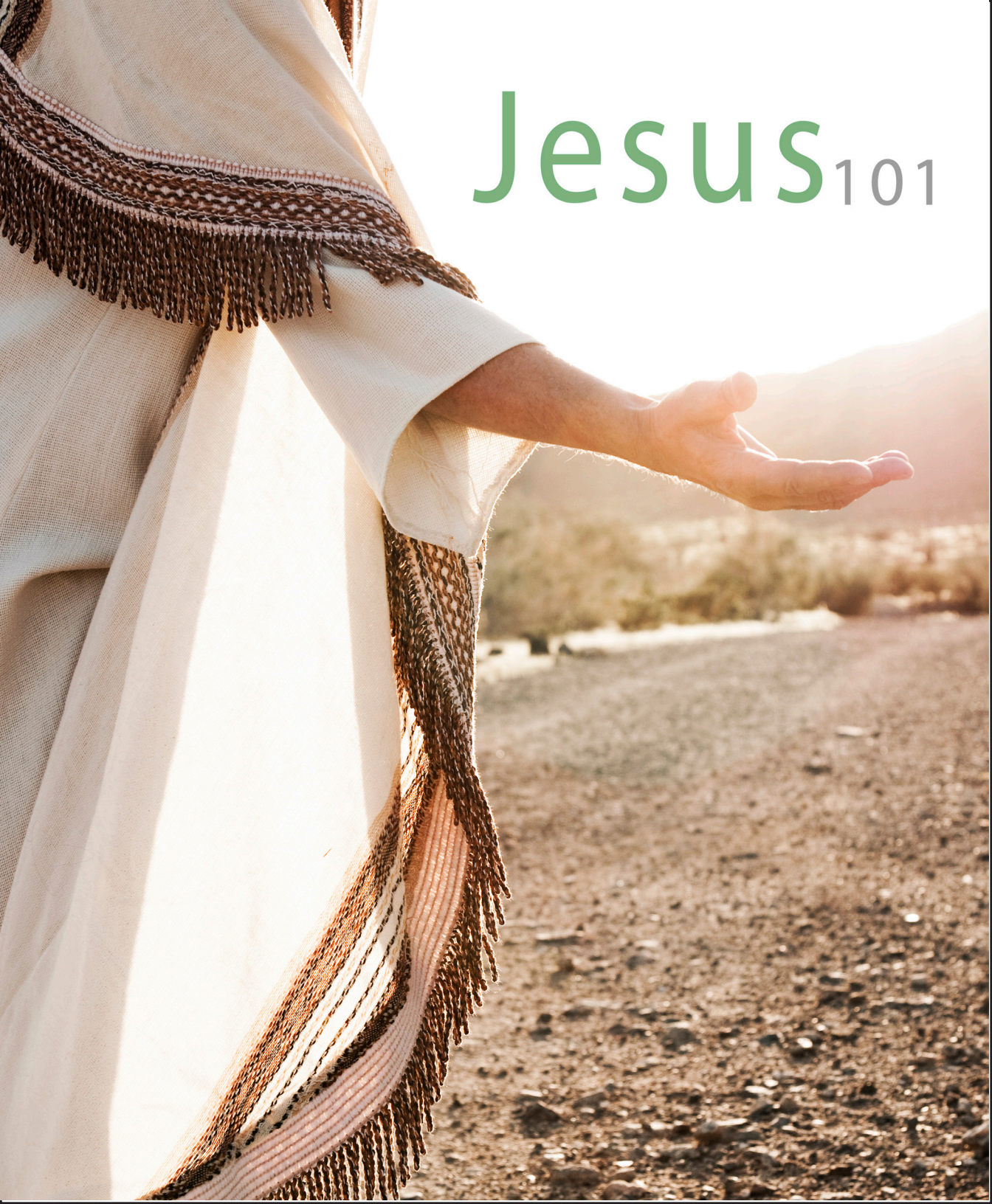


Jesus₁₀₁



Jesus¹⁰¹

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Jesus¹⁰¹

Introduction:

We all have questions. The questions we have about life, eternal life, sin, and salvation are serious questions. The four **Gospels** that are included in the New Testament are written to address those questions. This booklet is written to help guide you through the Gospel of Mark so that you can learn about Jesus, understand who He is, what He did, and find out what that means for you today. If people want to learn how to follow Jesus it only makes sense that we walk with Jesus and His **disciples** (followers) through the story of his life.

It is also important that we see this as a story that is taking us somewhere. Mark doesn't give us all the answers up front. In fact, Jesus even keeps his identity a secret until Mark 8 when Peter makes his confession. It is important that we experience this story and let it unfold in our minds so we can discover exactly who Jesus is and what that means for us.

Words that may need more explanation are green and are defined in the Glossary in the back of the book.

Lesson 1 – The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry

Mark 1-3

The Gospel of Mark starts with a man named John the Baptist. John was a **prophet**. Prophets weren’t always guys who could tell you the future. Prophets in the Bible are people who are God’s spokesmen. John’s mission was to get people ready for the coming of the **Messiah** (a word that means chosen or anointed). The coming of John and the coming of the Messiah were both prophesied about in the Old Testament. Those prophesies were written 700 years before Jesus was even born (Isaiah 53, Micah 5:1 and many more).

The Role of John the Baptist (Read Mark 1:2-5)

What does Mark say John was doing to prepare the way for people?

How would those actions prepare people for the Messiah?

The Authority of Jesus (Read Mark 1:7-11)

John spoke of someone who was to come after him. *How did John view the authority and power of the one who was to come after him?*

Jesus was not baptized for the same reason as the people we just read about in 1:4-5. *When Jesus was baptized, what happened that was different than everyone else?*

The Spirit coming down on Jesus and the voice of God from heaven **testify** (tells us something) about who Jesus is.

What did God say about Jesus when he was baptized?

What two things did God say about Jesus in addition to that?

Evidence About Jesus:

So far we have some pieces that help us figure out who Jesus is:

- Old Testament – prophesied about John the Baptist and the coming of the Christ
- John the Baptist (a prophet of God) – Jesus would come with power and baptize people with the Spirit
- God – Jesus is God’s Son
- God’s Spirit – descending on Jesus in a sign of acceptance

Jesus' Ministry Begins (Read 1:12-20)

Starting in Mark 1:12 Jesus' **ministry** has begun. The very first thing Jesus encounters is opposition from **Satan**. (More information on this story can be found in Matthew 4:1-11). The reason this is mentioned is because Jesus' ministry was a fight against the power of darkness. That is why Satan wants to oppose what Jesus is doing, because Jesus is standing up to Satan.

Next we see Jesus calling disciples to come and follow Him. This was a typical action taken by Jewish teachers in Jesus' day. The idea was the disciple would follow the master and learn to do what he did. Typically this involved the disciple learning the teachings of his rabbi (teacher) and eventually begin teaching it themselves.

Something else was going on with Jesus though. He was no ordinary teacher. The duty he would call his disciples to was more than just repeating his teachings. He would call them to take action against the forces of evil and bring life to the world. In the next few verses we will learn more about who Jesus was based on what Jesus did.

Jesus' Healing Ministry (Mark 1:21-2:12)

What kinds of things does Jesus heal in these verses?

- 1:21-28 – drives out a demon/evil spirit
- 1:29-34 – heals many diseases
- 1:40-45 – heals leprosy
- 2:1-12 – heals a paralyzed man & forgives his sins

In each instance (except for the 1:29-34) we see how Jesus cured these people.

How did Jesus do it in each instance?

What does it say about Jesus if he is able to say something and spirits and diseases obey Jesus' command?

Jesus had great **authority**. He had authority over spiritual beings (evil spirits) and Jesus had authority over sickness and disease. These healings are called **miracles**. A miracle is something that happens that has no natural explanation. It would not be a miracle if Simon's mother in law just gave it some time and her fever naturally went away. It is a miracle because Jesus commanded the fever to go away and it did. The same with the demon of Mark 1:21-28 and the men with leprosy and paralysis in Mark 1:40-2:12. Doctors today can't tell a disease to go away. They are trained to treat people but have no authority over the disease itself.

So far we have the testimony of John, God and the Holy Spirit that Jesus is God's Son. We also have the testimony of demons that Jesus is the "Holy One of God" and the evidence of his miraculous powers. These are more than just words. We are seeing what Jesus had the authority to do.

What seems strange is that Jesus tells the demons and even the leper to keep the Jesus' identity a secret. That happens several times in Mark. Why does Jesus do this? See "**Messianic Secret**" in the **Glossary**.

Who are people today we regard as having a tremendous amount of authority?

How does their authority compare up to what we have seen from Jesus so far?

Jesus' Authority (Read Mark 3:20-27)

In Mark 3:22 the **teachers of the law** were accusing Jesus of being demon possessed and that he was driving out demons by the power of **Beelzebub**. That is a serious accusation.

What evidence did they say they had of this in Mark 3:22?

Jesus responds to their accusation starting in 3:23. He says that a kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand. Satan wouldn't drive himself out. It is like accusing offensive linemen of trying to sack the quarterback or a soccer player purposely kicking the ball in the wrong goal. The accusation just doesn't make sense.

Last, Jesus tells a **parable** (a story that makes a spiritual point) starting in verse 27 that gives us a clue about why he is doing miracles.

Who do you think the strong man is that he is talking about here?

Jesus is saying that before he can take Satan's possessions he first has to go and tie up the strong man, Satan, so that he can take things (people) back out of Satan's household. Jesus is talking about saving people from the power of the devil.

Jesus is showing us that he has authority over demons and even over Satan himself (remember Mark 1:21-28?). Jesus has ultimate authority over everything. We are starting to see that but it won't be completely clear until the end of Mark just what all of that means. We get glimpses along the way.

[If you are wondering about what Jesus means by Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit there is more information on that in the back of this booklet right after the Glossary.]

Liberation:

Jesus stood against the prevailing authorities of his day. There were teachers of the Law who misunderstood God. There were evil spirits who kept people in spiritual bondage. There was illness that kept people crippled and sick. Jesus' healing is more than making people feel better. Jesus brought liberation from the powers that held people's lives in despair. Jesus came to liberate people from the powers of this world and bring us under His authority.

Questions to consider:

If you were Jesus how would you liberate people from all of these things?

What have you seen him have power over so far?

Why do you think there is evil in the world?

What kind of power do you think God has in the world today?

If Jesus used his power to liberate his people then, what does he use his power for today?

Jesus is doing things no one else can do or has ever done. After considering all these things who do you think Jesus is?

Do you have any questions that were not covered in this lesson?

Lesson 2 – Jesus Grows His Disciples

Mark 4-8

Jesus didn't see people the way the world sees them. Jesus cared for people the world thought of as outcasts because Jesus knew that all people are created with value and are loved by God.

Jesus' acceptance of others (Read Mark 2:13-17)

Jesus calls a **tax collector** named Levi (also called Matthew) to be his disciple. Jesus catches a lot of heat for his decision to ask a tax collector to be his follower. Those criticizing Jesus had a problem seeing what was actually going on. They couldn't see Levi as anything but a cheating tax collector.

How did Jesus see Levi?

How did everyone else see Levi?

How did Jesus attempt to change the way his critics saw people like Levi?

Jesus didn't see "sinners" as people with a label, to be avoided. Instead he saw them as people in need of hope and **salvation**. If he refused to spend time with Levi, he would have to refuse to spend time every single one of us! Romans 3:10 tells us, "there is no one righteous, no not one!"

Jesus was a loving person. That doesn't mean Jesus accepted every action of everybody. It does mean he was patient enough with people to give them a chance.

Why is it important that Jesus has this same compassion and patience with us?

Jesus teaches his followers (Read Mark 4:1-9)

In Mark 4 Jesus teaches a parable about a man who was scattering seed on the ground (how they used to plant their crops).

Sum up the four types of soil Jesus describes.

What is it that makes the difference for how well the seed grows and lasts?

In **Mark 4:13-20** Jesus explains the parable.

What does Jesus say the seed represents?

What does Jesus say the different soils represent?

Who is the sower?

Every single person who hears the word of God is like that soil. We all fit in this parable somewhere. The question for us is this, *which type of soil are we going to be?*

Jesus is not dooming us to only be one kind of soil. The more we listen, see and understand, the more God can work on our hearts and soften us up to receive His Words and grow. Anything that is worthwhile takes work, time and effort.

What does Jesus say happens if the sower's seed lands on good soil?

Jesus is not saying that if you believe what he is teaching that your savings account will automatically go up by 30, 60 or 100 times. Jesus is saying that when you put your **faith** in Jesus, God will be at work in your life to make your life spiritually full and abundant. Most people want to live a meaningful and full life.

Why is it important for your life to be about something bigger than yourself?

Is your life producing what God wants it to produce or are things getting in the way and choking out the growth God desires?

What are some things you feel are distracting you from growing closer to God?

Jesus Sends His Followers (Read Mark 6:7-13)

It was mentioned earlier that to follow a rabbi or teacher meant to learn to do what he was doing and to teach what he taught. That means at some point in time faith is more than just believing. Faith requires action. Most people don't want to take on a new set of beliefs to just sit on the couch and think it over for the next 20 years. Instead, people want their beliefs to change their lives and move them to meaningful action.

Why is it important for our beliefs result in action?

If you were preparing people to be sent out on a long journey where they would be walking their way to and from places what would you tell them to pack?

Why do you think Jesus' packing list was so short?

How would you respond if Jesus gave you that packing list?

Preparation for our journey in life will not require all the world says it requires.

What kinds of things does the world say we need in order to be successful in life? Is that really true?

Jesus was making them walk the walk. The walk is going to require trusting that God will take care of your needs.

What were the results of their journey?

What makes it challenging to trust God like they did?

Jesus Has Compassion (Read Mark 8:1-10)

How long had the crowd following Jesus been following him without food?

It is kind of funny that Jesus would ask his 12 disciples how many loaves of bread they had with them. Did he expect them to pull 4000 loaves from their 24 pockets? Jesus already knew they didn't have enough. Turns out they had 7 loaves and some fish. Jesus knew that would be enough.

Why did Jesus take the time to feed all of these people?

Jesus was connected with people. Jesus was connected through compassion to see through the surface of who they were and see what they needed most. Jesus also did this as he called his disciples from careers like tax collecting and fishing to come and follow him and one day, change the world. Before Jesus can take his disciples further there is one more thing they must understand about Jesus. Jesus asks them the question they need to answer in Mark 8:27.

Who is Jesus? (Read Mark 8:27-30)

What two questions does Jesus ask his followers?

What is the difference between those two questions?

When it comes to your own personal faith, it is not about what others have to say about Jesus. Some people have hope because their parents were Christians and so they hope it will count for them too but don't care to live like it. When it comes to your relationship with God, it doesn't matter what anyone else has to say, the question for you is not what do others say about who Jesus is but what do you say?

Up to this point there is a lot to base the answer to this question on. We have looked at Jesus' miracles, his teaching, his compassion and his mission. Jesus was up to something. He was on a mission. That mission has everything to do with who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do.

The question for you is this, *Who do you believe Jesus is?*

Peter believes Jesus is the Messiah but he doesn't yet understand everything that means. That is okay because Jesus

has more to teach him and he has more to teach us at this point in the story. There is more to discover about Jesus to help our faith continue to grow.

Questions to consider:

In this lesson we have talked about the acceptance and compassion of Jesus. Randy Harris has said "There is nothing you can do that will make God love you more than he already does." *How important is it to you that Jesus is compassionate, patient and loving?*

We have also talked about how Jesus teaches us how to live and how important it is to walk the walk instead of just having all the right beliefs. *What are some important things in your life and how do those things require action?*

How does following Jesus require action?

Last, we talked about who Jesus is. *Are there any areas of doubt that you still have about Jesus being the Messiah and Son of God?*

Do you have any questions that were not covered in this lesson?

Lesson 3 –Overcoming Opposition

Mark 8-14

Jesus' followers now believe Jesus is the chosen one of God who has come to take away the sins of the world. You might expect there to be a big celebration following Peter's confession. Instead there is great distress.

God's Way or Our Way? (Read Mark 8:31-33)

What does Jesus predict in these verses?

Why do you think Peter was so upset over Jesus' statement?

Jesus calls Peter **Satan** . . .satan is the Greek word for someone who stands in your way (as well as a word for the devil). Jesus was not saying Peter was actually the devil. Jesus was saying that as long as Peter wanted to stop (Mark says "**rebuke**") Jesus from what he had to do that Peter stood opposed to God's mission.

What does Jesus say about Peter's priorities?

The world sees things a certain way but Jesus calls us to see things differently. The world would say if Jesus has all this power and authority he should just take over the world, call 10,000 angels and use his power to destroy everything evil. That is not the way Jesus does things. Instead, he gives us an insight into how we can see things the way God sees things.

God's way may not always make sense to us. We may even resist it. Since God knows all things and wants the best for us, the Bible teaches us that we are to trust his way is right even when we don't understand it (Isa 55:9, 1 Cor 1:25).

What makes that kind of trust difficult?

The Cost of Following Jesus (Read Mark 8:34-38)

What does Jesus say is necessary if we are going to follow him?

It is impossible to put yourself first and follow Jesus with all your heart. Either "self" is Lord and master of your life or Jesus is Lord and master of your life. It cannot be both. The next thing Jesus says is a little mysterious. He says if you go out of your way to save your own life and ways of doing things you will lose it all but. . . if you lose your life to Jesus the result will be the saving of your life.

How does that work? Here is the secret. As long as we hold on tight to the control of our own life and choices, we will

always make poor decisions because God (our creator) is not involved in our choices and direction. However, if we give up control of our life and give it over to Jesus he will save us and make our lives into who God wants us to be.

What does the world say makes life fulfilling?

How is that backwards from what Jesus is saying here?

Does the world's idea of a good life actually lead to lasting fulfillment?

Who is the Greatest? (Read Mark 9:33-35)

The disciples weren't perfect. They were human just like the rest of us. It is hard to imagine how awkward they felt when Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about. Wasn't it obvious at this point who was greatest? Maybe Peter bragged that he had cast out more demons or John thought he was a shoe-in because he had healed more people. We just don't know. What we do know is Jesus used this as a teachable moment to teach them something about greatness.

How does Jesus say someone becomes first?

How do you put yourself last and others ahead of yourself?

Why is that great in God's eyes when people put themselves last?

Why is it hard to put yourself last?

The world tells us that every single one of us deserves to be first. Jesus says that we shouldn't see ourselves through the lens of pride and arrogance. That doesn't mean we lack value in God's sight. It means we recognize that everyone around us has just as much value to God as we do.

Obstacles to Following Jesus (Read Mark 10:17-23)

This man wanted to follow Jesus but not badly enough. *What did Jesus ask him to do?*

Jesus is not asking that every single person sell everything in order to follow him. Jesus was testing his heart. Jesus knew what was most valuable to him and was asking to see if he would give that up as well. That doesn't mean having money is wrong or being wealthy is evil. It does raise the question of who or what comes first in your life?

The question for us is this, are there things in your heart that won't allow Jesus to fit too? Some things are just not compatible with a life that is set on following Jesus. *If so, are you willing to let those things go in order to follow Christ? If not, what is so important about those things that they are worth dying for?*

On to Jerusalem (Read Mark 11:10-18)

In these last chapters of Mark, Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus has predicted that is where he would suffer, die, and rise again (Mark 8:31 & 10:33-34). In Mark 11 Jesus enters Jerusalem in a triumphant procession of celebration but the party doesn't last. There is immediate opposition to Jesus mission that will end in his trial and crucifixion.

Jesus enters the temple of God and is disturbed by what he sees. Instead of pure worship he finds people who have turned it into a way to make money. Jesus gets angry and runs the money changers out.

*What was the reaction of the **chief priests** and teachers of the Law?*

You would think the religious authorities would be happy that Jesus had come to bring true worship back to God but they weren't. Jesus was upsetting their system and turning the attention and glory away from them and giving all the glory to God. It didn't make them happy.

So they begin to question Jesus. **Read Mark 11:27-33**

Jesus wasn't well liked by the religious leaders and they challenged him because they felt threatened by him and his ability to do things they could not. Sometimes religion can get in the way of authentic and genuine relationship with God.

How have you seen religion become an obstacle to a real relationship with God?

What question do they ask Jesus about his authority?

What do you think is the answer to their question?

Why don't you think Jesus gave them the answer?

Jesus' point wasn't about the question. Jesus answered their question with a question of his own because Jesus wanted to point out their own unwillingness to believe. Jesus had a way of getting right to the heart of the matter. He had a way of bringing out the truth.

If Jesus were here today, how would he bring out the truth in your life? Has anything stood out in your life that needs to be examined in a careful, respectful and loving way?

The Last Supper (Read Mark 14:12-25)

When it was time for **Passover** people would make their journey to Jerusalem to celebrate. Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples but this won't be an ordinary Passover. Jesus is going to let them in on some important

information to prepare them for what is about to happen.

What is the first surprising thing Jesus tells them (14:18)?

Jesus was talking about Judas who would betray him.

Next, Jesus takes the traditional Passover meal and uses it to teach about himself and the **new covenant** God was making with mankind.

What two things does Jesus give to his disciples and what does he say they represent?

Jesus broke the bread, representing how his body would be broken on the cross. They drank the wine, representing Jesus' blood that would be shed on the cross. This meal was symbolic of the death Jesus was about to die.

What promise does Jesus give them about the future?

What does that mean?

Jesus is telling them he is going to die but he is also telling them that doesn't mean they have no hope. There is still great hope that lies ahead because Jesus is going to die for them.

What would the world be like without the sacrifice and forgiveness of Jesus?

Jesus' life has offered hope to countless generations. *How does Jesus' life and sacrifice give you hope?*

Questions to Consider:

Jesus faced a lot of opposition, even from those closest to him. He pushed on with the mission anyway, knowing it would cost him his life. Great leaders know how to get people to follow them even into difficult circumstances

Does Jesus possess any leadership qualities that inspire people to follow him?

Do you personally find those qualities appealing?

How do you think Jesus feels about you to endure so much opposition for you?

Lesson 4 –New Life Through Christ

Mark 14-16

Jesus Predicts His Disciples Will Abandon Him (Read Mark 14:27-31)

Similar to the prophesy about Judas a few verses before, Jesus makes another disturbing prophesy about the rest of his disciples. *What does he say they all will do?*

How does Peter respond to Jesus' statement?

Jesus makes it even more real for Peter, telling him he will deny Jesus not once, but three times. Peter still couldn't believe it and said he would even die for Christ. Even those closest to Jesus made mistakes. Later, we will see that we don't need to be perfect for Jesus to accept us.

Jesus Prays in the Garden (Read Mark 14:32-42)

Why do you think Jesus was so distressed?

Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him. He knew how brutal his death would be. He also knew the sins of the world would be upon him as he was the perfect sacrifice for sin. It was all very overwhelming.

Why do you think Jesus went ahead with all of this, even though it was so overwhelming?

What does that tell you about how valuable you are to Jesus?

Jesus arrested and put on trial (Read Mark 14:43-65)

The rest of chapter 14 and the beginning of 15 outline Jesus' trial. It is obvious that there is no attempt at actual justice or finding facts here. As we previously saw, the authorities were already looking for an excuse to kill Jesus ever since he cleared out the temple (Mark 11:12-19). When the soldiers came and arrested Jesus, it all happened just like he said it would and his disciples deserted him (14:50).

Through this whole story we see just how in control of things Jesus was. Jesus maintained his composure. He doesn't retaliate. He doesn't blast them with the truth. He allows the mob to hand him over to the Romans for crucifixion without a fight.

Why didn't Jesus speak up or use his authority to his own advantage and avoid all the pain and suffering he knew he would endure?

If you were the judge in this case, what would you do? What would your verdict be?

Jesus' Shame and Suffering (Read Mark 15:9-41)

What are a few ways Jesus physically suffered?

Read John 3:16 & 1 John 3:16-18

God gave Jesus to the world because of God's love for us. *What does John say that means for us and how we are to treat others?*

What Jesus did on the cross for us set an example of the kind of selfless life God wants for us to live. It is amazing that God could have just commanded from heaven that we live that way. Instead, he became a man and walked among us. Not only that, Jesus was willing to suffer and die to show us the way to God and cleanse us of our sins.

Why did Jesus Have to Die?

One of the biggest questions about all of this is why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't God have just proclaimed all sins forgiven and opened up the doors of heaven to every single person and let us all in regardless?

Jesus had to die for three reasons:

1. Sin requires sacrifice (Heb 9:22)
2. We have all sinned and the penalty of sin is death (Rom 3:23-24, Rom 6:23) which means Jesus took our place just as our Passover Lamb
3. There is one more big reason we will get to in a moment.

Victory Over Death (Read Mark 16:1-20)

There is one thing that sets Christianity apart from every other religion of the world. Every other religion says you are on your own and if you don't do things just right you have no hope. Every other religion is about your ability to do certain things to save yourself. That is not true of Christianity. In Christianity, God first took the initiative to offer his Son for our sins so we could have eternal life. If we put our faith in Christ we can have eternal life.

The third reason Jesus had to die: - Jesus' mission was to remove any obstacles that exist in the world between us and having **eternal life** with God.

What is an obstacle that separates us from God?

The two biggest obstacles to life with God are **sin** (rebellion against God) and **death** (the result of sin). If we are to have eternal life, which is what we are looking for in this study somehow sin and death have to be overcome.

Jesus lived in perfect obedience to God. Living that perfect life made him eligible to be the perfect, spotless sacrifice

for our sins. Jesus died for us on the cross. He died in our place. But Jesus did more than just die.

What happened to Jesus after he died that is different than anyone else who has ever lived?

Jesus predicted he would die in Jerusalem and on the third day he would rise again (Mark 10:33-34).

How does Jesus prophesying his own death and resurrection show that all of this was no accident, it was God's plan?

Jesus didn't accidentally die at the hands of the Romans. Jesus did all of this on purpose because he knew that if he didn't die for the sins of world that we would have no hope and that we would stand condemned before God.

Read Mark 16:7

Jesus' resurrection gives us hope. They had all denied him once but Peter denied Jesus three times and yet Jesus calls him by name and still accepts him even though he had failed. There is hope in Jesus because he is graceful with our mistakes as long as we continue to accept his graceful invitation back into his presence.

Have you ever experienced grace by someone who had authority over you? What was that like?

What does it mean to you that God loves you and extends his grace to cover times in your life that weren't living like God wanted you to live?

What do you believe about Jesus so far?

How relevant do you see his death and resurrection being to you and your life?

What is God Looking for?

Now that you have finished reading Mark you may be asking yourself, "what kind of response is God looking for from me?"

When people get to this point, most people realize that we all have things in our life that God doesn't approve of.

What do you do if your life and the way God wants you to live are not the same?

The Bible actually answers that question for us. The first place we find the answer is in Acts.

Read Acts 2:36-37

In Acts 2, Peter had just preached about Jesus. How did his listeners respond to the message of Christ?

Their question is our question. If all these things are true, our hearts are cut and we are left asking, "What should we do?"

Christians today try to answer this question in many different ways. Some say the answer to that question is to just

believe. Others say you are to pray a prayer asking Jesus into your heart. *How did the inspired apostle Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, answer our question?* **Read Acts 2:38-39**

Repentance is a word used to describe our realizing that some of our actions are wrong and that we want to change our behaviors, attitudes, and actions to be more Christ-like.

Baptism is a word that literally means to be immersed in something, in this case to be immersed in water. Baptism is something we submit to in order to start our walk with Christ. Baptism is something that is done to us and through which God works some pretty amazing things.

Baptism Connects Us with Christ:

Read Romans 6:3-7

What two things does Paul tell us baptism connects us with?

Baptism is a beautiful connection point between us and the death and resurrection of Christ. Just as Christ died and was put down in the grave, we are put down into the water. Just as Christ was raised alive again we are raised from the water. Jesus is calling us to a new kind of life, the same life He lived. Here is what that means. . . every single one of us will die some day. It is not a question of if but of when. The only hope we have for eternal life is that we are resurrected from that grave to live with God forever. God is telling us exactly how to make that connection, that through faith we submit to baptism so that our sins will be forgiven (Acts 2:38) and that we can be connected with Jesus death and resurrection.

Counting the Cost:

But before we do that, we must realize what we are getting into - **Read Luke 9:23-26**

Jesus says discipleship starts with self-denial. Most of the trouble we get ourselves into in life, including sin, comes from putting our self first. Jesus says if you recognize that he is Lord/Master of your life then you can no longer call the shots. He does and we follow.

The cross is a symbol of death. Jesus makes clear in the next verse that if we want true life we have to lose life as we have known it in order to take on a new life in Christ. This process of submission to Christ starts in our baptism but it doesn't stop there. We continue to live in submission to the will of God every single day after. We won't do that perfect but God wants that to be the way we live our lives.

What do you think Jesus means by taking up your cross daily?

Deciding to follow Jesus isn't a decision to consider lightly. It changes so much about how we live. Before anyone considers following Jesus they must first count the cost. **Read: Luke 14:28-33.** Jesus actually predicts that some will say they want to follow, but won't have what it takes to continue to follow him in their everyday life. Some may

have a lot of time left on this earth and others may have only have a little time left.

Whether you have 1 day or another 70 years: *Do you have the dedication to live every day for God?*

When Jesus is talking about the man who is building the tower that man carefully counts the cost because he doesn't want to appear foolish to those around him. If he does start to build and isn't able to finish Jesus says this man will be ridiculed. If we start living the Christian life and are not able to finish, then we not only make ourselves subject to ridicule, but we may also cause others to ridicule God and Christianity. That is why before anyone takes their first step as a new Christian they must determine if they have the commitment to live each day for Christ.

Jesus says in Luke 14:33 "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

Questions to Consider

Have you counted the cost?

Do you think you can put God first (above all other things), and give up the things you must to follow him?

After reading about Jesus what do you think of him at this point?

Are you willing to follow Jesus as your Lord?

If you haven't been baptized, is that something you are willing to do?

What will you have to give up in order to become his follower?

What things might prohibit you from living every day as a Christian?

Glossary

Authority – Authority has to do with having the power to make things happen. In the case of Jesus we see that he had power and authority over all things (Matthew 28:19). That is how Jesus was able to heal, calm storms, and cast out demons. When Jesus command things they happened because nothing else had more power or authority than Jesus to keep him from doing his mission.

Baptism – Baptism literally means to immerse or submerge something. Christian baptism is part of the mission Jesus' sent his disciples to do in order to make disciples of those they preached to. It is something still practiced today for people who want to become Christians and be connected with new life through Christ (Romans 6:4-7).

Beelzebub - A word that literally means "lord of the flies" and is another name for Satan.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit - See the next section for a full explanation.

Chief Priests – These were priests of high authority in the temple. It is possible that they were ex-high priests or permanent temple staff and temple officials who ran the daily operation of the temple.

Christ - Christ is another word for messiah or anointed one. When you say Jesus Christ you aren't giving his first and last names. You are saying, Jesus the Messiah or Jesus the anointed one.

Covenant – Covenant means an agreement or treaty. In the Old Testament God made covenants or agreements with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. God's New Covenant is made through Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20). That agreement is God's new arrangement to bring salvation to the world through faith in Christ.

Death – Death is the result of sin (Rom 6:23). When Adam and Eve committed the very first sin in Genesis 2:17 God told them the punishment was that they would "surely die." Death is the result of rebellion against God.

Disciple – A disciple is someone who follows someone else. They literally follow them or follow their teaching. Since Jesus is no longer walking and talking in the flesh on the earth Jesus calls us to be disciples by living according to his teaching. Often in scripture walk or walking is a symbol for the way you live for your life (See Psalm 1:1).

Eternal Life – This is more than just living forever, the length of time we can live our lives. It is also about the quality of life God desires for us. God wants to bring us to victory over sin and death by giving us new life that is eternal (See 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Faith – Faith is more than just belief. Satan and demons believe in God but that doesn't mean they deeply trust in God for their future or well being (James 2:19). Faith is about believing in God and his Son Jesus Christ so deeply that you trust him enough to give your life over to him.

Gospel – The word literally means “good news” specifically the good news about Jesus resurrection and the life that he offers to the world (Matthew 4:23).

Kingdom of God – Jesus taught about the kingdom of God as much as any other topic (Mark 1:15). God’s kingdom is more than just heaven. It includes the way we live, act, and think here and now and whether or not what we do lines up with God’s priorities for our lives.

Ministry – Ministry is simply service to God or people (Luke 3:23).

Miracles – Miracles are events that have no natural explanation. When Jesus calmed the storm it wasn’t that there was some weather event that made the storm stop or that the day was getting nicer by the minute anyway. Jesus commanded the waves and wind to stop and they did (Mark 4:39). That is a miracle.

Messiah – This means word anointed. In the Bible people were anointed for special purposes. David was anointed to be king. Jesus was God’s anointed one. Jesus had a purpose that no one before him or anyone after him will ever have. Jesus was anointed by God for the purpose of saving the world and giving us eternal life. Christ is another word for messiah or anointed one. When you say Jesus Christ you aren’t giving his first and last names. You are saying, Jesus the Messiah or Jesus the anointed one. See John 1:41

Messianic Secret – Over and over again in Mark Jesus tells people not to tell others about who he is. This happens up until Mark 8 when Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is and Peter says he is the Christ or Messiah. It seems kind of strange for Jesus to tell others not to tell people about what they have seen until half way through the book. Some believe the reason for this is because Jesus didn’t want people to misunderstand his mission and follow him for all the wrong reasons (to receive food like when he fed the 5000 in Mark 6).

Parable – They are like riddles. They can be hard to understand until you figure out what the different parts of the story represent. Jesus uses parables to teach people about God, life, and what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus. See Matthew 13 for a whole section of parables taught by Jesus.

Passover – Passover came from the Old Testament book of Exodus. God’s people, the Hebrews/Jews, were slaves in Egypt. God used plagues in the Egyptians to motivate Pharaoh to let his people go free. The final plague involved the death of the firstborn of Egypt. God told his people that if they wanted to avoid their first born dying that they should kill a lamb and put its blood on the door frame of their house. That way the angel would see the blood and pass over the house, leaving all inside safe. See Exodus 12. This has been practiced in the Spring (around Easter) every year for thousands of years by the Jewish people.

Passover Lamb – At Passover a lamb would be killed, the blood put on the door post of the house, and the lamb was eaten in a ceremonial meal that reminded them of how God brought them out of Egypt. As was mentioned above, the Passover lamb died in place of the firstborn of each household when the Jews were in slavery in Egypt. Jesus takes on that role in the New Testament (John 1:29). He died in our place so that we wouldn’t have to.

Pharisee – Pharisees were a religious and political group in Jesus' day who focused on correctly interpreting the Law (Genesis–Deuteronomy) and maintaining ritual purity.

Prophecy – People usually assume prophecy is telling the future. Prophecy is actually when God tells someone what to say and they say it. Sometimes the content of the message is about the future and other times it may be warnings, blessings, or many other things.

Prophet – Prophets are people God inspired to speak on his behalf. These are men like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many others.

Rebuke - This means to harshly criticize someone.

Repentance – This is a word that means to turn from evil and seek God. Repentance is the natural result of a heart that is in tune with God. A person who seeks God will repent when they do wrong (Mark 1:15).

Salvation - God's power to forgive sins and put people in a right relationship with him.

Satan – Satan is a word that means someone who stands in opposition to someone else. It can also refer to the prince of darkness who leads the world astray (Rev 12:9).

Sin – Sin is rebellion and is usually associated with breaking one of God's commands.

Tax collector – Tax collectors were hated because they often abused their power to collect money. They kept the difference between what Rome demanded they collect and what they actually told people they owed Rome. This caused a lot of resentment, especially when the tax collector was a fellow Jew extorting money from his own people.

Teachers of the Law – These were men who copied books of the Bible as well as interpreted and taught the scriptures (Old Testament in Jesus' day) to the people.

Temple – This is the house of God, where under the Old Testament Law, God was to be worshipped, sacrifices were offered and the High Priest performed his duties.

Testimony - Stating the truth about something for others to understand it.

Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

By Eric Brown

A couple of times a year someone will ask me about the “unforgivable sin” that Jesus names as blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. (Mark 3:20-30) Reading these words of Jesus often scares people because they fear they may have committed it and are the walking condemned. For this reason we need to understand what this “unforgivable sin” entails. In Mark 3, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is what the “teachers of the law” were doing during Jesus’ life time as they were witnessing the miracles he was performing and claiming that it was from the devil. Mark 3:30 explicitly states that they were claiming that Jesus had an evil spirit after seeing him drive out demons. I have a hard time understanding how someone could commit this sin today.

I found something that illustrates quite well why blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin and why people who fear they have committed this sin have not. To blaspheme the Holy Spirit you have to continue to insist that God’s gracious miracles are from Satan. If a person does this, then there is no other way that God can reach them. It is not that they have done something that they can’t then be forgiven for, they have rejected the very power of God’s love.

Since this is a topic that may come up again in your studies please take note. The following is from an unknown author:

The question then becomes, “Suppose you see the power of God rescuing people from utter hopelessness, yet you call that action demonic or evil, and therefore reject it; if you do that, then how will you be rescued from your hopelessness? If you refuse to see the difference between the Spirit of Holiness and the spirit of evil, if you reject the Holy Spirit who comes to transform you, then how will you be transformed? If you spurn the power of the Spirit to set you free, then how will you be set free?” Here is the rope to pull you out of the quicksand; the rope holds no grudge if you reject it, but you cannot be rescued without it. Here are the paramedics to extricate you from the wreck in which you are trapped; if you shout curses and slap their hands away, you will be unable to escape on your own. They will not be offended, but will think you must be in shock and will go on trying to rescue you. Here is the Spirit of God, who comes to redeem people in all their hopelessness; it is not that the Spirit retreats at your rejection and refuses to have any more to do with you. It nevertheless remains true that your life can only be transformed by the power of the transforming Spirit. The point of the saying, then, is not to indicate that there is no longer any hope for people who have failed in this one never-quite-specified way. Rather, it indicates that for us all there has never been any other hope than the transforming power of the Spirit.

Further Evidence About Jesus

Part 1 - Evidence that We Can Trust the Bible

Some people will point out that there are thousands of variations in the ancient copies of scripture we have discovered. They will say all that variety proves we cannot trust the Bible. Scriptures are handed down by people who copied by hand. Copies of copies will contain variations. You might misspell a word, leave out a word, or miss an entire line of a verse as you copy. Most of the variations that exist are extremely minor: things like misspelled words and words or lines that got left out as someone was making a copy. There are two things you need to know when it comes to these differences:

1. No major teaching of the Christian faith depends on any of these variations
2. We can be certain that 95% of what we read are the exact words from the original. That is impressive given that the New Testament was written nearly 2000 years ago.

Conclusion – The Bible we hold in our hands is accurate. That is an important conclusion because we are basing our faith on the evidence provided in the Bible about who Jesus is and about how he wants us to live.

Part 2 - Proof of Jesus' existence outside the Bible

There are two types of writing from Jesus' day that give proof about Jesus' existence.

Christian writings – The New Testament

The New Testament gives information about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is written by his followers after his death. It is written from the perspective of multiple insiders and followers of Jesus.

Non-Christian First Century Writing:

This is an important group of writings because it is coming from people who didn't have an agenda when it came to matters of faith. They testify that Jesus was a real man, was crucified and raised from the dead.

Pliny – A Roman who wrote about the attempts to get Christians to deny Christ as divine and the punishments they inflicted on Christians in order to get them to confess Caesar instead. Here is what Pliny wrote,

“Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the Gods, and who finally cursed Christ; none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing; these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty five years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ. They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but

never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food; but food of an ordinary and innocent kind." (Pliny 10.96)

Tacitus – Another Roman who wrote that Jesus was a real man who was arrested and tried by Pilate and who was given the sentence of capital punishment. Here is what he wrote,

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car." (Tacitus, 15.44)

Suetonius– wrote about why Jews were expelled from Rome by Claudius in 49, that their leader was a name named Chrestus (Christ)

"As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome." (Suetonius, 25.4)

Josephus (Jewish) – He was a Jewish historian who wrote about Jesus as the messiah, his miracles, death and resurrection. He also writes about James as the brother of Jesus.

"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day." (Antiquities 18.3.3)

This helps us see that Jesus is not just a made up character by a bunch of men in the first century but that he was a real man who was crucified under Pilate and some of them even agree he was raised from the dead.

Part 3 - What happened to Jesus followers?

Let's assume that Jesus didn't actually rise from the grave. All of Jesus' followers are let down, depressed and upset. They have lost all their hope. Would you continue to follow a man who promised he would rise from the dead in three days but who stayed dead days, weeks, and even years later?

Here is what happened to Jesus' followers:

- Andrew – crucified for his faith in Jesus
- Bartholomew – crucified for his faith in Jesus
- James – stoned for his faith
- James son of Zebedee – killed with a sword
- John – died of old age
- Matthew – died naturally
- Simon Peter – crucified
- Philip – crucified
- Simon – died naturally
- Thaddeus – died naturally
- Thomas – killed with a spear

7 of the 11 died for their faith that Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Would you die for a lie? If the resurrection didn't happen these guys would not have stood firm in their faith. If a court asked you to choose between Caesar as Lord or Jesus as Lord and choosing Jesus meant death, would you still choose Jesus if he hadn't risen from the dead? Their willingness to die points to the truth of the resurrection.

Part 4 - Other religions

Christianity is different from every other religion known to man. Every other religion is about how you work your way to the goal. A brief summary of how the other three main religions say we solve the problems of life and gain the life we were meant to live give these solutions:

Islam – submit perfectly to the will of Allah and you can go to heaven

Buddhism – empty yourself of all desire so you can blend into a sea of nothingness

Hinduism – Through meditation and seeing through the illusion of the world around us we move up the reincarnation ladder toward our escape into Brahman

The common theme is that the burden is on us to get it all perfect. There is no room for grace. There is no one reaching down to pull us out of this mess. That is where Christianity is different. Christianity says God is reaching down toward us and has provided the answers for life's problems through Jesus Christ. God offers us grace and an abundant hope because our destiny is not based upon our ability to work the system perfectly but to put our faith in the One who did, Jesus Christ. In him and through him we receive eternal life.

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