

Study Questions

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

by William Barclay

Introduction:

Kick-off Meeting **Introduction to the Gospel of Mark** (page 1)
up to but not including

The Beginning of the Story (page 11)

1. What is a synoptic gospel and why is it important to our study of Mark?
2. What were Mark's sources of information?
3. Barclay lists 5 characteristics of the Gospel of Mark. Which of the characteristics is most compelling for you going into this bible study? Why?

Mark:

Lesson 1 **The Beginning of the Story** (page 11)
up to but not including

Jesus Chooses His Friends (page 29)

1. Barclay does not explicitly state it, but how were the priests in the time of Jesus failing the people?
2. What is the significance of John the Baptist's statement that "I am not fit to stoop down and to loosen the strap of his sandals."
3. In light of Barclay's discussion concerning sandals, think back to John's Gospel concerning the foot washing (John 13:1-16) and our reliving the event at Lent. Does it now have more significance for you? Why or Why not.
4. What are the two *vivid* touches concerning the Temptation that Barclay fleshes out for us? Which is most significant for you? Why?
5. What is the *good news*?

Lesson 2 **Jesus Chooses His Friends** (page 29)
up to but not including

A Faith That Would Not Be Denied (page 52)

1. When has the call of God come to you? In prayer? Church? In the middle of the week on the way to work?
2. Why was the synagogue the most logical place for Jesus to begin his ministry?
3. What do you think of Barclay's discussion on demons? Do you agree or disagree?
4. Of the three (3) people discussed in "A Private Miracle", who did you learn the most about? Which person do you most closely identify with?
5. How is the story concerning Peter's wife's mother a lesson for us?
6. Barclay points out that there is the beginning of tragedy in "The Beginning of the Crowds" (pg 43). How does this tragedy reflect us and our society? Is this still happening?
7. What details are revealed about Jesus in "The Leper is Cleansed".

Gospel of Mark

A Faith That Would Not Be Denied (page 52)

Lesson 3 *up to but not including*

Piety, Real and False (page 71)

1. Barclay paints a beautiful picture of the four men carrying their friend in the stretcher. How does this help your understanding of this story in the Gospel?
2. Who were the Sanhedrin? Why was the Sanhedrin “scouting party” amazed at what Jesus said?
3. How does Jesus sign his own death warrant?
4. Why might the story concerning Matthew the tax collector not seem relevant to modern folks but seem extraordinary to the people in the time of Jesus and the disciples?
5. As part of the discussion in “The Necessity of Staying Young in Mind”, Barclay says that in Jesus “No one was ever such an expert in getting from the ‘here and now’ to the ‘there and then’. What did he mean?

Lesson 4 **Piety, Real and False** (page 71)

up to but not including

The Conditions of Kinship (page 93)

1. Barclay briefly discusses some of the rules having to do the Sabbath. With his discussion in mind, where do we draw the line concerning the rules and canon law of the Catholic Church? Or were the rules because of abuses?
2. How does Barclay’s discussion of the Pharisees in “The Clash of Ideas” show us to what depths we will go to justify our own positions? When are we Pharisees?
3. How could this realization change people’s hearts? Especially for those who mechanically/ritually go to mass?
4. Beginning on page 81, Barclay presents an interesting discussion on the “Son of God”. What, if anything, did you learn from his discussion? Why did Jesus ask people, more often than not, to remain silent concerning their revelation that he is the Son of God?
5. Which was more important to Jesus? Dealing with evil **or** saving bodies and souls?
6. We have discussed this before as part of the other Gospels and it has been discussed as part of homilies. What is the sin against the Holy Spirit and why is it unforgivable?

Lesson 5 **The Conditions of Kinship** (page 93)

up to but not including

The Harvest is Sure (page 108)

1. What conditions of true kinship would reinvigorate the church?
2. Imagine yourself as an Orthodox Jew (Pharisee) in the time of Jesus. What might you think about Jesus’ teaching methods? In particular what about him teaching from the boat? How is this applicable to us in our church?
3. Barclay defines a parable and provides 4 reasons for why Jesus used them. What do you think of his reasons? Can you think of any other reasons why Jesus used parables?
4. After reading Barclay’s discussion in “From Earth to Heaven”, please re-read Mark 4:3-9 and try to visualize yourself on the lakeshore and imagine what it must have been like in light of what Barclay discussed. Any new insights?

Gospel of Mark

The Harvest is Sure (page 108)

Lesson 6 *up to but not including*

The Wise Teacher and the Wise Scholar (page 129)

1. What do the four different soil types represent in the parable of the sower? Which soil type are you?
2. Barclay discusses the meaning of the parable of the sower in “The Harvest is Sure”. In the final paragraph of the section, though, he provides an alternative meaning. What do you think of the alternate explanation of the parable?
3. What truths from “The Balance of Life” had you not considered until reading Barclay’s commentary?
4. “The Unseen Growth and the Certain End” begins the discussion about Jesus’ parables concerning what the Kingdom of God is like. Do you have a better understanding of the Kingdom after reading this section?
5. What was the most common way to refer to great empires in the Old Testament? Why was it relevant for Jesus to use the mustard seed as a metaphor for the Kingdom of God.

The Wise Teacher and the Wise Scholar (page 129)

Lesson 7 *up to but not including*

A Suffer’s Last Hope (page 148)

1. Other than because he is God, why is Jesus considered a wise teacher?
2. What is the measure of a good teacher?
3. Barclay posits that there are both literal and symbolic meaning to the story in “The Peace of the Presence.” What do you think of his discussion? Do you have any other ideas or thoughts?
4. The passage discussed in “Bidding Christ Be Gone” is very difficult to understand when taken at face value. Barclay suggests that it is actually an indictment or warning on how we as humans are more than likely to act. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. Like many stories from the Gospels, the scripture discussed within the section “In the Hour of Need” can be overlooked because it doesn’t seem relevant to our modern, non-Jewish way of thinking. What about the discussion interested you the most? What can you apply to future bible studies?

A Suffer’s Last Hope (page 148)

Lesson 8 *up to but not including*

The Message and the Mercy of the King (page 166)

1. What does the passage discussed in “A Suffer’s Last Hope” tell us about the three people? Which of the three people do you think you are?
2. Barclay helps us to visualize Jesus’ actions in “The Difference Faith Makes”. Does his discussion help you to more fully understand Barclay’s argument for Mark’s authorship of the Gospel?
3. Some have never understood why his own village scorned Jesus. Do you agree with Barclay’s reasoning why he was rejected? Why or why not?
4. What is the tremendous responsibility laid on us as Christians?
5. What were the 5 typical articles of clothing of a Jew in Palestine in the time of Jesus? Which item was the most interesting to you in regards to the discussion of Mark 6:7-11.

Gospel of Mark

The Message and the Mercy of the King (page 166)

Lesson 9 *up to but not including*

The Conquest of the Storm (page 184)

1. Barclay says that “Repentance means a change of heart and a change of action”. In your faith journey, have you experienced repentance as defined by the text?
2. Most of the time we may quickly skim through the passage discussed in “An Evil Woman’s Revenge” and think of it as nothing more than an interesting historical anecdote. Barclay’s discussion of the drama is revealing on many levels both historically and morally. Now how do you feel about the passage?
3. The miracle of the loaves and fishes is significant in that it is the only miracle in all four gospels. Because of our familiarity with it, it is easy to tune it out during the Sunday readings at Mass. Are there any new insights you may have gained from Barclay’s discussion?

The Conquest of the Storm (page 184)

Lesson 10 *up to but not including*

The Forecast of a World for Christ (page 203)

1. Why did Jesus send the disciples away after the miracle of the loaves and fishes?
2. Chapter 6 ends with the crowds demanding more of Jesus. Barclay’s discussion condemns the attitude where people tend to take more than they give. What are your thoughts, do you take more than you get from Christ and the church?
3. Do you have a passion for definition or a passion for great moral principles?
4. What separates us from the Father? What really makes us unclean? Is this story still applicable to us?

The Forecast of a World for Christ (page 203)

Lesson 11 *up to but not including*

The Great Discovery (page 221)

1. What about Barclay’s discussion of “The Forecast of a World for Christ” helps clear up any confusion or misgivings you may have had concerning the Syrophenician woman?
2. Put aside the miracle in “Doing All Things Well” for a minute. What are we to learn from the Son of Man’s actions?
3. How is the scripture passage discussed in “Compassion and Challenge” related to Mark 5:1-20, the Gerasene demoniac? Have you thought about this before?
4. What extraordinary claim does Barclay make towards the end of the discussion on the second feeding of the multitudes?
5. Why was leaven a sign of evil to the Jews?
6. For the discussion of Mark 8:14-21, Barclay suggests that Jesus may not have been scolding the disciples. Do you agree or disagree with his suggestion? Why?
7. In “A Blind Man Learns to See”, what three points does Barclay make about Jesus and the miracle? Does that give you any more insight and/appreciation for how God works in our lives?

Gospel of Mark

The Great Discovery (page 221)

Lesson 12 *up to but not including*

When the King Comes into his Own (page 240)

1. After Peter confesses that Jesus is the “Anointed One”, Jesus orders all the disciples to tell no one. Why?
2. What was the Jewish idea of the Messiah?
3. What does Apocalypse mean? How is it relevant to the event that happened at Caesarea Philippi?
4. Is the name Christ a name or a title?
5. In Barclay’s words the Apocalyptic literature concerning the coming of the Messiah was “violent, nationalistic, destructive, vengeful.” How does all the discussion tie in with the Gospel story in 8:27-30?
6. Why did Jesus have to continually re-educate his disciples concerning the true meaning of Messiahship?
7. What is remarkable about Jesus’ call to Christianity that is different from most, if not all other movements?

When the King Comes into his Own (page 240)

Lesson 13 *up to but not including*

A Lesson in Tolerance (page 261)

1. What is Barclay’s interpretation of what Jesus meant when he said “... there are those who are standing here who will not taste of death until they shall see the kingdom of God coming with power”?
2. Barclay provides an interesting reason for why Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah on the mountain. What is the reason? What do you think of it?
3. Why was the Transfiguration especially significant for the disciples, especially seen in the light of their actions after the Ascension?
4. Barclay makes it clear that the disciples’ heads were probably “swimming” after the Transfiguration. Yet they persevered even though they still did not understand. What can we take away from their experiences? Is it applicable to our faith journey?
5. What two things do we learn about Jesus when he comes down to the town from the mountain? Can we hope to have the gifts that Barclay says Jesus had?
6. Jesus sees the cross coming, is tired and in Mark 9:14-18 he sees that his disciples are suffering from a lack of faith. In Mark 9:10-24 he sounds like he is scolding them, at least to our way of thinking. Do you think, as Barclay claims, that Jesus must have felt daunted by all the pressure? Why or why not?
7. In Mark 9:19-24, Barclay points out an interesting thing about Jesus’ ability to take care of the task at hand. Have you thought about this story in this manner before? What can we take away from it?
8. Why did Jesus say the disciples failed to cast out the demon? How is this a lesson for us in our daily life? How about when life is difficult? When life is good?
9. In “Facing the End” we see Jesus trying to appeal to a particular disciple. Which one? Why is this extraordinary? What does this say about God’s love for us? Do you think most people miss this revelation?
10. What does it mean when a Rabbi sits down to talk with his disciples? Does it lend more credence to his words in Mark 9:32-35 than you may have thought previously?

Gospel of Mark

A Lesson in Tolerance (page 261)

Lesson 14 *up to but not including*

How Much do you Want Goodness (page 282)

11. What is the lesson in tolerance that nearly everyone needs to learn?
12. What is Gehenna?
13. Do you think the Pharisees were honestly interested in Jesus' opinion of divorce?
14. What parallels can be drawn between the morality of Jesus' day and the morals in society today?
15. The discussion concerning the phrase "for of such is the Kingdom of God". Reveals quite a bit about the character of Jesus. What points did you find most interesting?
16. What is it about children that Jesus liked so much?
17. This is the second reference to children and the Kingdom of God. What significance can we attach to this repetition?

How Much do you Want Goodness (page 282)

Lesson 15 *up to but not including*

The Coming of the King (page 305)

1. Respectability consists of "not doing things." What does Christian life consist of?
2. Does the discussion on Mark 10:17-22 drive home the point about being sacrificially generous?
3. What are the dangers of material things and prosperity?
4. Why was it difficult for the disciples to understand that it was more difficult for the rich and prosperous to enter the kingdom?
5. In "The Approaching End" Barclay points out that the Author paints a picture that tells us three things about Jesus. What are they? Do you agree with them?
6. The final point made in "The Approaching End" talks about how the magnetism of Jesus and how that led the disciples to follow. Why do you think Judas still followed at this point?
7. What explanation does Barclay give for the metaphors Jesus uses in Mark 10:35-40? The RSV translates it as "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Have you thought of Jesus' meaning behind his words in this way before?
8. What is the price of salvation?
9. Starting on page 303, Barclay lists the conditions of a miracle with respect to the blind man who was made to see. What do you think of the conditions? Do you think they are needed or required?

The Coming of the King (page 305)

Lesson 16 *up to but not including*

A Cunning Question and a Piercing Answer (page 323)

1. Do you think Jesus made prior arrangements for the donkey as Barclay suggests?
2. What is the significance of the donkey in 11:1-6?
3. The cursed fig tree is one of the most difficult stories of the Gospels. Barclay says that it may be a "living parable." What is a living parable? Which living parable do you feel is speaking to you and why?
4. Why did Jesus throw out the money-changers and merchants from the "Court of the Gentiles"?
5. What are the laws of prayer? Has Barclay's discussion helped you to improve your prayer life? Why or why not?

Gospel of Mark

A Cunning Question and a Piercing Answer (page 323)

Lesson 17 *up to but not including*

Love God and Love for Neighbor (page 340)

1. What does the parable in 12:1-12 say about human nature? Can you give examples in your life that are applicable to you? What about our society?
2. Was there a part of Barclay's discussion concerning "rendering to Caesar" that helped you to understand the scripture and the message behind it more fully?
3. Barclay's discussion of "The Wrong Idea of the Life to Come" brings up the point that as humans we try to think of heaven in terms of what would make us happy. Jesus' words are pretty challenging to this way of thinking. How did you imagine heaven before reading the scripture and discussion? Has your perception of heaven changed?

Love God and Love for Neighbor (page 340)

Lesson 18 *up to but not including*

A City's Agony (page 360)

1. Many people, religious and secular alike, think of Jesus in terms of Christianity and not Judaism. What example(s) does Barclay provide that show Jesus' teaching is firmly rooted in Judaism?
2. The discussion in "The Son of David" may be the most difficult in Barclay's commentary. What do you think Jesus is saying?
3. What is it about the scribes that Jesus did not like?
4. What is the greatest gift? Why did Barclay call it the greatest gift?
5. What is the "The Day of the Lord"?

A City's Agony (page 360)

Lesson 19 *up to but not including*

The Traitor (page 382)

1. Why were the early Christians hated by the Romans?
2. In "The Dangers of the Last Days", Barclay discusses Jesus' warnings concerning heretics. What are the five ways in which heresy may arise? Are you guilty of your own private heresies?
3. In "His Coming Again" many people get caught up in the imagery, trying to predict the future. What is really important about Mark 13:7-8 and 24-27?
4. What significance, other than the historical one from Exodus, did the Feast of Passover have for the Jews?
5. Why do some think that breaking the flask of oil was foreshadowing Jesus' death?
6. What are we to learn about love from the actions of the woman who anointed Jesus' head?
7. How is the woman's action a lesson in impulsiveness that we should follow?

Gospel of Mark

Lesson 20 **The Traitor** (page 382)
up to but not including

The Arrest (page 402)

1. In “The Traitor”, Barclay lists several potential things that distinguish Judas because of his actions. What are they? Are we so different from Judas? What are we to learn from this passage?
2. What clues does Barclay flesh out to show that the preparation of the Passover meal for Jesus and his disciples was prearranged?
3. What were the preparations that a Jew made for the Passover?
4. There were four cups of wine used during the Passover meal. What is the significance of each of these four cups with respect to Exodus?
5. If the Passover Meal was a commemoration (or reliving) of the meal in Egypt, why did the Jews of Jesus’ time recline at table rather stand and eat?
6. What are we to learn about God’s love from Jesus’ words in Mark 14:17-21?
7. What is the Old Covenant based on? What is the New Covenant based on?
8. What two things did Jesus desire in the Garden of Gethsemane? Are we any different?

Lesson 21 **The Arrest** (page 402)
up to but not including

The Soldier’s Mockery (page 417)

1. Who is the young man clothed in the linen sheet?
2. Why was everything about Jesus’ “trial” before the Sanhedrin illegal?
3. Did Peter show courage or cowardice? How is he different from Judas?
4. We often think that the reason the crowd turned on Jesus so quickly after Palm Sunday that it was because of their fickleness. Does Barclay’s discussion about Barabbas change that perception?

Lesson 22 **The Soldier’s Mockery** (page 417) **to the End**

1. Why, other than to show his suffering, did Mark include the mocking of Jesus by the Roman Soldiers?
2. What do you think of Barclay’s speculation concerning the effect that Jesus had on Simon of Cyrene?
3. How do we know that God’s Love is without limit?
4. What was the curtain of the Temple used for? What is the significance of the tearing of the curtain?
5. What is the best proof of the Resurrection?