

Mark Bible Study #10

Mark 15: 16-39 - Our Suffering Servant

Leader's Preparation

Read the passage over at least three times (perhaps in The Message or NASB versions). As you are reading the passage - mark down questions that you might have regarding the text, words you might not understand, concepts that seem foreign to you or may be foreign to your group. Write them down and look to some commentaries to help understand the passage more deeply. Pay attention to what the main point of the passage is.

Some time this week, read the parallel passage in the other Gospels:

- Mt. 27: 27-54
- Luke 23: 26-49

Try reading a good commentary by: N.T. Wright or William Lane or David Garland.

Remember to read these verses with the idea of a broad theme coming out of the passage. There are so many details that it would be easy to get bogged down in the specifics of the passage. But there is so much wisdom and insight to be gained from seeing how all the passages link together. Ask yourselves why did Mark put these verses together.

It will help our understanding of the book of Mark and our Christian story to find out what theme and purpose arises from the passage as a whole.

Introduction

Much of Mark focuses on the nature of discipleship - the cost of following Christ, and the suffering and sacrifice which happen when we choose to follow Jesus. And through it all, we have seen the perfect example of a disciple when we look at Christ. As well as seeing the disciples who continually strive for power, desert and betray Jesus and in general simply don't quite understand what the Kingdom of God looks like.

This passage is the capstone of where the book of Mark is leading. To the cross. And like the rest of the book - we see in this passage Jesus as our example of a disciple - faithful, sacrificing, a servant. True greatness is found in being a servant. Calling back Mark 10:43 - "Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Discuss the statement - "True greatness is found in being a servant" - What does this mean?

Discussion (read the passage)

1. a) What are the insults and mockery that was heaped upon Jesus?
b) What is the irony in these statements and actions?

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c) Why didn't Jesus save himself?

Note especially "he saved others,...but he can't save himself." Be sure the group sees that it is precisely because he did not save himself that he is able to save others. There are several other ironies in the passage. In verse 32, the cross was a stumbling block to them believing in Jesus, when in fact it is what we are to believe in. Looking to the cross is the focus of what we are to believe not that he would come down off of the cross at that moment. (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25- the cross is foolishness and a stumbling block). Later Jesus does come off the cross and rises from the dead- yet they don't believe.

2. After seeing the horrific way that Jesus was treated and was killed. One needs to ask the question - Why was it necessary? Why is there such depth and significance to see Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

Here are some points to guide the discussion, they don't do justice to the question but it will be some help. This is a huge question and it would benefit you to read a few commentaries in order to help your group members come to a deeper understanding of what Jesus did for us.

- 1. We now have a Savior and God who understands suffering, who did not turn away from it, but accepted and bore it for us.*
- 2. The cross reveals the truth about humankind but also about God's incredible power. God's power absorbs the toxin of human sin and hatred and turns it into salvation for all who put their trust in a God who loves this much and who works in this way.*
- 3. The cross reveals God's incredible love as well as the pain of the human situation. The Son of God took on our humanity and absorbed all the bitter suffering and anguish of the world.*
- 4. The cross reveals a new way of life. Those who taunted Jesus assumed that anyone with power would use it to extricate himself from a personal life-threatening situation. The disciples heeded the call to save themselves when they fled into the night. Jesus lives out his teaching. The one who tries to save his life will lose it. The one who gives up his or her life will gain it and will give life to others.*

3. In what ways is the centurion's confession a climax to the whole of Mark's gospel?

The point of the crucifixion is to bring people to a confession of faith. It's not sufficient to understand the history and be moved and feel pity for Jesus. He wants us to come to faith.

Application

4. How can seeing Jesus in his suffering help us through our trials and pain? How does it affect your life?