

Teaching Disciples: Part II



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Mark 10; Gen. 1:27; Gen. 2:24; Gal. 4:1, 2; Rom. 6:1–11; Isa. 11:1–16.*

Memory Text: “‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’ ” (*Mark 10:45, NKJV*).

This week covers Mark 10, completing the special section in which Jesus teaches His disciples in preparation for the Cross. About half of the chapter deals with the disciples themselves, and the rest with issues important to discipleship but told through the lens of others who interact with Jesus. Pharisees come and argue with Him over the subject of divorce. Parents bring their children for Jesus to bless. A rich man asks about eternal life, and a blind man asks for sight.

This chapter of Mark carries important teachings about what it means to follow Jesus, particularly as it relates to living in the here and now: marriage, children, how to relate to riches, and the reward and cost of following Him. Topping it off is the healing of a second blind man (*Mark 10:46–52; compare with Mark 8:22–26*), which provides the closing bookend for the section (*Mark 8:22–10:52*) and a beautiful illustration of what following Jesus both costs and leads to.

Together, these lessons prepare the follower of Jesus—whether the disciples 2,000 years ago or disciples in the twenty-first century—for the challenges that come with discipleship.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 24.

God's Plan for Marriage

Read Mark 10:1–12, as well as Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. What trap was hiding under the Pharisees' question about divorce, and what lessons did Jesus teach in His response?

In this passage, the Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Among the Pharisees, divorce was considered lawful. The question was on what grounds. The School of *Shammai* was arguably more restrictive—only for childlessness, material neglect, emotional neglect, or marital unfaithfulness. The School of *Hillel* was much more lenient, allowing divorce for almost any reason, though their process of granting the divorce was more complex, helping to slow things down.

So, it may seem a bit odd that they ask Jesus the blanket question if divorce is acceptable at all. Hiding under this question was a plot to get Jesus in trouble with Herod Antipas, the ruler of the region to the east of the Jordan, where Jesus was now. Antipas had divorced his wife and married Herodias, his brother's wife. Herod had beheaded John the Baptist because of his rebuke regarding this illicit relationship (see *Matt. 14:1–12*).

Jesus parries their question with His own, asking the Pharisees what Moses commanded on the matter. The passage the Pharisees reference in reply is Deuteronomy 24:1–4, which describes a particular case of remarriage after divorce. The Israelites in Moses' day were already practicing divorce. The case law described in Deuteronomy 24 was meant to provide protections for the woman. But in Jesus' day, this was twisted by the School of *Hillel* to make it easier to get a divorce for almost any reason. Thus, the law that was meant to protect the woman was being used to make it easy to thrust her aside.

Instead of debating the case law in Deuteronomy 24, Jesus refers back to God's original ideal for marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. He notes that in the beginning God made a man and a woman (*Gen. 1:27*), two individuals. He then combines this truth with Genesis 2:24, which says that a man leaves his parents and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This concept of unity becomes the basis of Jesus' affirmation of the marriage bond. What God has joined, people should not separate.

What can your congregation do to strengthen the marriages among you? How do you help those whose marriages have already fallen apart?

Jesus and Children

Read Mark 10:13–16. What did Jesus do for those who brought children to Him?

While children were greatly desired in the ancient world (particularly boys in the male-dominant culture), birth and childhood were not easy. Without modern medical care, the risks to mothers in giving birth and to newborns, infants, and children were elevated. Many cultures had traditional medicines and amulets used to protect these vulnerable individuals against malevolent forces.

While children were desired, they were of low social status, along the lines of slaves, actually (*Gal. 4:1, 2*). In the Greco-Roman world, those who were deformed or undesirable would be exposed, or even tossed in a river. Boys were valued over girls; sometimes girl babies were left to die among the elements. At times these abandoned babies were “rescued,” only to be raised and sold as slaves.

The disciples appear not to have understood Jesus’ teaching in Mark 9 about receiving the kingdom of God like a child (*Mark 9:33–37*). Now they rebuke those who brought children to Jesus for blessing, perhaps thinking that He would not have time for such a simple task.

They were wrong. Jesus is indignant. Throughout Mark, Jesus has some striking reactions to people, and it is instructive that one of His strong reactions was toward people who were keeping children away from Him.

He strongly insists that the disciples must not stand in the way of the children. Why? Because the kingdom of God belongs to them, and one must receive it in the attitude and outlook of a child—probably a reference to simple, implicit trust in God.

“Let not your un-Christlike character misrepresent Jesus. Do not keep the little ones away from Him by your coldness and harshness. Never give them cause to feel that heaven would not be a pleasant place to them if you were there. Do not speak of religion as something that children cannot understand, or act as if they were not expected to accept Christ in their childhood. Do not give them the false impression that the religion of Christ is a religion of gloom, and that in coming to the Saviour they must give up all that makes life joyful.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 43, 44.

How can you better reveal Jesus to whatever children are around you?

The Best Investment

Read Mark 10:17–31. What crucial lessons about faith and the cost of discipleship—for anyone, rich or poor—is revealed here?

The man’s approach indicates his sincerity and respect for Jesus. He runs up, kneels before Him, and asks the question central to the destiny of every soul—*What are the requirements in order to inherit eternal life?* Jesus responds by referring to the second table of the Decalogue. Again, the man shows his idealism by saying that he has kept all these, even from his youth.

Of the four Gospels, Mark alone notes that Jesus loved the man. There is something appealing about the man’s idealism. But Jesus tests his sincerity by asking him to sell everything and to follow Him. The man leaves crestfallen because he had great possessions. In fact, he was not really keeping the commandments. He broke the first one, placing something above God in his life. His riches were his idol.

Jesus then explains how seductive riches are and that it is easier for a big animal like a camel to go through the tiny hole of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter heaven.

The disciples are astonished by Jesus’ words and wonder who can be saved. Jesus delivers the punch line in Mark 10:27. “‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God’ ” (*ESV*).

Mark 10:27 seems like a beautiful place to end the story: you cannot make it to heaven on your own, you need the grace of God in order to be saved.

But then Peter blurts out that he and his friends have left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus responds that whatever you have left to follow Him is nothing in contrast to what you will receive, now and in “the age to come” (*ESV*).

Here is the point: it is the death of Christ that resolves human guilt, and then the grace of Christ and His resurrection are what empower obedience to His commands.

Read Romans 6:1–11. How do these verses reveal the reality of God’s grace in our lives, both in justifying us and in making us new people in Him?

Can You Drink My Cup?

Read Mark 10:32–45. How do these verses reveal the continued ignorance of the disciples regarding not only Jesus’ mission but what it means to follow Him?

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He reveals to His disciples what will happen there. It is not a scenario they believe in or want to hear. Jesus’ specificity as to the outline of His death and resurrection is striking. But when it is not what you want to hear, it is all too easy to dismiss.

This is apparently what James and John do as they come to Jesus with a private request. Jesus rightly asks for more specifics, and they respond that they want to sit on His right and left in His glory. It is easy to criticize their request as rank egocentrism. But these two men have dedicated themselves to Jesus’ ministry, and their desires were probably not wholly selfish in nature.

Jesus seeks to deepen their understanding of just what they are requesting. He asks if they can drink His cup or be baptized with His baptism. His cup will be the cup of suffering in Gethsemane and on the cross (*compare with Mark 14:36*), and His baptism will be His death and burial (*Mark 15:33–47*), where events there parallel His baptism recorded in Mark 1.

But James and John do not see it. They glibly reply that they are able. Jesus then prophesies that indeed they will drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism. James was the first of the apostles to die a martyr’s death (*Acts 12:2*). John was the longest lived of the apostles and was exiled to Patmos (*Rev. 1:9*). But Jesus indicates that places in glory are set by God.

How did the other disciples respond to Jesus’ answer? Not too well. The same Greek word, *aganakteō*, “to be angry, indignant,” is used in Mark 10:41 as in Mark 10:14, regarding Jesus’ anger over keeping the children away from Him.

Jesus then calls the group together to give one of His most profound teachings. He indicates that Gentile rulers use power for personal advantage. But in the kingdom of God, power must always be used to uplift and bless others. Jesus leads the way as the King of the kingdom of God. How? By giving His own life as a ransom—not quite what His followers expected to hear.

What does it mean as a Christian to be a “servant” to others? That is, how do you manifest this principle in your daily interaction with people?

“What Do You Want Me to Do for You?”

Read Mark 10:46–52. How did Bartimaeus react to Jesus’ passing by?

Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, with few exceptions, Jesus has been telling people to keep quiet about His miracles and about who He is. In this account, as He is leaving Jericho, a blind man begging on the side of the road, upon hearing that it is Jesus of Nazareth, begins to shout, “ ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (*Mark 10:47, NKJV*). In keeping with the revelation/secret motif of the book, the crowd takes on the role of those calling for silence as they unsuccessfully try to quiet the noisy beggar.

But Bartimaeus is undeterred and shouts even louder, “ ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ” (*Mark 10:48, NKJV*). His words are both a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah and confidence that He can heal him. The title “Son of David” in Jesus’ day had two concepts connected with it—the restoration of a king to Israel’s throne (*compare with Isaiah 11; Jer. 23:5, 6; Jer. 33:15; Ezek. 34:23, 24; Ezek. 37:24; Mic. 5:2–4; Zech. 3:8; and Zech. 6:12*), and that this personage would be a healer and exorcist.

Jesus stops and tells them to call the blind man. Significantly, the blind man throws off his cloak as he comes to Jesus. Blind people in Jesus’ day were at the bottom of society, along with widows and orphans. These were individuals below subsistence level and in real peril. The cloak would be the man’s security. Leaving it behind meant he had faith that Jesus would heal him.

Jesus does not disappoint. Indeed, whoever comes to Him for help in the Gospels always receives it. Jesus asks the same question He asked James and John in Mark 10:36, “ ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ ” (*Mark 10:51, NKJV*). Without hesitation, the blind man asks to receive his sight, which Jesus immediately restores. The blind man follows Him on the road.

This story is the close of the discipleship section in Mark, serving as a bookend with the other story of healing a blind man in Mark 8:22–26. The two stories illustrate how discipleship is about seeing the world with new eyes, sometimes not clearly at first but always following Jesus in the way He leads.

In what ways have you at times cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”? What happened, and what did you learn from this experience?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Blessing the Children,” pp. 511–517; “‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’” pp. 518–523, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“Jesus was ever a lover of children. He accepted their childish sympathy and their open, unaffected love. The grateful praise from their pure lips was music in His ears, and refreshed His spirit when oppressed by contact with crafty and hypocritical men. Wherever the Saviour went, the benignity of His countenance, and His gentle, kindly manner won the love and confidence of children.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 511.

“To those who, like the young ruler, are in high positions of trust and have great possessions, it may seem too great a sacrifice to give up all in order to follow Christ. But this is the rule of conduct for all who would become His disciples. Nothing short of obedience can be accepted. Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ. Often it is presented and enjoined in language that seems authoritative, because there is no other way to save man than to cut away those things which, if entertained, will demoralize the whole being.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are ways that you can help children and young people stay connected to Christ and the church congregation? Why is it so important that we do this?
- 2 We sometimes hear people say that they don’t care about money. That is not true. Everyone cares about money, and there is nothing wrong with that. What, then, can be the problem with money, and why must faithful Christians, either rich or poor, be careful in how they relate to money?
- 3 If Jesus were to ask you, “What do you want Me to do for you?” how would you respond?
- 4 Dwell more on Jesus’ words in Mark 10:43–45. What does it mean to live like this? How do we learn to serve as opposed to being served? What does this mean in regard to how we live and interact with others?

Home Turned Into a Church

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Father kept his word about organizing Sabbath worship services at home in Armenia. Having prohibited Mother and their daughter, Anush, from going to the Seventh-day Adventist church, he called them to the living room on Sabbath morning. For Sabbath School, they studied the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* and prayed together. Then Anush preached a short sermon.

The worship services continued for months. Father, who had never visited an Adventist church, was so serious about the worship services that, if guests were visiting, he invited them to the living room, opened his Bible, and said, “Welcome to our worship service. Today is the Sabbath, and you can join us.” This was not the Armenian way. In Armenia, hosts leave everything to entertain guests. Guests were shocked and wondered what was going on.

As the family worshiped together, Father realized that he didn’t know the Bible. In Matthew 4, the family read how Jesus met every temptation by Satan with the words, “It is written.” Father was impressed. He saw that he wouldn’t know if Satan was tempting him if he didn’t know the Bible. From that day, he began to read the Bible daily. As he read, he also sought answers to why he and his family were worshiping on the seventh day, Saturday, while many Christians in Armenia worship on the first day, Sunday.

Father had vowed that Anush and Mother would never return to the Adventist Church, and he wanted to keep his word. Anush very much missed church services, but she hid her feelings because she understood that her duty was to love her father and wait for God to bring him to repentance.

But when she learned that the Adventist house church in their town was preparing for a Communion Sabbath, she asked Father for permission to go. Armenia is a largely patriarchal society where many fathers are the decision-makers of the household. “Would you allow us to take part in the communion service?” she asked.

“Communion?” Father said. “You know, I can lead that ceremony, too.”

Nobody went to Communion that Sabbath.

Then Father and Mother became grandparents. Anush had an older sister who had gotten married and left home, and she gave birth to a baby. Mother learned that the baby and the rest of the family had been lifted up in prayer at church. “They prayed for us in church, and I want to take something sweet to them as a thank-you gift,” she told Father.

Father’s heart was touched by the kindness of the church members, and he allowed Anush and Mother to return to church.

Part of last quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open a center of influence for families like Anush’s in Yerevan, Armenia. Thank you for helping spread the gospel with your offerings. Next week: Father starts going to church.