



Theme: Jesus and the Earliest Gospel... Mark

“Good News Comes from the Wilderness”

Weekly Memory Verse: ¹² *The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness* –Mark 1:12

Family Activity for the Week: Ever wondered about a fun and innovative way to encourage Scripture memorization for you and your family? This week, (and every week hereafter if your kids enjoy it!) write the memory verse – Mark 1:12 – on a few index cards or pieces of paper. Then, hide the cards around one room in your house. For an extra challenge, you can turn off all the lights and give your children flashlights to find the cards! Number each card so that you and your children can piece the verse together upon finding them all. Have someone read each card aloud, (and in order) then repeat!

During this season of Lent, the 40 days and 7 Sundays before Easter, we will be reading the entire Gospel of Mark, which is the earliest gospel. The reading plan will give you about a half a chapter a day and then some questions to reflect upon. We pray the Holy Spirit will touch your heart as you make this journey with us!

Monday, February 22 – Read Mark 1:1-20. After the dramatic appearance of the Holy Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, the work of the Spirit was to lead Jesus – really to drive Jesus into the wilderness. Mark has used a strange word. “The Spirit *compelled* Jesus to go into the wilderness.” The word *compelled* is the same word used a few verses later when Jesus *casted out* and evil Spirit. Mark intends us to see a connection between these two stories. Jesus is “*compelled*” into the wilderness for 40 days and then leaves that experience and the **FIRST** thing he does is “*compel*” an evil spirit out of a man.

- ▲ Jesus identified with sinners in his baptism, showing us the way to new life through the Good News. In the wilderness, Jesus identified with sinners in our temptations. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, “This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.” How does it feel to know that Jesus has entered into, and experienced, what we experience in the world?
- ▲ Forty – as in the forty days of Jesus in the wilderness – is a number that often shows a time of testing or judgment. In Noah’s flood, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. Israel was in the wilderness 40 years. Moses kept sheep in the wilderness for 40 years. This is Jesus’ time of testing and it is why Lent is 40 days before Easter. Mark tells us that Jesus was with the wild beasts: Matthew and Luke make no mention of this, but it is significant. In the ancient Greek grammar, the emphasis is on *with*. In other words, Jesus was at peace with the wild beasts. In some ways, this is a metaphor for the “wild beasts” we wrestle with like anger, hate, hurt, addiction, etc. What “wild beasts” are you struggling with today? Can you invite Jesus to help you be at peace by allowing him into your heart?

(Message Notes and Meditation Moments for February 20-21, 2021 – For more, go to www.summitdurango.org)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, during this season of Lent, help me to enter the wild places in my heart and find the peace you offer. I repent, turn around, and turn towards you this season. Calm my wild heart. Amen.

Tuesday, February 23 – Read Mark 1:21-39. The only person who might have ever had a right to feel he should (or could) try to fix the world all at once was Jesus. But he didn't! Yes, he healed sick people, drove out demons and ministered to the whole town gathered at the door of the house. But in the morning, without telling anyone, he left the whole crowd waiting while he prayed. When the disciples nervously said, "Everyone is looking for you," Jesus replied, "Let's go somewhere else." He took the long view of God's plans, and of his own place in them.

- ▲ Imagine for a moment how a modern PR expert might have planned for Jesus to "capitalize" on the crowds he drew in Capernaum. (He was, after all, the Lord of the universe come to live on earth.) In what ways did Jesus' behavior differ from the advice you imagine him getting? In what ways can you learn from Jesus' example, and adopt his attitude toward "success" and letting God, not popular acclaim, define your true value?
- ▲ Verse 34 used language that, in Semitic idiom, implied that Jesus healed everyone who came to him. In his day's view, it also took in virtually every human ill: he healed "all kinds of diseases" and cast out "many demons." Today, God usually works through people trained in physical and emotional healing—but it's still God at work. What hurt(s) do you bring to Jesus today? Are you open to God's help and healing through today's means?

Prayer: Lord, you know even my most carefully hidden or deeply buried hurts and fears. I ask for your healing touch. I trust you to be at work for my good. Amen.

Wednesday, February 24 – Read Mark 1:40-2:12. In Jesus' day, a "leper" had one of a variety of visible skin diseases. People thought such people were highly contagious, so they feared and shunned them—but Jesus didn't. Homes excavated in Capernaum show room for maybe 50 people in the "living room." Four men tried to bring their sick friend to Jesus on a stretcher, but the room was full. They got creative! Most houses then had an outer staircase to a roof made of branches and rushes laid over beams and covered with dried mud. They climbed up, dug through, and lowered their friend to Jesus.

- ▲ Jesus' healing power was most visible when crippled people got up and walked. But Jesus, knowing physical healing wouldn't last forever, linked it to eternal issues. Would it have surprised you to hear Jesus say to the crippled man lowered through the roof, "Your sins are forgiven"? What does Jesus' choice of remedy suggest to you about his "diagnosis"? What connection(s) might exist between forgiving sins and physical healing?
- ▲ The man would have stayed paralyzed without his four friends' energetic, creative caring. When was the last time you were able to be a "stretcher bearer" for someone else? Who has been a "stretcher bearer" for you? How determined and creative are you willing to be to bring Christ's help to someone you know who needs it?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about the well-being of my body and my inner self. Help me to live each day in the beautiful reality of your forgiving, restoring grace. Amen.

Thursday, February 25 – Read Mark 2:13-28. Compare Mark 1:21 with today's first verse. Scholar William Barclay noted, "Steadily and inexorably the synagogue door was shutting on Jesus. Between him and the guardians of Jewish orthodoxy war had been declared." Jesus kept doing and saying shocking things. He called a tax collector (who worked for Herod Antipas and/or the Romans) to join him. He said the Kingdom "wine" he brought couldn't fit the old forms the Pharisees clung to. He said he was Lord even over venerable customs like the laws about proper Sabbath-keeping.

- ▲ It's tempting to dismiss those first-century Pharisees as narrow and blind, without realizing how easily we become like them. Christian singer Todd Agnew's song "My Jesus" included these challenging lines: (Message Notes and Meditation Moments for February 20-21, 2021 – For more, go to www.summitdurango.org)

“My Jesus would never be accepted in my church, 'Cause the blood and dirt on His feet might stain the carpet.” What comfortable customs, habits or assumptions might Jesus challenge in your workplace, neighborhood or church today?

- ▲ Scholar N. T. Wright unpacked Jesus’ words about Sabbath: “He doesn’t deny that the disciples are out of line with traditional sabbath observance, but he pleads special circumstances and scriptural precedent. He puts himself on a par with King David... That’s a pretty heavy claim: the implication is that Jesus is the true king.” In what ways have you already made Jesus the true king of your life? Are there areas where you might expand his reign this Lenten season?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you badly upset complacent, “righteous” people, while accepting outcasts like Levi the tax collector. Make me righteous, not in complacency, but in a way that follows you wherever you lead. Amen.

Friday, February 26 – Read Mark 3:1-19. By Jesus’ day, efforts to uphold the Sabbath (it was the fourth of the Ten Commandments, after all— see Exodus 20:8-11) had led to a complex tangle of rabbinic rules about what was and wasn’t work. Jesus more often defied those rules than obeyed them, as we saw in yesterday’s and today’s readings. The Sabbath rules forbade action to make people well on the holy day, a rule that angered Jesus. His determination to offer healing on the Sabbath led “the righteous” to seek an alliance with the corrupt Herodians to destroy Jesus.

- ▲ Couldn’t Jesus have just told the man to meet him in secret the next day? It seems, in this and other stories (like Luke 14:1-6, John 5:1-18) that Jesus went out of his way to show that he valued people’s well-being more highly than strictly following rules. Of course, we need some level of rules and guidelines. Have you ever faced a situation in which you needed to set aside the rules or guidelines in the interest of meeting human needs?
- ▲ Scholar William Barclay wrote, “It is significant that Christianity began with a group. The Christian faith... from the beginning had to be discovered and lived out in a fellowship.... the very name Pharisee means ‘the separated one;’ the essence of Christianity was that it ... presented [people] with the task of living with each other and for each other.” How does our age of division make this a vital Christian principle? How, if at all, has shared loyalty to Jesus helped you bridge beliefs or ways of living that might have divided you and another person?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the boldness to be one of your disciples, and the courage to do what is right even when there’s pressure to stay quiet and “go along.” Amen.

Saturday, February 27 – Read Mark 3:20-35. Jesus should have had a perfect family life, right? But Mark said his mother and brothers came to “take control” of him, fearing he’d lost his mental balance. The religious leaders went further, claiming Jesus was in league with the ruler of demons. Jesus’ response in verses 29-30 was forceful, but it was an ugly charge: Attributing the Holy Spirit’s work to an impure spirit (v. 30) is roughly tantamount to calling God Satan. And family is important, but on this occasion, Jesus reminded his hearers that family is not God. Maybe even without realizing it, some families demand that all family members agree, or avoid embarrassing the family. But Jesus said our highest loyalty is to God and who God calls us to be, even beyond our family.

- ▲ How could Jesus’ mother have so drastically misjudged her son’s actions to carry out his mission? Have your parents ever misunderstood you, or you misunderstood your children or siblings? How can you offer wisdom and support to people you love, and yet not try to heavy-handedly control their lives?
- ▲ Jesus was serious about his bond with those who do God’s will. How can faith and shared life with God create ties as close as, or closer than, those we share with family? Do you have any added “family members” because you share in God’s family? How can giving Jesus your first loyalty make you, in the end, a better family member than ignoring your true self to “get along”?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it must have hurt to have your family think you were out of your mind. You kept on loving them, even when you had to act in ways they didn't like or understand. Help me find that same balance in my earthly relationships. Amen.