



Thank you for your interest in Follow Me—a nineteen-week study of the book of Mark. This series also appears in Look at the Man.

The pages which follow include:

- The titles and texts for the study (1 page)
- A sample sermon/class outline (4 pages)
- A sample handout (4 pages)

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## **Sermon Titles for Mark**

**The Gospel According to Mark (Overview)**  
**The Undercover Christ (Mk 1:1-13)**  
**The Popular Christ (Mk 1:14-45)**  
**The Controversial Christ (Mk 2:1-22)**  
**The Gathering Storm (2:23-3:6)**  
**Taking Sides (Mk 3:7-35)**  
**Magic Seed (Mk 4:1-34)**  
**Who is Jesus? (Overview of Mk 4:35-6:29)**  
**Dull Disciples (Mk 6:30-8:21)**  
**The Second Touch (Mk 8:22-26; 10:46-52)**  
**The Jesus Style (Mk 8:27-9:29)**  
**The Radical Christ (Mk 9:30-10:31)**  
**Blind Disciples (Mk 10:32-45)**  
**Cleaning House (Mk 11:1-26)**  
**The Final Conflict (Mk 11:27-12:44)**  
**Watch Out! (Mk 13)**  
**The Disciples' Failure (Mk 14)**  
**The Servant's Success (Mk 15)**  
**When is The End not the End? (Mk 16)**

## Taking Sides

One of my favorite stories is the one about three blind men and an elephant. None of these men knew what an elephant was. Obviously, they had never seen one and, in this instance, they had not even heard of such a creature. Each man was led into an enclosure, asked to find the elephant, and told to describe the animal they had found.

The first blind man happened to catch the elephant by its tail. "The elephant is like a rope," said the man. The second blind man caught hold of a leg and said, "The elephant is like a tree." The third blind man bumped into the flank of the elephant. "The elephant is like a wall," was his description.

Each man based his description of the elephant on that piece of anatomy to which he was exposed. Since all they knew of the elephant was a tail or leg or flank, they could not begin to appreciate the full size and shape of the pachyderm.

So it is with us as we try to see Jesus. Each of us bases our response to Jesus on that piece of him to which we are exposed. We grab a tail or a leg or a flank and sincerely believe we are forming an accurate picture of who he is and what he wants of us. Unfortunately, we underestimate the extent of our own blindness. We forget that our *estimation* of who Jesus is might be very different from what he *actually* is.

In the third chapter of Mark, four different groups of people grab hold of Jesus. Each group thinks it has grasped the whole of him when in fact each group has only a piece. Yet they respond to Jesus on the basis of that piece, forming their impressions about him and reacting to him accordingly.

Note the structure of the first chapters of Mark:

1. Stories of Christ's growing popularity (1:14-45).
2. Stories of Christ in conflict (2:1-3:6).
3. Stories of the various reactions to Jesus (3:7-35).
4. The parable of the Sower (4:1-20)

All of this information is included in the first major segment of Mark's gospel (1:1-8:21) where the burning question is, "Who is this Jesus?" People are evaluating Jesus, trying to find a handle to him. Some (like the disciples) will respond with a sincere, if weak, faith. Others, like the religious leaders, will convince themselves that Jesus is a blasphemer. In chapter three, this evaluation of Jesus is clearly shown.

## I. Four Groups of People Respond to Jesus

### A. The crowds - Read Mark 3:7-12 (see also vss 20, 32)

1. They grabbed hold of the *miracles* of Jesus.
  - a. They "heard all he was doing" (vs 8).
  - b. They flocked to him from the surrounding vicinities.
  - c. The crowd wanted to touch Jesus and be healed.
2. They came for healing and exorcism, not for words of life.
  - a. No mention of Jesus teaching the crowds here.
  - b. They are impressed with Jesus, but for his miraculous power not his miraculous teachings.
  - c. In the end, they shout for crucifixion (Mk 15:8-15).
3. "This is what Jesus is like -- a miracle worker...an exorcist."

### B. The family - Read Mark 3:20-21, 31-35

1. Christ's family thought he had lost his mind. Both 3:20-21 and 3:31-35 refer to the same incident, one introducing and the other concluding the story about Christ's family. Mark interrupts the story with a conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees.
  - a. Jesus won't take time out to care for basic necessities (vs 20).
  - b. The family decides to "arrest" Jesus:
    - i. *kratesai* - meaning to arrest or seize.
    - ii. Same word is used when Herod arrests John the Baptist and the Pharisees arrest Jesus.
  - c. They believe Jesus is "out of his mind."
    - i. *exeste* - lit. "to stand outside of." Corresponds almost directly with our "to be beside yourself."
    - ii. Paul uses the same word in 2Co 5:13.
2. They grabbed hold of the *strangeness* of Jesus.
  - a. This lack of concern for himself and family concerns them.
  - b. They want Jesus to be normal, not a religious extremist.
    - i. They want him to return to the carpentry shop and stop all this wandering around the countryside.
    - ii. They, after all, are his family. They know him for who he "really" is. They knew him before all this Messiah stuff.
3. "This is what Jesus should be like -- a family man...a carpenter."

### C. The Pharisees - Read Mark 3:22-30

1. They agreed with the family of Jesus. Jesus was crazy.
  - a. This is the thrust of their charge that he is demon-possessed. Parallel to "He is demon-possessed and raving mad." (Jn 10:20)
  - b. They frequently accused Jesus of being possessed.
  - c. His ability to cast out demons proved the issue to them.
2. They also grabbed hold of the strangeness of Jesus.
  - a. His disdain for their tradition, his flouting of their rules, the uniqueness of his teachings, his power to perform miracles.
  - b. They could have seen all this as evidence that Jesus was from God, but chose to believe, instead, that he was from Satan.
    - i. **They** knew what God wanted from them.
    - ii. Jesus did not agree with their understanding.
    - iii. Therefore, Jesus could not be from God.
3. "This is what Jesus is like -- a blasphemer...an upstart."

#### **D. The disciples - Read Mark 3:13-19 (See also vss 32-35)**

1. Jesus had grabbed hold of them.
  - a. Jesus picks 12 to become apostles (13-15).
    - i. to be with him.
    - ii. to preach and exercise authority.
  - b. It is important to notice that among all these groups, this listing of individuals stands out. The 12 are named.
    - i. Simon - also known as Peter.
    - ii. James and John - aka Boanerges.
    - iii. Even Judas - the betrayer.
2. They had grabbed hold of something deeper in Jesus.
  - a. They had left everything to follow Jesus because they saw something in him more than his miracles or his strangeness.
  - b. They understood that he spoke the will of God.
    - i. **Read Mark 3:32-35** - Jesus speaks to the disciples.
    - ii. They were the new family of Jesus.

### **II. Jesus Knew that People would Respond Differently to Him.**

#### **A. The parable of the sower**

1. **Read Mark 4:14-20**
2. Jesus is the sower who spreads the word of the kingdom. The soils represent the kinds of hearts exposed to God's word.
3. It is no accident that this parable follows hard on the heels of the events reported in chapter three.

#### **B. The seed and the soil**

1. The seed sown on the path is similar to the *Pharisees*.
  - a. Their hearts were so hardened, the seed did not have a chance. The word lay on the surface, unable to penetrate.
  - b. So Satan comes and snatches up the seed as soon as it is sown.
2. The seed sown on rocky soil corresponds to the *crowds*.
  - a. They received the word with joy - they were enthusiastic (almost hysterical) about the ministry of Jesus.
  - b. They had no root in themselves - they had not sunk themselves deeply into the mind of Jesus.
3. The seed sown among thorns is like Jesus' *family*.
  - a. They heard the word Jesus was preaching and may even have responded to some degree before they found out just how far Jesus would take what he said.
  - b. Soon, the worries of everyday life and other priorities choked Christ's message.
4. The seed sown in good soil symbolizes the *disciples*.
  - a. They *heard the word*, accepted it as truth, and were changed by what they heard.
  - b. The result in their lives was a crop.
    - i. Not just evangelistic fruit - our usual interpretation.
    - ii. This refers to the same thing as the new wine parable - the word changes people, it produces results in good hearts.

## **Conclusion: What do you think about Jesus?**

### **A. What piece of him have you grabbed?**

1. Are you like the Pharisees? Hung up on his lack of respect for traditional religion? Uncomfortable with his audacious claims and incredible power?
2. Are you like the crowds? Impressed with what Jesus can do and hopeful he will bring healing to your life, but not very interested in:
  - a. being a disciple
  - b. leaving all to follow him
  - c. listening to his word and accepting it and being changed by it.
3. Are you like the family? Claiming to have a real love for Jesus, but trying to:
  - a. contain him
  - b. keep him within certain boundaries
  - c. control his tendency to ask to much and go too far.
4. Will you be a disciple? Allowing Jesus to be Lord, recognizing that he has the words of eternal life, accepting those words and being changed by them.

### **B. How are you responding to him as a result?**

1. Only one kind of soil is openly antagonistic to the seed. Only those with the hardest hearts have no time for Jesus at all.
2. Other kinds of soil (like Jesus' family and the crowds) will spend time with Jesus. They will come to him and marvel at him and even claim to love him.
  - a. Only persecutions and troubles will actually distance some followers from Jesus.
  - b. The "desire for other things" will slowly choke out discipleship in others.
3. The good soil, responding wholeheartedly to Jesus, is mixed in with all this other soil.
  - a. It is hard at times to distinguish the true disciples (those who listen to the word and accept it) from the false disciples (those who, in the end, will not allow Jesus to be Lord).
  - b. Be good soil. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Allow it to do its work in your life. Don't try to control it or contain it or limit it. Let the seed grow and produce a crop - "30, 60, or even 100 times what was sown."

## Insight

Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.

One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself....But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money?...Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured...

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

C.S. Lewis

*Mere Christianity*, pp. 54-56.

Mark 3: 7-35

## Taking Sides

**Key Text:** **Mk 3: 33-35**

*"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

**Theme:**

Different people respond differently to Jesus. This was as true in his day as it is in ours. People grab on to some part of Jesus—his teaching, his personality, his power—and form an opinion of him based on that piece of him they have encountered. Some people scoff at Jesus; others marvel, a few believe. It is important to see Jesus accurately before drawing any conclusions.

**Application:**

What piece of Jesus have you grabbed? What do you see in him? Don't forget that your estimation of Jesus might be very different from who he actually is. Others have misjudged him. We can too.



# Sermon Outline

Have you heard the one about the three blind men and an elephant? None of them had ever seen an elephant or even heard of such a creature. Each man was led into an enclosure, asked to find the elephant and to describe what they'd found.

The first blind man happened to catch the elephant by its tail. "The elephant is like a rope," said the man. The second blind man caught hold of a leg and said, "The elephant is like a tree." The third blind man bumped into the flank of the elephant. "The elephant is like a wall," was his description.

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In the third chapter of Mark, four different groups of people grab hold of Jesus. Each group thinks it has grasped the whole of him when in fact each group has only a piece. Yet they respond to Jesus on the basis of that piece, forming their impressions about him and reacting to him accordingly.

Note the structure of the first three chapters of Mark:

## **Jesus is the Christ (1:1-13)**

### **Evaluating Jesus (1:14-3:35)**

1. Christ's growing popularity (1:14-45).
2. Christ in conflict (2:1-3:6).
3. The various reactions to Jesus (3:7-35).
4. The parable of the Sower (4:1-20).

## **I. Four Groups of People Respond to Jesus**

### **A. The crowds - Read Mark 3:7-12**

1. They grabbed hold of the *miracles* of Jesus.
2. They came for healing and exorcism, not for words of life. They were impressed with Jesus, but for his miraculous power not his miraculous teachings.

### **B. The family - Read Mark 3:20-21, 31-35**

1. Christ's family thought he had lost his mind.
2. They grabbed the *strangeness* of Jesus. They wanted Jesus to be normal, not a religious extremist.

### **C. The Pharisees - Read Mark 3:22-30**

1. They agreed with family - Jesus was crazy.
2. They also grabbed hold of the strangeness of Jesus - his disdain for tradition, flouting of their rules, power to perform miracles.
3. They could have seen this as evidence that Jesus was from God. But they interpreted it as evidence that he was from Satan.

### **D. The disciples - Read Mark 3:13-19**

1. Jesus had grabbed hold of them.
2. They had grabbed hold of something deeper in Jesus. They understood that he spoke the will of God.

## **II. Jesus Knew People would see him Differently**

### **A. The parable of the sower**

#### **1. Read Mark 4:14-20**

2. It is no accident that this parable follows the events reported in chapter three.

### **B. The seed and the soil**

1. The seed sown on the path - the Pharisees.
2. The seed sown on rocky soil - the crowds.
3. The seed sown among thorns - Jesus' family.
4. The seed sown in good soil - the disciples.

## **Conclusion: What do you think about Jesus?**

1. What piece of him have you grabbed?
2. How are you responding to him as a result?

The story of discipleship in Mark reminds you of the title of Irving Stone's biography of Michelangelo, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*. Initially, you cannot help but be impressed by the disciples' faith and commitment. They leave their families and businesses to follow after Jesus, though they do not know where he will lead or what will become of them. They go out preaching and meet with some success. They recognize who Jesus is long before others in Mark, although they do not understand what his identity means.

But gradually, the picture of the disciples refocuses on their doubt, pride, and hardness of heart. They are simply overwhelmed by Jesus and his demands on them. He speaks in parables and expects them to understand. They do not. He works miracles and expects them to do likewise. They cannot. He is calm in the most trying circumstances and expects them to be the same. They are not.

Mark underscores that the conflict between Jesus and his disciples involves a clash of values. Essentially, the disciples share the values of the religious leaders. They want to be important and powerful. They long for riches and preeminence. They have not signed on for service and self-sacrifice. They want to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus when he comes in his "glory" (10:37). Much of the gospel (especially chapters 8-10) shows Jesus retraining these men to have in mind the things of God. He does not, in Mark's story, succeed in this task.

In spite of their blindness, and fear, the disciples have one quality in Mark that redeems all the rest - they are loyal. They have enough faith to stick with Jesus. Though he rebukes them and corrects them and expresses disappointment in them, they remain true to their commission to "be with" Jesus (Mk 3:14). Only on the eve of his death, when they desert Jesus in the Garden, does their fear win out over their loyalty. In Mark, the ideal disciple is not one who understands perfectly or obeys perfectly, but one who can stay with Jesus even though he or she may not understand him or be comfortable with his demands.

**Warm up:**

What could you do to make people think you were possessed by Satan?

**Look at the Man**

**Mark 3:7-34**

1. Why do you think Mark introduced the "evil spirits" and "demons" in verses 11 and 15?
2. How would evil spirits know who Jesus was? Why do you think Jesus did not want them to tell who he was?
3. Why would the family of Jesus say that he was "out of his mind"?
  - a. To protect Him from the Pharisees.
  - b. Because they were jealous of His popularity.
  - c. To defend His strange behavior.
  - d. Because they did not understand His message and actions.
4. What do you think was the motive behind the Pharisees charge that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub?
  - a. 3:6
  - b. 3:7, 9, 20
  - c. other reasons
5. How does the parable challenge their reasoning?
6. What does verse 22 have to do with verses 29 and 30?

**Looking Closer:**

1. If you were one of Jesus' family, how might you have reacted to the ministry of Jesus?
2. Why do you think the actions of Jesus were so misunderstood? Are there times when you are misunderstood? How do you react?
3. Can a person commit an eternal sin today and never receive forgiveness? How?
4. In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to do God's will? How can you remedy this?

**Looking Around:**

Confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of your life. Repent of the wrongs you have done. Allow the group to pray for you and your relationship with God.

## Mark 4: 1-34

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**Read Mark 4:1-34.** These four parables are the only ones found in Mark except for a few spoken on the last days of Christ's life. Focus on vss 10-12 and 33-34. Respond in your notebook to the following questions:

1. Why did Jesus speak in parables?
2. Who was meant to understand what he said?
3. Who was meant to be kept in the dark by what he said?
4. What was the unifying theme of these parables? (Notice vss 11, 26, and 30.)

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In the parable of the Sower (4:1-20), Jesus seems to acknowledge that he is not surprised by the different receptions he received in chapter three. (See Sermon Outline in this handout and study of Mark 3:7-35 from last week.) Reproduce the following chart in your notebook and give the required information:

Type of Soil:	Reaction to Seed:	Real-life Equivalent
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Mark 4:21-25 is an especially interesting passage. The parable about the lamp is not so much about the kingdom of God as it is a plea for Christ's listeners to really listen. Jesus makes the point that his parables are meant to be lamps to those who will listen. They are meant to "disclose" and "bring out into the open" that which is hidden. But they do not do this without effort on the part of the listener. What does Christ mean when he says: (write your observations in your notebook)

1. "If anyone has ears, let him hear" (vs 23).
2. "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (vs 24).
3. "Whoever has will be given more" (vs 25).

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The final two parables in this passage have to do with the irrepressible nature of the kingdom. Struggle with these parables for a while. Answer the following questions:

1. In the parable of the growing seed, who is the "man" scattering seed? What does Jesus mean when he says that "all by itself" the seed grows?
2. In the parable of the mustard seed, why is the kingdom compared to the "smallest seed" in the first place? What is it about the phenomenal growth of the mustard seed that is instructive about the kingdom of God?

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Read the material in your commentary covering Mark 4:26-32. How do those comments confirm or challenge your own conclusions on the meaning of these parables? What new insights does the commentary provide? Do you see any problems with the commentator's understanding of the text?