

The Gospel of Mark, Teacher's Guide

Week 20: The Cross, the Empty Tomb, and the Call to Go

Mark 14:53–16:20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Mark 14:53–16:20 is the climax of the entire Gospel of Mark and the heart of the Christian gospel. The teacher must handle several enormous doctrinal themes. The confession of Christ before the Sanhedrin as the “I am” who will sit at the right hand of Power. The denial and eventual restoration of Peter. The mocking, suffering, and crucifixion of Christ as the substitutionary, sin-bearing, wrath-satisfying death by which we are saved. The tearing of the temple curtain as the visible sign of new access to God through Christ. The centurion’s confession as the gospel reaching the nations from the very moment of Christ’s death. The empty tomb and the bodily resurrection of Christ as the foundation of every believer’s hope. And the Great Commission, with Mark 16:16 grounding the New Testament plan of salvation by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ.

Build the heaviest doctrinal weight at two places. First, the resurrection. The empty tomb is not a sentimental ending. It is the historical, bodily, public, divinely attested rising of Christ from the dead, which is the foundation of every Christian doctrine and every Christian’s hope. Without it, our preaching is vain and our faith is vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). With it, every promise of God in Christ is yes and amen. Second, the Great Commission. Mark 16:15–16 is one of the clearest statements in the Gospels of the gospel response God has appointed. Hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins is not a denominational distinctive. It is the New Testament pattern. The teacher should use this final lesson to ground students once more in the gospel they have responded to and to call any who have not yet done so to respond now.

At the same time, this is the closing lesson of a twenty-week journey. The students have walked with Mark from the opening declaration of the gospel to the empty tomb. They have heard the King arrive, watched His authority be revealed, witnessed His teaching about the kingdom, followed Him through suffering and surrender, sat with Him in Gethsemane, and now stand at the empty tomb and hear His commission to go. Close the study by giving each student space to identify what the Lord has been doing in them and what one concrete step they will take in the next season. The Christian life is the daily living out of the gospel they have just been studying for nearly half a year.

Question 1

Student Question:

Before the Sanhedrin Jesus is asked, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” He answers, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (14:61–62). What is Jesus claiming about Himself in this answer, why does the high priest treat it as blasphemy, and how does this confession ground the Christian’s own confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the present King at God’s right hand (compare Daniel 7:13–14; Psalm 110:1; Acts 7:55–56)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The trial before the Sanhedrin is one of the great climactic scenes in the Gospel. False witnesses cannot agree, but the testimony does not need to be coherent for the verdict to be already decided. Finally the high priest asks the question that drives to the center: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus answers, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (14:61–62).

The Greek phrase Jesus uses (‘ego eimi,’ “I am”) carries the freight of the divine name in Exodus 3:14 and Christ’s repeated self-identifications in John’s Gospel (John 8:58; 18:5–6). He is not merely affirming the human title. He is identifying Himself with the divine name. He then combines two of the most loaded Old Testament texts. “Seated at the right hand of Power” echoes Psalm 110:1, the most quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament. “Coming with the clouds of heaven” echoes Daniel 7:13–14, where the Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days and receives an everlasting kingdom. Christ is saying that He is the divine Son who will be vindicated and enthroned, and that the very men who are judging Him will one day see Him exalted in glory.

This is why the high priest tears his robes. From a Jewish standpoint, the claim is unambiguous. Either Christ is who He says He is, in which case the men of the Sanhedrin are committing the supreme sin in judging Him, or He is blaspheming, in which case He must die. Their verdict is the second. The Christian’s verdict is the first. Christ is the ‘I am.’ He is enthroned at the right hand of God. He will come again with the clouds. The very claim that condemned Him in their court vindicates Him in the church’s confession.

This confession grounds the central confession of the Christian faith. Peter at Pentecost preached, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). Stephen, at his martyrdom, saw “the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55–56). Paul wrote, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). The whole New Testament continues the confession Christ Himself made before the Sanhedrin.

For students, this scene calls for the same confession. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Not whispered in private. Not held only in the heart. Confessed before the world that Christ told us would oppose us, even as He confessed before the world that condemned Him. The disciple’s confession is meant to look like Christ’s confession in shape. Honest. Costly. Sure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deity and Messiahship of Christ confessed before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:61–62; John 8:58)
- The combined fulfillment of Daniel 7:13–14 and Psalm 110:1 in Christ
- Christ as the present King at the right hand of God (Acts 2:32–36; Hebrews 1:3, 13)
- Christ as the coming Son of Man who will return with the clouds at the end of the age (Acts 1:9–11; Revelation 1:7)
- The Christian confession of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, modeled on Christ's own confession (Romans 10:9–10; 1 Timothy 6:12)
- The cost of confession, modeled by the One who confessed at the cost of His life

Discussion Prompts

- What is Jesus claiming about Himself in His answer to the high priest?
- How do Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 stand behind that answer?
- How does Christ's confession shape the confession He calls every disciple to make?

Question 2

Student Question:

At the very moment Christ is confessing the truth at the cost of His life, Peter in the courtyard outside is denying that he even knows Him. Where in your own walk has fear silenced you when Christ called for confession, and as you close this study, what specific setting in your life is Christ asking you to begin confessing Him in more openly going forward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At the very moment Christ is confessing inside, Peter is denying outside. Mark places these two scenes deliberately side by side. Christ stands before the high priest and confesses, knowing it will cost Him His life. Peter stands by a charcoal fire and denies, knowing it will cost him nothing. Three times Peter is asked. Three times he denies. The rooster crows. He remembers Christ's words. He goes out and weeps bitterly (14:72; compare Luke 22:62).

This is the picture of every disciple who has ever let fear silence their confession of Christ. The setting is rarely a trial. It is usually a family dinner where the conversation has turned away from Christ and we have remained quiet. It is a workplace where our colleagues are mocking faith and we have laughed along. It is a friendship that has avoided the gospel for years because we have feared the awkwardness. It is a public moment where we have been asked, openly or by implication, whether we are with Jesus, and we have given the answer least likely to cost us something.

For students closing a twenty-week study of the Gospel of Mark, this question is meant to land specifically. Where is your specific Peter-by-the-fire setting? In what relationship, what circle,

what context, has fear been silencing the confession Christ calls for? Be honest. The first step is naming the setting.

Then ask, what would Christ-shaped confession look like there? It does not have to be a sermon. It can be a single sentence honestly spoken. “Actually, that is not how I see it. I follow Jesus, and this is what He says.” It can be the willingness to mention His name where we have always avoided it. It can be a question that quietly opens a conversation. “Can I tell you what the Lord has done for me in this season?” It can be an invitation to come to worship. It can be a thoughtful, kind explanation of why a Christian sees something differently. It can be a refusal to laugh along with what we know is contrary to Christ. The shape will be different in each setting; the heart is the same. Christ above the fear of people.

Help students see also the great comfort in this question. Peter wept bitterly that night. But Peter was not finished. The risen Christ would meet him by another charcoal fire (John 21:9, 15–19) and ask him three times, “Do you love me?”, restoring him to ministry. Peter would go on to preach the sermon at Pentecost, the very sermon that called three thousand to faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ. Failure of nerve is not the end of the disciple’s story. The risen Christ restores His denying disciples and sends them out again. He will do the same for us.

For the next season after this study, encourage students to identify one specific setting where they will begin to confess Christ more openly, even if in small ways at first. The seed of one honest sentence often grows into the steady witness of a whole life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger and reality of denial by even close disciples under pressure (Mark 14:66–72)
- The cost of faithful confession, modeled by Christ before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:61–62; 1 Timothy 6:12–13)
- The risen Christ’s restoration of failing disciples (John 21:15–19; 2 Timothy 2:13)
- Confession of Jesus as Lord as both a one-time act and an ongoing life (Romans 10:9; Matthew 10:32–33)
- The Holy Spirit’s help to speak boldly when called upon (Acts 4:13, 29–31; Ephesians 6:19–20)
- Repentance and restoration available to every disciple who has failed in a moment of confession

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life is your “Peter by the fire” setting?
- What would Christ-shaped confession look like there?
- How does Peter’s restoration encourage you about your past failures of confession?

Question 3

Student Question:

Mark 15 records the crucifixion of Christ with deliberate restraint: the mocking by soldiers and bystanders, the darkness over the land, the cry “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34), His death, and the tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom. Connecting these details with Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, Hebrews 9–10, and 2 Corinthians 5:21, what is Mark teaching about the meaning of the cross, the substitutionary work of Christ, the bearing of God’s wrath against sin, and the new access to God opened by His death (Hebrews 10:19–22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark records the crucifixion of Christ with striking restraint. He does not dwell on the physical horror. He simply tells the story. The soldiers mock Him as king and crown Him with thorns. They lead Him out to Golgotha and crucify Him between two robbers. The passers-by mock. The chief priests mock. The soldiers cast lots for His clothing. At the sixth hour darkness covers the land. At the ninth hour Jesus cries with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”, which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34). A little later He breathes His last. The curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom. A Roman centurion confesses Him as Son of God. The women watch from a distance.

Mark’s restraint is its own kind of weight. Every detail is loaded.

The mocking fulfills Psalm 22 in detail. The casting of lots, the wagging of heads, the shouts to come down from the cross, all echo the prophetic Psalm. The cry from the cross is the opening line of that Psalm: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). The Psalm’s vivid description of suffering (pierced hands and feet, dried-up strength, divided garments) was written centuries before crucifixion was even invented. Christ on the cross is the embodiment of Psalm 22, both in suffering and in the eventual proclamation of God’s name to the nations with which the Psalm ends.

The darkness over the land is a sign of judgment. In Amos 8:9 the LORD says, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.” The darkness at the crucifixion is the visible sign of the day of God’s judgment falling on the One who bore the sin of the world.

The cry of dereliction, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is among the most weighty sentences in Scripture. Christ on the cross was experiencing, in His own consciousness, the dreadful reality of bearing the sin of the world and the just judgment of God against it. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Isaiah 53 had foretold it. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed... Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring” (Isaiah 53:4–5, 10). The wrath of God against the sin of His people fell on

Christ. The forsakenness was real. He bore what we could not bear, so that we would never be forsaken by God.

The tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom is the visible sign of a new arrangement. The curtain had separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, where the high priest alone entered, once a year, with blood. The tearing is from top to bottom because God Himself is doing it. Hebrews 10:19–22 fills out the doctrine. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” The way into the presence of God has been opened. The Old Covenant arrangement is fulfilled and superseded. The new covenant is in His blood.

Christ’s death is therefore the substitutionary, sin-bearing, wrath-satisfying, covenant-inaugurating, way-opening, salvation-accomplishing act at the heart of the gospel. “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). “For the death he died he died to sin, once for all” (Romans 6:10). The cross is not only an example. It is the saving act of God in history.

For students, this scene should produce both deep sobriety and deep joy. Sobriety, because our sin is so serious that nothing less than the death of the Son of God could deal with it. Joy, because that death has been offered, and the gospel call is the announcement that what He did, He did for sinners like us, and that whoever responds in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Him will live in the good of what He has accomplished.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The substitutionary, sin-bearing death of Christ for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24)
- The cross as the satisfaction of God’s righteous judgment against sin (Romans 3:21–26; Romans 5:8–10)
- The fulfillment of Psalm 22 in detail by the crucifixion
- The cry of dereliction as Christ’s genuine bearing of forsakenness on our behalf (Mark 15:34; Habakkuk 1:13)
- The tearing of the temple curtain as the sign of new and direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 10:19–22)
- The end of the Old Covenant sacrificial system in Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9–10)
- The new covenant inaugurated in His blood (Mark 14:24; Hebrews 9:15)
- The cross as both example to follow and saving act to receive (1 Peter 2:21–25)

Discussion Prompts

- What does Mark's restrained account of the crucifixion teach us, and how does Isaiah 53 fill in its meaning?
- What was Christ experiencing in the cry "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
- What does the tearing of the temple curtain tell us about the new arrangement in Christ?

Question 4

Student Question:

At the heart of Christian assurance is the truth that Christ has borne the wrath against our sin, fully and once for all, in His own body on the cross. Where in your daily walk has this truth grown dim, allowing guilt, shame, or earning-thinking to take its place, and how would daily living in the full reality of Christ's finished work change your inner conversation this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At the heart of Christian assurance is the truth that Christ has dealt with our sin fully and once for all on the cross. Long-tenured Christians can lose touch with this truth in their daily inner conversation. The voice of guilt still speaks. The voice of shame still names old sins. The voice of earning-thinking still tells us we have to do more, perform more, prove more to make God love us. None of these voices is honoring the cross.

What the cross actually accomplished was this: the just penalty for the sin of every person who comes to Christ has already been paid in His body. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13–14). "He himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). The bill has been paid. The wrath has been borne. The way has been opened. The sinner who has come to Christ in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism stands in His finished work.

Living in the full reality of Christ's finished work changes the inner conversation in several ways.

First, the disciple does not earn God's love by performance. We do not get more loved by the Father on the days we read the Bible and less loved on the days we slept in. We are loved on the basis of being in Christ. Our walk reflects that love rather than producing it. "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Second, the disciple does not bear ongoing guilt for forgiven sin. The sins we confessed when we came to Christ have been removed. "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). When we sin afresh as believers, we confess (1 John 1:9), we repent, we walk in His cleansing, and we keep walking. We do not keep dragging the corpse of forgiven sin behind us. He has buried it.

Third, the disciple does not measure standing with God by feeling. Feelings come and go. The cross does not. On a good day or a hard day, the believer is in Christ on the basis of His finished work, not on the basis of how the day feels.

Fourth, the disciple is freed for joyful obedience. We obey not to be loved but because we are loved. We give not to earn favor but because favor has been freely given. We pray not as if we are knocking on a closed door but because the curtain has been torn and the throne of grace is open.

For students, examine where the cross has been growing dim in your inner conversation. Where guilt still speaks. Where shame still names. Where earning-thinking still drives. Then re-anchor in the cross. Read Romans 5–8 slowly. Read Hebrews 10. Read 1 John 1–2. Let the finished work of Christ retrain the voice in your soul. The Sunday Lord's Supper is meant to do exactly this. Every week the bread and the cup re-proclaim what He has accomplished. Receive them attentively. Let them settle the noise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The full, finished, once-for-all sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (Hebrews 9:24–28; 10:11–14)
- The forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood for all who respond to the gospel (Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13–14)
- No condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1, 31–39)
- Daily walking in the light, confessing sin and being cleansed (1 John 1:7–9)
- Salvation by grace through faith, expressed in obedient response, not by performance (Ephesians 2:8–10; Titus 3:4–7)
- The Lord's Supper as a weekly reanchoring in the finished work of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23–26)
- The danger of letting guilt, shame, or earning-thinking displace the gospel in daily life

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your inner conversation has guilt, shame, or earning-thinking been louder than the gospel?
- What truths about Christ's finished work would retrain that voice?
- How does the weekly Lord's Supper help you re-anchor in His finished work?

Question 5

Student Question:

As Jesus dies, a Roman centurion standing facing Him says, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39). What is striking about who is making this confession, where in the Gospel of Mark this confession had been previously hinted at (Mark 1:1, 11; 3:11; 9:7), and how does the centurion's

confession show that the gospel is for the nations and for the unlikely from the very moment of Christ's death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark 15:39 is one of the most carefully placed sentences in the Gospel. "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" The first human in the Gospel of Mark to confess Jesus as Son of God after the moment of His death is not a disciple, not a Jew, not a friend. It is a Roman officer, the man in charge of the squad that just crucified Him.

This confession is striking for several reasons. First, who is making it. Mark has been building the Gospel toward the right confession of Christ since the opening verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The Father confessed Him at His baptism and at the Transfiguration (1:11; 9:7). Demons confessed Him with horror (3:11; 5:7). The high priest had just asked, mockingly, "Are you the Son of the Blessed?" (14:61). Peter had confessed earlier at Caesarea Philippi (8:29). But the first human after Christ's death to put the full confession together (Mark 1:1 echoed back at the cross) is a Gentile soldier.

Second, where it happens. The centurion is standing facing the cross. He has watched Christ die. He has seen the darkness. He has heard the loud cry. Whatever he was expecting, this was different. Something about the way Christ died produced a confession that the religious leaders, who knew the Scriptures, could not produce. The Roman soldier who knew nothing of Israel's history had seen something the chief priests refused to see.

Third, what it shows about the breadth of the gospel. The cross is for the nations. From the very moment of Christ's death, a Gentile confesses Him. This is consistent with everything else Mark has shown us across the Gospel. The Syrophoenician woman. The Gerasene demoniac. The deaf and mute man in the Decapolis. The Greeks coming to worship. The gospel was always going to reach the nations. The cross is the moment it begins reaching them in fullness. The Great Commission a few paragraphs later (16:15) will give explicit voice to what was already implicit at the cross.

For Christians today, the centurion's confession encourages and challenges in equal measure. It encourages, because it shows that the gospel reaches the most unlikely. The Roman officer in charge of executing Jesus could be moved, by the moment of His death, to confess Him as Son of God. There is no person beyond the reach of the cross. It challenges, because it confronts our assumptions about who is likely to come to Christ. The very people we have written off may be the very people Christ is drawing.

This is the perfect preparation for the Great Commission. The gospel is for the centurion, for the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), for the prodigal in the far country, for the religious leader who finally bows, for the family member whose heart has seemed hardened, for the neighbor we

have known for years, for the people group on the other side of the world, for the one God puts in our path today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The centurion's confession as the first human declaration of Christ as Son of God after His death (Mark 15:39; Mark 1:1)
- The breadth of the gospel for Jew and Gentile, including the unlikely (Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:26–29)
- The cross itself as the moment that draws all people to Christ (John 12:32; Ephesians 2:11–22)
- The Spirit's sovereign work in opening eyes to see Christ (John 6:44; Acts 16:14)
- The reach of the gospel to "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9; Matthew 28:18–20)
- The encouragement of every disciple toward bold witness, because no one is beyond Christ's reach

Discussion Prompts

- What is significant about who the centurion is and where he is standing when he confesses Christ?
- How does this confession at the cross prepare for the Great Commission a few paragraphs later?
- How does the centurion encourage you about witness to the unlikely?

Question 6

Student Question:

The first human after Christ's death to confess Him as Son of God is a Roman soldier who had just helped kill Him. Where in your own life are you most prone to write off someone as unlikely to come to Christ (a particular family member, coworker, neighbor, public figure, or social group), and how does the centurion at the cross challenge that assumption and call you to renewed witness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The centurion at the cross is a kind of mirror held up to every disciple. He represents the person we are most likely to assume is beyond the reach of the gospel. The hardened relative. The cynical coworker. The mocking neighbor. The public figure whose words seem the opposite of Christ. The young person who has drifted far away. The friend who tried church once and never came back. The person we have prayed for so long that we have quietly given up.

Mark places the centurion at the cross to say: this one too. The one whose hands were on the hammer. The one whose orders carried out the crucifixion. The one who would have been at the

bottom of every disciple's list of likely converts. Christ drew him through the very act that we might have thought disqualified him. The hardness of his work did not prevent the softening of his heart. The hostility of his role did not block the confession of his lips. Christ is more powerful than the obstacles between any person and faith.

For students, this challenges several common patterns of thinking. The pattern of writing people off because their language or their politics or their lifestyle suggests they could not possibly come to Christ. The pattern of giving up on a particular relative or friend because they have not responded after many years. The pattern of assuming entire categories of people (a certain age, a certain culture, a certain background, a certain wealth, a certain affliction) are beyond reach. The centurion at the cross is the steady reminder that Christ has not lost interest in any of them.

How does this call us to renewed witness? Several ways. First, by reawakening prayer. We pray again for the names we had stopped praying for. We pray with expectation rather than resignation. We ask the Lord to do what only He can do in the hearts we cannot move. Second, by renewed willingness to speak. We do not give up the conversation, the testimony, the invitation, simply because earlier attempts have not produced visible fruit. Christ is at work even when we cannot see. Third, by stepping into new circles. The Lord may have prepared a centurion-style hearer right next door to us, in a part of our work life or community we have not yet engaged. Fourth, by holding our witness with kindness and patience over the long haul. The hardness we see today may be the soil out of which faith grows tomorrow.

Encourage students to name one specific person they have been quietly writing off, and to bring that person back to prayer and to faithful witness in this final season of the study.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reach of the gospel to those we have written off (Acts 9; 1 Timothy 1:12–17)
- The Spirit's sovereign work in unexpected hearts (John 3:8; Acts 16:14)
- Persistent prayer for the salvation of others (Luke 18:1–8; Colossians 4:2–4)
- Faithful witness in long obedience over many years (1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 4:1–5)
- The church's mission to all peoples (Matthew 28:18–20; Revelation 5:9)
- Hospitality, friendship, and consistent presence as means of witness over time

Discussion Prompts

- Who is the "centurion" you have been quietly writing off?
- How does Mark 15:39 challenge that assumption?
- What is one step of renewed prayer or witness you can take this season?

Question 7

Student Question:

Early on the first day of the week, the women come to anoint Jesus and find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. A young man in white says, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here" (16:6). Connecting this scene with 1 Corinthians 15:1–28, Romans 4:25, Acts 2:32–36, and 1 Peter 1:3–9, what is the resurrection of Christ, why is it essential to the gospel and to the believer's hope, and how does the resurrection ground the Christian's present life and future hope in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the Christian gospel. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive" (1 Corinthians 15:1–6). The gospel is not only that Christ died; it is that He has been raised.

Mark records the resurrection with the same restraint with which he recorded the crucifixion. Early on the first day of the week, the women come with spices to anoint the body. They are worried about who will roll the large stone away. Then they look up and see that the stone has already been rolled back. Entering the tomb, they see a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they are alarmed. He says to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you" (16:6–7). The angel's message includes a particular mention of Peter. The denying disciple has not been forgotten. The risen Christ has him in mind by name.

Why is the resurrection essential to the gospel and to the believer's hope? Several truths converge.

First, the resurrection is the Father's vindication of the Son. Christ was crucified as a criminal. The chief priests and Romans declared Him a fraud, a blasphemer, a failed Messiah. The Father's vindication came in the empty tomb. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:32–33). The resurrection is God's public declaration that Christ is who He said He was.

Second, the resurrection is the proof that the sacrifice was accepted. "Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). The empty tomb is the receipt that the price has been paid in full. Christ has not remained in the grave; the wrath against sin has been borne and exhausted. He lives.

Third, the resurrection is the foundation of justification, regeneration, and resurrection life. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Christianity stands or falls on whether the tomb is empty. The empty tomb says that our faith is not futile, our sins are forgiven, and the new life Christ promised is not a metaphor.

Fourth, the resurrection is the firstfruits of the believer's own resurrection. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:22–23). Christ's body was raised in transformed, glorified form. The same will happen to every disciple at His return. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Fifth, the resurrection is the present source of new life for believers. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). The disciple who has been baptized into Christ has been joined to His death and His resurrection. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in the believer (Ephesians 1:19–20). New life now. Resurrection life later. Both grounded in the empty tomb.

Sixth, the resurrection grounds the believer's hope in suffering and in death. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3–4). The Christian's hope is not vague optimism. It is the living hope grounded in a real historical event: the bodily resurrection of Christ.

For students, the closing chapters of Mark are not the end of the story. They are the beginning. Christ is risen. He is reigning. He is coming again. The disciple who has been walking through twenty weeks of Mark stands now at the empty tomb and hears the angel's message: "He has risen; he is not here." The proper response is worship, surrender, and going.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bodily resurrection of Christ on the third day as a real historical event (Mark 16:1–8; 1 Corinthians 15:1–11)
- The resurrection as the Father's vindication of the Son (Acts 2:32–36; Romans 1:4)
- The resurrection as proof that the sacrifice was accepted and justification accomplished (Romans 4:25)
- Christ as the firstfruits of those who will be raised at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:20–23)
- Union with Christ in His death and resurrection through baptism into Him (Romans 6:3–5)
- The believer's new life now and resurrection life later, both grounded in Christ's resurrection
- The Christian's living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3–9)
- The faithfulness of Christ to His denying disciples, named specifically by the angel ("tell his disciples and Peter", Mark 16:7)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the resurrection of Christ essential to the gospel and to the Christian's hope?
- What does the angel's specific mention of Peter teach about the risen Christ's heart toward His failing disciples?
- How does union with Christ in His death and resurrection through baptism ground the believer's daily new life?

Question 8

Student Question:

The resurrection is not merely a doctrine to be believed but the present reality in which the disciple lives. Where in your own thinking, fearing, and acting are you most prone to live as if Christ had not been raised, and what would the daily, conscious reality of the resurrection change for you in this next season of life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The resurrection of Christ is meant to shape the daily life of every disciple. The danger for long-tenured Christians is that resurrection becomes a doctrine we affirm without it being the air we breathe. We say we believe Christ is risen, and we live, in our actual thinking and fearing, as if He were still in the tomb.

How does living-as-if-Christ-had-not-been-raised show up? Several ways.

It shows up in fear. We fear death as if it were the end of the story. We fear loss as if there were no inheritance kept for us. We fear failure as if our final standing depended on our last performance. We fear the future as if the One we trust were not on the throne.

It shows up in despair. We grieve as those who have no hope. We watch hard providences and conclude that nothing will be made right. We carry shame as though the grave had the final word over our past. We assume our sins are stronger than His blood, our wounds deeper than His resurrection.

It shows up in pride. We act as if we can save ourselves. We perform to earn the favor that has already been freely given. We boast in achievements that the resurrection has put in their proper place.

It shows up in dullness. We treat Sunday as routine. We come to the Lord's Supper distracted. We hear the Word as familiar furniture. We sing the songs of the resurrection without our hearts being moved by what they say.

What would living in the resurrection actually look like for the coming season? Several practices help.

First, deliberate remembering. Begin the day with a sentence: “Christ is risen. He is reigning. He is coming again.” Let that sentence reframe everything before it.

Second, attentive participation in the Lord’s Supper. Every Sunday is a small Easter. We proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). Come attentively. Receive the bread and the cup as truly meeting the risen Christ.

Third, courageous witness. The disciple who knows the tomb is empty has nothing finally to fear. “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28). Speak the gospel openly. Live the gospel openly. Risk the disapproval that fear used to control.

Fourth, hope in grief. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14). The believer is allowed honest grief; the believer is forbidden hopeless grief.

Fifth, joyful obedience. New life in Christ means we are not slaves to sin (Romans 6). The disciple obeys not by gritted teeth but by the power of resurrection life within. The Spirit who raised Christ from the dead dwells in us (Romans 8:11).

Encourage one specific way the resurrection will reshape your week. The fear to lay down. The hope to recover. The witness to offer. The grief to bring honestly into the light. The Sunday to attend with new attentiveness. The lesson is not finished until the resurrection is becoming present, not merely past, in your daily life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Resurrection life as the present reality of the believer (Romans 6:1–14; Colossians 3:1–4)
- Freedom from the fear of death through Christ’s defeat of it (Hebrews 2:14–15; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57)
- Hope in grief grounded in the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; John 11:25–26)
- Courage in witness because Christ has overcome (John 16:33; Matthew 10:28)
- The Lord’s Supper as the church’s weekly proclamation of the risen Christ until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Acts 20:7)
- The Spirit who raised Christ dwelling in the believer (Romans 8:11; Ephesians 1:19–20)

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life are you living as if Christ had not been raised?
- What specific change in your week would put resurrection reality back in the center?
- How does the Lord’s Supper each Sunday help you live in the resurrection?

Question 9

Student Question:

The risen Christ sends His disciples into all the world. “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (16:15–16). Connecting this with Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 2:38, Acts 8:35–38, Acts 22:16, Romans 6:3–5, Galatians 3:26–27, and 1 Peter 3:21, what is the New Testament plan of salvation in clear summary, how does baptism into Christ relate to belief, repentance, and confession of Him as Lord, and how should the church faithfully proclaim this gospel to the whole creation today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark’s account of the Great Commission is shorter than Matthew’s, but it contains one of the clearest statements in the Gospels about the New Testament plan of salvation. “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (16:15–16). The disciples are sent into all the world. The gospel is to be proclaimed to the whole creation. And the response God has appointed is named explicitly: belief and baptism. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

Matthew 28:18–20 fills out the picture. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The disciples are to go, to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them into the triune name, and to teach them everything Christ commanded.

Acts 2 records what this looked like the first time. Peter preached the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ. The hearers were cut to the heart and asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter answered, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:38–39). About three thousand received the word and were baptized (2:41).

The pattern is repeated throughout Acts. Philip preached Christ from Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian asked, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” Philip baptized him in response to his confession of faith in Christ (Acts 8:34–38). Saul of Tarsus, after his encounter with the risen Christ, was told by Ananias, “Why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). The Philippian jailer believed the gospel and was baptized that same night with all his household (Acts 16:30–34). The pattern across Acts is consistent. Hearing, believing, repenting, confessing Christ, being baptized into Him. This is the New Testament plan of salvation.

What is baptism into Christ? Several truths. First, it is by immersion. The Greek word ‘baptizo’ means “to immerse” or “to dip.” The pictures in Acts (going down into the water, coming up out of the water; Acts 8:38–39) and the theology of Romans 6:3–5 (burial and resurrection) require immersion. Second, it is for believers. Throughout Acts those who are baptized are those who have heard, believed, and repented. Baptism is the obedient act of personal faith in Christ. Third, it is into Christ. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3–4). At baptism the believer is united to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Fourth, it is for the forgiveness of sins. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). The forgiveness purchased by Christ on the cross is personally applied to the believer at the moment of obedient baptism into Him. Fifth, it is into His body, the church. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The baptized believer is added to the church of Christ (Acts 2:47).

This is not denominationalism. It is the New Testament pattern, plainly read. It is what every congregation of the Lord’s church should be teaching and practicing today. It is what every person who has not yet responded in this way should be invited to do.

How should the church faithfully proclaim this gospel today? Several truths. First, preach Christ. The gospel is the good news of the death, burial, resurrection, and lordship of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Preach Him. Second, call for response. Do not preach without telling hearers what God has commanded them to do in response. Call for faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ. Third, baptize the responding. The act of baptism is part of the gospel response, not an optional extra. Fourth, teach the baptized. Discipleship continues after baptism. “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Faithful churches do not stop at baptism. They continue teaching, equipping, and shepherding for the rest of life. Fifth, go everywhere. The Great Commission is global. The church of Christ continues to take the gospel to every nation, language, and people, often through ordinary believers going about their ordinary lives with the message of Christ in their hearts and on their lips.

For students closing a twenty-week study of the Gospel of Mark, this question is the doorway out of the classroom. The gospel they have been studying is meant to be heard, believed, repented of, confessed, and obeyed. Some who hear this lesson may not yet have responded in baptism into Christ. The lesson is the right place for that response. Some have responded long ago and are now being called to faithful witness. The lesson is the right place for renewed surrender to that mission. Either way, the chapter does not end at the empty tomb. It ends with going.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Great Commission as the ongoing mission of Christ's church (Mark 16:15–16; Matthew 28:18–20)
- The New Testament plan of salvation: hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repenting of sin, confessing Christ, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Romans 10:9–10; Acts 8:36–38; Romans 6:3–4)
- Baptism by immersion of believers into Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, and into His body the church (Romans 6:3–5; Galatians 3:26–27; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:38, 41, 47)
- Rejection of “sinner’s prayer” alone or any other substitute for the New Testament response of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ
- Continuing faithful discipleship after baptism, teaching observance of all Christ commanded (Matthew 28:20)
- The local congregation as the present expression of Christ’s church, into which the baptized are added (Acts 2:47)
- Christ’s authority over all the nations as the foundation of the church’s confidence in mission (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9–11)
- The continuing call to every disciple to participate in the going, not only specialists

Discussion Prompts

- What is the New Testament plan of salvation in clear summary?
- What is baptism into Christ, and what does Scripture say it accomplishes?
- How should our congregation faithfully proclaim this gospel in our time?

Question 10

Student Question:

The Gospel of Mark ends with the Lord working with His disciples as they go everywhere preaching, the Lord confirming the message by signs that accompanied it (16:20). As you finish this twenty-week study, who is the “whole creation” in your reach (your family, your neighbors, your workplace, your community, the people God has placed in your path), and what is one specific step of obedient witness and faithful Christian life you will take in the coming season because of what you have heard from the Lord through this study?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Gospel of Mark ends with the disciples going out, the Lord working with them, and the message confirmed by accompanying signs (16:20). The story does not end at the empty tomb. It continues in the going. For two thousand years, the church has been doing exactly this: going into all the world, proclaiming the gospel, baptizing those who believe, teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded, and trusting the risen Lord to be with them to the end of the age.

For students who have walked twenty weeks through Mark, this final question is the bridge from the study back into life. The Mark study is over. The disciples' commission to go has just begun.

Who is the "whole creation" in your reach? Most students do not need a mission trip across an ocean to start. The "whole creation" begins right where you are. The family at your table. The neighbors on your street. The coworkers at your job. The classmates at your school. The strangers in your community. The friends in your network. The people God has placed in your path who are not in Christ. The church members who are weary and need to be encouraged. The young believers who need to be discipled. The wandering disciples who need to be brought back. Each of them is part of the whole creation Christ has sent you to.

What is one specific step of obedient witness and faithful Christian life you will take in the coming season because of what you have heard? Help students name something concrete. The conversation with a relative that has been postponed. The invitation to a neighbor to come to worship. The renewed commitment to weekly Bible reading and prayer. The new posture at the Lord's Supper. The act of generosity toward the kingdom. The deeper involvement in the local congregation. The renewed marriage commitment. The forgiveness offered. The sin renounced. The dependence on the Spirit recovered. The baptism into Christ for those who have not yet responded. The mission committed to. The next class enrolled in. The brother or sister discipled. The witness offered.

Close the study with deliberate intention. The Gospel of Mark has been the soil in which the Spirit has been planting seeds for many weeks. The harvest is not in the classroom; it is in the lives outside. Encourage students to write down their one specific commitment, to share it with one trusted brother or sister, and to ask the Lord to make them faithful to it.

Tie the whole study together. The Gospel of Mark opened with the King arriving (Week 1). It closes with the King reigning and sending. We have watched His authority unfold, His teaching land, His compassion meet the needy, His mercy reach the unlikely, His cross paid for the sin of His people, His tomb burst open, and His commission go out. The same Christ who walked the Galilean road is risen and reigning today. The same Christ who sent the eleven sends His church now. The same Christ who promised to be with His disciples to the end of the age is with us as well.

End the lesson with worship and with going. "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs" (16:20). May the same be said of every disciple who has walked through this study, and of every congregation faithful to the Christ of Mark. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The continuing mission of Christ's church across the ages (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8)

- Christ's present help and presence with His sent people (Matthew 28:20; Mark 16:20)
- Every disciple as a participant in the going, not a spectator (1 Peter 2:9; 3:15)
- The local congregation as the sending and supporting community for personal witness
- The Christian life as the ongoing application of the gospel in word and deed (James 1:22–25; Titus 2:11–14)
- The risen Christ as the foundation of all confidence in mission
- Worship of Christ as Lord, with thanksgiving for what He has accomplished and is accomplishing through His people

Discussion Prompts

- Who is the “whole creation” in your reach right now?
- What one specific step of witness and faithful Christian life will you take in the coming season?
- What has the Lord most deeply done in you through this twenty-week study, and how will you honor that work in the next chapter of your life?