

main course

on the way: bible study 2

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Bible Studies by Lance Stone based on John Proctor's 'Mark's Jesus'

Bible Study 2: On The Way

AIM

To explore the way Jesus' travels are presented in the gospel of Mark and to see how this speaks to us today.

YOU WILL NEED

Bibles or at least copies of Mark's gospel for everyone in the group.

A copy of 'Mark's Jesus', by John Proctor, available from Church House bookshop or the Grove website, either as hard copy or as download <http://www.grovebooks.co.uk>

The booklet is also reviewed on the Vision4life website. You don't need one for everyone but have it available for those who want to follow this up.

TO BEGIN: JESUS, THE TRAVELLER ON 'THE WAY'.

One striking feature of Mark is the way that Jesus is portrayed as a person constantly on the move, travelling the length and breadth of Israel and between Jewish and Gentile territory. John Proctor writes:

'Mark is a gospel of journeys. In Galilee Jesus constantly travels about (1.39; 6.6). Four time he crosses Lake Galilee (4.35-41; 5.18-21; 6.45-53; 8:13-21). Once he leaves Galilee proper and follows a great arc around its edge (7.24, 31). Half way through the gospel he goes north to Caesarea Philippi (8.27), before taking the long road south to Jerusalem and crucifixion. But this is not just a travelogue. The journey seems to have meaning.' (*Mark's Jesus*, p.17).

Mark's account of Jesus' great journey to Jerusalem seems clearly has particular symbolic meaning and importance.

Read the seven occasions that we find the phrase 'on the way' (not always translated exactly with those words) on this journey: 8.27, 9.33-34, 10.17, 32, 52; 11.8.

The same word however is also found earlier: it is 'the way of the Lord' proclaimed by John the Baptist right at the beginning of the Gospel – see 1.2-3. It is also found in the parable of the sower: as the sower sows some seed falls 'by the way' where the birds come and eat it up (4.4, 15).

It would seem that the 'the Way' is the road of discipleship. It is the road we walk with Jesus, and it takes us into the same kind of places that it took him, and there are obstacles and opposition along the way (e.g the parable of the sower).

In this Bible Study we are going to be thinking about what it means to be "people of the Way", disciples who walk this road with Jesus.

Discuss: Share a little of your own journey with Jesus. How did it begin? Were you brought up in a Christian family? Have there been any particularly significant steps along the way? It would be good if you could take a bit of time for this.

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THE ROAD FROM CAESAREA PHILIPPI TO JERUSALEM.

At the centre of Mark's Gospel is a journey from Caesarea Philippi in the North of the country to Jerusalem, in the South, where Jesus must suffer and die. At both the beginning and end of the journey Jesus heals someone who is blind – first at Bethsaida and then at Jericho.

Let's follow that journey, stopping to read short passages and asking some questions:

Read: Mark 8: 22-26.

Discuss:

- i) What do we notice about the crowd? Is there anything we can learn from them?
- ii) Any thoughts as to why Jesus took the man out of the village (v.23) and told him not to return to it? (v.26)?

Read: Mark 8: 27-33.

Discuss:

- i) How is Peter like the blind beggar?
- ii) Are there any particular aspects of your faith that you struggle to understand? Where is God different from how you would like God to be?

Read: Mark 10: 45-52.

Discuss:

- i) Discuss any differences you can see between this story and the healing of the blind man in Bethsaida?
- ii) What does Jesus say to the blind man in v.51? Note that he said the same thing to James and John in 10.36, when they asked for special places of honour, at Jesus right and left hand, in the kingdom they thought Jesus was about to inaugurate. It is a strange question to ask a blind man, isn't it? Why do you think Jesus asked it?
- iii) How would you answer Jesus question, "what do you want me to do for you?" What do you want from Jesus?
- iv) Bartimaeus, the outcast blind man, joins Jesus 'on the way'. A rejected outcast, marginalised ("at the roadside" – v.46) is incorporated onto 'the way', becoming a disciple. Who do we marginalise in the church?

John Proctor writes this about this section of Mark's Gospel we have been looking at.

'At the beginning and end of the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus helps two men to see. At Bethsaida vision comes gradually, in two instalments (8.22-26). Whereas Bartimaeus, in Jericho near Jerusalem, receives his sight all at once, 'immediately... and he followed Jesus on the way (10.52). These two healings, similar and yet different too, seem to be symbols. They frame the journey, and show it as a road of vision, as the disciples themselves see Jesus more truly and fully. The healing at Bethsaida comes just before Peter's experience at Caesarea Philippi (8.27-37) – where Peter half-sees who Jesus is, but cannot see the sort of Messiah that Jesus must be. By the time Bartimaeus is healed, Jesus destiny has become much clearer. He has reached Jerusalem, and we realise very surely that he has come to die. The one who sees must follow; those who have followed can now see.' (Mark's Jesus, p.10).

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Discuss:

- i) What difference does it make to our faith that Jesus chose this path as Messiah?
- ii) What are the implications for our lives of discipleship – “on the way”?

Prayer: Remember especially anyone in need of healing; those who in one way or another “sit at the roadside”.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

- What was the most helpful thing?
- What was the least helpful thing?
- What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more bible studies like this on the Gospel of Mark there are three more on the website.

If you want a different kind of Bible study based on the story of the boy with epilepsy and his family it is one the website as ‘Waiting at the bottom of the mountain’.