

Sydney University

Evangelical Union

***Introductory
Bible Studies***

***The Gospel of
Mark***

2000 edition **About Sydney University Evangelical
Union**

Introductory Bible Studies

1. What are the goals of the Introductory Bible studies?

Broadly, the goal of the Introductory Bible studies is to teach people the Christian gospel, lead people to Christ, and enable them to begin to path to maturity in Christ. They are for people who want to investigate the Christian faith, as well as for people who have become Christians recently. There are two strands – studies in Mark's gospel, and studies in some passages from Paul, under the heading, "Jesus is Lord". They are adapted from the First Year Bible studies, and you will need to adapt them to the person you are doing them with – however, don't be afraid to challenge people directly, both to become Christian, and to change their life in response to the word of God.

The studies are outcome oriented. That is, we ask the question, how do we want to have influenced people after having done these studies? What kind of people do we want them to be having been confronted by the gospel of Christ? And to that question we have come up with 4 parameters: we are looking for them to become

- evangelical at depth. This means having a right belief (orthodoxy); a right response or practice (orthopraxy); and a right heart, a love for God and a deep trust in Christ (orthocardia).
- ministry mindedness on campus. That is, a care of others which is outward looking, a readiness to use their gifts on campus, and a loyalty to and energy for the body of Christ at Uni.
- evangelistically oriented. In other words, be the sort of people who look and pray for opportunities to present Christ.
- integrated into a church and S.U.E.U., so that they own the objects as an expression of God's purposes at Sydney uni, value the Doctrinal Basis, and are convinced

members, with a stake in the work.

2. The First Year Group study material program

The theme: “The Lord”

The aim these Bible studies is to explore aspects of Christ’s lordship. Christ’s lordship is not merely an interesting theme in the New Testament but the very content of the gospel proclamation itself. Hence, grounding people, whether they be unbelievers searching for the truth, or new Christians, in this gospel is the surest foundation they can build their lives on.

Study 1	Mark 1.1–15 “The kingdom of God is at hand”	We start with the gospel of Mark, to introduce the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This study aims to understand that Jesus coming was not out of the blue, but in the context of God’s promises one day to reign as king as he foretold in the ancient promises.
Study 2	Mark 3.7–30 “The conflict of the kingdom of God”	This study aims see the various ways in which the people who came into contact with Jesus responded to him, to understand Jesus own explanation of himself and its relation to the kingdom of God and then to explore the issue of how a person should respond to him.
Study 3	Mark 4.1–34 “The hiddenness of the kingdom of God”	This study focuses on the hidden and unexpected nature of the kingdom of God, that it repels as well as attracts, and is small and hidden in nature. As ane outcome of this study we hope to help people have correct expectations of the kingdom of God.
Study 4	Mark 5.21–43 “The grace of the kingdom of God”	This study is about the nature of the kingdom of God – it is a kingdom of peace and life, enacted in the wonderful life-bringing healings by Jesus of the bleeding woman and the daughter of Jairus.
Study 5	Mark 8.22–33 “The unexpected way of the kingdom of God”	The kingdom of God is inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus fulfils expectations of what the Messiah is to be, and shockingly breaks them also.
Study 6	Mark 8.31–38 “Following the king”	
Study 7	Mark 10.13–31 “Receiving the kingdom”	
Study 8	Mark 12.28–40 “The heart of the king”	
Study 9	Mark 15.1–39 “The crucified king”	
Study 10	Mark 15.42–16.8 “The victorious king”	

Study 1 Mark 1.1–15

“The kingdom of God is at hand!”

A. Preparation Questions on Mark 1.1–15 (for the leader)

What is a gospel?

The quotes in 1.2,3 come from Malachi 3.1 and Isaiah 40.3. Read them in their contexts (Mal 2.17–4.6 and Is 40.1–11). Why do you think the author used them? Who is the “I” of v. 2? Who is the “you”, whose way will be prepared? Who is the voice in v. 3?

What is a ‘baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’? Did John’s baptism deal with sin at all? If so, why did Jesus need to come? If not, what did it achieve?

What does the description tell us about John? How does John’s message of vv. 7–8 fit in with the message of v. 4?

Why did Jesus get baptised? Did he need forgiveness of sins? What was the significance of the dove and the voice from heaven?

Why did the Spirit *drive* Jesus into the wilderness? Why didn’t he go of his own accord?

Why did Jesus wait until John’s arrest to start preaching?

What is the difference between John’s message and Jesus’ message, and between the gospel we preach and the one Jesus preached?

B. Notes on the Passage: Mark 1.1–15

The word 'gospel' is not uniquely theological. The original meaning was 'good news' or 'grand announcement', so that a 'gospel' was made at the birth, or accession to power, of an emperor. Further, this grand announcement concerns the man Jesus. Who this man is, is central to the account. Here we are told he is the Christ, or Messiah which means the anointed king (which is the affirmation of Peter at 8.29), and that he is the Son of God, (which is the affirmation of the centurion at 15.39). In a sense then, these three statements enclose the book. Thus Jesus is the Messiah, the very Son of God, who is bringing the salvation of the Lord.

What sort of gospel or 'good news' or 'grand announcement' do we have here? Certainly not any old good news. As the references to Malachi and Isaiah make clear, here we are talking about the salvation that the Lord brings, when he comes with might - see Is 40.10–11.

What then is the beginning of this gospel? In fact, this good news begins with the ministry of John, who announces and prepares the way for the Lord to come, a point which is made clear by the quotes. Three things are emphasised by the quotes; there will be a messenger, the Lord will come, and that these things will occur in the wilderness. The identity of the messenger is made clear immediately. It is John the baptiser, who appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming. This is the most significant event in the life of Israel for over 300 years, since there had during that time been an absence of prophets. Now again God was speaking to his people. However, as a prophet, he spoke not of himself, but of the one who was coming, preparing his way.

The concept of 'wilderness' is significant in this passage, and gives us an idea of what it was that John was doing. (Note it is used 4 times, in vv. 3, 4, 12, 13.) According to Is 40.3, the wilderness was where the Lord was going to come, as the wilderness was where the people of Israel had started out, saved by the Lord from the Egyptians and led by him in the wilderness. In the NRSV the word is often translated "desert", but the point is the same. The wilderness was where the Lord first saved His people, and once again in the wilderness he is coming.

How did John prepare the way of the Lord? In two ways. First, by getting people to come out with him into the wilderness and be baptised in repentance. That is, the people (and there were plenty of them - v. 5) returned to the Lord in their hearts, returned to being the people of God that they were in the Exodus, admitted that they were a rebellious people and sought the forgiveness of their sins. Thus they were ready and prepared to receive the Lord. Note that in Is 40 and Mal 3–4 the coming of the Lord is not good news for everybody. He comes to rescue his people "with might", but to put down his enemies; indeed Mal 3 and 4 is all about refining his people and judging the wicked. Therefore John calls for repentance to prepare the way of the Lord.

Second, he prepares the way by speaking of the One who is to come. This one is very mighty, since John is not worthy to perform even the most menial task, removal of sandals, which Hebrew slaves were not required to perform. Further, where John baptises with water, this one baptises with the Holy Spirit; that is, he gives to his people the Holy Spirit, long promised by the prophets - see Ezek 36.22–32, Joel 2.28–29, Acts 2.

John speaks of one who is to come - the in v. 9 someone comes; Jesus! The implication is clear. But how does he come? In the way we would expect someone to come if a prophet of God was not even worthy to do that which a slave was not required to do? No, in distinct contrast, Jesus received John's baptism, humbly and passively. This contrast between what we expect of power and greatness, and the example of Jesus, is repeated later - 10.41–45.

Why Jesus is baptised is a difficult question. The standard answer is that he identifies with sinful humanity. Another explanation is that he is the true Israel, in contrast to those from Judea and Jerusalem, who truly turns to God in response to the prophetic call in the wilderness. These are down the same line; that of identification with people, and not shirking from their sin. However, Jesus is not only identified with sinful people. He is also very close to the Father's heart; in fact, his Beloved Son, with whom the Father is well pleased. The words of the heavenly voice strongly echo the messianic prophecies found in Psalm 2 (esp v. 7) of the conquering, ruling Messiah, and Isaiah 42 (esp v. 1) of the servant Messiah.

Further he sees heaven opened and is baptised with the Spirit, so that he in turn can baptise others with the Spirit. There is no indication that anyone else other than Jesus saw or heard anything.

Immediately the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness; in fact, Jesus' expulsion into the desert is a necessary consequence of his baptism. What it means for him to be the Beloved Son, pleasing to God, who baptises with the Spirit is to do battle with God's enemies. He stays in the wilderness, tempted by Satan and in danger from wild animals. Note that there is no conclusion spoken of here yet; indeed, Jesus remains in the wilderness, tempted by Satan to abandon his mission and in danger from ferocious animals/people for the rest of the book. Only at the end, in the crucifixion and resurrection do we see the result of the battle. Note also the symbolic importance of the 'forty days', a significant number in the history of Israel.

It is up to a year later that Jesus starts his ministry, after the arrest of John (all of John chs 1–3 happen in between). What is his ministry - proclaiming the gospel/ good news of God. Note the change from v. 1, where it is the "good news of Jesus Christ". What is the content of this proclamation? That the time has filled up; it's all used up, fulfilled. Therefore, God is about to act decisively in human history, his kingdom is near, the very next thing that is coming.

The 'kingdom' refers more to the person of the king and his lordship and authority than the area of his dominion measured in hectares. Thus, God is becoming king is coming in fulfilment of the promises of the prophets. The emphasis is the kingdom *of God*, not the *kingdom of God*.

How should people respond? By repenting and believing this gospel. Note that this is not a new message at all, but is in fact very similar to that of John. The difference is that where John pointed away from himself to another, Jesus will on the contrary, call people to himself as the King in the kingdom - he is the one who will baptise with the Spirit.

C. For the Study on Mark 1.1–15

Aim: To understand that Jesus coming was not out of the blue, but in the context of God's promises one day to reign as king as he foretold in the ancient promises. To see Jesus' ministry as bigger than the way of salvation ('going to heaven when you die') and his miracles as more than charismatic social action.

Suggestions for the study:

Getting started: Getting to know each other and expectations

Here are some suggestions for the first part of your first meeting.

Ask some questions about how the person came to be doing Bible studies, what their past experience of Christian things has been and so on

Discuss their expectations: A good way may be to ask the question "What sort of things are you hoping to achieve/get out of this time together?"

Introduction: cliches and impressions of Jesus

• Opening question: What are some of the ways that Jesus is understood by non-Christians/people at this University? What are some of the Christian cliches used to describe Jesus and his work? What intrigues/impresses you most about Jesus? (Note: don't spend too much time gathering responses, this is simply a way in to helping people think afresh about Jesus and the kingdom of God).

- Read Mark 1.1-15

"Jesus and the kingdom of God" Filling out the table.

Mark 1.1 presents us with the figure of Jesus, who is called 'Christ' and the 'Son of God'. Explain that this chapter is full of events and allusions to the OT, through which Mark accords significance to the appearing of John and Jesus. We will briefly look at four, using the table on the worksheet to make notes and to chart how they add to Mark's picture of Jesus.

- Read Isaiah 40.1-11

What situation do you think these words of prophecy originally addressed?

(You may wish to glance back at Isaiah 39.5 ff)

What is promised?

When used in Mark 1.3 what does imply about the situation in Jesus days and what Jesus coming might be about?

- How does John's ministry add to our expectations of Jesus' coming? Why does he preach 'a baptism of *repentance*'?

- Read Psalm 2

(This Psalm was probably originally written for the coronation of the king of Israel and expresses the basic understanding of what we might call Messiahship.) Who is writing this Psalm? (note here he is the 'Anointed One' = in Hebrew "Messiah" in Greek "Christ" and he is 'the son' of God.) What place does he have in God's plans for his creation?

What might be the implications of these words are spoken to Jesus in Mark 1.11?

- Why did the Spirit send Jesus into the *desert* for forty days? Is there an Old Testament precedent for such activity?

What might be the significance of this event for the picture Mark is building of Jesus?

Further wider questions on the worksheet

1. In the light of the Old Testament references and allusions, how would you explain the significance of Jesus' words in Mark 1.15? Why does he call for repentance and faith?

2. Skim the rest of chapter 1 and 2 to see Jesus actions as he continues to announce the kingdom of God in different ways. How do Jesus' words and miracles add to our understanding so far of what his coming is about?

Application:

Ask people to reflect on what they have learnt about Jesus that is new.

3. Why does Mark want us to take notice of Jesus? How compelling is his Jesus?

WORKSHEET FOR STUDY 1: MARK 1.1-15

“THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND!”

Getting started: Getting to know each other and expectations

Introduction: cliches and impressions of Jesus

Jesus and the Kingdom of God

	Isaiah 40:1-11	John's Ministry	Psalm 2	The Desert
Notes				
Jesus				

• In the light of the Old Testament references and these early events of Jesus' ministry, how would you explain the significance of Jesus' words in Mark 1.15? Why does he call for repentance and faith?

• Skim the rest of chapter 1 and 2 to see Jesus actions. How do Jesus' words and miracles fill out the Old Testament picture of the Christ/Son of God, and our understanding of what his coming is about?

Jesus, the Kingdom of God & the SUEU at Sydney University

• What surprised impressed or intrigued you about the picture of Jesus here in Mark.

Study 2 Mark 3.7–30

The Conflict of the Kingdom of God

A. Preparation Questions on Mark 3.7–30 (for the leader)

Who are referred to as “his disciples” in 3.7, 9?

Given the crowd’s response to Jesus, what do they see him as?

How did the unclean spirits respond to Jesus? Why did the unclean spirits respond to Jesus in the way they did? Why did Jesus forbid them to make him known? Do they obey him? Why?

What was distinctive about the position of the apostles? What was the message they were appointed to proclaim? What enabled them to cast out demons?

What was the claim some people were making about Jesus? Why do you think this was being said of him?

What were the scribes saying about Jesus? Why were they saying such a thing?

What do you think Jesus means when he speaks of plundering a strong man’s house in v.27? How might this serve as a parable for his own ministry seen up to now, and the ministry he has just given the apostles?

Read 3. 28–29. Are these verses contradictory? What is it to blaspheme something? What is the difference between “whatever blasphemies they utter” and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? How does a person blaspheme “against the Holy Spirit”? Why is it an eternal sin, for which people cannot be forgiven?

B. Notes on the Passage: Mark 3.7–30

This passage shows three more short episodes as Jesus continues his ministry of preaching and healing. More interesting than the incidents themselves, however, are the different perceptions people are shown to have of Jesus, bearing in mind that a key underlying idea in Mark is the realisation of Jesus' true identity.

Make sure that you read the short section from 2.18–3.6, which falls between the last study and this one. In particular, we see Jesus hinting at the new perspective he brings to the way the law had come to be applied, and we also see Jesus' enemies start to work towards his destruction.

The disciples referred to in v.7 were a fairly large group of followers attached to Jesus who by this stage had become something of a celebrity. The "great multitude" which pursues him seems more eager to cash in on his reputation as a gifted healer than anything else. They fail to understand him or his mission. In a rather ironic contrast to this first response comes the response of the unclean spirits, who upon seeing Jesus would immediately fall before him, acknowledging his supreme authority over them and recognise his identity as the son of God. In keeping with his intention that people understand who he is in the context of his work and purpose rather than as a naked announcement, Jesus orders the spirits to remain silent.

The next few verses show Jesus making a formal appointment of the twelve as his chosen apostles. Their role is to "be with him", "to be sent out to proclaim to the message", and "to have authority to cast out demons". This sets up the unique role they are to have, even after the resurrection, having been Jesus' constant companions during his ministry. Their ministry resembles Jesus' own: proclamation of the message of the kingdom and of repentance, and authority over unclean spirits. Note that this is an authority which they have only by virtue of the fact that Jesus himself has given it to them.

The next few verses show still other reactions to Jesus. Once again there is a crowd which clamours for access, and we are also told that there are some who are claiming that Jesus "has gone out of his mind", which at which point Jesus' own relatives try to restrain him. In fact the word translated "people" in vs. 21 NRSV is simply "they" (as in NIV) and could mean that it was his family who thought he was out of his mind! This might have been for any one of a number of reasons: Jesus had risen from obscurity to be a major public figure, getting up to speak in synagogues, dining unashamedly with outcasts and adopting a lifestyle of constant moving from place to place, typified in the verses immediately prior, where he was apparently unable to eat due to the pressures of the crowd.

Lastly, there are the reactions of the scribes, a group of Jewish legal specialists, who have come down from Jerusalem, possibly in order to investigate this new preacher who has so rapidly gained such a large following. They accuse Jesus firstly of being possessed, and secondly of casting out demons by demonic power. Jesus' answer comes in three parts.

He begins by saying that for him to be operating by the power of Satan would mean that Satan was at war with himself and therefore powerless. This is clearly not so - the evidence of Satan's strength and activity was all around them. This also implies that Jesus must be working by the power of God.

Jesus goes on to give the parable about successfully plundering the house of a strong man only by first tying him up. This binding of the strong man represents the ministry of Jesus and the coming kingdom - the overthrow of Satan's power as seen in demonic activity and illness by healings, exorcisms, and the proclamation of God's kingdom. It is this same ministry which Jesus gives to his apostles in vv. 14–15.

Finally, Jesus gives his infamous remarks about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This was a warning tailored to the scribes themselves, who were well-versed in the gravity of blasphemy, which was always an expression of defiant hostility towards the holy God. For those who knew the law to perversely maintain that the expulsion of demons was other than evidence of the awaited kingdom of God showed their own arrogant refusal acknowledge Jesus as God's anointed. Without such an acknowledgment, no person can find forgiveness.

C. For the Study on Mark 3.7–30

Aim: To see the various ways in which the people who came into contact with Jesus responded to him, to understand Jesus own explanation of himself and its relation to the kingdom of God and then to explore the issue of how a person should respond to him.

Suggestions for the study: Although the aim of the study is to consider the issue of response to Jesus, you should be prepared for the probability that people will want to launch into discussion of other interesting things such as the “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” text. Make sure you keep on track, either by answering the questions very briefly, or by promising to come back to the issues if there is time left after the study.

1. (Put answers in first speech bubble) Ask what are the different ways people explain or respond to Jesus in our society, or even on campus? How is he explained by different religious groups, for instance? How is he explained by non-Christian friends or members of your group? What response do they make to him on this basis?

The idea of this discussion is to establish the fact that people have a wide range of ideas and explanations about Jesus, of which the Christian response appears to them to be only one, and that people respond to Jesus according to their view of him.

2. Now read through the whole passage. In it, a number of different responses to Jesus are shown: those of the crowd, the unclean spirits, other people, his own family, and the scribes.

3. Have the group identify these different responses fill in the table and discuss them.

4. You can ask questions like “What have the various people seen of Jesus?” “Are their explanations of/responses to him justifiable in the light of what they know of him?” “Which response(s) is/are right?” “Why are they right?”

5. Now ask how does Jesus defend himself in the parables he tells?

Note that he doesn't actually speak of himself in as many words but in parables. What is the meaning of his parables? You may find it helpful to unpack the parable by asking, “Why does Jesus say his exorcisms can't be by the power of Satan” “What does he mean by the Strong Man? Who has bound him?”

6. What does this have to do with the kingdom of God?

Worksheet for Study 2 Mark 3:7-30

The Conflict of the Kingdom of God



Read Mark 3:7-30. Fill in the responses the various groups had towards Jesus.

Crowd	
Evil spirit	
Family	
Scribes	

How does Jesus defend himself in the parables he tells?

What does this have to do with the kingdom of God?

Study 3 - Mark 4.1–34

The Hiddenness of the Kingdom of God

A. Preparation Questions on Mark 4.1–34 (for the leader)

What is a parable?

What does Jesus mean when he says in v. 9, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”?

In what sense had the disciples been given “the secret of the kingdom of God” (v. 11)?

Who are “those on the outside” (v. 11)? Outside of what? Who is on the inside?

What do you think is meant by v. 12? Is Jesus deliberately trying to obstruct people’s repentance?

What is the point being made in v. 13? What is this saying about this parable’s significance?

What is “the word” to which Jesus refers in v. 14?

What is it for Satan to “take away the word” (v.15)?

What is it to “receive the word” (v.16)?

Read v. 17. Is it possible for Christians to experience trouble or persecution other than on account of the word? What is the distinction?

What type of things are described as “the cares of the world” (v. 19)?

In the parable, what do you think is meant by the “fruit” which some seed yields and other seed does not?

What is the point being made in the parable of vv.21–23? What is the “lamp”? What remains “hidden” at this point in Mark’s gospel, and what is being said about it?

What is the point being made in vv. 24–25? What is it of which the disciples are to have some now, and an abundance later? What is it of which if a person has none now, he will suffer great loss later?

In what sense is the kingdom of God like the illustration of vv. 26–29?

In what sense is the kingdom of God like the illustration of vv. 31–32?

How do vv. 33–34 tie in with vv. 11–12?

B. Notes on the Passage: Mark 4.1–34

In terms of the structure of Mark's gospel, the parables of chapter 4 are a key passage. The whole first half of the book has the theme of the hidden identity and authority of Jesus, and the parables, which come in the centre of this first half, have a clear message about the nature of this kingdom of God which Jesus has been announcing (see 1.14–15), and therefore explain the nature of Jesus' own ministry.

Three of the parables take up the ideas of sowing, growth and harvest, focussing on the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom coming at some decisive point beyond the contemporary situation.

In the so-called parable of the sower of vv. 3–9, Jesus begins and ends with a call to listen attentively, giving a clue that there is more to his story than a superficial hearing will find. It also sets this parable apart in its importance, and he later says that an understanding of this parable is basic to understanding any other parable. The parable gives an excellent teaching on the nature of the kingdom of God, including aspects which the next two parables lack. You shouldn't let yourself be so distracted by the intrigue of the different soils and finer points of the illustration that you lose the whole picture, which, like the two subsequent parables, works from the idea of God's initiative (the sowing of the seed) through a period of growth and ripening, and onto the fulfilment of the kingdom of God, seen in the metaphor of a glorious harvest. Apparently a yield of "thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold" (v. 20), was freakishly large. Maintain this general structural focus of insignificant sowing leading to a glorious harvest as you read through the parable.

Vs. 10–20 are a "flash-forward" to a later point when Jesus is alone with the smaller group, which has been inserted in the middle of the narrative of his teaching from the boat. This smaller group of followers is nonetheless a larger body than simply the Twelve, as v. 10 shows.

Vs. 11–12 signify what has already been clearly seen in Mark so far; that among those who encounter Jesus there is a clear distinction between those who are prepared to follow and learn, and those who refuse to believe. V. 12 has long caused problems for Christian readers. The most probable explanation is that the start of v. 12 is an introduction to the quotation which follows, and so the meaning of the verse is something like "...for those outside everything is in parables, so that *the Scripture will be fulfilled which says* they may indeed see but not understand...". The remainder of the verse is a quotation from Isaiah 6.9ff, a passage which provides a commentary on what we have seen: people's hardness of heart, which while it lasts precludes them from further instruction in the secret of the kingdom of God.

V. 13 signifies that this parable is the most comprehensive in its teaching on the coming of the kingdom of God - it provides the basis for understanding the later parables.

Overall, the parable shows the announcement of the kingdom of God, the various responses to that word, and the fulfilment of the kingdom of God and outcome of the responses seen at that "time of harvest". This text is helpful in understanding our own experiences in evangelism - Jesus fully expects a range of responses, including outright rejection and apparent conversion which is followed by falling away. In all three parables the whole focus is upon bearing fruit at the harvest; it is this which indicates that the word has succeeded. You shouldn't understand fruit as being some specific Christian good work, such as evangelism. This also means that the plants which are choked by weeds are not to be understood as "unfruitful" Christians, but people in whose lives the word has not acted, ie not Christians.

The point of the lamp parable of vs. 21–23 is probably a reference to Jesus himself and his ministry of the kingdom of God. The Greek reads, "Does *the lamp come* in order to be put under a bowl?", rather than the version of most English translations which read, "Is *a lamp brought in*...". Jesus is speaking of what is now hidden, but which will become known. His purpose is not that the kingdom of God remain obscure and veiled, but that it be powerfully revealed. As with the other parables, the aspect of looking forward to the end is focal.

The teaching of vs. 24–25 is also future-focussed. Those who in this age are involved in the kingdom of God will receive their reward. To use the language of the parable of the sower, those who have "received the word" will receive an even greater blessing in God's eternal kingdom, whereas those who do not will suffer the ultimate loss of separation from their God.

The final two parables return to the language of seeds, growth and maturity as an image of the kingdom of God which commences in the apparently insignificant life and death of Jesus, and mysteriously grows to its awesome fulfilment at the last day. The first of these two, vv. 26–29, has the onus on the mystery of the seed's growth, whereas the second, vv. 30–32, focuses on the great contrast between the kingdom of God's initial apparent insignificance, and its ultimate magnificence.

C. For the Study on Mark 4.1–34

Aim: to help people have correct expectations about what the kingdom of God should be like, and therefore be appropriately less discouraged in the present and instead hungry for God's reign.

This is a very significant goal. It is important that people have correct expectations about what they think being a Christian will be like, and in this passage, we are told that although things start small and look insignificant, they will, in the future, be proved to be major.

There are basically two errors that we can fall into here.

On one hand, as we look around us, it may come as no surprise to hear that the kingdom of God is, or looks insignificant. One might even say that this is especially the case given recent media beat ups concerning Christians. The church is a minority, and a confused one at that, and to many people it seems to be increasingly irrelevant. However, the grave danger here is to assume that what it is like now is also the way it will be like in the future. This is indicated when people say small things about heaven. On the contrary, Jesus tells us that on the great day, the kingdom of God will be of magnificent glory. Our response then to our pathetic present experience is to hunger for God's reign!

On the other hand, some may know that it is the kingdom of God that we are involved with. The danger here is that we try and deny that there is any fundamental difference between the way it will be like then and the way it is now. We can try and experience the fullness of the kingdom of God, when all it is yet is a mustard seed! Eventually, once the obvious failure of this world to measure up to the next becomes apparent, deep disillusionment can set in.

The goal then is to set people up so that they avoid both of these errors.

C. Suggestions for the study:

1. The first thing to do is to remind people of what has happened in the gospel so far. What has in fact happened is that the kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus. And what an arrival - demons cast out; sins forgiven, people healed etc. Therefore, ask your group *what are the hallmarks of the great kingdom of God?* Do this before you read the passage.

The idea is that people should realise that if the kingdom of almighty God has arrived they should quite rightly expect to experience its triumphant majesty and splendour. You will more than likely get answers dealing with the forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt etc. You should now point out that what they are describing, though nice in its own way, is still a far cry from the irresistible force of God's great kingdom being unleashed throughout creation. The normal Christian experience is fairly pedestrian; frankly, it feels more like a mustard seed than a magnificent, spreading tree! Even if people speak in high terms of their present experience, push them to aim even higher for the kingdom of God in its fullness.

2. The next question to ask is *why is there such a contrast between what we understand the kingdom of God to be and our experience of it?*

3. At this point read the passage and explore the understanding of the kingdom of God given in each parable. The question to ask of each one is *what is this parable saying that the kingdom of God is like?* Move quickly. We don't want endless details but the main similarities.

4. In each case, ask people *if their present experience of the kingdom of God is in fact like the parables, and if so in what ways?* Things to mention here are the fact that it seems often that evangelism falls flat, people make little response to the gospel and even seem to fall away, the fact that the growth of the kingdom of God is inexplicable etc.

5. Ask What are the implications of this chapter for being a Christian here at Uni?

Worksheet for Study 3 - Mark 4.1–34

The Hiddenness of the Kingdom of God

1. What are the hallmarks of the great kingdom of God?

2. Why is there such a contrast between what we understand the kingdom of God to be and our experience of it?

3. What is each of these parables saying that the kingdom of God is like? Fill in this sheet

The parable	What it is about	How the Kingdom of God is like this
4.1-8 (and 4.13-20)		
4.26-29		
4.30-32		

4. Is your present experience of the kingdom of God is in fact like the parables, and if so in what ways?

5. What implications do these parables have for us here at uni?

Study 4 Mark 5.21–43

The Grace of the Kingdom of God

A. Preparation Questions on Mark 5.21–43 (for the leaders)

What is your emotional response to Jesus and the people in these stories?

Why do you think these stories are bracketed together?

Why does Jesus stop to speak to the woman, especially if they are rushing to Jairus' dying daughter?

Is the little girl dead? Why does Jesus say she is sleeping? Could 1 Corinthians 15:6, 20 help?

Why tell no- one, especially in light of many people waiting expectantly outside the front door?

What is the substance of the faith of Jairus and the woman?

What is faith?

How do you understand your "faith has made you well" ? If someone is not healed from sickness is it due to lack of faith?

What is the link between faith and Jesus' ability to heal? Read on into 6:1-6a to shed further light.

Why is 6:1-6a so significant when placed along these miracle stories?

B. Notes on the Passage: Mark 5.21-43

This passage is a significant one for it shows Jesus, the messiah at work reversing the powers of sickness and death. It falls after the dramatic release of the man from demonic possession in the Gerasenes. While showing us the power of Jesus, we also encounter a man who deals with people sensitively and with great intimacy as he meets them and responds to their great needs.

Mark uses a sandwich format for these stories, that is the story of the bleeding woman is embedded in the story of Jairus and his dying daughter. This style is one favoured by Mark and strangely enough is called a "Markan sandwich".

A. Jairus request Jesus help

B. The Bleeding woman healed

A. Jesus continues to Jairus' house.

The events may simply be placed together because the interruption of the bleeding woman leads to the death of the young girl. But Mark creates many parallels between the two stories- the desperate need of both the woman and the young girl, the healing, dependent faith of the woman and Jairus and Jesus' interaction with them (also as a point of interest the fact that the woman has bled for 12 years and that is the age of the little girl).

The woman has bled for 12 years, she had sought help from doctors and finds herself worse off! As a woman bleeding she would have suffered physically, personally as she would have been unable to have children, socially because she would be ritually unclean (Lev 15:25-33) and unable to come into contact with others. Her bleeding would also prevent her from normal sexual relations and she may thus be divorced. She has come to the end of the road and with immense faith reaches out to the one who she knows will make her well, in fact she doesn't even need to speak to him or even touch him, just his cloak. And she is healed.

Jairus, by contrast, is a synagogue leader, despite being a popular and upstanding man his need for Jesus is just as desperate as his daughter lies dying. Jairus like the woman seeks Jesus, knowing that if Jesus lays his hands on the girl she will be healed. With the delay and the news of the daughter's death, Jesus encourages Jairus "Do not fear, only believe", believe that Jesus can bring her back from the dead!

Jesus in these stories shows the immense power of the messiah, who can heal and restore life to the dead. Check out Isaiah 61 for the implication of what the Messiah will do and what the kingdom of God will look like.

Jesus also interacts with the characters in a very intimate way. When addressing the woman he calls her "Daughter" a term of tenderness. When he speaks to the little girl he uses Aramaic "Talitha" which as Mark points out means little girl but has an affectionate tone more like little lamb. Jesus speaks to the woman to assure her that it is her faith in a loving and gracious God that brings her healing rather than allowing superstitious thoughts. Jesus reassures and encourages Jairus at the news of his daughter's death. The kingdom of God as seen in the messiah, Jesus is one with the power to heal and resurrect but also one of grace which provides for and meets people's great need.

The word "to heal" used in this passage has a broader meaning in the Greek, where it includes "to save". Thus it also reads your "faith has saved you" (Mk 5:34 & Mk 10:52). Another example is in Mk 15:30, the passers-by say to Jesus "Come down from the cross and save yourself". The use of this save word by Mark may be because he wants his post-Easter readers to know that as faith in Jesus healed these sick people then, faith in Jesus will bring the salvation of God-complete restoration -to all people!

Chapter 6:1-6a, which has a misplaced break in our texts, is a sequel to the end of chapter 5. It has many contrasts to our stories and sheds further light on the role of faith and the person of Jesus.

C. For the Study on Mark 5.21–43

1. Draw attention to how the two stories are written together ABA. “A Markan Sandwich”
Now ask the group to fill out the chart on the similarities and differences between the two stories. *There are many.*

2. Ask: How do the events of this narrative add to our understanding of (a) the kingdom of God? (b) the role of Jesus?

(a) The Kingdom of God is about God restoring the destitute and giving life.

(b) Jesus is the embodiment of God's saving and restoring kingship and the one through whom God's power is exercised.

3. Read Mark 6.1–6a, the sequel to 5.21–43, and ask: In the light of this sequel what extra insights do you now have into our stories?

The sequel highlights the role of faith and expectations of Jesus.

4. Ask this question: Though Jesus still heals today in response to believing prayer (but not as often as we would like) how do these stories also speak to us on the wider questions of relating to Christ?

5. Ask: Having read these stories, what attitude does God have to you when you approach him through Jesus with your needs?

6. In the light of these stories what difference does it make that it is this Jesus, who we are leading students to a personal faith in, who we are encouraging continual submission to, and whose service we are making people aware of.

Worksheet for Study 4 Mark 5.21–43

The Grace of the Kingdom of God

Similarities	Differences

How do the events of this narrative add to our understanding of (a) the kingdom of God? (b) the role of Jesus.

In the light of Mark 6.1-6a what extra insights do you now have into our stories?

Though Jesus still heals today in response to believing prayer (but not as often as we would like) how do these stories also speak to us on the wider questions of relating to Christ?

This Jesus?

Study 5 Mark 8:22–33

The Unexpected Way of the Kingdom of God

or , What part of the word “Messiah” is it you don’t understand?

A. Preparation Questions on Mark 8:22–33 (for the leaders)

What bodily organs does Jesus say in 8.18 fail the disciples? In 7.31–36 and 8.22–26, what organs does Jesus heal?

The blind man of 8.22 is not instantly healed - it requires a second action from Jesus. Was Jesus unable to cure him in the way he had cured so many others? What do you think is the significance of this partial and then complete giving of sight to the man?

What exactly does Jesus’ question in 8.28-29 mean?

What do the various people’s opinions of Jesus have in common?

What was Peter saying by calling Jesus the Messiah? How is his answer different from the others?

How did Jesus respond now that the disciples had got it right at last? Why do you think he responded in this way?

Why do you think he announces this future (the son of man = “the man” = me)?

Why does Peter rebuke Jesus?

Why does Jesus rebuke Peter so harshly?

B. Notes on the Passage: Mark 8:22–33

The two-stage healing of the blind man (8.22–26) is very curious. One explanation which makes sense is that, as the symbolic value of his miracles has just been pointed out by Jesus himself, (8.17–21) this provides another example of an acted parable, possibly representing the partial understanding of the apostles, which will precede their full understanding. This would certainly make sense in the context, as Peter in the next few verses will make the massive breakthrough of correctly identifying Jesus as the Christ/Messiah, only to find that his understanding of “Messiah” is badly distorted. As well as this, the healing of the blind man would itself aid the apostles’ understanding, as such healings were clearly foretold in Old Testament prophecy as accompanying God’s redemption of his people (see Isa 35.5).

8.27–30 lie at the centre of the whole book of Mark. The question of Jesus’ true identity and authority has been an inescapable one as we have read of his astonishing actions and teachings.

The question “who do people/you say that I am?” is asking about Jesus’ place in God’s scheme for his people. The general views about Jesus are that he is in some way a “supernatural” figure a returned prophet. The disciples see more deeply. Having announced Jesus as the Christ/Messiah in 1.1, Mark shows the slow process by which this Jesus brings this truth to the disciples as they accompany and observe him. He has strictly forbidden evil spirits to pre-empt this realisation, which Peter finally has at 8.29. Even this, though a long-awaited expression of faith and comprehension, was an insufficient understanding of the identity and purpose of Jesus.

Lane writes:

“Peter’s confession recognised that Jesus was the *appointed agent of God* whose coming marks the fulfilment of the divine promise and the realisation of Israel’s hopes. Of the deeper and more costly dimensions of messiah-ship, however, he had no intimation.”

Jesus now announces his vocation, to suffer die and be raised beyond that. But Peter is so shocked by Jesus’ predictions that he rebukes him. We can imagine how Peter could easily refer Jesus to texts like Psalm 2 or Psalm 91 to encourage him that the Lord’s Messiah will triumph over his enemies. For instance.

⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.

⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”
(Psalm 2:8-9, NRSV)

Jesus rebukes Peter in as sharp a words as can be imagined. “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” (8.33) That is Peter is thinking humanly not as God’s way. What then is God’s way? His Messiah will triumph through suffering. This is a totally unexpected truth.

It is for this reason that Jesus continues to insist on secrecy as he sets about the remainder of his time with the twelve teaching them what it will mean for him to be the Messiah. This is starkly obvious from the sudden direction he takes with his teaching as seen in the very next verse, 3.31.

C. For the study on Mark 8:22–33

Aim: to understand the passage (the climax of the first half of Mark) that God’s kingdom is inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus who fulfils expectations of what the Messiah is to be, and shockingly breaks them also.

Suggestions for the Study: Ask the following questions:

1. Start by saying that this is the last study in Mark for while. Then review the main points of the last 4 studies about the kingdom of God

(Fill out table)

2. Note that up to now (that is mid chapter 8) in Mark there is something important about Jesus that the disciples just don't get. (8.17–21, 6.52)

In 8.22-26 Mark tells us about a healing of the blind man. What is unusual about this healing?

Now Read 8.27–33. How is the miracle of the blind man a picture of what happened to the disciples?

3. What do you make of the two questions Jesus asked the disciples. (Jesus asks the disciples questions about who people say he is and who the disciples themselves say he is. What do you make of his question? This a chance to explore both why Jesus might ask such a thing, and what the question "who am I" itself is really asking.)

4. What do the answers of the people and of Peter have in common and how are they different? (For example, both see Jesus as a supernatural figure of some sort, they see him as from God, etc. but there is a difference between returned prophets and the Messiah.)

5. Can you think what kinds of things Peter might have said to Jesus (8.32)? For example, can you think of reasons why Peter might encourage Jesus not to be so negative? (You might want to check Psalm 2 for example)

6. How do you feel about Jesus reply to Peter?

7. How can Peter be so right and so wrong at the one time? How can we at Uni be right and wrong at the one time? Or to put it another way, What part of the word "Messiah is it you don't understand"?

Worksheet for Study 5 Mark 8:1–33

The Unexpected Way of the Kingdom of God

or , What part of the word “Messiah” is it you don’t understand?

The last 4 studies about the kingdom of God

Topic	Main point
1. “The kingdom of God is at hand”	
2. “The conflict of the kingdom of God”	
3. The hiddenness of the kingdom of God”	
4. The grace of the kingdom of God”	

Mark 8:22-26, NRSV

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” ²⁴ And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”

Mark 8:27-33, NRSV

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸ And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. ³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

What do you make of the two questions Jesus asked his disciples?

What do the answers of the people and of Peter have in common and how are they different?

How can Peter be so right and so wrong at the one time? How can we at Uni be right and wrong at the one time? Or to put it another way, What part of the word “Messiah” is it you don’t understand?

Study 6 – Mark 8.31–38

Following the King

A. Preparation Questions

What did Peter understand when he called Jesus the Messiah? How did Jesus respond to this? Why did he respond this way?

Why does Peter rebuke Jesus? What human things has he set his mind on in v33? Why is Jesus response so strong? Has Peter understood what it means for Jesus to be the messiah?

How did Jesus deny himself? How are we to deny ourselves? How did Jesus take up his cross? How are we to take up our cross? What is it to take up your cross?

What does Jesus mean when he says you are to lose your life? Is this related to taking up your cross? Does he mean this literally? How does this understanding of following Jesus help us to understand our own Christian life?

Why would someone be ashamed of following Jesus? What words would you be ashamed of? Why does Jesus say this?

B. Notes on the Passage

This passage begins with Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah which is a pivotal point in the book of Mark. We know from v.31-33 however, that Peter understands this title "Messiah" in only a limited way, in that he recognises Jesus as an agent of God and Israel's hope for the future. Perhaps Peter hopes that Jesus will be a conquering king like David and liberate Israel from the occupation of the Roman Empire. Jesus understands his role as messiah in a very different way; in vv. 31-33 he says that he the messiah must suffer, be rejected, killed and raised again. This is not the great and conquering king that Peter expected, instead, Jesus predicts for himself humiliation, suffering and defeat. It is no wonder that Peter is shocked and rebukes Jesus. He is ashamed because Jesus appears to be demeaning himself. Jesus response to Peter is very strong and even harsh because Peter has so misunderstood him. He accuses Peter of thinking of human things, which probably refers to glory or greatness or victory. Peter wanted to follow a victor rather than a crucified messiah.

After establishing what it means to be the Messiah, Jesus turns to the crowd to instruct them how to be followers of this Messiah. He tells them that they must imitate him by taking up their cross. Jesus took up "his cross", that is, losing his life for the sake of others. Not only did he lose his life, but he died the most humiliating death possible..

Note: the way people were crucified was that they carried their own crosses to the place of their crucifixion. Thus understood literally, the metaphor means that you are to be a dead person, since you are carrying a cross. This is what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus then explains why taking up the cross is no optional extra for his followers; he states that if you want to save your life you'll lose it, but if you lose it (for Jesus' sake and the gospel) you'll save it. We must be careful how we understand this. To follow Jesus, people must deny themselves, that is, not give up every thing that you enjoy, like coffee and TV and chocolate, but to give up your own self-centred concern in order to serve others as Jesus did by dying. To take up your cross for us is to go the way of Jesus; namely, to die to your old way of life and instead live his. The person who wants to save his life is concerned for their own desires, not losing the good things that life offers for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. Jesus says that these people will not have eternal life. Instead, the way to follow Jesus is to lose your life, that is, to sacrifice everything, in order to serve others, to die to yourself and your desires. Jesus words exhort his followers to shift the centre of gravity from a concern for self to reckless abandonment to the will of God.

In the next few verses, Jesus encourages his listeners to weigh up the costs and benefits of following Jesus or going the way of the world. To lose your soul is not worth even the whole world and what it can give you, such as power, wealth and love. Nothing of this world can be given in exchange for eternal life. So the point is, simply choose on the basis of self interest - what is more profitable.

Why is this? Why is it that to attempt to save your life will only result in losing it, and that the only way to save your life is to lose it for Jesus' sake and the gospel? Why should things be this way? The answer is that to not lose your life for Jesus' sake, to not take up your cross and follow him is in effect to be ashamed of him; it is to consider him an irrelevance to your life, and his death a waste of time. And if this is your attitude to him now, then when he comes in power to judge the living and the dead, it will also be his attitude to you! We have seen before us an example of this shame; namely Peter, who was not the slightest bit interested in a crucified messiah, and in fact rebuked Jesus for his negativity. In other words, do not be like Peter at this point!

C. For the Study

Aim: To realise that following the Messiah involves self-denial and suffering, turning the focus of your life away from your self-centred desires for Jesus' sake and the gospel, and therefore serving others.

Suggestions for the study: There are two parts to this study. The first is to make the connections

between the various parts of the passage; and the second is talk with deep openness and practicality about what it will mean and look like to do the things that Jesus says.

Begin by reminding the group that we are picking up Mark where we left it off last semester in chapter 8.

Question: What are the connections between the various sections; why does Jesus say one after another?

Ask the group to divide the passage into sections marking the text and drawing on it. Make clear to the group that there is no the right or the wrong way of doing this. In particular, spend time asking what are the connections between the sections; why does he say one after the other; how does the latter flow on from the former?

Now discuss these two following questions.

Question: Why did Jesus take up his cross?
Jesus' answer to Peter has a clue.

Question: What are the two options given to us in verses 35-37?

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

Then its simply a matter of asking what this will look like in practice. (Check with the comments in the Notes on the Passage.)

One point which is very worthwhile making is that whatever it means in practice, it certainly involves wholehearted commitment and passion for the things of Jesus and the gospel. Half heartedness is not an option!

Worksheet for study 6: Mark 8.31–38

Following the King

Mark 8.31–38 NRSV

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

What are the connections between the various sections; why does Jesus say one after another?

Why did Jesus take up his cross?

What are the two options given to us in verses 35-37?

Is following Jesus worth the cost? Why?

How might we be ashamed of Jesus and/or his words?

In practical terms what will it mean for you to take up your cross and follow Jesus?

Study 7 – Mark 10.13–31

Receiving the kingdom

A. Preparation Questions

What do you think the people hoped to achieve by having Jesus touch their children? Why were the disciples rebuking people for doing this?

Remind yourself from earlier studies: What is the kingdom of God? How does a little child receive the kingdom of God? What is significant about Jesus' actions in vs 16?

Is there anything wrong with the man's question in vs 17? What evidence can you find in the text to support your answer?

Why do you think Jesus' makes the 'sideline' point in verse 18?

Why does the man ask what he must do to inherit eternal life if he has kept the Law?

Is Jesus' encouraging the man to attempt to earn or achieve salvation by his own efforts in vs 21? How does it relate to what he is saying in vs 15-16?

Do we need to give away everything to the poor to inherit eternal life? Why or Why not?

Why is it so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God? Why are the disciple so amazed at Jesus' words (vs24a & vs 26a)?

How does Jesus' statement in vs 27 answer the question 'Who then can be saved?'?

What does Jesus mean in vs 29ff? In what ways have you received 'a hundred times as much in this present age'? Who are the first and who are the last in vs 31?

What is so easy for children and so hard for the rich man?

B. Notes on the passage

In contrast to the Pharisees of 10.1-12, who came to Jesus to test him, we now see children being brought to Jesus to be blessed and a young man asking to receive eternal life. These two stories form a unit and address the question of entry into the kingdom of God. The conundrum is this: What is easy for children but impossible for a rich man? Whatever it is, it is the key to receiving the kingdom of God.

As we have seen, the disciples now realise that Jesus is the Messiah, ushering in the kingdom of God, and yet they have not completely grasped that the glory and power of God's kingdom will only come through weakness and suffering. The disciples have not understood this unexpected way of the kingdom: the way that will characterise both the ministry of Jesus and the lives of those who seek to follow him. This is why it is not surprising to find the disciples turning away the children brought to Jesus (vs13), since children were among the weakest and lowest members of society.

Sparked by indignation, Jesus seizes the opportunity to teach further about the nature of kingdom of God: 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these' (vs14 NIV). How are we to understand Jesus' words? His statement is not about the universal salvation of children. Rather, Jesus is making the revolutionary declaration that the kingdom of God belongs to those who will receive it like children vs 15. Those bringing the children wanted Jesus to touch them. But Jesus does even more than they had hoped for. He takes the weak and helpless from the edge of society into his arms and blesses them: they are placed at the centre of the kingdom of God.

This is a powerful symbolic act, which adds weight to the remaining question: how does a child receive the kingdom of God? Joyfully? Innocently? With a dirty nappy?

With the arrival of the man in vs 17, we see a clear example of what Jesus has just been talking about, for what the children found easy, this man finds impossible.

A short note before we proceed: this text becomes confused and convoluted when we try to read it through the theological paradigm of 'faith and works'. While a central paradigm in other contexts, it is foreign to Mark's gospel and to Jesus' words here. If we dump this theological paradigm on this text we will miss the point of the story.

It seems clear that the man's fault is **not** that he is trying to **earn** eternal life. Jesus does not rebuke him for his question 'what must I **do** to inherit eternal life?' (vs 17). This is a good, and we must assume earnest, question. Indeed Jesus gives him things to **do**. First, Jesus says that he must keep the commandments. This is a genuine answer from Jesus to the man's genuine question, and it reflects the consistent teaching of the Old Testament. Who will be vindicated on the last Day when God establishes his kingdom? Biblical Jews in Jesus' day knew that the answer to that question was: those in Israel who have been faithful to the LORD, who have kept his Law. It is not that Jesus is advocating 'salvation by works'. This is simply not the category with which he is operating. Rather, he is reinforcing that God's gracious, unmerited salvation will be given to those who are faithful to him.

Dependence and trust are, in this story at least, not the opposite of merit, earning and achievement. Rather, they are the opposite of self sufficiency and wealth. The key contrast is dependence vs self-sufficiency, not dependence vs achievement.

The reason Jesus draws attention to the man's use of 'good' in addressing Jesus, is not because he wishes to convince the man of his own sinfulness. Jesus' question 'why do you call me good?' in verse 18 is best understood as a riddle (so characteristic of Jesus) and not as a dismissal of the man's statement. Jesus wants to draw attention to himself, and the implications of what the man is saying. He wants the man to reflect on what has led him to draw the conclusion that Jesus is good, therefore on exactly to whom he is talking and on how important it might be to take Jesus' answer to his question seriously.

The man claims to have obeyed the commandments since he was a boy (vs 20). And it is plausible that he has done so. This is not the same as a claim to sinless perfection. The Law itself made ample provision for the forgiveness of sin. Keeping the law was about faithfulness

not perfection (compare the similar claim made by the apostle Paul in Philippians 3.6). And yet, with love in his eyes, Jesus insists that there is still, 'one thing you lack' (vs 21). The man may have kept the commandments since he was a boy, but he has not done so out of a heart that humbly, like a child, depends on God.

This becomes evident by his response to Jesus' second directive (vs 21). Jesus' command to sell everything, give to the poor, and then to follow him is again something for the man to **do**. Indeed, it is something *more* for the man to do, in addition to what he already claimed to be doing! Jesus second instruction is consistent with his first: he is demonstrating the true depth of the Law, which the man claims to have kept. The Law called for a radical loyalty to God and a humble dependence on him. Outward adherence to the Law was not enough. The key to entry into the kingdom of God was that which is easy for a child but impossible for a rich man: a radical trust and dependence on God. 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?'. Good question! Answer: you must, like a child, live in dependence on God.

This is why for the rich man to inherit eternal life, to enter God's kingdom, Jesus required that he forsake his trust in his riches and instead trust in God. What must he do? He must abandon false hopes and comforts and turn to God alone for mercy. This is nothing different from what Jesus had already taught the disciples: 'whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it' (8.35). The most striking feature of Jesus' command is the call to follow him. In the light of Jesus' ministry, faithfulness and loyalty to the LORD is now to be expressed by faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus. Sadly, because of his great wealth, the man finds himself unable to do this.

This is staggering: to keep the commandments is easy compared to Jesus' call to a childlike dependence on God. This is what Jesus goes on to teach in verses 23-25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (an impossible situation which is laughable in its hopelessness), than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples are amazed at this teaching. If it is hard even for the rich and the strong to enter the kingdom of God, then who can be saved?! (vs26). They are amazed because they have not yet understood that the way of the kingdom of God is weakness and childlike dependence on God's mercy (10.13-16), that the way to gain life is to lose it (8.35), and that the way to be first is to become a slave of all (10.44).

Jesus' response to their amazement in vs 27 is telling: 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God'. All people find it hard to stand before God helpless. But it is even harder for the rich, who are sheltered from the material harshness of life and look to wealth to meet their needs. But God can and does do what is impossible. He can change people, to enable them to humbly depend on him like a child. Entry to the kingdom of God is purely by his grace.

The passage ends with a final irony. Despite their failure to grasp intellectually why it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, the disciples have, with their own lives, done what is necessary. They have done what is easy for children but impossible for a rich man. Peter's exasperated exclamation is beautiful: 'we have left everything to follow you!' (vs 28). They have become like dependant children, they have sold all of their possessions, they have committed themselves wholeheartedly to following Jesus.

Jesus words in vs 29-31 are therefore to be read as words of comfort and assurance to the disciples and to all who follow in their footsteps. The richness of life in the kingdom of God, though not free from persecutions, will overwhelmingly compensate for any sacrifice made for the sake of Jesus and the kingdom of God. Here is powerful incentive to forsake false hopes and depend, like a child, on the all merciful God: 'many who are first will be last, and the last first' (vs31).

C. For the Study

Aim: To see that God's sovereign, gracious rule (the kingdom of God) is to be received in childlike dependence and trust, and to encourage group members to respond to God appropriately.

1. What difficulties did you have with becoming Christian? What difficulties are people you know having with becoming Christian?

Read Mark 10.13-27. Ask the group as you read it to think about the similarities and differences between the children and the rich man.

2. Fill out the table. What are the similarities and differences between the rich man and the little children?
3. After you have filled in the table ask, 'What is so hard for the rich man but so easy for the little children?' Maybe flesh this out with the following questions ...
What are the requirements to enter the kingdom of God? Do these requirements continue once you have entered?
4. Now read Mark 10.28-31
4. Are Peter and the disciples more like the little children or the rich man? Who ends up the richest in these stories?
5. How do these encounters with Jesus shape our understanding of what it means to become a Christian? How will they help you to talk to friends who are having difficulties submitting themselves to Jesus' Lordship?
6. Pray specifically for people you know who don't know Jesus as their Lord. Pray that God will remove the things that prevent them from coming to him and enable them to humbly depend on him (remember: 'all things are possible with God!').

Worksheet for Study 7

Receiving the kingdom of God

Mark 10.13-31

What difficulties did you have with becoming Christian? What difficulties are people you know having with becoming Christian?

Mark 10.13-27

<i>Similarities</i>	<i>Differences</i>

What is so hard for the rich man but so easy for the little children?

Mark 10.28-31

Are Peter and the disciples more like the little children or the rich man? Who ends up the richest in these stories?

How do these encounters with Jesus shape our understanding of what it means to become a Christian?

How will they help you to talk to friends who are having difficulties submitting themselves to Jesus' Lordship?

Study 8 Mark 12: 28-44

A Heart for the King

A. Preparation Questions

vs 28-44

What attitude did the teacher of the law have toward Jesus? What can we learn from his attitude?

What is the significance of "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" to the most important commandment?

What should our love for God be like?

How does the second commandment flow on from the first? What does it mean to love your neighbour as yourself?

Why are these the greatest commandments?

What has the teacher of the law grasped when he says that these two commandments are more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices? Why then does Jesus say that he is not far from the kingdom of God?

vs 35-40

What point is Jesus trying to make in verses 35-37?

Why does Jesus warn them about the teachers of the law? How do the lives of the teachers of the law contrast to the life that God calls us to live in the most important two commandments?

vs 41-44

What does the widow's offering tell us about her attitude toward God?

How does her offering reflect the two greatest commandments?

B. Notes on the Passage

This passage raises three main themes. Firstly, that what God desires from us is a life characterised by all-consuming love for him. Secondly, that this is more important to God than the ceremonial strictures of the Jewish temple. And thirdly, that Jesus has been revealed as the Lord who is worthy of our loving obedience and as the one who fulfills and surpasses the ceremonies and role of the temple.

The first theme is that the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, strength and soul, and to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus himself announces this in verses 29-31. This theme is further elaborated by the contrasting descriptions of the teachers of the law and the widow. The teachers of the law break both commands, they show contempt for God, honouring themselves in the temple and in their prayers, and they take advantage of vulnerable and poor widows. Diametrically opposed to the behaviour of the teachers of the law is that of the widow. She almost recklessly gives all she has as a temple offering despite her poverty.

The second theme is that God desires a people who love him and others more than "all burnt offerings and sacrifices". This theme is raised most explicitly in the interchange between the teacher of the law and Jesus in verses 28-34. The teacher of the law declares that the two commandments are "more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices". Jesus affirms this observation with the words: "You are not far from the kingdom of God".

The third and most fundamental point, is that whilst God desires a people passionate in their love for him and each other, and that this is more important than the strictures of the temple system, the establishment of such a people is now made possible through Jesus. This theme is raised most clearly by Jesus' reference to Psalm 110. Psalm 110 describes a Messiah-figure who will be Lord, ruler, and Judge of all the earth, exacting wrath and victory over his enemies. He is also described as an eternal priest- the perfect intercessor between God and his people. In Mark 12: 35-37 Jesus is pointing out that the Messiah, as prophesied in Psalm 110, will be greater than any earthly king. This is illustrated by the fact that David, from whom the Messiah is descended, calls him Lord. In retrospect we understand Jesus is the prophesied Messiah who has been made Lord of all.

The theme of the need to recognize Jesus as central to God's plans for his people is not made explicitly in Mark 12 vs 28-44, in fact Jesus' only reference to such a theme is in the form of a riddle (vs. 36-37). However, within the context of the passage this theme emerges as of great significance. It sheds new light upon the actions of the wise teacher of the law (vs. 28-34), the hypocritical teachers of the law (vs. 38-40) and the widow (vs.41-44). The wise teacher of the law is on the one hand close to the kingdom of God because he realizes that the strictures of the temple system are of only secondary importance to God's desire for people to love him and one another passionately. However, on the other hand, there is a certain irony here- does the wise teacher of the law realize that the burnt offerings and the temple itself will be surpassed in the person of Jesus? That through Jesus, the very person standing before him, God will establish a people empowered to love him and each other? Is the wise teacher really wise after all?

The actions of the teachers of the law also take on heightened significance. Their transgression is not only that they have broken God's commands but more significantly their transgression is their failure to realize who Jesus is. In the very act of honouring themselves like kings (vs 39) and hypocritically continuing to carry out the rites of the temple system they fail to acknowledge Jesus as the Lord of all things and eternal priest who surpasses the existing temple (Psalm 110 and Matthew 12:6). As such they are subject to his judgment (Psalm 110 and Mark 12:40).

Finally, the actions of the widow are also seen in a new light. On the one hand her whole-hearted offering is commendable as an act of commitment and obedience to God and the temple rituals, however on the other hand the image of her putting all she has into the temple, while Jesus (the new and true temple) stands nearby, is a provocative image. Whilst the

teachers of the law exclude themselves from the kingdom through their willful disobedience, in the widow we have an even more disturbing scenario. Her whole-hearted abandonment in offering all she has is striking. However are we to understand this as the whole-hearted abandonment which will allow her to hear and accept the gospel? Or is the widow a warning to well-intentioned people who appear beyond repute morally, and religiously and yet fail to recognize Jesus as the new Way, the new temple?

Both the widow and the wise teacher of the law are so close to the Kingdom of God. They recognise the wisdom of God, they live lives of moral repute, and yet they may miss the most important point of all- the pivotal role of Jesus in God's plans.

The power of this passage is not necessarily explicit, but upon reflection it reveals an almost shockingly stark challenge. The emphasis of this passage does not revolve around issues of character (obedience verses disobedience; love for God vs love of self), rather it revolves around issues of recognition (will the characters in this passage recognize who Jesus is and his pivotal role in God's plans for his people?). This passage shows us what real love and obedience to God looks like. It shows us that the most significant act of wholehearted loving obedience to God is an act of recognition- recognizing and honouring Jesus as Lord.

God has a desire for this world. He desires a world of perfect relationships- between himself and all people. He makes this possible through Jesus. If we fail to acknowledge Jesus as the key to God's plans for his world, either through out-right disobedience or well-intended yet misguided efforts to be right with God, we will be punished most severely (Mark 12: 40).

C. Suggestion for the Study

Aim: To understand that what God desires of us is love expressed in an obedience which consumes every aspect of our lives. Foundational to this loving obedience is an acknowledgement that Jesus is central in God's plans to establish a people who love him and each other perfectly.

Table

Get the group to fill in the table with the actions and attitudes of the three key players- the wise teacher of the law vs 28-34, the disobedient teachers of the law vs 35-40, and the widow vs 41-44. Try and get the group to conceptualise them as real people.

Some questions to ask are- What were the motivations behind their actions? What was the relationship between the teachers of the law and the widow (note that the teachers of the law take advantage of widows)? The law did not command people to give all that they possessed to the temple, was the widow being unwise?

Do not take too much time on this question. It is a tool to get the group acquainted with the passage.

Why is the teacher of the law close to the kingdom of God?

Draw out the first two themes (as outlined in the Notes on the Passage section). The teacher of the law recognizes that Jesus is right in saying the greatest commandments are to love God with all our being and to love others as ourselves. More significantly he understands that this is more important to God than burnt offerings and sacrifices. Discuss the connection between the wise teacher of the law realizing the temple system is of only secondary importance to a right relationship with God and him being close to the kingdom of God. You may wish to refer to Matthew 12:6.

What is the point Jesus is trying to make in vs. 35-37?

Refer to Psalm 110. Discuss the roles of the messiah figure described in Psalm 110. Show that Jesus is pointing out that the Messiah, as prophesied in Psalm 110, will be greater than any earthly king. This is illustrated by the fact that David, from whom the Messiah is descended, calls him Lord.

Note that Jesus presents this argument in riddle form, and that the crowd "listens with delight".

It is interesting to ponder whether they delighted in the riddle yet remained largely unaware of their proximity to the “Lord” of the riddle.

Return to the diagrams used in the first question. Use this as an opportunity to revisit the actions of the three individuals and groups. Point out that the focus of the passage is not only their character but also their proximity to the kingdom. Some questions to ask include: The teacher of the law is wise and the widow is obedient but will they get into the kingdom? Will they get the point of the riddle? Will they understand that Jesus is the King of the Kingdom?

From this passage- what will it mean for us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?

Draw together the themes of the passage to show that a life which expresses real love for God is one of obedience to God’s commands. Foundational to this loving obedience is an understanding of Jesus as our Lord, the Lord of all, the only one worthy of our love and obedience. Also, with the coming of Jesus obedience to God takes a fundamental shift- the old ceremonial system of burnt offerings has finally been surpassed- now Jesus is central to a life of loving obedience to God. He is the new temple, the perfect sacrifice, and our eternal priest. This means that to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is to live a life of loving obedience to and through Jesus.

It will be beneficial to acknowledge that keeping the ceremonies of the ancient Jewish temple is not likely to be a stumbling block for the majority of people in the smallgroup! Consider what ways we might, in our contemporary gentile context, fail to realise the central role of Jesus for a life of obedience which pleases God (either through outright rejection of Jesus, or more subtly by relying upon our moral and religious faultlessness)?

Discuss some practical out-workings of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength in specific contexts of our lives: work, church, friends, family, and (of course) EU!

Worksheet for Study 8: Mark 12: 28-44

A Heart for the King

Fill in the table with the actions and attitudes of the three key players:

Wise Teacher of the law vs 28-34	The Disobedient Teachers of the law vs 35-40	The Widow vs 41-44

Why is the wise teacher of the law close to the kingdom of God? vs 28-34

What is the point Jesus is trying to make in vs. 35-37?

The teacher of the law is wise and the widow is obedient but will they get into the kingdom?

In what ways might we fail to realise the central role of Jesus for a life of obedience which pleases God (either through outright rejection of Jesus, or more subtly by relying upon our own moral and religious faultlessness)?

From this passage- what will it mean for us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?

What are some practical out-workings of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength in specific contexts of our lives: work, church, friends, family, and (of course) EU!

Pray. Thank God for sending Jesus to establish a new Kingdom and that we are the people of that kingdom- created to be a holy people who whole heartedly love their God. Ask God to help us honour Jesus as Lord and in so doing love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

Study 9– Mark 15:1–39

The Crucified King

A. Preparation Questions

Who was Pilate? Why do the Jewish authorities take Jesus before him?

Why was whether Jesus was king of the Jews an issue for Pilate? Compare this with what the Pharisees wanted to know in 14.61.

Was Jesus the “king of the Jews”? How many times in the passage is this phrase used of Jesus?

Why does Jesus not speak up in v.5?

What is “the festival” referred to in v.6?

Is Pilate right in v.10 about the motives of the Jewish leaders? Of what could they have been jealous?

Why does Jesus refuse to drink the mixture in v.23?

Read vv. 29-32. Do you see the irony in each of the scornful remarks of the passers-by?

Why does Jesus say what he does in v.34? Had God forsaken him? If so, why?

Why does Mark include the incident of v.38?

What is significant about the centurion’s comment in v39? How does this relate to the charge for which Jesus was crucified?

B. Notes on the Passage

Mark 14:52-65 gives the account of Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities on the charge of blasphemy. Their verdict was that he was deserving of death (14:64). As Judea was a subject territory of the Roman Empire, however, only the Roman authorities had power to carry out a death sentence. They took Jesus before Pilate, the Roman prefect of the region, to have him pass sentence. This action on the part of the Jews fulfils Jesus' own prophecy of 10:33. Before Pilate, the charge is not the Jewish capital offence of blasphemy, but the Roman capital offence of high treason, which involved someone other than the emperor declaring himself ruler over Roman subjects. The trial revolves around the question of whether Jesus is the King of the Jews or not. This is repeated throughout the section and clearly draws the theme of Jesus' kingship (which has been prevalent in Mark) to the forefront of what is going on at the cross. As for whether Jesus actually was king of the Jews, John 18:33-36 provides the answer.

Jesus doesn't take advantage of his right to defend himself in court, and therefore is found guilty. He remains silent in order to accomplish his purpose as stated in 8:31 (cf. Is 53:7). Jesus' reply to the charges are best translated "The words are yours" thus merely acknowledging the charge of high treason rather than any big claim to Messiahship. The festival of v.6 is the Jewish Passover. More of Jesus' own prophecy is fulfilled in his treatment by the guards. Look back to 10:33ff. Jesus refuses the narcotic offered to him, which would deaden the pain, consistent with his refusal throughout to avoid suffering. He would not reject the cup the Father had given him to drink. (10:38, 14:56)

There follows a brief account of Jesus' suffering on the cross, including the scornful comments of passers-by, who ironically challenge Jesus to save himself, unaware that he is at that point saving others.

The notice above Jesus' head reminds us again that this is all part of Jesus' Kingship, even though at this point it looks least like Jesus is the promised King that Israel has been waiting for. Mark records darkness over the area during the crucifixion. This has ominous parallels in Amos 8:9ff about the nature of the Day of the Lord, and also in the curse of God in the darkness of the original Passover in Egypt in Ex 10:21ff. Jesus' cry horrifically shows the suffering that he endured on the cross. His greatest agony was not physical but rather an agony of soul as he bore the world's guilt, giving his life "as a ransom for many". Jesus quotes Psalm 22 on the cross, a Psalm of persecution and despair that develops to be a Psalm of deliverance and gratitude. Although obviously for Jesus the focus is on the first part of the Psalm. The sense in which God had forsaken Christ was that the Father withdrew from communion with the Son. No longer did he evidence his love towards his Son. Instead, Christ had become the object of the Father's displeasure, because he is the substitute for sinners. A holy God cannot look with favour upon sin, and so Jesus suffers the sinner's rejection by God.

The temple curtain of v.38 may have been the inner curtain which divided the "Holy of Holies" from the rest of the temple, in which case its tearing could symbolise the opening of the barrier between God and people and the end of the old covenant and the temple ordinances. The centurion's comment, which closes the section, is important.

Exactly what the centurion meant by his comment is not clear, certainly he acknowledged that there was something unique and different about Jesus, however we do not know what he understood by the term Son of God. It is a remarkable statement as he sees Jesus dies on the cross forsaken by God, and this comment by a gentile contrasts greatly with the comments of the other characters, faithful Jews. In the context of the bible and especially in Mark's gospel, Son of God is a Kingship term. This statement, located where it is, ties together the theme of Jesus' kingship through the cross.

C. For the Study

Aim: To see and feel the disparity between Jesus as King and his treatment in the lead up to and during his crucifixion.

Suggestions for the study:

Read the passage

Go through and circle all the 'king' references and allusions in the passage
Some to note are vv. 2,9,12,17-20,26 and 32. Don't worry if they don't get v.39 as that is covered in question 4.

Now go through and underline the descriptions of the way Jesus was treated
Handed over (v1), flogged (v15), struck & spat on (v19), mocked (v20), crucified & clothes divided (v24), between 2 robbers (v27), insults hurled (v29ff), forsaken (v34) etc

What strikes you about the things you have marked in the passage?
Hopefully they will start to note the disparity between Jesus' treatment and the fact that he is constantly described as a king.

What is ironic about each of the taunts in vv.29-32?
Again this should emphasise the disparity between what appears to be happening and the reality going on beneath the surface. In terms of the taunts, Jesus was referring to his body when he talked about the temple and he was in the process of saving others while he hung on the cross.

Had God really forsaken Jesus?
This is an interesting question that cuts right to the heart of what is going on at the cross. Refer to some of the comments in section B above.

Why is the Centurion's comment so important?
For the first time in the passage someone gives Jesus a Kingly title (Son of God) and actually means it. It concludes the section by affirming that this man hanging on the cross really is God's chosen king. It leaves us waiting for what will happen next.

Spend some time thanking the King for the treatment he endured for us

Worksheet for Study 9 – Mark 15:1–39

The Crucified King

Read the passage

Go through and circle all the 'king' references and allusions in the passage

Now go through and underline the descriptions of the way Jesus was treated

What strikes you about the things you have marked in the passage?

What is ironic about each of the taunts in vv.29-32?

"Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"	
"He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe."	

Had God really forsaken Jesus?

Why is the Centurion's comment so important?

Spend some time thanking the King for the treatment he endured for us

Mark 15:1-39 NRSV

¹ As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ² Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." ³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed..

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷ Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹ Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he realised that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify him!" ¹⁴ Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²² Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. ²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁸ ²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Study 10– Mark 15:42–16.8

The Vindication of the King

A. Preparation Questions

Mark 15.42-46

1. Why was Joseph or Arimathea the one who asked for the body of Jesus? Where were all the rest of Jesus' friends? Do you identify with Joseph?

For what have we, as readers of Mark's gospel, been waiting, for which Joseph is also waiting? (cf. 1.15, 4.26-32, 9.1, 10.30, 14.25)

Why does Pilate check to see if Jesus is dead? What function does this serve in the narrative? What happens to the expectations of the gospel so far (see question 2), now that Jesus is buried?

Mark 16.1-8

What do the women expect to find at the tomb? What is the significance of what the women find? Look up:

8.31, 9.31, 10.33-34

13.24-27 (cf. Daniel 7.13-14)

14.61-62

What difference would it make to Mark's 'gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (1.1) if Jesus had not been raised from the dead?

Who is the young man? What clues are given as to his identity?

Why is Peter singled out from among the disciples?

Was the women's response right or wrong? Do you feel like condemning or rebuking them?

B. Notes on the Passage

This section comprises two distinct, but clearly related events; the burial of Jesus and the subsequent discovery of the empty tomb. We will look at each in turn.

The setting is the day of Good Friday; Jesus' crucifixion had begun at 9am that morning, and it is now evening. Jesus had breathed his last at 3pm, and there was little time for the burial to be completed. A number of factors complicated this procedure. First, it was technically the case in Roman law that in some circumstances burial was not allowed for criminals. This was particularly so for those convicted of high treason, which was the charge brought against Jesus (see Mark 15.1-15, also John 19.21). However, sometimes this was allowed by special dispensation of the imperial magistrate. In this case, Pilate does let Joseph take away the body, thus confirming that he thought Jesus was innocent and had only allowed his crucifixion to placate the mob.

Second, Jewish law prescribed that when someone was hung, they should be buried that same night, in order to prevent the land from coming under a curse (Deut 21.23). However, it was Friday, and the Sabbath (which for Jews is Saturday) began at sundown on the Friday, and thus Joseph had little time to do the task at hand (work was not permitted on the Sabbath, and touching a dead body would defile you). This accounts for the fact that the women see fit to go back to the tomb in order to anoint the body (16.1-2): there would have been no time on the Friday. Furthermore, it was usually the case that family members or disciples looked after burial arrangements. Presumably Mary was emotionally exhausted by the events (and there is no evidence that Jesus' brothers or sisters were in the city), and since the disciples had all fled, it was left to Joseph, a pious Jew, to see to it. We don't know a great deal about him, other than that he was a 'good and righteous man' (Luke 23.50-51), who was a member of the Sanhedrin and had not voted to execute Jesus; and he was a disciple of Jesus, though secretly for fear of the Jews (Jn 19.38). Nonetheless, he comes through boldly here and sees to the body of Jesus.

Pilate wonders whether Jesus was dead. There are records of people lasting 2-3 days on the cross before dying, and thus Jesus' death was relatively rapid. However, Pilate confirms this with the centurion. This puts paid to any 'swoon' theories; Mark goes to great lengths to let us know that Jesus really was dead. In fact, the entire burial episode serves to confirm this fact, and it formed part of the earliest confessions of faith: 'Christ died for our sins ... and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day' (1 Cor 15.3-4). There is only a hasty interment, consisting of the wrapping of Jesus' body in linen which Joseph had procured, presumably after it had been washed, as was the Jewish custom (see Acts 9.37 as an example, and also John 19.40). The body is then laid on a shelf in a tomb, which had been cut from the bedrock (see Luke 23. 53), and a stone rolled in front to prevent animals or intruders from gaining access. This entire episode is witnessed by two of the women who had also watched the crucifixion (15.42), and who therefore knew where to go in 2 days time to anoint the body.

This is exactly where the narrative moves next. The Sabbath concludes at sunset on the Saturday. Immediately it is finished, the women purchase spices with which to anoint the body, which they set out to do early on the Sunday morning. This is not for the purpose of mummification, which was not a Jewish practice, but to offset the odours from decomposition. Clearly they expected to find Jesus' body there, and in fact had they done so, it is unlikely that the world would have heard much more about him. His disciples were scattered and shattered, and the only thing that halted the dissolution of the 'Jesus movement' was the resurrection.

The women are not particularly well prepared since it is unclear how they will roll away the stone which seals off the tomb. However, they discover it already removed, although no explanation is given as to how this has happened. Indeed, the whole account is characterised by similar restraint. For example, we are given no information as to exactly what happened to Jesus' body, or when exactly he rose. The spectacular is very underplayed. Inside the entrance to such Jewish tombs was a cave or antechamber, with a small (1m high) door leading to the burial chamber, about 7 ft square. On the right of the cave is a 'young man'. It would appear that he is an angel, since he brings a word of revelation and wears white clothing, symbolic of the glory of heaven. Understandably, the women were terrified.

Imagine what the women see - Jesus' body is gone, the heavy rock has been moved, and this guy is sitting there. What are they to think? Resurrection is not the only option to explain the empty tomb, nor even the obvious one. They need a word of revelation, and this is what the angel provides - God's interpretation of the known, but unclear, facts. He tells them that in fact Jesus has been raised, and has gone ahead to Galilee, as he said he would (14.28). There are a number of things to note. First, the messenger makes it very clear that the one who was crucified and buried is the same one who has risen. That the tomb was empty was never disputed by the Jews; in fact they made up the story that the body had been stolen (Math 28.15). That he had been raised from the dead comes by revelation. Second, it is unlikely that the early Christians would have made up this story, since it is women who make the discovery and hear the angel, and in the culture of the time, women were ineligible as witnesses - hardly a good strategy for a lie! Third, it is likely that Peter is singled out because of his repeated and emphatic denial of Jesus. It might have been thought that this would exclude him from Jesus' triumph, but this makes it clear that he has been forgiven and accepted.

What does the man in white say? "He has risen! He is not here". This is momentous news. Now we know that the expectation and predictions have all come true. Everything has happened just as Jesus predicted, no less than three times (see 8.31, 9.31, 10.32-34). The Son of Man *has* risen after his fiery ordeal (remember 10.38). Thus he *will* come with great power and glory (remember 13.24-27), and *will* be seated at the right hand of God (remember 14.62). Jesus' disciples *will* meet him in Galilee as he predicted (14.28). Jesus' enemies have been shown to be wrong! Jesus has been vindicated!

How do the women respond to the news of the resurrection? They flee in terror and are reduced to silence, at least for a while. Why are they afraid? Because they have come face to face with God's direct intervention in history. Their response is parallel to the transfiguration, where Peter's suggestion of building 3 tabernacles results from him being terrified (9.6). This fear and amazement is consistent with the way people have responded to Jesus throughout the gospel and stands in contrast to our somewhat familiar way with God.

The importance of these short paragraphs (16.1-8) to the gospel of Mark, and indeed to the Christian faith, cannot be overestimated. If Jesus has been raised and thus vindicated, then the kingdom of God has arrived! Though now small and unimpressive, it will undoubtedly grow to become like an all encompassing mustard tree (4.30-32). God's enemies have been defeated (3.23-27) and the 'age to come' (10.30) is now here! Even more than that, Jesus' vindication underpins and points forward to the vindication of all those who lose their lives for him and for the gospel. They too *will* be raised (8.35). The last *will* be first (9.35). Those who serve *will* be great (10.44-45). The effect of this momentous news on the reader is to draw a deeper loyalty to Jesus and the kingdom of God, in the knowledge that God has won the decisive victory so that one day they will reign with him in glory.

A note on the alternative endings

The earliest Greek manuscripts of the gospel end at 16.8. That this was the original and intended ending is supported by two further considerations. First, the abrupt nature of the ending fits with the abrupt style of Mark throughout. Second, the gospel works as a gospel without the longer endings. If the importance of the resurrection in Mark's gospel is the vindication of Jesus (as we argued above), then there is no necessity for the longer endings. They add no substance to the gospel's message. It appears, therefore that some who read the gospel were embarrassed at such an abrupt ending in 16.8, and decided to do a bit of editing to 'round off' the gospel. However, we will not deal with them as part of the original gospel.

C. For the Study

Teaching aim: to understand that the resurrection is the vindication of Jesus and the final event inaugurating of the kingdom of God.

Life Change aim: to trust that since Jesus was vindicated, so too those who lose their lives for him and the gospel will be vindicated, and hence to live in humble dependence on God and in servant like obedience.

Read Mark 15.42-46

1. For what have we, as readers of Mark's gospel, been waiting, for which Joseph is also waiting?

2. What does this paragraph add to what we already know of Jesus' death from chapter 15? How does it affect our hopes?

The account of the burial reinforces that Jesus really did die. How can a dead man establish the kingdom of God?

Read Mark 16.1-8

2. How does what the women find at the tomb differ from what they expected to find? Can you relate to their reaction?

3. Fill out the two sides of the '**difference of a raised Messiah**' table:

a. What difference would it make to the **Jesus** portrayed in Mark's gospel if he had not been raised from the dead?

1.14-15, 8.31, 14.61-62, 15.33-34

b. What difference would it make to **someone who had heard Jesus' words** if Jesus had not been raised?

4.30-32, 8.34-38, 10.29-31

Of these verses only 14.61-62 is new, all the others have been discussed as part of previous studies. For this reason, do not spend too much time on the verses themselves, rather, work hard at understanding the difference the resurrection makes to our understanding of them. The key idea for both sides of the table is vindication: of Jesus and of those who follow him.

5. To what extent have Joseph's hopes been fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus?

This is, yet again, now/not yet stuff. Remember 1 Corinthians 15?

6. What difference will confidence in Jesus' resurrection make to your life?

Worksheet for Study 10: Mark 15.42 – 16.8

The Vindication of the King

Mark 15.42-46

For what have we, as readers of Mark's gospel, been waiting, for which Joseph is also waiting?

What does this paragraph add to what we already know of Jesus' death from chapter 15? How does it affect our hopes?

Mark 16.1-8

How does what the women find at the tomb differ from what they expected to find? Can you relate to their reaction?

The difference of a raised Messiah?

Jesus	Jesus' followers
1.14-15	4.30-32
8.31	8.34-38
14.61-62	10.29-31
15.33-34	

To what extent have Joseph's hopes been fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus?

What difference will confidence in Jesus' resurrection make to your life?