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# Isaiah in Mark

## Lesson 10

### “Mark 10”

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**Objective:** To understand how Isaiah is used by Mark to proclaim the good news to his original audience and to understand how this should be understood by us today. How should the gospel message impact our lives. The historical and cultural barriers often cause us to miss, or even misinterpret the message of Mark. This then inhibits transformation into the image of Christ.

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**Materials:** Books, Journal articles, Targums, the Syriac Peshitta and interviews.

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**Procedures:** To outline the issues that confront us as we seek to comprehend more fully the powerful ways that the Old Testament, and in particular Isaiah challenged and transformed the world-view and the lives of first century believers. In doing this, it is hoped that we can then transform that understanding into a contextual milieu that will allow our lives to be impacted by the Gospel in the powerful, transformative way that it impacted that first audience.

As we move into Mark chapter 10 we need to understand some of the issues that continued to confound and confuse the people of Israel. We are told at Mark 10:1 that Jesus went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan and that crowds gathered around him and he began to teach. It is at this point that some Pharisees come to him “to test him.” As a test they ask him a question regarding whether, or not, it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. You may ask how does this relate in any way to Isaiah. In Isaiah 50:1<sup>1</sup> we find that this question of divorce was related to Israel being sent into captivity. This oracle in the mouth of Yahweh is a disputatious challenge directed at Israel. Some in Israel wondered, was their exile just punishment meted out to Israel by Yahweh? While others wondered if the exile was the result of Yahweh’s inattentiveness, or impatience? The real question was, was the exile Yahweh’s fault? The oracle in Isaiah represents an act of self-defense on the part of Yahweh.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Thus says the LORD: Where is your mother’s bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away.** NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, in the Westminster Bible Companion series (Louisville KY: 1998), p. 120.

The issue of divorce became wrapped up in the whole issue of theodicy (why a good God permits evil to exist); an issue that became a tremendous matter of preoccupation among the Jews of the Second Temple period. The question among the Jews was has God divorced Israel and if so, was it for just cause? The biblical teaching regarding divorce was heavily debated primarily for two reasons. First, while there are not a lot of texts that directly deal with divorce those that do exist, provoke exegetical issues that are complex and difficult. Secondly, and probably more prominent on our horizon, but less important in the present discussion is the fact that church and synagogue look to Scripture for moral guidance in this area when it becomes a pressing issue.<sup>3</sup> Certainly morality is important in a pastoral sense, but in the context of Mark there is also a deeper issue that is at stake and that has to do with the nature of covenant. Israel had the deep concern that covenant, and marriage was a covenant, could be broken easily and for a variety of reasons. This is at least partly behind the tremendous fascination and preoccupation with

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<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Wall, "Divorce," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2 (New York NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 217-219.

this topic. They fear that God has divorced (abandoned) them, and they are angry, anxious and fearful as a result of these fears.

The great halakic (the collective body of Jewish laws, both written and oral) debate over the issue of divorce among the ranks of the Second Temple period focused primarily upon two texts: Genesis 2:22-24<sup>4</sup> (with 1:27<sup>5</sup>) and Deuteronomy 24:1-4.<sup>6</sup> According to the teachings of the rabbis, Genesis 2:22-24 teaches that God created males and females (Genesis 1:27) in order to re-create them into an inviolable union *CD* 4:19-5:3.<sup>7</sup> The indication here is that marriage

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<sup>4</sup> <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." <sup>24</sup> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> <sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. NRSV.

<sup>6</sup> <sup>1</sup> Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because **he finds something objectionable about her**, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house <sup>2</sup> and goes off to become another man's wife. <sup>3</sup> Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); <sup>4</sup> her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession. NRSV.

<sup>7</sup> <sup>19</sup> in another. *Blank* The builders of the wall who go after Zaw - Zaw is the preacher <sup>20</sup> of whom he said: *Mic* 2:6 «Assuredly they will preach» - are caught twice in fornication: by taking <sup>21</sup> two wives in their lives, even though the principle of creation *Gen* 1:27 «male and female he created them», v <sup>1</sup> and the ones who went into the ark *Gen* 7:9 «went two by two into the ark». *Blank* And about it is written: *2 Deut* 17:17 «He should not multiply wives to himself». However, David had not read the sealed book of the law which <sup>3</sup> was in the ark, for it had not been opened in Israel since the day of the death of Eleazar" in Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 557.

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establishes a new physical relationship (“*one flesh*”) that is comparable to other family relationships. This new relationship is then held in place by natural (i.e. hereditary) and therefore is an indissoluble covenant. The practical issue that confronted the rabbis was to explain somehow the grounds under which divorce was permissible. The school of Rabbi Shammai contended that the critical phrase that referred to a woman being “objectionable” in Deuteronomy 24:1 referred to unlawful sexual behaviors despite the fact that clearly Deuteronomy advocates the punishment of death for such behavior (Deuteronomy 22:22-24), rather than divorce. The school of Rabbi Hillel contended for a much broader definition for this phrase which included such things as childlessness, cultic offenses, and even for failure to complete household duties.<sup>8</sup>

The teaching of Jesus on divorce can be understood against the background of this rabbinic discussion. The tendency of the Pharisees was to define the “one flesh” principle very negatively and narrowly in order to broaden their own grounds for divorce and to justify polygamy. The affect of the teaching of Jesus on this subject

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<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Wall, “Divorce,” pp. 217-219.

was to challenge divorce as a practice approved by God and to reassert monogamy as God's ideal. The issue is still incredibly complex, but set against the practical matters it must be the conclusion from what Jesus teaches that ideally there is no divorce. Divorce was not the intent of God.<sup>9</sup> The question that you may then be asking is how does all of this relate in any way to Isaiah? In order to address this we need to keep in mind that Mark told us clearly that the Good News he proclaimed was the Good News according to Isaiah the prophet.

If we return for a moment to Isaiah 50 the oracle begins with two rhetorical questions that in their turn ask: (1) Did Yahweh arbitrarily divorce wife-Israel as it was a husband's right to do in that patriarchal society (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)? (2) Did Yahweh arbitrarily sell Israel for profit as a bond-servant? The answer that is definitely required to both of these questions is absolutely not. Yahweh did not arbitrarily divorce Israel, nor did he sell her out. Yahweh is not the cause of the exile. The case of the divorce is due to the fickleness of Israel and not due to the arbitrariness of Yahweh. Israel was sold

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<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Wall, "Divorce," pp. 217-219.

because of sin and divorced for cause.<sup>10</sup> I think we need to realize that the discussion regarding divorce was a hot topic in the first century because divorce was common and affected vast numbers of people, not unlike it does in our own time. This is certainly the primary reason that Jesus was likely asked about this matter and why Mark includes it in his Gospel account. The text of Isaiah here is very much on the margins of this discussion, but the whole issue of fidelity to covenant is a matter of concern for both Isaiah and Mark.

Wrapped up in these issues are everyday matters of family life. Families are split apart through divorce, adultery, and separation. These are matters of tremendous concern and now in the United States the picture has become even more complex with the ruling of the Supreme Court that marriage can now be between two people of the same gender. This is not really an issue for us to deal with today, except in passing. For the ancient Hebrews, and for the Christians of the first century, marriage was something that was not a thing that the state had control over. God defined marriage and only what God defined as marriage was indeed marriage. What God has joined

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, p. 120.

together “let no one separate” (Mark 10:9). God made them male and female and when they join together they become one flesh. This is something more than a physical joining. They are now related, they belong to one another. The provision for divorce is rejected by Jesus by pointing to the chronological and ontological priority of permanent union of man and woman (Genesis 1:17; 2:24).<sup>11</sup> Divorce does not change this fact according to Jesus. According to Jesus, here in Mark divorce can happen, but the reality of the two being one flesh is not broken, or changed. Divorce can happen, but that does not mean that remarriage can take place. In other places Jesus indicates that divorce is only allowed in the instance of adultery. No other reason than this, because only in this act is the covenant bond between two, that were one, can be broken. This is a hard teaching and Jesus here demonstrates that he is more conservative to the word of God than the Pharisees were. He out-conservatives the conservatives.

We need to realize that, at least for some, there would be a recognition that this is about covenant even more fully than it is

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<sup>11</sup> Howard Clark Kee, “The Function of Scriptural Quotations and Allusions in Mark 11-16,” in E. Earle Ellis and Erich Gräßer, eds., *Jesus und Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), p. 178.



about the issue of divorce only. Covenants can be broken, but it did not happen arbitrarily, or easily. God does not take his covenant role lightly. This is serious business and as we think about the lengths to which God would go to enter into covenant, and maintain covenant, we should recognize this fact. Rather than stand upon his rights of covenant, and how this relationship is hurting him, he sent his son to demonstrate that he was willing to die in order to maintain covenant. He is willing to be harmed, and he has been, and is being harmed by his covenant relationship with human beings. It is perhaps in this relationship that we can in some small way begin to see the pain that God endures in order to maintain covenant relationship with his weak, and adulterous, covenant partners. He strives to maintain relationship, even when it costs him the life of his son. In 10:10-12 the disciples demonstrate that they still do not understand what Jesus says. Jesus clarifies his teaching to them. It is interesting that Jesus does not single out one, or the other, he speaks of both the male and the female. The breaking of covenant is his primary concern here in Mark 10.

At Mark 10:13-16, people are bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing. This is in many ways a problematic passage for us. For one thing we seldom think about blessing except perhaps as something we do for our food. I wonder is that so that it will taste good, so that it won't make us sick, or so that it will do what food is supposed to do? Blessing is in fact asking for something from God and it may indeed be all of the things above. The issue is not the what, it is the who. Blessing is not something that we as humans can really do very well, but it is in reality something that comes from God. The word used here by Jesus in Mark 10:16 for the blessing (κατευλόγει) of the children is a rare word in Greek. It occurs no other place in the New Testament. It is rare word in all of Greek literature occurring in few other places in the Septuagint (the Old Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures), only in Tobit 10:14 and 11:17. It is a word that means to praise. It is not the traditional word for blessing. Jesus praises the children here and elevates their position in the eyes of the church while at the same time giving us a cautionary warning not to be like the disciples here. Instead, we are

to be like the children. The children are to be our role models, while the disciples are given to us here as a warning.<sup>12</sup>

At Mark 10:17, we have the continuation of the second subsection of Jesus' passion prediction, which is a unit made up of teaching by Jesus on three topics: marriage and divorce (10:2-12), receiving the reign of God (10:13-16) and the problem of wealth (10:17-31). The first part of this chapter began with an attempt to test Jesus and here it closes with testing of a different sort, the temptation, or testing of wealth.<sup>13</sup> Having exalted children as a paradigm for discipleship within the kingdom of God, Jesus now confronts a dramatically different paradigm of humanity and the blessings of God.<sup>14</sup> This is a paradigm for humanity that continues to be a major issue among human beings. Many hold the view that if God loves them he will bless them, which makes sense. The only problem is that the view of blessing that these people have is of physical health and physical wealth. There is a constant stream of

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<sup>12</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), pp. 332-334.

<sup>13</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark* (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, in *The Anchor Yale Bible*, Vol. 27A (New Haven CT: The Anchor Yale Bible, 2009), p. 723.

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this preached and some of the largest churches in the world have this as a part of their foundational teaching.

It is in so many ways ironic that Jesus was unaware of this principle. He was born in poverty, laid in a manger, had to flee for his life before he is 2 years old, had no material wealth during his lifetime and died a horrific, painful and unjust death. The teaching given here by Jesus in Mark 10 also links wealth, or at least the love of wealth, with the issue of eternal life. This rich man asks the question of Jesus as to what he must do to inherit eternal life. Notice he does not ask what attitude, or where his heart should be. He recognizes at least that doing is important, and he has kept all the commandments from his youth. We are told here that Jesus “loved” (ἠγάπησεν) him and he told him that he lacked but one thing. He told him to sell all that he has, give it to the poor and to come and follow him. To me that sounds like three things, but it really only is one. What Jesus is calling this man to do is to follow him. He cannot do that with his wealth. Following Jesus requires a level of commitment and trust that wealth, and that trusting in wealth, destroys. In 10:22, we are told that this man whom Jesus loved went away grieving because he thought more

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of his possessions than he did of eternal life. He lived for the now, and not for eternity. How often do we do the same?

Jesus knows that the words he has just spoken fly in the face of the expectations and beliefs of his disciples so he continues to explain and teach them even before they ask. At 10:23, he tells his disciples that it is hard for those that have wealth, possessions (χρήματα) to enter the kingdom of God. This should send a cold shiver up the spine of every person living in the United States, because all of us are in danger of “having” (ἔχοντες) possessions. Notice it just says “having” and not “loving.” We would be a lot more comfortable if Jesus would speak with more clarity, you see because what we so often hear Jesus say is that we must not “love” possessions, be “attached” to possessions, but he says “having.” These words of Jesus turn the disciples world upside down. They had been taught that God loved Abraham and he had blessed him with much wealth, the same with Isaac and Jacob, and then the same with David and Solomon. Wealth and power were seen as signs of God’s blessing.

Jesus tells his disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the

kingdom of God. How are we to interpret this passage? Most of our attempts at interpreting this passage “dwarf the camel and expand the needle’s eye.” In interpreting this passage people have tried to remove the sting of these words by suggesting that the “camel” is not a “camel,” but a rope. They have transformed the “needles eye” into a gate; they have tried to say that this particular rich man is a special case. After all of course Jesus knew that he suffered from greed and so chose this difficult test in order to demonstrate that fact. As we examine this section of Scripture it is important for us to recognize that it is part of continuity that goes from 10:13 to 11:10. In this continuity one antithesis pervades the whole of it. It is the recurring contrast of the humble and the exalted, the poor and the rich, the last and the first, the least and the greatest, those who serve, compared to those who are served. In terms of the mission of Jesus, this entire chain illustrates the truth spoken by the Apostle Paul:

“Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” 2

Corinthians 8:9).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Sevier Minear, “The Needle’s Eye: A Study in Form Criticism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1942) 61, pp. 157-169.

This section of Scripture illustrates the antithesis between meekness and pride, between service and power, between the way of this age and the way of eternity (the way of the kingdom of God).<sup>16</sup> It is clear from the response of the disciples that we are not the only ones troubled by the words of Jesus here. The disciples of Jesus were “even more astounded” (περισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο). These challenging words of Jesus have continued to cause more than a little consternation down through the centuries. Many commentators see the answer that Jesus gives really directed toward the rich and not just a general answer to the question. Surely it seems better to take the answer of Jesus to be the answer to the question of this section of Scripture rather, than the answer to some other hypothetical question. If we hold in our minds this background of expecting riches to be a demonstration of the blessings of God the answer easily becomes the answer to the actual question. The answer to the question then is that - like the healing of the paralytic (2:1-12), the cleansing of the leper (1:40-45), the calming of the storm (4:35-41), the exorcism of a legion of demons (5:1-20), the rising of the

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Sevier Minear, “The Needle’s Eye: A Study in Form Criticism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1942) 61, pp. 157-169.

daughter of Jairus and the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage (5:21-43), salvation is possible for God. Jesus does not simply accept people where they are and leave them there, he heals them and releases them from their bondage, transforming their lives and their prospects for the future.<sup>17</sup>

As is so often the case even after the answer comes the disciples still do not understand, so at 10:28 we have Peter asking another question, which is basically what about us? I wonder if Peter ever regretted asking a question, because he always seems to get more than he bargained for when Jesus answers? The answer of Jesus starts out well, and would have likely been what Peter and the other disciples hoped for as he promises them more than they have given up in return, but then he adds “with persecutions” (διωγμῶν). This is a word that means something like “pursuit,” “persecution,” or “harassing.” Jesus here not only answers the question of Peter he also answers the unspoken questions of Peter. Why would anyone choose to become a Christian in order to become downwardly mobile? The response of Jesus is that those who live their life

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<sup>17</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, pp. 107-108.



according to the “not yet” reality of God’s reign in the present evil age are more than compensated for their losses. The promise here is a promise of community, a promise of a “called out” community.<sup>18</sup>

The promise of Jesus is that Christians will have community, that which so often today is devalued and neglected. The community of God is a benefit, an essential element on the road to eternity. Along with this there is also the promise of persecutions. These persecutions are to be seen not as a negative, but as a benefit in this upside-down value system (cf. Philippians 1:29; Acts 5:41).<sup>19</sup> Jesus makes it clear that the values of the kingdom of God are different from those of the kingdom of this world. Verse 31, clearly indicates that things have been turned on their head. This concept still challenges us today and it is something that we must continually be reminded of, lest we forget. The first will be last, and the last will be first. The kingdom of God is different. Its values are different and the people seeking that kingdom will act and react differently than the world expects. This is a foundational principle of the kingdom and not an optional extra.

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<sup>18</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>19</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, p. 108.

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At 10:32, we are told that as they head for Jerusalem they were “amazed” and “afraid.” They are likely having this reaction because 2 times before Jesus has predicted that Jerusalem will be the place of his death. In this section, Jesus will now for the third time, tell them that he will handed over to the chief priests and scribes and be condemned to death. He tells them that he will be mocked, spat upon, flogged and killed. I wonder if after the shock of all these predictions, and the fact that their feet are pointed in the wrong way on the road, they really heard the end to this sentence that after three days he would rise again? This all only makes sense in the upside-down world that Jesus has been telling them about. In the kingdom of this world, this is insane. According to the wisdom of this world, Jesus should turn around and never enter Jerusalem again, but here he is headed toward this terrible destiny rather than away from it. This is the nature of the world that Jesus has been teaching them about, where the Son of God comes to earth, poor, weak (at least by the world’s standards), serving rather than being served.

This perspective is not just for the advanced students in the kingdom of God, this is the essential perspective that must be

grasped. At 10:35 and following, it is obvious that James and John at least do not grasp the message of Jesus here. They want positions of honor, but they have no real grasp of what they are asking. Jesus challenges them with the words of verse 38, **“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”** Despite their perhaps being ignorant, Jesus says they will be granted at least something because of their request. They will be granted the honor of drinking the cup of persecution, the baptism of pain, suffering as martyrs for the kingdom of God (one to the death and the other in imprisonment). They will ultimately come to witness to the fact that they now understand the upside-down aspect of the kingdom of God. Jesus also demonstrates his submission to the plan, and will, of God as he is not able to grant their request for positions of honor, that is beyond his purview.

The next section (10:41-45), demonstrates that the other ten disciples also have not grasped the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God either, since they become angry when they hear of the request of James and John. Jesus calls them to himself and

explains that the way they are thinking is the way of the Gentiles and that their way is to be different. Here again, he challenges them to live according to the new paradigm in which a servant is far more honorable than a king who rules as a tyrant. Greatness in the kingdom belongs to the slave and not to the served. Mark 10:45 is seen by many scholars as an allusion to Isaiah 53.<sup>20</sup> This may not seem a really big issue because it is so brief, but in reality it is this allusion which helps us to anchor the words and vision of Jesus into a contextual framework in a powerful and substantive way. Jesus is linking his ministry into the prophecies of the Prophet Isaiah and as such the mission of God is more clearly defined in the sacrifice of Jesus. This is indeed a pivotal moment in understanding the mission of God as the servant who would suffer for Israel, and in conjunction with his teachings on the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God, the stage is set for the return of the King. The king will come in an unexpected way to an unexpected segment of people. He comes to the poor, the humble, the weak, the child.

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<sup>20</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), pp. 122-132.

Very quickly the narrative moves on with Jesus continuing toward Jerusalem where they come across the blind beggar. This is the last healing miracle recorded in Mark's gospel account and the final episode before Jesus enters into Jerusalem. At first sight this miracle seems to intrude into the context in a way that makes it seem out of place. One reason for the miracle appearing here is to give a geographical reference point for the journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem. The miracle also serves a literary and theological function too, forming an inclusion that frames this section of the Gospel (8:22-10:45) with two blind men. The two blind men in this inclusion stand in contrast to others in this section as they actually receive sight and are no longer blind. This passage also bears relationship to what follows because of the cry of the blind man, "Jesus, Son of David ...". The cry of the blind man prepares us for the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem (11:1-11) where the pilgrims there will cry out "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" This serves to remind the readers that Jesus is indeed the Davidic Messiah that was expected and which was prophesied.<sup>21</sup>


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<sup>21</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2014), p. 465.

Bartimaeus is the only person healed in the Gospel of Mark who is directly said to have then become a follower of Jesus (we are told that the Gerasene demoniac desired to do so). The message is that recovering from blindness allows a person to become a follower of Jesus. It is here that we are reminded of the Isaianic equation of sight and blindness being equated with faithful and unfaithful responses to covenant relationship with Yahweh. When one recovers from blindness it enables them to set their feet “on the way” to suffering and martyrdom, but such a recovery is only possible through the miraculous healing touch of Jesus. Jesus here asks the same question of Bartimaeus that he asked James and John earlier (10:51). They gave a poor response to that question as they asked for power and prestige, here we have the proper response to that question for a disciple who hopes to set his feet on the path of salvation.<sup>22</sup> The response of Jesus shows that indeed the question was answered wisely as Jesus responds, “Go away your faith has saved you” (Ὕπαγε, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε). When Jesus heals of us our blindness, and only he can, we can then put our feet on the

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<sup>22</sup> Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark*, pp. 115-116.



path that he showed those who were his disciples and those that would be his disciples. It is a path that only makes sense in the upside-down world of the kingdom of God; that is only visible to those with sight restored by the hand of the Son of David, the Davidic Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the Son of God. This is the same worldview advanced by the words of the ancient Hebrew prophet Isaiah as he tells people in the eighth century B.C. of the coming of a Messiah that would suffer, bleed and die.

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# Synopsis

This chapter begins with Jesus being tested by the Pharisees, who we often see as traditional and conservative members of Jewish society, but who in reality were not. They question Jesus regarding divorce, which is meant to be a trap because it was a hotly debated issue in Israel. It was hotly debated not only because of the societal and familial pressure that have always been there, but because this was an issue linked to the matter of covenant faithfulness, particularly in relation to God being faithful to Israel. This was an issue where the rabbis debated the nature of God, the nature of covenant and the matter of evil existing in the world. Some even accused God of unfaithfulness because of the Babylonian captivity and the oppression of foreign nations upon Israel. The answer that Jesus gives, draws upon the original intent of God in marriage and indicates clearly that divorce was not a part of that original intent and that the breaking of covenant is a serious thing. Basically, the answer that Jesus gives is that God does not arbitrarily break covenant and the covenant of marriage should be treated as God treats covenant,



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seriously, and in line with the views of God, and not in line with the views of men.

People were bringing their children to Jesus for blessing and this displeases the disciples and Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach them about the nature of the kingdom of God and the attitude that is necessary for those who wish to be a part of that kingdom. Children are set up as role models for entrance into the kingdom of God.

Jesus also addresses the issue of wealth and power in this chapter; first in the encounter with the rich man and then in the request of James and John along with the indignation of the other ten apostles because of the request of James and John. Jesus indicates the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God, which is given to the humble, the poor, the weak, and servant. This, when seen in the full context of what Jesus is about to endure for covenant restoration, served as a powerful force of change for the disciples of Jesus. The entire perspective of the world would be challenged and then ultimately changed. Before they had seen wealth and power as indications of the blessing and affirmation of God whereas Jesus calls

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them to see things very differently. He challenges them to see humility and persecutions as things to be valued in the kingdom of God.

This change of perspective can only come because of the touch of Jesus, which is illustrated in the healing of Bartimaeus, who follows Jesus as a disciple. In all of this, Jesus promises something greater than power and wealth, he promises community to his disciples. He also promises them persecutions, which though puzzling to them at the time will have made sense after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

In this section we see Jesus setting his feet toward Jerusalem where he would suffer, bleed, and die. He challenges their perceptions of the world, of God, and of the Messiah. These perceptions are heavily rooted into the contextual imagery of the suffering servant passages from Isaiah.

# Questions

1. What are some ways that marriage is a covenant?
2. Who defines the terms of a covenant?
3. What is the role of the state in defining marriage?
4. How does our view of covenant affect our relationship with God?
5. How might the matter of divorce relate to our view of covenant with God?
6. Is Jesus more conservative, or less conservative, than the Pharisees?
7. Why do you think people might want to make divorce easier? What does this have to do with our relationship with God?
8. What does it mean to become family? How does this relate to our relationship with God?
9. What does Isaiah 50 have to do with the discussion of divorce?
10. What should we learn from children about entering the kingdom of God?
11. Why do you think Jesus came to die and what does it have to do with covenant?

12. What does wealth and power have to do with entering the kingdom of God?
13. How do we differ today from the people of the time of Jesus in our perceptions about wealth and power?
14. What do wealth and power have to do with the kingdom of God?
15. Why do you think Jesus promises his disciples persecutions?
16. Why is community important?
17. What things are valuable to God?
18. Why do people fear death?
19. What does it mean to be blind?
20. How are the values of the church today different from the values of the United States?
21. What do you think the consequences are of the church having values that are different than the values of the state?