

## **WAIT, WAIT, THERE'S MORE: THE UNFINISHED STORIES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

### **UNIT ONE: THIS YOU'VE GOTTA SEE!**

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**OPENING:** I love those commercials that tell you about the product—the miracle knife, the waterproof tape—and when you think they're about done, they then have the classic sentence: "Wait, wait, there's more!" Of course there is. You're not going to pay \$19.95 plus shipping and tax for just the one knife or the one roll of tape. There's got to be more.

But the fun is guessing what the more is going to be. Is it a second knife, maybe a little smaller? Maybe it's another roll of tape and then miracle caulk in a tube. We're near the end of the commercial, but before we can make the sale, we've got to add one thing more.

The Gospel of Mark follows this pattern often. Mark is noted for telling us the beginning of a story and then, before finishing it, giving us something more in a new story. When that one is finished, then we go back to the original story. The two stories have a relationship and the charm in reading is seeing the comparison that comes from the two of them.

Our three part study will take on three of these stories. While Bible commentators debate how many such stories are in Mark, we'll take three that are without question examples of Mark's method. We'll start with a pair of healing miracles joined together, then go to a strange miracle that has a sharp message, and we'll end with two stories that contrast greed and generosity.

Let's start with those commercials: *What commercials do you remember that make that pitch: "Wait, wait, there's more." What is the "more" that usually comes? Does that extra something make the difference for you?*

### **STUDY: READ MARK 5:21-43**

The commercials we've been discussing last only 30 seconds, 60 at the most. There's no time to waste. Perhaps that's why they talk so fast. We can imagine Jairus has the same sort of urgency. We can understand his insistence that Jesus needs to come with him.

*How do you see Jairus as he explains to Jesus what needs to be done for his daughter? How do you think he walks/runs? Does he explain the illness and tell Jesus about his daughter as they hurry along? How do you see Jesus as they go along?*

The key for Jairus is that he needs to get Jesus to his daughter and to do so in time. He needs to be there and soon. How does this seem reasonable as you consider an illness and the way in which it can be cured?

We might have the same feelings and actions as Jairus. We need a nearness of Jesus to the problem and we need to get his full attention. We know others have problems too, but right now, we need to be the center of God's attention. When have you felt that way and why is this such a natural need?

But then we have more! The woman with the bleeding suddenly comes into view. She must have come up behind Jesus and touched him in a brief, shy way, slipping forward and then sliding away.

How is the woman an opposite of Jairus in many ways? How is her expectations of Jesus both different from Jairus and yet also similar, at least in terms of the certainty of healing?

As soon as she touched Jesus, she knew she was healed and Jesus knew it too. If you had asked her, I expect she would have wanted to slip away unnoticed. But Jesus stops all and asks "Who touched me?" Obviously many did, given the amazed answer of the disciples. But Jesus stays rooted and waits for her reply.

How did Jesus ask the question, "Who touched me?" Why did he wait for her to come forward? What reassurance did she need from his words to her?

But we have to feel for Jairus during all this. The waiting for something more must have terrible for him. He wants to get Jesus to his daughter as soon as possible. But now it's too late. The messengers say his daughter is dead. Too late!

But Jesus tells him to not lose heart. What might the woman have said to Jairus at this moment of despair? Why would her experience of healing be valuable now to Jairus?

Jesus comes to the home and dismisses the mourners, though they mock him. He takes only the parents and the immediate circle of disciples. He holds the little girl's hand and tells her to get up. Why make this resurrection miracle so simple, so hidden? Why not let the whole town see this life-from-death miracle?

**APPLY:** I have wondered if the woman who was healed ever met with the little girl raised from the dead. What might they have said to each other about that day and the One who healed them both?

We might often feel like Jairus when Jesus stopped to find the woman. Our needs are desperate and he seems interested only in someone else. What might we learn from the example of the woman and the eventual outcome for Jairus and his daughter?

What seemed at first to be an unneeded extra, something more that only delayed the daughter's healing, actually became the proof of the power of Jesus' healing. We might ask the same question about those interruptions and delays that frustrate us. How might God be using this to become the sign of His power and to also create trust and patience in us?

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### **UNIT TWO: DO IT AGAIN!**

**OPENING:** You can't do just one. Our granddaughter won't let you do just one trick. Do the lift/toss her in the air/spin her around/and catch her on the way down trick. It's great and a little tiring. "Do it again, Grandpa." Maybe one more but Grandpa is getting tired and just a little nervous about making the catch just right again. Two is good, no more.

We have seen Jesus do so many miracles, we likely can't remember them all. Now we're going to see him do one more in Jerusalem during his final week before he dies on the cross. Yes there are miracles on Maundy Thursday, the miracle of the Lord's Supper and the healing of the servant's ear. But during the week from Palm Sunday up to Thursday evening, we might expect miracles to come with his teaching. But what will that one more miracle be? A mass healing, a sign in the heavens with stars and the sun, maybe lifting himself into the air? There are so many possibilities.

*What might have been the one last miracle that Jesus did in the presence of many during that last week before he dies? Who would have been there to see it? What should their reaction have been?*

In this study, we will study the surprisingly simple miracle that Jesus does do. It is the outer half of one of Mark's two-part stories. The power of the miracle will be not only in the work itself but also in the meaning it gives to the extra story that Jesus gives.

### **READ: MARK 11:12-23**

Is the cursing of the fig tree the miracle you expected? If it is, you are amazing. Considering the more frequent miracles of healing diseases, saving disciples from stormy seas, raising the dead and feeding thousands, *how is this cursing of the fig tree different and unexpected?*

*After cursing the tree, what do you expect to happen to the tree?*

*However, what apparently happened to the tree in the moments after Jesus' curse?*

We would wonder why this harsh sentence on a tree, lush with leaves but missing any fruit. However, then we go to the next story, the cleansing of the temple.

How is the temple much like the tree? What is the lush life of the temple that is seen by everyone?

However, what is the missing fruit that Jesus was looking for?

Why would it be natural that Jesus would expect to find the desired fruit there in the temple and among the people of Israel? We might especially remember that this is the end of his ministry so that the people of Israel have had these three years to develop the intended fruit.

Now that the temple is cleansed, it's time to return to the fig tree and to complete the first story. Do you think the disciples were eager to go see the tree? Did they even remember the curse from the day before?

Jesus takes the disciples to see the tree in order that he might make a lesson from both the tree and yesterday's temple cleansing. But first the surprise of the disciples comes. How do you imagine Peter said v. 21? Why would this be so surprising for Peter?

The point of cursing the fig tree was to provide a backdrop and serious warning for the cleansing of the temple. The temple was to bear fruit but it had become an empty tree. If someone discounted this cleansing, then let the cursed tree be a warning. What is the serious warning that comes from the cursed fig tree? When God looks for fruit and finds none, how serious is that?

But the remarkable turn in the study is two-fold. First, Jesus could have easily said only the message of warning we just described. Instead, his words to the disciples in v. 22 through 24 are about faith and receiving gifts in prayer. Why would Jesus focus this miracle on the need for faith and the power of prayer?

The second key point is the cursed tree itself. The cursed, dead tree is the miracle. What good is a dead tree? That's the point, of course. Given the coming of Good Friday, why might a cursed dead tree early in the week be a fitting miracle and a sign of what is to come?

**APPLY:** We have seen many miracles by Jesus but we might still yearn for one more. How might this miracle of the tree calm our desire for another miracle beyond what we've seen?

How might the image of a dead tree be the answer we need and also be the focus of the faith that Jesus gives us, vv. 22-24?

Knowing that Jesus has this immediate power and that he looks for true fruit, what might we ask for in prayer?

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### **UNIT THREE: YOU'LL NEVER FORGET THIS ONE**

**OPENING:** The old saying is, "If a little is good, then more must be better." Well, maybe. Sometimes this works and sometimes, more is just more and just too much.

*When has a little been good and more has actually been a good thing? On the other hand, when was a little of something just right and more was too much?*

In this third study, we're going to meet a woman who definitely believed that a little was good and more, much more, was better. She made a memorable evening for Jesus and for all of us who read her account. But her story is the middle of another of Mark's paired stories. Before we get to her wonderful work, we must go to the complete opposite setting with people whose hearts as far from her as can be.

### **READ MARK 14:1-11**

First we have to start in the darkness. We have known that this plot was coming since we've known of the desire to kill Jesus already back in Mark 3:6. But now the plan has become immediate. Jesus is no longer in the distant region of Galilee but he has come to Jerusalem at the busy time of Passover. With that pressure, the plot has to accelerate.

*How do you see the meeting in vv. 1-2? Where is it? Is the door open or closed? How are their voices? Are they confident or frustrated?*

They fear an uproar from the people if the betrayal is done badly. How strange that this is their fear. *Given what we know of Jesus and whose Son he is, what might we tell them is their true fear? "Don't worry about the crowd. If you do this, I'll tell you who you need to fear..."*

But then the scene changes. We know nothing of the setting of the dinner other than it was a meal apparently open for the woman to come in on her own. Her perfume cost the equivalent of 300 days' work. This was a very compact treasure! In opening the vial as she did, it was all going to be poured out.

What contrasts do you imagine here as she pours out the perfume amidst the complaints of v. 4-5? When else have we seen times like this where the actions of Jesus are done in a setting of anger or danger?

Jesus comes to her defense. They can always help the poor, though we must wonder if such hard-hearted people have any actual care for the poor. But the poor who they can't see will remain. The Savior they have today will soon be gone.

Why is it striking that Jesus defends the woman for her gift even while he reminds them of his own coming death?

Jesus says that this will be remembered for as long as the Gospel is spoken. Yes, we read of this gift still today. We might also imagine that this gift of perfume itself endured for that week and perhaps lingered even onto Good Friday. What a contrast: the head that wears the bitter crown of thorns was also still fragrant from the perfume.

Now we return to the first story and the finding of one to betray Jesus. Perhaps the gift of the perfume and the apparent waste of this small fortune prompted the jealousy and greed of Judas. Losing the opportunity for the 300 denarii, he snatches for the silver. The money he had, but still he had to look for the opportune time.

What an exchange: In his hand Judas has the silver, but he must deliver Jesus in order to keep this small fortune. He cannot keep both: the silver and the Savior. It is one or the other. What would we say to Judas as he seeks to finish this exchange? What would the generous woman with the perfume say to him?

**APPLY:** This has been an episode of too much and too little. The perfume poured out so extravagantly seemed too much, but it was just enough. The small fortune that Judas grasped was far too little for the trade which he made.

What has seemed too much, too much to give, and yet it was the right amount in the end?

*On the other hand, when have you grasped what seemed enough, only to find that it was too soon gone, too soon too little?*

On the other hand, we can go to the dinner with the generous woman and stand in awe of her faith and generosity which saw Jesus, not as a lost cause, but as the Savior giving his life as a perfect, pleasing sacrifice for us all.