

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Small Group Bible Study

## The Gospel According to Mark (Part 5)

### SERIES INTRODUCTION

As Jesus became more visible and his ministry of preaching, healing and exorcism became more extensive, the teachers of the Law, priests, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees were especially anxious and envious of his public influences. They kept questioning Jesus' authority and testing his Scriptural knowledge in a bid to discredit him publicly. But the harder they tried, the more they found their own credibility caving in below their feet. Not only was Jesus knowledgeable in truth, and skilful and wise in controlling their conversations, he also exposed their wicked motives.

In Part 5, we continue with the "Q&A" section of Mark's Gospel, leading to a most important question with eternal significance and consequences which Jesus publicly posed in the temple courts – "Whose Son Is the Christ?" Having silenced his opponents (Mk 12:34b), He went on to warn them of the hypocrisy of the religious authorities and also revealed knowledge about the future things.

The public advent of Jesus turned the world upside down and the right side up. Have you allowed Jesus into your life to do the same?

1 Feb

**The Most Important Commandment**

Mark 12:28-34

8 Feb

**Pious Teachers, Poor Widow**

Mark 12:35-44

15 Feb

**Don't Be Deceived!**

Mark 13:1-23

22 Feb

**Be On Guard!**

Mark 13:24-37

# The Most Important Commandment

MARK 12:28 - 34

## GENERAL SURVEY

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## Introduction

Love is a God-given ability because human beings are created in His image and likeness – “God is love” (Genesis 1:27; 1 John 4:8). It is interesting the Jesus directed the teacher of the law to love being the greatest commandment. Why is that so? What is love? What does love look like practically? How then are we to love? Popular notions of love often border on shallow emotionalism and selfish desires. How does Jesus’ teaching redeemed and revolutionised love intended by God from the beginning?

## For Study and Discussion

1. A Good Question (12:28)

Jewish tradition teaches that there are 613 Mitzvot (or Commandments) in the Torah (i.e. Genesis to Deuteronomy). These Commandments govern the civil and religious life of the Jewish community ranging from their responsibilities towards God, the Scriptures, worship and family life, treatment of Gentiles, business practices, property, civil and criminal laws, etc. However, they are not all of equal importance and weight to one’s religious piety and merit.

  - a. In view of the background notes above, why do you think the rabbi’s question is of particularly interest to the religious “highflyers”? What were their assumptions and therefore hopes in observing the Commandments?
  - b. What are some hallmarks that people tend to associate with religious piety today? What are their assumptions beneath those hallmarks?
  - c. The rabbi asked a seemingly good question according to the interests of their prevailing religious assumptions. As far as Jesus was concerned, what the Apostle Paul subsequently taught in Ephesians 2:8-9 is the only basis for gaining a right standing with God, i.e. justification. Why do many people struggle to accept the “Ephesian 2:8-9” basis for justification?
2. A Good Answer (12:29-33)
  - a. There are three vital and inseparable truths to the most important Commandment in Jesus’ answer. What are they? Cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18.

b. How does the first vital truth concerning God distinctively shape the nature and manner of love in the subsequent truths? Consider Exodus 20:1-17 on how we ought to love God and our neighbours.

c. Why is it that loving the Lord God and loving our neighbours are two sides of the same coin (Matthew 22:39)? Discuss 1 John 4:19-21.

3. A Good Promise (12:34)

a. The rabbi heartily agreed with Jesus' answer to his question (vv32-33). However, whether he loved God for his own sake or for God's own sake is unclear. What do you think Jesus meant with his comment about the rabbi in verse 34a? How does it stir your own reflection?

b. "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Are you assured of this good promise of Jesus? If you are, why? If you are not, why not? How can you be sure?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

- There is only one God who creates, rules, and loves his Creation, Yahweh is his name. Since this is the truth we profess, it must necessarily mean that any other 'god' is a fiction of our human creation/imagination.
- As God's creatures, we are to respond by loving Him only. We do not divide out our passions and devotions to anything or anyone else. To give God our divided loyalty and love is to devote ourselves in parts to some 'gods'. This is idolatry.
- Loving God for God's own sake as our Creator and Lover must also not be qualified by our own ulterior desires and objectives however religious they may be. To love God for our own sake is self-centred and often driven by temporal needs.
- Our vertical relationship with God must be translated into our horizontal relationship with people since God is love (1 John 4:8) and we have our beings in Him (Acts 17:28). To refuse to love our neighbours is to deny our beings as his new creation in Christ. It is essentially to deny our identity as God's people and therefore, our fellowship with Him.

## **Family/Group Moments**

- Do you feel secure in your standing with God; that he will let you into his heaven? What gives you security? What reduces that sense of security?
- If that which makes you feel secure is anything else other than the basis in Ephesians 2:8-9, will you obey God's word rather than your feeling?
- In what ways have you expressed your love for God? How else can you show God's love?

# Pious Teachers, Poor Widow

MARK 12:35 - 44

## GENERAL SURVEY

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## For Study and Discussion

1. David's son? (Mk 12:35-37; cf. Matt 22:41-46; Lk 20:41-44)

The teachers of the law were correct in saying that the Messiah was the son of David (2 Sam 7:12-14; 1 Ch 17:13; Isa 11:10). Jesus presented his listeners with a problem: King David calls the Messiah his Lord (Psalm 110:1 - quoted in v36), although Messiah should have been his descendant.

- a. Why is verse 36 problematic? (Most of us today would properly not consider this a big problem, but it was a big problem for the Jews in Jesus day.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. They were not able to answer Jesus (Matt 22:46). Read Romans 1:3-4; John 1: 1-3, 14. How would you answer Jesus' question in verse 37?

## Discipleship Pointer:

Jesus was the Messiah that the Jew expected. That is why Matthew emphasis that Jesus was a son of David at the beginning of his gospel account. In the various gospel accounts - when people called Jesus son of David - they are not saying that he is a descendant of David - there were many descendant of David in Israel - No! They were calling him Messiah (see Matt 9:27, 15:12; Lk 18:35-40).

They had problems with Psalm 110:1 because they did not realise that the Messiah - i.e. Jesus - was both God and man. How about us? Do we acknowledge Jesus as both God and man? There are many "Christians" in the world who do not accept that Jesus is both God and man. Let us not be deceived.

2. Pious teachers? (Mk 12:38-40; cf. Matt 23:1-7; Lk 20:45-47)

a. What do the teachers of the law love to do? Why did they do these things? (Matt 6:5)

- b. Jesus taught his audience to do the teachings of the law teachers, but warned against following their examples (Matt 23:2-3). What were some of the actions that we should not follow? (12:40; cf. Matt 23:4; 6:1-8)

## **Discipleship Pointer:**

The pride of "wanting to be noticed" is often a serious problem with successful people - including successful religious people. This was the problem with the law teachers; they were successful; respected for their learnings (like PhD of Jesus' day). This leads to pride. Are we successful? Do we think we deserve respect? Let us be careful and heed the warning in this passage to us?

Why do we do the good deeds we do? Is it to be noticed? Let us heed Jesus' warning:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven (Matt 6:1-2).

### 3. Generous giver? (Mk 12:41-44; cf. Lk 21:1-4)

The temple had offering boxes where people would come up and put in their offerings in full view of others: The rich put in large sums; ordinary people put in smaller sums; the poor even lesser. A widow came and put in two copper coins that worth almost nothing - maybe the cost of a meal!

As far as Jesus was concerned, who put in the biggest offering? Why?

## **Discipleship Pointers:**

God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith (James 2:6) - Are you worldly or faithfully rich?

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven (Matt 6:1). Where would your rewards be found?

"Each man should give what he has decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor 9:7) What kind of giver are you?

# Don't Be Deceived!

MARK 13:1-23

## GENERAL SURVEY

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## Introduction

Jesus' discourse in Mark 13 is also known as the "Olivet Discourse" (given on the Mount of Olives). It is the longest of Jesus' discourses in the Book of Mark. That and the fact it is also repeated in Matthew and Luke (in substantial similarity) point to the importance of the discourse. Yet, it is also one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to interpret and understand. Numerous commentaries have been written on it. If one has to summarise, perhaps it may be put this way: "The discourse is mostly about judgment and the expected conduct of the followers of Jesus, and the need for vigilance by the followers in view of the coming judgment." Mark 13 is not meant to be read and studied for knowledge's sake only or as stand-alone theology. Indeed, Mark 13 contains a lot of practical teaching and guidance for all believers living in the end times (i.e. the time between the resurrection of Jesus and His second coming).

## For Study and Discussion

1. Disciples' Questions and Jesus' Answer (13:1-13)
  - a. From your knowledge of history, when did the collapse of the temple happen?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Were the four disciples in verse 4 just asking about the physical destruction of the temple? What else were they asking about?  
Cf. Matthew 24:3.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. In the light of the disciples' admiration of the beautiful temple (v1) and Jesus' foretelling of its destruction (v2), what spiritual lessons can be learnt about true worship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. List the happenings foretold in verses 6 to 13. Are these common events up until today? How were the disciples to respond to these events? (See vv5b, 7a, 8b, 9a, 11a) How about us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - e. What did Jesus say must happen before "the end"? (v10; Matthew 24:14) How will this happen? How can we be involved actively?

f. How do we know we will be saved? (v13)

2. Signs of the End Times (13:14-23)

a. The words “the abomination that causes desolation” in verse 14 were used by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11) to describe any person or object that would defile God’s temple. List the words or phrases in Mark 13:14-22 which show this event as a terrible and distressful event?

b. Why would Jesus talk about these terrible times? How are they relevant to us today?

c. Is it important to know when this would happen? Why and why not?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

- Jesus warns us not to be misled by “false Christs and false prophets” (v22), or to be alarmed by wars, disasters, etc. which would happen in the End-times. God has a plan in place for the second coming of Jesus. There is no need to speculate. Our responsibility is to “watch out that no one deceives us”.
- Jesus warns us about the great tribulation to come and tells us the signs to look for and what to do. Ultimately, those who stand firm to the end will be saved.
- Jesus has told us we need to know about the future to prepare ourselves, warn others and trust Him. Beyond what we need to know, we trust Him in the unknown.

## **Family/Group Moments**

- When you read the newspapers or listen to the news broadcast, what are the events that worry you or make you anxious or afraid? Why?
- What have you learnt in today’s passage that directly addresses your fear and anxiety?
- How do these events encourage you to look firmly to Christ and his eternal kingdom instead?

# Be On Guard!

MARK 13:24-37

## GENERAL SURVEY

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## Introduction

The Day of the Lord will reverse the curse upon the world by bringing judgement to all of God's enemies. The world will be judged by fire (Isaiah 66:16), and all nations will be included in this judgement (Amos 1:3-2:3; Ezekiel 25:1-17). When the Lord spoke of the judgement of the people living at His arrival (Matt 25:31-46), He pictured humanity as sheep or goats who inherit either everlasting punishment or eternal life." (Excerpt from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1995)

## For Study and Discussion

1. Signs of the Universe
  - a. What are some signs of the Lord Jesus's second return (vv24-25)?
    - i. The sun: \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. The moon: \_\_\_\_\_
    - iii. The stars: \_\_\_\_\_
    - iv. The heavenly bodies: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. How will the Lord Jesus's return be like (v26; cf. Daniel 7:13-14)?
  - c. In view of His return, what must we take heed (e.g. Mk 8:38)? What attribute(s) of God is seen in His return?
  
2. Signs of God's work
  - a. What is the significance of the re-gathering of the elect? What attribute(s) of God is seen in his re-gathering of the elect? How does this encourage our faith in God?



b. What is the significance of reminding His disciples of His second return and fulfilment of His words (Matt 5:17-20)? How does this encourage our faith in God?

3. Signs to follow

a. Why should everyone keep watch?

b. What are we to keep watch (13:5, 9, 23, 33, 35-36)?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

“The cross is the decisive eschatological event. In it the curse that brought God’s wrath was reversed. Ever since, God has been progressively accomplishing His judgement against the forces of wickedness. Psalm 110:1, ‘The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”’, is a key verse for understanding the redemptive side of eschatology. The King will reign until He defeats His enemies. As He returns to begin the final preparations for His reign, He will gather the elect to Himself. The redeemed will be evaluated by the Lord (Rom 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:14-15) and will receive their reward of eternal life. The curse will be reversed, the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled, all earthly distinctions eliminated, and God’s people will live in eternal fellowship with the Father and His Son.

A major emphasis of eschatology throughout the Bible is to provide encouragement to believers in their witness for Jesus Christ (Matt 24:14, 1 Cor. 15:58). It is not mentioned to encourage idle speculation or controversy. The reason God grants us a view of the future is to encourage us to witness for Christ and serve Him in the present.” (Excerpt from Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1995)

## **Family/Group Moment:**

- How are you witnessing for God?
- How are you encouraging faith in God, rather than spreading speculative knowledge about the End-time that does not edify, but confuses people?
- What discouragement to your faith must you guard against? How can others help by “watching” and “warning” you to be “on guard” and “alert”?