1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Mark, Part 2
Theme: Trust

Overview: Mark shows that Jesus is worthy of our complete trust. In this unit, students will learn to trust Jesus' power to protect them in a storm, his ability to take care of them in need, his authority to save their souls, and his strength to carry them through suffering.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The Gospel does not name its author, but early church tradition consistently attributes it to John Mark, a companion of both Paul and Peter (Acts 12:12, 25; 1 Peter 5:13). Early Christian writers said Mark recorded the preaching of the apostle Peter.

Audience

Mark appears to have written primarily for Gentile Christians, likely in Rome. He explains Jewish customs (Mark 7:3, 4) and translates Aramaic words (5:41; 15:34) for readers who would not have known them.

Date

Many scholars date the Gospel to the AD 50s or 60s, possibly around the time of Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome. Many believe Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be written.

Setting

These lessons move from Jesus' ministry around the Sea of Galilee—where he calmed a storm and healed a suffering woman—to Caesarea Philippi in the north, where Peter confessed him as the Messiah, and finally to the Mount of Olives during the last week of his life, where he warned his disciples of the suffering to come.

Theme

Trust. When the disciples saw Jesus calm the wind and the waves, they asked, "Who is this?" (Mark 4:41). Mark answers that question throughout his Gospel: Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), the Son of God (1:1), who has power over creation, sickness, and death, and who can be trusted with our very souls.

Why Study Mark?

Every believer faces storms, needs, and suffering. This study calls Christians to trust Jesus' power to protect them, his ability to take care of them, his authority to save them, and his strength to carry them through suffering, standing firm to the end.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Mark 4:35-41

WEEK 2: Mark 5:25-34

WEEK 3: Mark 8:27-38

WEEK 4: Mark 13:9-20

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Trust Jesus' power to protect you.**

STUDY: Mark, Part 2

THEME: Trust

LESSON TEXT: Mark 4:35-41

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 27:13-44; John 14:25-27

TRUST JESUS IN A STORM

BY MARK SCOTT

If Jesus can conquer death (last week's lesson) then he can certainly calm a storm. And not just figurative, metaphoric, or spiritual storms, but real, physical, honest-to-goodness storms. When sin entered the world creation experienced a separation from its creator (Genesis 3:17b-19; Romans 8:22). The coming of Jesus into the world began the process of setting things right and restoring creation. When Jesus performed miracles over nature, as in our text today, we witness the beginning of him making all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Prior to our narrative miracle-story text, Jesus had been preaching all day. The genre of his discourse was parables (Mark 4:1-34). But preaching will wear any preacher out, so Jesus was exhausted. At day's end he instructed his disciples to get into the boat and sail to the other side (which meant across the very northern tip of the Sea of Galilee). Even though Jesus gave the orders to leave, it seemed as though the disciples took charge of Jesus. The text says, "They took him along, just as he was." How was he? Bone tired. One detail that Mark gives is, "There were also other boats with him." Did these boats miss the storm somehow? Did they perish at sea? Did they witness this stunning miracle? Perhaps others gave their eye-witness testimony to the calming of the storm. And this will be just the first of three miracle stories (Mark 4:35–5:43).

A Sunday school teacher once asked her class, "What is faith?" A little girl responded, "Faith is believing God without asking any questions." That answer is not wrong, but it is inadequate. An informed faith contains scores of questions. Questions can stimulate a vigorous faith. Cliché answers to serious questions can make faith anemic and pale. We should notice that the sub-genre of our text is questions. Three are asked in the text, two asked by the disciples and one by Jesus.

The Question of Despair—"Don't you care if we drown?"

While Jesus and the disciples were sailing toward the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, a furious squall came up. This was not uncommon as the cool breeze from the hills combined with the warm moist air from the Sea of Galilee (650 feet below sea level) created tornadic-type winds. The storm was so severe that waves broke over the boat. Interestingly enough, Jesus slept through it. His preaching and ministry had exhausted him. He slept on the rower's cushion. (This is the only time in the Gospels where we are told that Jesus slept.)

The disciples let Jesus sleep at first, but when desperation turned to despair, they woke him out of his sleep with a most odd question (see Jonah 1:4-6). "Don't you care if we drown?" These experienced fishermen were scared. Jesus' sleep displayed his trust in his heavenly father. But the disciples wanted action. Have you ever felt that God was asleep in regard to your situation (Psalm 22:1)? The question of care is most odd. Jesus came all the way from Heaven because he cared. In this instance, Jesus came out of a deep sleep, rebuked (the same word for his rebuking of demons) the wind by speaking to creation, and calmed the storm. The miracle itself took one verse to tell.

The Question of Fear and Faith—"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

In Matthew's account of this story (Matthew 8:23-27) Jesus asked this question before calming the storm. But Mark has the actual calming first, and then this penetrating question. Matthew's Jesus is ever the teacher first. Mark's Jesus is ever the powerful wonder worker first. Matthew's account spoke of "little" faith. Mark spoke of "no" faith. Clearly Mark is a bit harsher with the disciples. Fear and faith actually go together. The disciples had both. Yet they continued to follow Jesus.

The Question of Identity—"Who is this?"

Facing a storm is pretty scary, but facing the one who can calm the storm is even scarier. The text says the disciples were terrified (literally, "feared a great fear"). Can Jesus calm the trouble and storms in our lives? Of course. But that is not the point of this text. The storm was a real physical storm. The disciples were awestruck—not by their storms being calmed but by the identity of the one who calmed them. Psalm 89:9 says, "You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them" (*English Standard Version*). Psalm 107:29 says, "He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed" (*ESV*). All of our questions of faith disappear when we focus clearly on the object of our faith.

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WHO IS IN THE BOAT WITH YOU?

BY DAVID FAUST

Did you ever have a close call? Were you nearly involved in a serious accident, or barely missed getting hit by a car? Perhaps you narrowly averted a disastrous mistake on the job. It's a relief to realize you avoided a serious problem.

Jesus' disciples had a close call on the Sea of Galilee. A furious squall swamped their boat and threatened to drown them (Mark 4:37). Although the boat's passengers that night included experienced fishermen and sailors, this violent storm was especially terrifying, and they thought they were going to die. During a visit to Israel last year, I boarded a small wooden boat owned by a man who has sailed on the Sea of Galilee for many years. When I asked about the local weather conditions, the skipper explained, "Storms come up quickly here. In fact, a few days ago I had to cancel my scheduled tours because the waves were too high." He claimed that during one storm he saw 12-foot waves on the lake. Imagine how frightened you would be in the middle of a storm like that! Matthew's Gospel describes the storm with the word *seismos*, a term we associate with earthquakes.

Where was Jesus while the wind howled and the waves crashed? In the back of the boat, sound asleep. He was no stranger to close calls. Early in his ministry, an angry mob tried to throw him off a cliff. Another time, hostile accusers picked up rocks and threatened to stone him to death. Jesus was accustomed to danger, but how could anyone sleep through a violent storm? The panicky disciples woke him up by shouting, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" They called him "Teacher" because even in the midst of the storm, they sensed he would teach them something. Their question drips with irony, though, for if anyone cares about those who are scared of dying, it's Jesus Christ. Calmly rising to his feet, the Lord ordered the wind and the waves to quiet down—and they did! The forces of nature bowed at Jesus' feet like dogs that knew their master's voice.

Scarier than the Storm

We can learn several lessons from this miraculous incident.

- When we panic, the Lord remains quietly in control.
- When it appears the Lord is unconcerned, he actually does care about us.
- When we feel powerless, we should seek the Lord's help.
- When necessary, the Lord who created nature can and will intervene in it.
- When the time is right, the Lord acts decisively.
- If we never faced a storm, we wouldn't appreciate the Lord's power over it.
- When the evidence is all in, faith is the most reasonable response.

As the boat settled safely onto the now-quiet surface of the lake, the disciples were frightened again, but now for a different reason. Jesus asked, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (v. 40). His disciples remained terrified after the storm died down, for they were compelled to face a logical question: "Who is this?" (v. 41). Even more alarming than the storm was the startling realization that they shared a tiny boat with someone more powerful than the wind and the waves!

Who is in the boat with you? That's a good question to ask, even when the waters are calm.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- What is the worst storm you have ever experienced? Was it a tornado, a blizzard, hailstorm, or hurricane? Describe how you got through it.
- What is the worst figurative storm you have experienced? Was it an illness, family issue, job loss, or something else? Describe how you weathered your figurative storm.

Read Mark 4:35-38

1. Notice in verse 36 how Mark described Jesus' condition at the end of the day. Try to imagine what Jesus' day was like, based on Mark 4:1. Jesus was fully human as well as fully God. Knowing that, what questions about Jesus' condition in verse 38a come to mind?

2. What seemingly random piece of information did Mark include in the last half of verse 36? Why might that be relevant? How has experiencing a personal crisis made you self-centered, not thinking about others facing a similar crisis?

3. What question did the disciples ask at that time (v. 38)? Was it a reasonable question? Why or why not? In what ways can a crisis cause your heart to overrule your head?

Read Mark 4:39, 40

4. What two questions did Jesus ask after calming the storm (v. 40)? Although the questions seem to be rhetorical (not expected to be answered aloud), how might the disciples have answered them in their own minds?

5. Contrast the disciples' reaction to a storm at sea to the apostle Paul's reaction in a similar situation (Acts 27:21-26). What are the results when you allow faith to conquer fear?

Read Mark 4:41

6. How does an insufficient understanding of who Jesus is affect the way we handle the storms of life? Refer to the question the disciples asked each other (v. 41). Keep one finger in your Bible at Mark 4:41 and another at Peter's answer to that question in Mark 8:29. Skim the pages between those verses to list some events that prompted Peter to give that answer.

7. Prepare your personal weather report for the coming week. What figurative storms might be coming your way? How can your faith in Jesus shape your reaction to a specific anticipated difficulty?

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Trust Jesus' ability to take care of you.**

STUDY: Mark, Part 2

THEME: Trust

LESSON TEXT: Mark 5:25-34

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Mark 12:41-44; 1 Kings 17:1-16

TRUST JESUS IN NEED

BY MARK SCOTT

Jesus' care for women was tender and counter-cultural. His "heart was touched by their grief" (Matthew 8:14-17; 15:21-28; 26:6-13; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; 12:41-44; Luke 7:36-50; 8:1-3; John 4:7-45; 7:53–8:11; 20:1, 2, 11-18). That is certainly evident in our text today with Jesus' encounter with the woman who in life of Christ studies is referred to as "the woman with the flow of blood" (i.e., discharging blood or subject to bleeding).

Mark (and Matthew) records this event as a "story within a story." Bible scholars call it "inclusio." We might call it bracketing. The story begins with Jairus's request for Jesus to come and heal his desperately ill daughter (5:21-24) and ends with Jesus raising the little girl from the dead (vv. 36-43). Jesus' journey to Jairus's house is interrupted by this needy and faithful woman. This is the final miracle in a triad. Jesus demonstrated power over creation (Mark 4:35-41), power over the spirit world (5:1-20), and now power over illness and death (vv. 21-43).

This miracle within a miracle is held together by more than one thing. Both females in the text are referred to as "daughter." Also the number 12 holds some significance. The sick woman had been ill for 12 years, and Jairus's daughter was 12 years old. But maybe more to the point, these stories are told this way because they happened this way. Jesus started out to help one family and got derailed by the needs of this believing woman.

Her Need Was Large

Mark 5:25-29

This woman was living a kind of death. Her need was underlined in five ways. She had the problem for 12 years. The number could be symbolic, but it is probably best to understand it literally. She had suffered (mentioned three times in our English text translating two different Greek words meaning "severe illness" or "affliction") a great deal. She had tried many doctors (healers) without getting relief. She had exhausted her income. Finally, she had gotten worse instead of better. She lived in a constant state of uncleanness (Leviticus 15:25). It's probable this condition left her with a foul odor, not to mention personal embarrassment and shame. No doubt her emotional despair matched her physical challenge.

But large needs can be met by a big God. Somewhere she had heard about Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 4:23-25). She threw caution to the wind and came near this worker of wonders. Trying to be as inconspicuous as possible (and perhaps in humility, trying to be careful not to contaminate others and thus obeying the law) she approached Jesus from behind and touched (mentioned four times) his clothes (mentioned three times). She believed that one touch would heal (i.e., save) her. Mark heightened the impact of the story by using one of his favorite words to describe this miracle, *immediately*. The bleeding stopped, and she felt (knew) that she was freed (made whole or healthy) from her suffering.

Her Faith Was Larger

Mark 5:30-34

Jesus stopped. Everyone gawked. Jairus probably grew impatient. On the surface the text seemed to call Jesus' omniscience into question because he asked who touched him. This miracle seemed to have occurred without overt participation by Jesus. Without sounding irreverent, Jesus seemed all but clueless about what happened. The word is left untranslated, but Mark used his favorite word again, "immediately" Jesus turned around and asked who had touched him.

The disciples (who are usually portrayed in Mark's Gospel as being "out to lunch") pushed back against Jesus' logic. The crowd was large and snug (literally, "the crowd was crowding"). The disciples all but rebuked Jesus with their question. But Jesus realized (intimately knew) that power had gone out from him and looked around (i.e., with a penetrating gaze) to see who had done it.

The woman knew the jig was up. With the same humility she displayed when she approached him the first time, she came forward and knelt down. In fact, she did so trembling with fear (literally, "fearing the trauma"). This phrase is used in the Old Testament to indicate how one approached deity. The woman confessed the whole truth. Perhaps she expected some form of rebuke. What she received was affirmation.

"Daughter" was a direct address of endearment. It conveyed tender respect. "Your faith has healed (saved) you" was a gospel announcement. Jesus came to save and heal. This tells us that the healing was a result of her faith; not something magical in Jesus' garment. "Go in peace" was an imperative to embrace a preferable future. Large needs when accompanied by a larger faith create a context for a tender Savior to, almost accidentally, heal all creation.

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12 YEARS AND COUNTING

BY DAVID FAUST

Some say 12 is a perfect number. There are 12 months in a year and 12 hours on a clock. A dozen seems like the right quantity when we buy eggs or donuts. (The English term *dozen* comes from *douzaine*, French for a group of 12 items.) A holiday song celebrates "The 12 Days of Christmas," though nowadays the season starts in October and lasts far longer than a dozen days. In football, famous quarterbacks have worn the number 12, including Roger Staubach, Aaron Rodgers, Terry Bradshaw, and Tom Brady.

In the Bible, there were 12 tribes of Israel, 12 stones on the high priest's breastplate (Exodus 28:21), and 12 spies who explored the land of Canaan. Jesus selected 12 apostles. There are 12 pearly gates in the heavenly New Jerusalem and 12 precious stones in the city's foundation (Revelation 21:12-21). Throughout the Scriptures, the number 12 appears to represent completeness and perfection.

In Mark chapter five, however, 12 years paint a picture of pain. There we meet a woman who was sick for 12 years, and a girl on the verge of death at the tender age of 12. Comparing the two situations, 12 years seem like a painfully long time for an adult to be sick, but a tragically brief lifetime for a child. The woman was anemic and discouraged after 12 years of futile medical treatment. Meanwhile, the 12-year-old's parents helplessly stood by her bedside, unable to find a cure for the child her father lovingly described as his "little daughter" (v. 23). There is no evidence that the sick woman and the sick girl knew each other, but their stories took place on parallel tracks. The whole time the girl had been alive, the woman had been suffering. While the girl was playing and moving through the normal stages of growing up, the woman was paying her hard-earned money to doctors in a desperate search for a cure.

Astonishing Power and Grace

At the very moment when the sick woman reached out in faith to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, the adolescent girl lay limply at home where her heartbroken family watched her die; but Jesus intervened in both situations with astonishing power and grace. He healed the woman's longstanding illness, erasing 12 years of misery with one swift miracle. The disciples were amazed not only by his healing power, but also by his miraculous awareness of the woman's need. Even in the midst of a jostling crowd, Jesus could detect the touch of one desperate woman who sought his help. Shortly thereafter, while mourners wept and wailed at the home of Jairus, Jesus stunned the skeptical crowd by raising the girl back to life.

Are you dealing with a longstanding problem? Are you wrestling with discouragement, grief, or physical pain? Reach out to Jesus. Cry out to Jesus. He notices you in the crowd. He sees your tears. He hears your pleas. He feels the touch of your outstretched hand. No magic formula can save you, but the perfect Christ can. Come to him in faith, and at the right time and in the right way —if not now, in eternity—he will meet your deepest needs and make you whole again. In an uncertain and imperfect world, you can count on him.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Why do you think the availability of healthcare is a perennial issue in American politics? What do we hope universal availability of medical treatment will accomplish? Will those hopes ever be fully realized? Explain.
- How does a disfiguring accident or chronic health condition change someone's life? Give an example or two to illustrate your thinking.

Read Mark 5:25, 26

1. The chronic health condition of this woman who lived two millennia ago sounds familiar. How were the physical, psychological, and financial consequences of this illness like those of someone you know?

2. Read Leviticus 15:25-27. In addition to the physical, psychological, and financial burdens of her condition, what social and religious stigma did her condition carry? Are there health conditions or physical disabilities today that isolate sufferers socially and even religiously? Explain.

Read Mark 5:27-29

3. Those who are chronically ill often rejoice when they hear of the possibility of a new treatment or experimental cure. Try to explain the thoughts of this woman assuming she is one of many referred to in Matthew 4:23-25. Why would she seek out Jesus though knowing little about him?

4. Matthew is more specific about the part of Jesus' clothing that people who sought healing touched (Matthew 9:20; 14:36). The edge of the garment often denoted the authority of a person (Zechariah 8:23). What do we mean today when we use the idiom "to ride someone's coattails"? Even though this woman knew little about Jesus, what did she know?

Read Mark 5:30-34

5. Note that the story of this healing is sandwiched between the two parts of the account of another healing (Mark 5:21-24, 35-43). The woman was isolated from the synagogue because of her condition. How does that compare to the girl who was healed? What significance do you see in both being referred to as "daughter"?

6. Believing that Jesus is all-knowing, why does his question in verse 30 seem strange? If he was not asking to gain information, why do you think he did ask?

7. Although we wish to be always healthy, why is that an unrealistic wish? How is our wish for health and long life in truth a desire for something more? Explain.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Trust Jesus' authority to save you.**

STUDY: Mark, Part 2

THEME: Trust

LESSON TEXT: Mark 8:27-38

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Mark 10:17-31; Acts 4:1-12; Revelation 22:12-17

TRUST JESUS WITH YOUR SOUL

BY MARK SCOTT

As part of a larger poem, William Ross Wallace wrote, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." A fitting tribute to mothers. But what about the God who rocks the whole world? Can we trust our souls to him? And speaking of "rocks" (a different nuance), our text today takes place at a huge "rock" about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

Clearly this is a high-water mark in the Gospel narrative. In chapter eight we shift from the Savior who serves to the servant who saves. Jesus possesses the authority to save our souls because of who he is and what he came to do. And he challenged us to follow him. Professor Seth Wilson adapted an outline from Ernest Beam referring to three large themes of the New Testament. We will apply that outline to this text.

The Christ

Mark 8:27-30

Jesus was well into his third year of ministry and about to conclude his ministry in Galilee before heading south to Jerusalem. It was imperative for him to secure the full devotion of his disciples. So he posed a question concerning his identity. The disciples had already confessed on their own that he was no mere man (Mark 4:41). But this time Jesus asked them for their confession. This took place at a huge rock formation near the city of Caesarea Philippi (a pagan area with an opening in a rock formation that was called the "Gates of Hades").

Jesus asked what the word on the street about him was. This was not a case of identity amnesia. The disciples had to be "all in" concerning who Jesus was or they would never withstand the pressure they would experience later. They gave him some popular answers. There was a grain of truth in each response: John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets (Matthew's account specifically mentions Jeremiah, Matthew 16:14). Given the various streams of the Messiah in the Old Testament as well as the additions brought on by Judaism, no wonder many ideas existed about the Messiah.

But then Jesus narrowed the question, "You yourselves (this is emphatic in Greek), what do you say?" Peter's answer could not have been better, "You are the Messiah" (Christ or anointed one). Matthew's account is longer, fleshing out Jesus' response with blessings and promises. We call it "the good confession" (see 1 Timothy 6:13). Jesus was not ready for his identity to be fully released so he warned (the same word for rebuking demons and used by Peter in Mark 8:32) them not to tell anyone about him. Even so, this is the most important identity issue in the world.

The Cross

Mark 8:31-33

If we know who Jesus is, then we will embrace his mission. His mission was to die on the cross. There have been veiled statements about the cross previously in Mark's Gospel (Mark 2:20), but Jesus spoke plainly (with boldness) about it now. He wanted to warn the disciples that the road ahead would be rough. Scholars speak about "three clear predictions" of the cross. In Mark's Gospel they are located in successive chapters (8, 9, and 10). With each prediction additional details are given.

Jesus explained that the Son of Man (his favorite self-designation) would have to (i.e., of divine necessity) suffer, be rejected by official Judaism, and be killed. The line that shot right by them was, "and after three days rise again." Peter blew a gasket. He could not wrap his mind around a vicariously suffering Messiah. He rebuked Jesus, and Jesus returned the favor by figuratively referring to him as "Satan." One of the most difficult concepts to accept, even today, is redemptive suffering, but it is the way of God in the world.

The New Creature

Mark 8:34-38

This is one of the Bible's most powerful paragraphs about discipleship. Followers of Jesus (new creatures in Christ) actually join his mission by sharing in this redemptive suffering. Jesus called the entire crowd to three imperatives followed by four reasons for following him.

Denying self means to renounce the idolatry of self-centeredness. Taking up the cross was a Roman metaphor for death. While self-denial and taking up the cross are viewed as completed actions, following is ongoing (i.e., "daily," see Luke 9:23). These fundamentals of discipleship are followed by a series of reasons for such radical living (each verse starts with "for" in Greek). If we want to save our lives, not forfeit our souls, and be able to stand when the Son of Man returns, then we must follow in the way of the cross.

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BAD TRADES, GOOD TRADES

BY DAVID FAUST

When baseball slugger Willie McCovey died, I felt sad when I heard the news, even though he played against my favorite team. Tall and lanky, with a smooth left-handed batting style, McCovey (nicknamed "Stretch") played first base for the San Francisco Giants. One humid summer night when I was a boy, our family went to Crosley Field to watch our beloved Cincinnati Reds play the Giants, and Willie McCovey came to bat with the bases loaded. Extending his long arms in a powerful swing, he clubbed a grand slam home run. From our vantage point on the third base side of the field, my brothers and I had an unobstructed view of the arc of the ball. I had never seen anyone hit a baseball like that. It soared majestically into the night sky and finally landed in the right field seats. McCovey's grand slam cost the Reds the game, but on that night I didn't mind. His athletic skill remains etched in my memory to this day.

The Reds had a power hitter of their own named Frank Robinson who slammed 33 home runs in 1965, but in December of that year the Reds traded Robinson (labeling him "an old 30") to the Baltimore Orioles for pitcher Milt Pappas and two other players. In Robinson's first year with the Orioles, he led them to a World Series championship and won the American League Triple Crown. He's now in the Baseball Hall of Fame. The Robinson-for-Pappas deal is considered one of the worst trades in baseball history, ranking alongside the decision of the Boston Red Sox to sell Babe Ruth's contract to the New York Yankees in 1919. In his first year with the Yankees, Ruth stroked 54 home runs, while the entire Red Sox team only hit 22. Ruth led the Yankees to four world championships, and the Red Sox didn't win the World Series again until 2004.

Forfeiture of the Soul

In the realm of the soul, bad trades happen all the time. Adam and Eve exchanged fellowship with God for the fruit of sin. Esau gave up his birthright in exchange for a pot of lentil stew. The Israelites forfeited their homeland by pursuing false gods (2 Kings 17:7-23). Judas traded proximity to Jesus for silver and despair. Men and women traded truth for lies, replaced God's glory with idols, and exchanged natural relations for unnatural sexual behaviors (Romans 1:21-27).

Jesus referenced the worst trade of all when he asked, "What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mark 8:37). What other priority could possibly be worth forfeiture of the soul? Why would anyone want to spend even a moment alienated from God?

We all have made bad trades and damaged our souls by wandering down the pathway of rebellion. There is a remedy, and it involves a trade as well, but this one is positive for us: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). At the cross, the righteousness of Jesus Christ was exchanged for our sin. Through Christ, we exchange darkness for light, lies for truth, death for life, despair for hope, isolation for togetherness, chaos for peace, Hell for Heaven. Why would anyone ever trade away such blessings given by the hand of God?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- Who are some of the most admired people in the world today? What qualities lead to such admiration? What do you think people seek when following such celebrities?
- If you were asked to list five people who changed the world for the better, who would be on your list? Defend each choice.

Read Mark 8:27-30

1. Even today, some people cling to the idea that a famous person did not die but is still living out of the public eye. Give an example or two. What do you think motivates that kind of fantasy? How was the way people identified Jesus as a past hero like this (v. 28)?

2. A common idea in Jesus' day was that Messiah would be a political leader who would overthrow Rome. See John 6:14, 15. With that in mind, why does it make sense that Jesus was not quick to want to be identified as Messiah?

Read Mark 8:31-33

3. Matthew expands this account and tells that Jesus gave Simon two different "stony" names —Peter (the rock) and stumbling block (Matthew 16:18, 23). What idea about Jesus' mission changed Simon Peter from being a foundation stone to loose gravel that causes others to fall?

4. Peter's objection to Jesus' talk of dying earned him an unwanted title—Satan! What does this say to those who only want to see Jesus as a good teacher?

Read Mark 8:34-38

5. An old story tells of a hen and a pig discussing what they could give to a fundraising dinner. When the hen suggested ham and eggs, the pig pointed out that what was a donation for the hen was a total commitment for him! How does this story illustrate what Jesus demands of his disciples (vv. 34, 35)?

6. Look at the two questions in verses 36 and 37. Paraphrase these verses as statements rather than questions. What is the cost of a human soul?

7. Make two columns on a piece of paper. Label one column "casual admirer" and the other "devoted follower." List characteristics of each under the proper heading. Decide which best describes you and any actions you can take in response.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Trust Jesus' strength to carry you through suffering.**

STUDY: Mark, Part 2

THEME: Trust

LESSON TEXT: Mark 13:9-20

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Mark 14:32-38; Acts 5:17-29, 40, 41; Revelation 2:8-11

TRUST JESUS IN SUFFERING

BY MARK SCOTT

Suffering is caused by a variety of things, including our poor choices, the poor choices of others, and creation being out of sorts with its Creator. Ultimately all suffering is caused by the devil (Genesis 3) and overseen by a loving heavenly Father (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). All of this is why believers need to trust Jesus in suffering.

Jesus' disciples needed to be warned of upcoming suffering. Mark 13 is the longest discourse in Mark's Gospel (parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21). It is typically called the "Olivet Discourse."

Our text takes place during the middle of the final week of Jesus' life. Jesus had just upbraided the leaders of Jerusalem for their hypocrisy and their rejection (Matthew 23). As he left the temple area the disciples drew attention to the tremendous stones (i.e., their beauty and size). "Not one stone will be left on another" (Mark 13:2). This so stunned the disciples that they held their tongues until they got to the Mount of Olives. Then they mustered the courage to ask two questions. When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign when this will be accomplished? (Matthew 24:3 adds, "and the end of the age?") While many God-loving, Bible-believing, Jesus-honoring people believe that Jesus is predicting the suffering at the end of time, the primary meaning (at least in this section of the discourse) refers to the suffering the disciples would endure prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Physical Suffering

Mark 13:9-11

Jesus called his disciples to "watch" (be on your guard). This is the key repeated word in Mark 13. Jesus even ends with it (13:37). Jesus did not want the twelve to be duped. In other words, "Do not be surprised when physical suffering comes along." Jesus mentioned five types of physical suffering. They would be handed over (literally "betrayed") to local "Sanhedrins." They would be flogged (beaten to the point of taking skin off). They would have to stand and witness before governmental officials. They would be arrested. Finally, they would be brought to trial.

None of this would be comfortable. The book that records this physical suffering is Acts. All five types would come to them rather soon. The encouragement Jesus gave them to endure such physical suffering was trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit's inspiration to ensure that the gospel would be preached to the nations.

Familial Suffering

Mark 13:12, 13

The family is your first church. The family is school district number 1. Jesus redefined family to include anyone who does his will (Mark 3:35). But what happens when familial relationships actually become the source of suffering? Jesus drew upon the language of Micah 7:6 to teach his disciples that the sword of the gospel sometimes divided the closest of earthly relationships. The promise in the text is that of hate. Everyone will hate the apostles because of their new familial relationship to Jesus. Jesus would promise this again (John 16:2) and Paul would later claim it for himself and others (Colossians 1:24; 2 Timothy 3:12).

Religious Suffering

Mark 13:14-20

Jesus tipped off the disciples as to when they could expect this suffering to get intense. It was when they saw "the abomination that causes desolation" in Jerusalem. The disciples had a reservoir from which to draw to understand this reference (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). What would pollute the temple in Jerusalem? Anything unholy or impure. The primary meaning from the Old Testament would be the prediction of Antiochus Epiphanes offering swine's flesh on the altar at the temple (1 Maccabees 1:41-64; 6:7; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 12.5.4). In light of the parallel passage in Luke 21:20 we can understand this as a reference to Titus's army coming to lay siege to Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Governmental oppression would cause religious suffering.

No wonder Jesus warned his listeners (and Mark's readers) to get out of town. They did. They escaped to Pella and other places on the eastern side of the Jordan River. They were to leave quickly and take nothing. Jesus showed his mercy for nursing mothers when such suffering would come. It would really be a horrible, rotten, no-good day—maybe the worst in history.

As bad as the suffering was to be, each section gave a word of hope (13:11, 13, 20). The disciples would be helped by the Holy Spirit, saved in the end, and their suffering cut short due to being his elect. No suffering seems light and momentary, but trusting Jesus to carry us through that suffering prepares for us an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).

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STAND FIRM TO THE END

BY DAVID FAUST

Christ is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), so it's not surprising when we find grace and truth mingled together throughout his teachings. When the Good Shepherd leads us beside quiet waters, that's grace. When his rod and staff correct us, that's truth. When Jesus tells the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you," that's grace. When he tells her, "Go and leave your life of sin," that's truth.

Jesus said, "Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13). This verse contains both grace and truth. Jesus' words underscore three lessons: (1) a solemn warning, (2) an urgent exhortation, and (3) a faithful promise.

A Solemn Warning: "Everyone Will Hate You Because of Me"

Jesus pulled no punches when he shared this hard-hitting truth with his disciples. Who wants to be the object of widespread hatred? Of course, this warning doesn't negate what the Bible says elsewhere about the love, comfort, and joy found in Christ. But if we think following Jesus will make us popular, we're in for a rude awakening. Most of the time, serious devotion to Christ doesn't please the crowd; it invites disdain and ridicule.

Christian values go against the grain in a culture that's out of sync with the Creator's will. "Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 4:12, 13).

An Urgent Exhortation: "Stand Firm to the End"

Christian discipleship is a lifetime commitment. At baptism we promise our faithfulness to the risen Christ, like a couple on their wedding day pledging to honor their vows for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health. Whatever happens, we must never give up our faith. We must stand firm to the end.

If you're driving a small car on a highway during a blinding snowstorm, it's smart to follow the tail-lights of the semi-truck ahead of you. From a high perch in his larger vehicle, the truck driver sees the road better than you do. Christians follow the Lord, trusting that he sees the way forward better than we do. Oswald Chambers said, "To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness, but it should be an expression of breathless expectation. We are uncertain of the next step, but we are certain of God."

A Faithful Promise: "Will Be Saved"

God's grace through Jesus Christ will save us at the final judgment, but we don't have to wait until we die to enjoy the benefits of knowing "it is by grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). While we await the final consummation of God's eternal plan, faith in Christ saves us from the futility of a lonely and meaningless life, separated from our heavenly Father. The same Lord Jesus who asks us to stand firm to the end promises to be with us to the end (Matthew 28:20).

The journey of faith is difficult, but we don't travel alone. The Lord of grace and truth is our traveling companion.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson:

- What is meant when someone says, "This is the hill I choose to die on"? What is your "hill to die on"? In other words, for what principle or cause would you be willing to stand regardless of the cost?
- Has anyone ever said to you, "It's just you and me against the world"? If you could choose just one person with whom to go against the world, who would it be? Why would you choose that person?

Read Mark 13:9-11

1. Jesus warned his disciples to be on guard (watch out, take heed) of what was to come for them. List the trials Jesus said they would face. Why is it significant that Jesus warned them ahead of time that they would suffer when spreading the gospel?

2. Compare the predictions in these verses to what later happened to these same disciples (Acts 5:17, 18, 27-33). What elements of Jesus' warnings do you see fulfilled in this account of persecution?

Read Mark 13:12, 13

3. While some have dysfunctional families, for most of us our families are a place of refuge and support. Summarize the content of Mark 13:12; Matthew 10:34-37; Micah 7:5, 6; Luke 12:49-53. Why is this discouraging?

4. If believers will face opposition even in their own families, where can they go for family-type encouragement? See Mark 3:31-35.

Read Mark 13:14-20

5. The reference to "the abomination that causes desolation" is a reference to Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11. This is usually interpreted as a prediction of Greek king Antiochus Epiphanes's desecration of the temple in the second century before Christ. Jesus is using this as a metaphor for a future destruction of the temple that his disciples would witness. Give some examples of government persecution of the church in history. Why do you think tyrants see the church as a threat?

6. Earlier, Jesus encouraged his disciples to stand despite physical persecution. In these verses, however, he seems to encourage fleeing imminent persecution. How can we know when it is best to suffer persecution or to flee it?

7. Every fall, Christians around the world observe International Days of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Learn more at idop.ca. Though it is months away, begin thinking about how you and your congregation can participate in encouraging those who trust Jesus to stand with them in their suffering.

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.