardice, John lost his life.

There are seasons in life when serving the Lord seems fairly smooth. We see fruit in the lives of those we are serving, volunteers are plentiful, budgets are strong, and team morale is high. Other times can be extremely challenging: An unforeseen enemy arises within the leadership circle, numbers decline, and we may feel threatened by a culture hostile to our proclamation of Christ. Both the smooth and the rough times are from Christ, and for His glory.

APPLY THE WORD

The disciples retrieved the body of John the Baptist and placed him in a tomb, even at risk of being identified by Herod. Today, consider how you can serve someone who is going through a difficult time. Can you pray for them or offer simple words of encouragement? Your visible presence in their life can help bring a sense of calm and peace.

PRAY WITH US

Lord Jesus, give us wisdom and insight to help a person who is going through a difficult time. Help us to be a calming and reassuring presence for a friend, a family member, or a coworker who is experiencing “turbulence” in their life.

SUNDAY
AUGUST

11

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

Ephesians 3:20

Desolate of Resources

In Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy, the romantic interest of main character Elizabeth Bennet, says, "Nothing is more deceitful than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast." As Christ followers, we are to have true humility. It is all too easy for us to publicly rejoice in an accomplishment as the Lord's work, while subtly claiming most of the credit for ourselves.

In today's passage, Jesus sent out the apostles with His power, and they were successful in casting out demons and healing the sick. But somewhere between their commissioning and their return to Jesus they began to take credit for this work, thinking their own power had accomplished the tasks. The feeding of the 5,000 taught them to think otherwise. In what Mark calls "a quiet place" (v. 31), "a solitary place" (v. 32), and "a remote place" (v. 35), the

disciples found themselves in a dilemma. How would they feed the 5,000?

Quickly they learned that Jesus did not need to send the people away or run to the market. Jesus had the ability to shepherd the people with compassionate care, no matter how big or how small their need was. In His power, there was enough to feed all the men, women, and children present and have twelve baskets full of leftover food! Unlike the disciples, Jesus' power was more than sufficient.

The Lord provides desolate times of ministry to remind us that our power to serve comes from Him alone. Dry periods of devotions, a sense of staleness in worship, or the departure of ministry partners remove any thoughts of the sufficiency of our own strength to do His will. He deserves every ounce of credit for any accomplishment and we should ascribe all power to Him.

APPLY THE WORD

Godly servants are marked by humility. Look at your recent accomplishments that have brought you joy. Go back one by one and declare to the Lord, "You alone accomplished this; keep your servant from taking any credit for this and all other successes." Attributing all we do to the grace of God helps us to be sober about our own power.

PRAY WITH US

Please include in your prayers today Moody's chief financial officer, Ken Heulitt. On behalf of the whole Institute, he thanks the Moody family for your friendship and faithful support of Moody's ministry. You make this ministry possible!

*Take courage! It is I!
Don't be afraid.*

Mark 6:51

MONDAY
AUGUST

12

Recognizing Jesus

The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines “get ahead of yourself” as “to do something too early, or before you are ready or prepared.” One often hears a public speaker make a remark about getting ahead of himself when he detours from the main subject at hand and goes off track to another item.

While in public speaking “getting ahead of oneself” might be excused as taking the listener on an intriguing detour, it is not recommended when serving God. With kindness and grace, Jesus showed the disciples that going ahead of Him was not the way to succeed.

The disciples were sent on ahead of Jesus to Bethsaida, while he cared for the crowd. In the boat on the lake, the disciples met with strong headwinds that made the journey extremely difficult. They were “straining on the oars” (v. 48). The hardness of their

hearts about Jesus feeding the 5,000 led them to fear Jesus as He walked on water toward them. Rather than being comforted, they were “terrified” (v. 50). Instead of being encouraged by the presence of the One who had the ability and power to feed 5,000 with no apparent supplies, they became afraid.

It can be easy for us to make plans that seem pleasing to God but are actually getting ahead of what the Lord wants us to do. We may pray over our plans and offer ideas that will strengthen ministries, but waiting to put our ideas in action is difficult. Yet, to make sure we are not running ahead of the Lord, we have to plan with wisdom and delay our plans if necessary. Thankfully, the Lord may sometimes provide strong winds to slow us down and allow Him to intervene with our plans. Thankfully, too, our attempts at running ahead of the Lord will not stop others from recognizing Jesus.

APPLY THE WORD

Zeal for the Lord is good and right, and even commanded in Scripture (Rom. 12:11)! But we must moderate our zeal with wisdom and patience. Our future-planning, vision-casting, organizational overhauls and personal improvement projects all need a healthy dose of “show me your will” sprinkled throughout them. Slow us down, Jesus!

PRAY WITH US

Would you pray for the staff of Moody Radio's KMBI, in Spokane, Wash.? Thank God for the creativity and talent of Chris Wright, Deborah Massey, Joe Gonzalez, and Scott Carlon and ask that they experience joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.

TUESDAY
AUGUST

13

*You have let go of the commands of God
and are holding on to the traditions of men.*

Mark 7:8

Against Religious Tradition

“Business as usual” can be a roadblock when it comes to innovation and progress. Whether at work or in our churches, if we do things just because “that’s the way we have always done it,” we may be standing in the way of needed improvements.

In Mark 7, Jesus confronts some traditions practiced by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Notice that the writer mentions “tradition(s)” five times in verses 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9. These traditions had started with good intentions, based on Scripture. But over the years, they expanded into layers of empty rituals.

The Jewish *Mishnah* says, “Tradition is a fence around the law.” The ceremonial washing of hands was one such tradition that had taken on a life of its own. When the Pharisees asked Jesus, “Why do your disciples not do what everyone else has been doing?,” Jesus appealed to Isaiah 29:13. He said substituting

tradition for real worship of God has been a problem of the ages. Human-created religious tradition can allow people to praise God vocally without having a heart for God; and rituals can take the place of genuine faith (v. 6).

The Pharisees had established a practice called Corban, meaning “dedicated to God”. This was a vow to set aside money for the Lord. But one did not actually have to distribute the money, but only to say the funds were Corban. Then, if a parent needed financial help, an adult child could say the higher honor would be to hold his money for the Lord. Obviously, this tradition needed to be questioned.

Jesus said it was not what we do on the outside that matters, but the condition of our heart (v. 15). We are to be less concerned with keeping traditions and more concerned about a heart fully devoted to God.

APPLY THE WORD

Serving God requires thoughtfulness and humility. When you have to reconsider practices within your church that have become tradition but are not scripturally mandated, try to ask honest questions and be open to change. Be flexible and gracious to those asking for changes. Most of all, be open to the Spirit’s leading in each situation.

PRAY WITH US

Lord, we pray that you give us the ability to serve you thoughtfully and humbly, that we will be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in every situation, and that we as the body of Christ will be open to godly change in our churches.

*These people come near to me with
their mouth and honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.*

Isaiah 29:13

WEDNESDAY
AUGUST

14

Private Miracles

P. T. Barnum made history when he toured the United States in the mid-1800s with his self-proclaimed Greatest Show on Earth. Barnum invented the art of the spectacle with curious exhibits and straight-out hoaxes that drew enormous crowds clamoring to buy tickets. In contrast, Jesus had no such desire to be viewed as a local showman.

When Jesus met the man with deafness and a speech impediment, He pulled the man aside from the crowd. He was already attempting to retreat unnoticed in a house in Tyre and Sidon. Jesus takes him “away from the crowd” to restore the man’s ears and eyesight (v. 33). But despite Jesus’ command that they should not tell others, news of the miracle spread quickly. “People were overwhelmed with amazement” (v. 37). By doing this miracle in private, the Lord’s acts of compassion could not be viewed as mere crowd-pleasing gimmicks. Further, His instruction against

telling others disassociated Jesus’ miracles from common tricks. Jesus’ purpose for healing was not to amuse and entertain crowds, but to clearly bear witness to the power of God.

At the beginning of today’s passage, Jesus responds to another request for healing from a Gentile, a Syrophenician woman. The woman is grieving because her daughter suffers from the possession by an evil spirit. Here Jesus shows that His ministry to Israel did not limit Him from a simultaneous ministry to Gentiles. The woman received the requested healing for her daughter.

In both cases, Jesus clearly showed the power of God, for both salvation and for physical healing. He also set a precedent for the way we do ministry. Powerful ministry can take place in private as well as in public. In fact, much of ministry takes place in quiet places where the public will never see.

APPLY THE WORD

Jesus taught that what we say and do in private matters, and that serving Him is not about gaining public recognition! When you serve God, it should not matter that there is no audience. Can you do a quiet act of service today? Maybe it is helping restack chairs after a church gathering or sending notes of care to those who have been sick.

PRAY WITH US

Today is New Student Orientation on our Chicago campus. Coming to a new school can be exciting and sometimes frightening. Today, as new students arrive on our campus, ask the Lord to calm their fears and prepare them for the exciting year ahead.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Rosalie De Rosset, Professor of Communications and Literature

Q **Is it a sin to fantasize about a celebrity? There weren't television or computers in Christ's day. Wasn't He speaking only about people who knew one another?**

A While there were no television or computers in Christ's day, the temptation to fantasize has existed since the Garden of Eden. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given everything beautiful and delightful including the actual presence of God. Then Satan invaded this innocence, deluding Eve that all of this wasn't enough, that God had cheated them of something better. Eve's fantasy of greater knowledge and sensuous indulgence along with Adam's apparent refusal to counter this fantasy (for reasons we do not know) led to the tragedy of the Fall.

Fantasizing about someone who can't be part of your life is a poor use of imagination, whether that person is a celebrity or someone you know. Beyond that, the Bible clearly says, in many places, that sexual fantasy is always sin no matter whom it involves. Matthew 5:28 is clear: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman [or *man*, by implication] lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Our imagination is to be treated as holy ground. When daydreams replace reality, they are a foolish way to escape our present circumstances rather than to address, change, or live with them.

Q **The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself? How do we love ourselves?**

A I can hear the poignancy and sincere desire in your question, one many people ask today with a kind of helplessness. You are right to suppose that it is impossible to love your neighbor if you don't value yourself. The problem is that Christians have to start at a different place than themselves or their neighbors to come up with a good theological answer.

Too often, friends, counselors and well-meaning mentors, encourage a way of thinking that focuses on self-love. They encourage a kind of self-affirmation that is not rooted in a biblical foundation, but an individualistic working up of things to make us feel good. However, Mark 12:28–30 makes it clear that the first and most important commandment is: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

If we are not practicing holiness in all that we do, our wills will be weakened, leading to great difficulty in choosing righteousness.

Out of that fierce love for God proceeds love for our neighbor, the second greatest commandment (Mark 12:31). The priority is clear; if you love God, you will love yourself because you are a reflection of Him, your values will be His, and you will know He values you. Then, you will love your neighbor. When we truly understand how much God loves us, how He even went so far as to give His Son to die for us, how He provided the Bible to show us His love, how He set up laws that, when followed, provide the best way we can thrive, out of that realization comes the ordering of our values and our love for ourselves and others. I must add that it is imperative to be in a healthy community of wise believers to help remind us of the confidence, identity, and purpose we have in Christ.

Q I often feel as though, under the pressure of addictive sin, I have no choice but to fall. How much choice do we really have when something seems impossible to resist?

A This is a very good question, and sadly it suggests a deception too often propagated about one of the great gifts God gave us, the gift of choice. Because He knew coerced love

and obedience were worth little, He created Adam and Eve and placed them in a perfect environment and relationship in the Garden. God issued only one limitation: they were not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2). Notice this limitation involved choice. To maintain this wonderful life, they had to *choose* to do right.

I teach a course that focuses on a theology of sin in great literature. In the class, we read a number of books and stories in which the main character is destroyed by compulsive attraction to evil. In every case he or she *chooses* to open the door to darkness and keeps choosing through self-deception to go places, be with people, or do things that perpetuate poor choices. The warning is clear. We can choose, but good choices come out of rigorous self-examination. It matters what we do not only in our work time but also in our spare time, what we watch, what we read, what we listen to, whom we befriend. Nothing is neutral. We can take nothing for granted. If we are not practicing holiness in all that we do, our wills will be weakened, leading to great difficulty in choosing righteousness. We start believing the lie that choice is no longer possible.

THURSDAY
AUGUST

15

“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

Mark 8:15

The Yeast of Unbelief

Have you ever purchased one of those small packets of yeast for baking bread? That tiny bit of granulated yeast is living and active, and it's the key ingredient needed for bread to rise. In today's passage, yeast is used as a warning about disbelief.

At this stage in Mark's narrative, you would hope the disciples were able to recognize a pattern in Jesus' ministry and learn. If you compare the accounts of the feeding of the 5,000 and then the 4,000, both have many similarities. In both, the setting is described as a “remote place” (6:35; 8:4). In both events the disciples encouraged Jesus to “send the people away” (6:36) and to “send them home hungry” (8:2–3). In both encounters the disciples raised the question of the scarcity of “bread” (6:37; 8:4). Even if the disciples did not recall the similarity of the words within these two exchanges, you would think that when Jesus asked the very same

question (“How many loaves do you have?”) they would have recalled the feeding of the 5,000 (6:38; 8:5).

Instead of saying, “Hey, wait a minute. This should be no problem for you,” they did not seem to understand. When Jesus directed the crowd to “sit down,” there was another opportunity for the disciples to trust Jesus. Just as He had done in the past, He would again use their meager resources to show compassion for the oversized crowd.

Apparently they have bought into the skepticism or “yeast” of the Pharisees and failed to understand Jesus' true identity. However, just as Jesus refused to give the Pharisees a sign from heaven to assuage their unbelief, so He warned the disciples against adopting the Pharisees' posture of unbelief. Disbelief, like yeast, has the ability to grow and multiply. It would require faith to recognize that Jesus is God the Son.

APPLY THE WORD

Only after giving thanks did Jesus give the fish and loaves to the disciples to distribute. In looking to heaven, Jesus taught the disciples that the current inventory of our earthly resources does not limit the power of God to meet needs. Faith in God's ability to go far beyond our resources is important. Will you trust God to meet your needs today?

PRAY WITH US

New students arrive today on Moody's Plymouth, Mich., campus for their studies at Moody Theological Seminary. Would you pray that their graduate studies would give glory to God and bring abundant fruit in students' lives?

*His sight was restored,
and he saw everything clearly.*

Mark 8:25

FRIDAY
AUGUST

16

Seeing Jesus

Many have compared our physical eyesight to our spiritual rebirth. In the beloved and famous hymn, “Amazing Grace,” John Newton wrote, “I once was lost, but now am found, / Was blind, but now I see.” When we come to Christ and trust Him for our salvation, our eyes are opened and we are able to see and understand God’s truth. It is truly a miraculous moment!

Jesus heals the blind man in two stages, first separating him from the crowd (v. 23). The crowd might have reacted negatively to Jesus spitting on the man’s eyes, maybe even goading the man to turn away before his sight was restored fully.

Notice that a gradual healing leads to the complete restoration of the man’s sight (vv. 23–26). The second time Jesus places His hands on the man’s eyes, the man sees clearly! Then Jesus sends him home, not to the village, to give

others the chance to come to a gradual understanding of what had happened, without the man simply announcing the miracle to the surrounding crowd.

In a similar way, Jesus’ questioning of the disciples about His identity comes in two separate stages—one related to the people’s understanding, and the other related to the disciples’ understanding. Jesus forbids them to share things that the others need to learn for themselves.

Some people come to a gradual seeing of who Jesus is. For some reason, they are not able to see the truth immediately. Jesus shows here that He can be a gradual healer and gradual revealer. Regardless of how quickly you come to truth, it is He who opened your eyes to see clearly, so you are no longer blind.

APPLY THE WORD

Billions of people around the world suffer from spiritual blindness today, many still out of the reach of a Bible, a foreign missionary, or any believers at all. Take a little extra time today to ask the Lord to open the eyes of someone you know who is blind to His truth and pray for missionaries who devote their lives to reaching the unreached.

PRAY WITH US

We thank you today, Jesus, for opening our eyes to your truth, love, beauty, and grace! Thank you for giving us your freedom and joy. What a miracle! May we have determination and courage to tell others about the miracle of God’s saving love.

SATURDAY
AUGUST

17

*This is my Son, whom I love.
Listen to him!*

Mark 9:7

Glorified and Clarified

American astronaut Scott Kelly describes the first time he saw Earth from space, saying, “As the Sun came up I was absolutely blown away by how incredibly beautiful our planet Earth is. Absolutely breathtaking. Like someone took the most brilliant blue paint and painted a mural right in front of my eyes. I knew right then and there that I would never, ever see anything as beautiful as planet Earth again.”

The view from space allowed Kelly to see Earth with fresh eyes, helping him more fully appreciate its beauty. The Transfiguration was a stunning event that gave Peter, James, and John, a fresh look at Jesus. They were terrified! In fact, Peter was so scared that he had no idea what to say (v. 6). Instead, he offered insulting suggestions that reduced Jesus to a mere teacher, one in need of Peter’s help, or someone no greater than Moses and Elijah. But when the cloud enveloped them and

the Father spoke of the identity of His Son, all became very clear. Only Jesus remained standing before them (v. 8).

Based on the Transfiguration, the disciples’ questions about the resurrection and Elijah just make sense. They hadn’t done so well understanding who Jesus was, even as they watched Him feed thousands and walk on water. So we can easily expect that they needed help to understand this important moment.

Jesus’ follow-up question and explanation about Elijah and the Son of Man might have seemed out of sync with what they just witnessed. Yet it was true: The all-glorious Son of God, the Lord of Moses and Elijah, would suffer for the salvation of His people and then rise again from the dead! When we finally see this Jesus face to face, we will not find anything more beautiful.

APPLY THE WORD

Pause to meditate on what it will mean to stand in the very presence of the glorified Jesus. Think of the most bleach-white garment in your possession. It will look pale in comparison to Him. Quiet yourself enough to imagine hearing the Father say to you, “This is my Son, whom I love!” (v.7). Are you prepared to stand in His holy presence forever?

PRAY WITH US

Today, Moody’s campus is filled with students who are coming back after their summer break. Ask the Lord that these young people will have a good transition into the new school year and that His Spirit will teach them and guide them in all truth.

Everything is possible for one who believes.

Mark 9:23

SUNDAY
AUGUST

18

Discipleship Requires Prayer

How do you resist the devil? In his commentary, John Calvin addressed that very question, “Not every kind of faith that will suffice, when we have to enter into a serious conflict with Satan, but that vigorous efforts are indispensably necessary.”

This passage is not the first time Mark records the casting out of an evil spirit by Jesus’ disciples. Already they had successfully cast out many evil spirits by the authority which Jesus gave them (6:13–27). Nor was it the first time they saw Jesus encounter an evil spirit.

Their first lesson in casting out demons occurred when they were still new disciples. They were with Jesus at a synagogue when He cast out an unclean spirit (1:23–26). And then, in their sight, He had ordered evil spirits out of the Gerasenes demoniac (5:13) and the Syrophenician woman’s daughter (7:29).

Certainly by now the disciples were knowledgeable and experienced at casting out evil spirits. So why were they not able to cast out this particular one? Jesus pressed into the situation, recognizing the length of time the boy had been tormented by the spirit and the lack of faith present in both the “unbelieving generation” (v. 19) and the father. He advises the use of prayer—prayer, apparently, of great faith (v. 29). Somewhere in following Jesus, even as they had successfully cast out other evil spirits, the disciples had missed the lessons on deep and fertile praying.

In our efforts to follow Christ well and make disciples, it is important to emphasize and re-emphasize prayer as the means to accomplishing work in His power. Facing the evil one in both seen and unseen realms requires prayer accompanied by great faith. Christ has the power for us to successfully overcome all evil.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you fight your battles with prayer? As we seek to be faithful servants of Christ, we must first get on our knees. Evangelist D. L. Moody once said, “He who kneels the most, stands the best.” Renew your determination today to spend more time in prayer. Ask God for His power to stand firm and overcome evil in our world.

PRAY WITH US

As we’ve read in today’s devotional about prayer and its power to overcome evil, let’s lift up to the Lord our need to spend more time with Him. Let’s ask Him to make us people of prayer, able and willing to overcome evil with good through fervent prayer.

MONDAY
AUGUST

19

*Do not cause anyone to stumble,
whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God.*

1 Corinthians 10:32

Self-Judgment

When we hear a report of child abduction or abuse, it provokes righteous anger within us. We immediately recognize the incredible injustice of someone taking advantage of the innocence and weakness of a child. No justification is possible for this blatant disregard for righteousness.

So it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus minces no words as He speaks about judgment for those who cause "little ones" to stumble (v. 42). But who are the little ones? First, He is referring more broadly to new believers, all those new followers who were casting out demons in His name or giving a cup of cold water to His disciples (v. 41). Jesus reminds His disciples that "whoever is not against us is for us" (v. 40). But just earlier, Jesus referred specifically to small children (vv. 36–37). To avoid causing "little ones," young or old, to sin and to avoid the fiery judgment of hell for making them stumble, Jesus suggests some

extreme acts to stop our sinful behavior: dismembering the hand or the foot, or taking out one's eye. Then, one will not be "salted with fire"—judged in hell's fire as mentioned in verses 43, 45, and 47.

The consequence of sin is real. Hell is described here as a place where "the worm does not die and fire is not quenched" (v. 48), and stands in stark contrast to entering the kingdom of God (v. 47). Hell is a real threat to the person who causes another to stumble.

The reality of eternal punishment should urge careful self-examination of our actions, because the consequence is worse than entering the grave. Death is not a threat; it is natural. But the consequence of hell is beyond what is natural. Therefore, just as we react with great concern about an abused or abducted child, we should pay attention to Jesus' warning and lead others to Christ, not turn them away.

APPLY THE WORD

For many, the mention of hell can feel too harsh, too out of touch with modern sensibilities. Yet the reality of everlasting punishment does not disappear because our society wishes to ignore it. We must continue the task of preaching the gospel. There is no other message that gives people the good news of escaping hell.

PRAY WITH US

Fall semester at Moody Bible Institute begins today! Please join us as we pray for Moody's faculty, staff, and administration. Pray that they will work together in unity to help students become strong Christian leaders of tomorrow.

*That is why a man leaves his father
and mother and is united to his wife,
and they become one flesh.*

Genesis 2:24

TUESDAY
AUGUST

20

Jesus, Marriage, and Children

Statistics on divorce in America can make the chances of having a lasting marriage seem bleak. Divorce is not something anyone desires. The dissolution of a marriage causes pain not only to the married couple, but to their children, friends, and extended family. And Christian marriages that fail can be a negative witness for Christianity.

In this passage, Jesus speaks frankly about marriage and divorce. Jesus' teaching on the lawfulness of divorce reveals that God's original intent in Creation was that no one who married would separate. God had "joined together" Adam and Eve (v. 9). They became "one flesh" (v. 8). He intended a lifelong union between a man and a woman for our joy and for His glory.

While many believers have experienced God's grace and mercy in remarriage, Jesus clearly taught that

this was not God's intended plan. There seems to be an exception in Matthew 19 for allowable remarriage when one has been victimized by adultery: "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." But even in this we need to be cautious. Every passage should be read in light of all the other biblical statements on marriage, for Scripture is consistent within itself.

Also in this passage, Jesus turned His attention to children who were being brought to Him for blessing. His disciples rebuked those who brought the children. The passage says that Jesus was "indignant" (v. 14)—not at the parents and others who brought the children, but at the disciples. Jesus welcomed and blessed the children (v. 16). He upheld as sacred both the union of marriage and blessing of children.

APPLY THE WORD

This passage may be hard to read for we all know married couples who struggle. Today, ask God to help you come alongside and serve those in need. Maybe you can offer to care for the children of a young couple so they can have a night out? Or you could extend a dinner invitation to a couple having a difficult season.

PRAY WITH US

The student body of MBI gathers this evening for the Opening Convocation ceremony. Dr. Mark Jobe, Moody's president, will lead the students in a time of prayer. Please support Dr. Jobe's ministry to the students with your prayers today.

WEDNESDAY
AUGUST

21

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.

James 1:9

Last in the Kingdom

In August 2017, in his final world competition, Usain Bolt, the United States 100 m world-record holder was favored to win in the IAAF World Championships in London. Bolt had not lost a final of any race for four years, but this race would not provide a cherry on top of the sprinter's incredible career. Instead, Bolt was defeated in the finals by longtime rival Justin Gatlin. The great king of the 100 m dash was knocked down a few notches, finishing third.

Sometimes those expected to finish in first place do not make the mark. As it relates to eternal life, Jesus affirms that many who assume they have lived a good life and acquired the righteousness needed to guarantee salvation, in fact have missed the mark.

The rich man who inquired of Jesus about inheriting eternal life felt certain that he had salvation in hand. From the start, however, his assumption about

himself proved as faulty as his words of flattery. Notice that he recognized Jesus only as a “good teacher” and not as God (v. 17). He felt he never had broken the Law, but on the contrary, his heart was controlled by greed. Rather than gaining eternal life, he would go away “last,” because he refused to follow Jesus (v. 22). By contrast, the disciples, who had sacrificed all to follow Jesus and who were probably considered “last” with respect to wealth and accomplishment, would secure a place in the kingdom, gaining rewards for their sacrifice and most importantly, eternal life.

Many have given their lives for the Lord's service. Some have moved into the mission field, far from their families. Others have made second-career moves that significantly reduce their income and standard of living; they go without many of life's comforts. Their sacrifices are not in vain. They are winning the race of eternity (vv. 30–31).

APPLY THE WORD

The disciples might have been amazed to realize that gaining wealth does not guarantee heaven's approval (v. 26). Equating riches with the blessing of God is prevalent even today. In contrast, Jesus commends decreasing our portfolio for the great purpose of His kingdom. Think of how you can decrease yours in order to advance the gospel.

PRAY WITH US

Those who work in Food Service have a vital ministry to the students on campus. Please pray for Seth Mendez, Rachel Campbell, and Paul Houk as they serve the whole student body with nutritious meals in the Student Dining Room.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.

Mark 10:43

THURSDAY
AUGUST

22

Front Row Seats

The average Super Bowl ticket costs between \$2,500 and \$3,000. However, one sports fan paid \$65,000 to get a seat on the 40-yard line, just six rows from the field, for Super Bowl LIII! Front row seat—or even those close to the front row—are coveted in any sports or entertainment venue. The closer the seat to the front, the higher the price such a ticket can fetch.

Getting front row seats in Heaven was the request posed to Jesus by James and John (v. 37). But when they confidently asked Jesus to give them seats at His right and left, they did not really know what they were asking. These seats come with the high price-tag of undergoing *suffering*, which Jesus would soon experience. The seat giving, too, is not up to us. It is in the hands of God the Father, who *sovereignly* determines kingdom rewards. Most of all, Jesus explains to the jealous band of disciples that these seats are not about

greatness; they are about *servicing* (vv. 42–45). The ten think James and John are going to have a leg-up on telling them what to do in the kingdom by speaking first and securing the key seats next to the King. However, if we think in terms of the heavenly kingdom of Christ, this view of power positions is wrong-headed.

Power seeking is part and parcel of this world's way of living. To be great in God's kingdom involves being a servant—exemplified by Jesus. Jesus' path to greatness came through serving those in need of salvation. He offered Himself to purchase our redemption. By the world's standards, there was nothing great or appealing about serving or dying by the shameful death on a cross. Yet, the best seats in the house, where Jesus will reign, come by following the path our King took to greatness.

APPLY THE WORD

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks James and John (v. 36) and again a blind man (v. 51). To each, Jesus responded as a servant: listening, helping, caring. While the crowd thought the blind beggar was unworthy of Jesus' attention, Jesus served him with the same grace He gave to James and John. We must do the same.

PRAY WITH US

Keeping in prayer the Food Service staff, please add Brianne Dueck, Gonzalo Garcia, Gregory Dickson, Hoa Lam, and Jeffery Williams to your prayer list. They make an important contribution to the successful operation of the Student Dining Room.

FRIDAY
AUGUST

23

*Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord!*

Mark 11:9

The Useless Tree

Fig trees are found all over Israel. The tall, leafy, shade-giving trees produce two harvests of fruit each year. Despite its unassuming exterior, the fruit produced by a fig tree is rich and delicious with a wonderful distinctive smell. But fig trees don't necessarily flourish on their own. They take time and nurturing in order to grow and give fruit.

In today's reading, Jesus uses the fig tree as an important symbol of the nation of Israel. Notice that the fig tree appears here both before (vv. 12–14) and after (vv. 20–21) Jesus' tumultuous visit to the Temple. In order to restore the Temple to a house of prayer for the nations, Jesus began physically removing buyers, sellers, and vessel-carriers. His clearing of the Temple upset the chief priests and jealous scribes, and the Bible says they began plotting to destroy Him. Notice also that the incident with Jesus in the Temple occurs immediately following His Triumphal

Entry (vv. 1–11). The Jewish hope was that their triumphant King would return to establish Himself in Jerusalem, provide the promises of His kingdom to Israel, and vanquish Israel's foes. But even though Jesus had been welcomed by crowds, the Jewish people were not prepared to receive Jesus as their King.

Jesus discovered a nation living in a way that did not please His Father. That's why they received the curses promised in Deuteronomy 28 for failing to obey the Lord; they would be cursed just like the fig tree. The cursing and withering of the fig tree here serve as a warning for Israel.

Despite this haunting symbol, all was not lost for Israel, as the promises to the disciples revealed. Neither is all lost for those churches today that have veered from the mission of being Christ's witnesses. By faith, many in Israel will be forgiven, and it will be restored to glory.

APPLY THE WORD

Keeping the church on track in Christ is not just the job of the pastor. With patience, love, humility, and prayer, every member has a responsibility to help our church maintain faithful stewardship of the gospel. Together, we need to seek the salvation of the lost and make disciples of those saved. Ask your pastoral staff how you can help.

PRAY WITH US

With thousands of students to serve, Jonathan True, Joseph Timmer, Martin Rios, Nathaniel Brumbaugh, and Olivia Litowski have busy days in the Student Dining Room. Ask the Lord to strengthen them and give them joy for their day-to-day work.

*The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.*

Mark 12:10

SATURDAY
AUGUST

24

Rejecting Jesus

A cornerstone, also called a foundation stone, is important because it is the very first stone laid in a building. Structurally it is the stone on which the rest of the building is constructed. Jesus is described as the Chief Cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20).

The tenants in Jesus' parable had stewardship of the landowner's land. Instead of sharing the fruit of the land with the owner, however, they rejected his authority by disrespecting and then killing each messenger he sent to collect rent. Scripture said the landowner sent "many" messengers, "some of them they beat, others they killed" (v. 5). Finally, the landowner sent his son, "whom he loved" (v. 6). Instead of paying what was due, the tenants first acknowledged that this was indeed the son, and then, decided to kill him. These farmers had a relationship with the landowner. He was allowing them to work his land. He reached out to them repeatedly,

patiently. Finally, he even sent his own son, and the workers not only rejected his efforts, they killed his son. Ultimately the farmers received just punishment for their actions (v. 9).

While some of Jesus' parables were difficult to understand, this one was not. Verse 12 says the meaning of the parable was understood by the religious leaders. They knew Jesus was speaking to them directly. The religious teachers had continued to question Jesus' source of authority. In chapter 11, verses 27–33, they had directly confronted Jesus about His teaching and actions. "Who gave you authority?" they asked (11:28). This occurs four times in just these few verses (vv. 28, 29, 32).

It's potentially possible to run a church without the authority of Christ and His Word. It's possible for a church to turn away from the gospel. We should take seriously the warning in this parable.

APPLY THE WORD

The picture of the landowner killing the tenants is gruesome and sobering. The Lord will hold accountable those who reject His authority through His Son, as well as those who do not follow God's Word—those who reject the authority of the Son of God. Encourage your church to respect and follow the Word of the Lord.

PRAY WITH US

Vice president Paul Santhouse welcomes your prayers for the teams at Moody Publishers. Thank the Lord in prayer for the ministry of its Finance team: Catrina Barwick, Harrison Gunter, Jeffrey Reynolds, Priscilla Diaz, Richard Peterson, and Susan Malnati.

SUNDAY
AUGUST

25

You are not far from the kingdom of God.

Mark 12:34

Greatness God's Way

When the Loyola University men's basketball team reached the Final Four in 2018, many thought their Cinderella season would end with a NCAA championship. Entering the tournament as a No. 11 seed, they defeated opponent after opponent to secure their spot in the Final Four. Taking a first-half lead against the Michigan Wolverines, Loyola's victory seemed secure. But Michigan's offense proved too powerful, and they were defeated. Loyola was so close to winning, and yet so far away.

The scribe who asked Jesus about the most important commandment was so close to fully understanding the identity of Jesus and entering the kingdom. Already he had found Jesus answering the other religious leaders' questions very well. Now, rather than testing Jesus like his peers, he seemed to want affirmation of who he thought Jesus was. Jesus replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, the command to "love the Lord your

God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." And also to love one's neighbor as oneself. These words seemed to satisfy the scribe's inquiry as he concurred with Jesus' understanding of the uniqueness of God and His definition of the two greatest commandments. But Jesus' response indicates that the scribe's intellectual agreement ("he had answered wisely") was not enough (v. 34). He was close to the kingdom without fully believing.

Agreement with the truth about God and even acknowledging "good things" about the Bible are not enough to enter the kingdom of God as a citizen. While right thinking about God is necessary to confess that God came in the flesh to redeem us, this confession must be coupled with a heart of faith in Christ and His redemptive work. Our heart and our mind are deeply connected as we place our trust in Christ alone for our salvation.

APPLY THE WORD

Some people may feel like they are Christians just by knowledge of the Bible or association with the church. But knowing the facts about Christianity is not enough. We are called to come to Jesus in faith, to open our hearts to His truth and acknowledge Him as our personal Lord and Savior.

PRAY WITH US

Lord Jesus, teach us by the power of the Holy Spirit to love you with our whole heart, mind, and strength. Increase our faith! May we trust you with everything in us, and not just offer you intellectual agreement with your truth. Amen!

*Watch out that no one deceives you.
Many will come in my name, claiming,
“I am he,” and will deceive many.*

Mark 13:5–6

MONDAY
AUGUST

26

Preparing for the End

Herod's Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD with an incredible amount of violent bloodshed. In *The Jewish War*, historian Flavius Josephus describes the destruction with horrific and vivid words: “Crowded together around the entrances many were trampled by their friends, many fell among the still hot and smoking ruins of the colonnades and died as miserably as the defeated. . . . Everywhere was slaughter and flight.” So great was the bloodshed, one very well might have mistaken those days for the last days.

Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple, even while it still stood in magnificent splendor. Incredulous, the disciples pressed Him for more details wanting to know where and when it would happen so they could be prepared. The “end” Jesus speaks of here refers both to the destruction of Herod's Temple in the time of the disciples as well as the end described

in Revelation. Those living in the first century were to remain on their guard; those believers who are alive and the time of the rebuilding of the temple should be on their guard for persecution and attempts at deception.

Jesus' explanation of events associated with the complete destruction of the Temple calls the reader to be watchful for deceivers in order to endure to that final end. Today, many try to take advantage of people's fears, pointing to the chaos in our world, as we near the time of the return of Christ.

Yet our response to the hope of Christ's return is to be watchful, guarding ourselves against deceiving words about His return and preparing without anxiety for the world's hatred toward us to increase. We know that our Lord will be victorious, He will destroy His enemies. And we will be with Him in joy forever.

APPLY THE WORD

We are not to be anxious and fearful, but to be firm in our faith. The Lord promises salvation to “the one who stands firm” (v. 13). Losing salvation is not possible for the believer. But those who turn forever away from a *profession* of Christ reveal themselves as never having truly accepted Him. Those belonging to God will never lose their hope.

PRAY WITH US

Today we invite you to pray for Moody's Customer Service Center in Chicago. Praise God for this team that serves with dedication and excellence, answering hundreds of phone calls every day with a kind and helpful attitude.

TUESDAY
AUGUST

27

*What I say to you,
I say to everyone: Watch!*

Mark 13:37

Signs to Stay Awake

Driving along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway in October, you will see a beautiful sight: most of the foliage begins to change into red, orange, and yellow shades. The stretch of road between the two cities is lined with trees bursting with colors. And when drivers see these autumn colors, they know winter is coming very soon.

When the leaves of the fig tree sprouted and its twigs became tender, it was a sign for Jesus' audience that summer was drawing near (v. 28). Jesus used the ability to read that physical sign in nature to exhort his hearers to consider signs pointing to His return.

The unique nature of these signs would distinguish them from anyone's claim to have seen the returned Messiah. Scripture teaches that all celestial bodies will be disturbed by the return of Christ—the sun, moon, and stars (vv. 24–25).

Unlike the predictable signs of the changing seasons, the exact time of the return of Christ is unknown even to Jesus (v. 32)! Only the Father has that date on His calendar. Jesus, in humility, voluntarily chooses to leave that date in the mind of the Father alone.

In doing so, Jesus lovingly creates a situation in which we must be ready at all times for signs pointing toward His return. We cannot drive down life's road looking for an annual event that will nudge us to get ready for what's to come. Instead, we must live in readiness mode at all times, being ever watchful.

Christ's words about the end times have more permanence than the present heaven and earth. We would do well to heed His words with expectant hearts. This time He is coming with the power and glory of His rule.

APPLY THE WORD

How often do you check your daily calendar? While we cannot check our calendar to know the exact date of Christ's return, every generation has hoped that Jesus would return in their lifetime. This eager expectancy reflects the promises of our salvation. We are to live each day as if we will see our King in His full glory tomorrow.

PRAY WITH US

Would you pray for Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media? Greg's humility and love for the Lord have been a blessing for many at MBI. Ask God to continue guiding Greg in his media ministry, as well as in his service on MBI's leadership team.

She has done a beautiful thing to me.

Mark 14:6

WEDNESDAY
AUGUST

28

Preparing for Passover

As the most anticipated movie of 2019, Marvel's *Avengers: Endgame* broke the international opening weekend gross record, making \$859 million. Building up to the event, potential viewers were encouraged to re-watch the entire 20+ movies in the Marvel series leading up to *Endgame*. For many, the pre-viewing measures helped make the waiting for the movie worth all its surrounding hype.

In Mark's narrative, multiple preparations were under way for the Passover, all of them associated with Jesus. Some of these actions were horribly wrong and went against the central meaning of Passover. Others were perceptively right and honored the event. Wrongly, the chief priests and scribes worked to remove Jesus from the Passover celebration. Their actions were especially self-condemning since they knew what the Law taught about murder and what the Old Testament taught about treating the righteous as evil.

Equally wrongly, Judas entered a plot to betray Jesus. The wayward disciple was guided by his desire for money rather than the remembrance of God's mercy as commemorated by the Passover.

Rightly, however, a woman unidentified by Mark anointed Jesus for burial with costly pure nard or perfume, recognizing Him as her High Priest (Ex. 29:7). She had eyes to see Jesus' coming death and burial, and associated it with Passover. This woman prepared for the feast by worshiping Jesus, recognizing her need for His mediation. Similarly, the disciples obediently prepared the place to share the Passover feast with Jesus.

The way we prepare to participate in the Lord's Supper—the event memorializing Jesus' death for us—can help us gain more from the celebration. Our preparations of worship and obedience appropriately honor Jesus and remember His sacrifice.

APPLY THE WORD

Does your church participate in the Lord's Supper, also known as the Communion Table? If you know the date ahead of time, set aside time to prepare your heart for worship. Reread passages that mention the Lord's Supper in the Gospels, reflect on the meaning of Christ's death on your behalf, and ask the Lord to cleanse you of sin.

PRAY WITH US

Thank God for the lesson we've learned from today's reading. May we remember Jesus as the Passover Lamb, thank Him for His sacrifice on our behalf, and honor Him as Lord. May we worship Him in Spirit and in truth!

THURSDAY
AUGUST

29

Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Mark 14:25

The Coming Crucifixion

By this time the disciples should have been well-prepared for the death of Jesus. Three times He had warned them of the soon-to-come events in Jerusalem, each time with the promise of His resurrection after three days (8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34). The disciples had just witnessed a woman pour out costly oil on Him, which He described as preparation for His “burial” (14:8). And, as they celebrated the Passover, He spoke of His body and of drinking again in the kingdom of God (14:25).

The disciples didn’t fully understand Jesus and continued eating. Jesus showed again that they did not recognize Him when He said there were potential betrayers and deserters among them. Misunderstanding the significance of His statements about the coming Crucifixion, Peter pledged loyalty to Jesus with great overconfidence. “Even if all fall away, I will not” (v. 29). Their misunderstanding would allow them to

be weak in prayer rather than vigilant, and eventually would lead to their desertion.

Fully understanding the significance of the death of Jesus will take the remainder of our lives in both this world and the next. For all eternity we will rejoice at the significance of His great redemption of our souls by the sacrifice of His life. In this life, we have every day to meditate on His atoning work, the forgiveness that comes by the shedding of His blood, His fulfillment of the requirements of the Law’s judgment, and His taking God’s wrath on Himself in our place.

We should appreciate the meaning of Christ’s death more and more each day. Participation with fellow saints in the Lord’s Supper should be sweeter, our prayer life should become stronger, and our devotion to our Savior should increase.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s Lord’s Supper celebrations emphasize the solemnity of the event. We come to this table in a serious manner. We take time to prepare ourselves. The Lord’s Supper, like Passover, is also a feast of celebration. We marvel at the forgiveness of our sins through Christ’s death. Thank God with joy while taking communion!

PRAY WITH US

Are you a part of a local church? Take time today to pray for your church, as well as for your pastor and elders. As today’s devotional shows us, the best way to grow in faith, understand the things of God, and make disciples is in a community of believers.

*He was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities.*

Isaiah 53:5

FRIDAY
AUGUST

30

The Death of Jesus

The *Heidelberg Catechism* features a series of questions and answers, which instruct in specific doctrines of the faith. Question 39 focuses on the significance of the Cross, asking if it is important that Christ was crucified and did not die in another way. The answer: “Yes, for thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay upon me; because the death of the cross was accursed of God.”

The significance of the Cross of Christ for our *salvation* is clearly understood by any Christian reading of the events of Good Friday. But the significance of the Cross for our *suffering* may not be as well understood or appreciated. Jesus’ acceptance of unjust treatment, even to the point of His crucifixion, affirmed His identity as the Messianic King.

Jesus did not reply to the charges brought by His accusers (v. 5). As Barabbas was released and mocking

took place, He did not speak up in His own defense but accepted His sentence. As the soldiers brutally mistreated Jesus, He did nothing to stop them (vv. 16–20). Jesus did not use His divine power to deter this abuse. He did not act to save Himself. Accepting the greatest injustice ever leveled at a person in history, Jesus showed His disciples, and us as well, how to handle injustice—walking through the most unimaginable, unbearable, unjust, unrelenting, undeserved, and seemingly unendurable of trials. Jesus let His silence speak when He was wrongly accused. His innocence stood trial as leaders played politics with His life.

A centurion, or soldier, watching the events, declared, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (v. 39). His response shows us that our acceptance of unjust treatment for the sake of Christ will speak volumes to those looking on, pointing them to that same Messiah.

APPLY THE WORD

The centurion’s testimony is significant! As a soldier, he no doubt witnessed a great number of crucifixions. As a Roman, he most likely was a polytheist. That is why his declaration of Jesus as God, after witnessing Christ’s crucifixion, is especially moving. Rejoice and tell someone else of your certainty that God Himself came to save you.

PRAY WITH US

What a sobering message presents today’s Scripture! As we read about the death of Jesus, help us remember, Lord, that in a world trying to achieve justice its own way, all justice belongs to you.

SATURDAY
AUGUST

31

He has risen! He is not here.

Mark 16:7

The Empty Tomb

Mark's Gospel account ends on an odd note. In many Bibles, verses 9–20 contain a commentator's note about the disputed authenticity of the closing section of the book. Many Bible scholars say that the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel do not contain this ending.

Equally odd is the description in verses 1 to 8: the reaction of the three women at the tomb of Jesus. They are there, having overcome obstacles to get to Jesus, including awaiting the Sabbath to finish, the sun to rise, and having the stone rolled away. Yet, they are described as "alarmed" by the appearance of the angel at the tomb (v. 5).

Moreover, after multiple reassurances that the crucified Jesus is alive, this account says that they leave fearful and even more—"bewildered" (v. 8). In the conclusion of Mark's Gospel, despite the assurances to tell Peter and the disciples

about the resurrection and the promise from Jesus that they will see Him alive, they do not announce it to anyone.

Even when there are no obstacles preventing us from remembering Christ's death on our behalf, we might be hesitant to tell others about Him. Even with the scores of reassurances we have from His Word, history, and the Holy Spirit within us, we still might find ourselves hesitant to proclaim to others that the tomb is indeed empty.

The end of the Gospel of Mark proposes a challenge to servants of Jesus: Will we be silent with the message of Jesus' death and resurrection? Or, will we use the empty tomb and the proclamation of His resurrection as a starting point to take the message of the Gospel of Mark—the good news of Jesus—to everyone without fear, assured by the promise of His return?

APPLY THE WORD

Now that you we have finished the Gospel of Mark, we suggest you go back and read the full story again. With the end in mind, you will notice the many references to Jesus being the Son of God and King of the Jews who came to offer eternal life. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you boldness and courage to tell others that Jesus' tomb is empty.

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our study of the Gospel of Mark this month, let's thank God for His wondrous salvation extended to all who believe, and for His grace that is always sufficient. Let's pray that our lives would be pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ.



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