

Mark Core Study #7

Mark 8:14-9:1 – What kind of King in the Kingdom of God?

Leader's Preparation

Read the passage over at least three times. Note some of your own initial questions and what you feel might be the main point. The Message version is quite helpful in understanding the ending of this passage.

Through out this week, read the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke:

- Peter's Confession: Mt. 16:13-16; and Luke 9:18-20
- Jesus Predicts His Death: Mt. 16:21-28; and Luke 9:22-27

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

Here's some questions and answers to help you as the leader dig deeper:

1. How would the metaphor of "yeast" be significant to a 1st century Jew?

Yeast was and still is commonly used as a leavening agent in baking, where it converts the fermentable sugars present in the dough into carbon dioxide. This causes the dough to rise or expand as the carbon dioxide forms pockets or bubbles. Jesus is referencing a symbol that is significant to Jews. Yeast was forbidden to be used at Passover time in order to remind them of when they were in such a hurry to leave their slavery in Egypt that they only had time to make unleavened bread. Jesus is implying that the teaching of the Pharisees and the ideology of Herod are like yeast, something that slowly contaminates the entire loaf and to be avoided entirely.

2. Notice how Jesus warns his disciple against two antagonists, the Pharisees and Herod. How are each in opposition to the vision of the Kingdom of God Jesus is proclaiming? (See 6:14-29 and 7:1-23)

Jesus isn't warning them against the wrong type of bread, but to put them on guard against the wrong sort of kingdom-vision. The Pharisees are diluting the vision: they want God to set up a kingdom for the benefit of Jews who can observe the law with great strictness, not for the benefit of the wider company Jesus had in mind. Herod and his entourage are diluting the vision as well: they want God to establish their royal family as the true Kings of Israel. Like unleavened bread reminds them of the urgency of leaving Egypt and the trust they put in their God, Jesus is trying to make them see the urgency of understanding his message and to trust him.

3. Notice Jesus quotes Jeremiah 5:21 in v. 18. How does the context of this quote help us understand the passage?

Jesus isn't simply trying to be poetic, but is saying that they are in danger of going the way of the Israelites in Jeremiah's day! The issue in that day was much like the problem Jesus saw with the Pharisees and Herod. People were so caught up with their own concerns, and so unconcerned about injustice and wickedness in their society, that God had no alternative but to abandon them to their fate at the hands of foreigners.

4. What do the disciples fail to understand in verses 14-21 and why?

Mark Core Study #7

Mark 8:14-9:1 – What kind of King in the Kingdom of God?

5. How does the story of the blind man receiving his sight inform us of the meaning of the preceding and following stories?

Often reading the parallel passages not only gives us an appreciation for the distinctives of a particular gospel (like Mark's concern for the disciples to understand the nature of Messiahship), but it also can make us aware of the different kinds of contexts in which the same or similar material lived in the early church. For example, in our current passage, Matthew and Luke both tell the story of Peter declaring Jesus the Messiah proceeding the parable of the yeast of the Pharisees. Comparatively, Mark includes the story of the healing of the blind man between these two narratives. Having now read the parallel passages, we should be inclined to wonder why? Is this story significant?

I would suggest that Mark has put together the story of the blind man receiving his sight and the blind disciples gaining their insight, in order to highlight what's going on in the second story (by means of the parallel with the first). Notice the parallels in each story how Jesus takes his disciples or the blind man away from the crowds in order to preserve secrecy. The closer they get to understanding his Kingdom-mission as a Messiah-mission, the more dangerous it gets. Ultimately, both stories tell of a two-stage process of illumination. The crowds have vision like the blind man seeing trees; only seeing Jesus as a prophet. But like the second touch, the disciples & Peter now understand the meaning of the loaves: Jesus is the Messiah!

6. Notice Jesus uses the term “Son of Man” right after Peter declares Jesus “the Messiah”. What is the significance of Jesus using this term? (See previous notes in Study #3)

7. How is Peter like the blind man?

8. Once the disciples understood that Jesus was the Messiah, Mark tells us that Jesus began to teach his disciples and the crowds something new. Summarize in your own words what Jesus requires of his followers?

9. It appears that Jesus concludes by saying (9:1) that the Kingdom will come during the lifetime of some of the people present. What does he mean by that?

This passage could be quoted as a classic example of misplaced hope, with the early Christians looking for the end of the space-time world and the establishment of a totally different existence. But that didn't happen in their generation, nor is this what Jewish language like this means.

The Message translation offers a much simpler interpretation, by adding a bit to the original text, implying that the following passage answers the question when three of the disciples see Jesus transfigured: “Six days later, three of them did see it” (9:2). Certainly this is a valid interpretation, but the coming of God's Kingdom with power also much include the radical defeat of evil and the Pentecost event. Jesus has just explained that evil will be defeated, and the kingdom will come, precisely through his own suffering and death, his work on the cross. It's possible he is also pointing to the empowerment they would receive by the Holy Spirit in Jesus' absence. What is crystal clear is that Jesus is saying that following him is the only way to go.

Mark Core Study #7

Mark 8:14-9:1 – What kind of King in the Kingdom of God?

INTRODUCTION

Try an ice Breaker and/ or this introductory question before reading the text:

- **In the passage we're going to read we've reached a climactic turning point. Jesus asks his disciple, 'Who do people say I am?' What is your answer?**

Think about our current culture, debates you've heard on campus, conversations you've been in with classmates, or what your religion professor has said about Jesus.

Remember this is an icebreaker question to begin the discussion. Share your experience or story first. At an appropriate point direct the transition to digging into the passage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is the "yeast" of the Pharisees and that of Herod? (Hint: What is Herod's main problem in Ch. 6 and what does Jesus condemn the Pharisees for in Ch. 5?) (cf. Matthew 16:12).**
2. **Why does Mark include this story of the blind man, who needs two touches to be healed, right in the middle of this climactic turning point of the disciples understanding that he is the Messiah (vv. 22-26)? How does it help us understand the rest of the passage?**
3. **Wow, Jesus just called Peter "Satan"! That's pretty harsh. Why does Jesus respond to Peter so harshly?**
4. **Finally after 8 chapters, his disciples are beginning to understand who Jesus is: the Messiah. But what kind of Messiah were they expecting? How does Jesus response (vv. 8:34 – 9:1) challenge their preconceptions?**

RESPONSE:

Summarize what the members of your Core have collectively been learning about this passage.

5. **Jesus asks each of us this question: "Who do you say I am?" The answer we give ultimately determines our destiny. What areas of our lives does Jesus say, "Do you still not understand" about who he is?**

We're half way through the Gospel according to Mark, and we're realizing the confrontation between Jesus' kingdom-mission and its rivals is coming up fast. Mark continues to use urgent language with his repetition of the conjunction "And then ..." and beginning new sections with the word "Immediately". Jesus is anxious that his disciples should understand what's happening. And this all raises the question; do WE understand what Jesus' mission was all about? Have we made it the foundation of our faith and hope? Do we understand what he is doing right now, not only in our own lives, but in our world? What is it about us that would make him say, like a frustrated teacher, "You still don't get it?"

Take time to pray with one another about the areas in our lives that we are in need of taking up our cross and following Jesus in. Note: make space for this prayer time by intentionally ending the bible discussion time earlier than normal. Don't simply leave the last 5 minutes of Core, but be intentional about prayer and ministry with one another, allowing the Spirit to bring healing and empowerment.