

10 studies on
Mark's Gospel

For 1 to 1 study with
Chinese friends

Prepared for the Return

Contents

Introduction	3
1. Mark 1:1-15	4
2. Mark 1:16-39	6
3. Mark 2:1-12	8
4. Mark 7:1-23	10
5. Mark 8:22-9:1	12
6. Mark 10:13-31	14
7. Mark 10:32-45	17
8. Mark 12:1-12	19
9. Mark 15:1-39	22
10. Mark 15:40-16:8	25
Appendices	27

Introduction

Aim of this resource

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). We want our friends to hear about Jesus and come to trust in him - and God's word is the most effective tool he has given us for this work. But often we don't know how to go about introducing our friends to the Bible.

This resource is designed to help Christians study the Bible one-to-one with non-Christian friends (although it could also be used for group study). It is a series of 10 simple Bible studies which go through Mark's Gospel explaining the good news of Jesus Christ. The questions can be used just as they are, or adapted as you wish to suit the context you are using it in.

The Bible studies are particularly designed as an introduction for Chinese people who may have had very little previous contact with Christianity. They seek to engage with the way many Chinese people have been brought up to think about the world, and to present Jesus in a way that resonates with this.

Features of this resource

Each study begins with a Main Point, summarising the main lesson to drive home from the passage.

Mark's Gospel slowly reveals the answers to three big questions: **Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus come? What does Jesus demand?** These studies trace the three questions through the book, giving a sense of continuity and building up to a full picture of Jesus Christ. You could write each question on a piece of paper and add to the answer each week. Red letters in these notes indicate a new piece of information to be added.

Suggestions for making the most of this resource

The ten passages selected here have been chosen to cover as fully as possible the message of Mark's Gospel. However, our friends will learn more about Jesus if they read the whole Gospel, so you could encourage them to read on their own the parts that are not covered. Each time you meet to study, start by asking them if they have any questions from the part they read by themselves.

If you are interested in studying Mark's Gospel in greater depth or with a group of Chinese Christians, we have also produced some leaders' notes which can be downloaded [here](#).

Study 1 Mark 1:1-15

Main Point: Jesus is important news!

Introduce Mark's Gospel using the Olympic Games illustration (see Appendix 1)

Starter Question: If you asked people back in China to think of 3 words to describe Jesus, what might they say?

Read Mark 1:1-15.

1. Who is Jesus, according to...

Mark	The Prophets	John	God

a) **Mark?** *The Christ (= King); the Son of God (v1)*

Who else says that Jesus is the Son of God? *God (v11)*

This title is full of meaning - read Psalm 2, especially verses 6-8. God's Son is a king reigning over the whole world!

b) **The prophets?** (v2-3 are quotations from prophets, who wrote their message 700/500 years before Jesus was born)

What will the messenger (v2) and 'voice' (v3) do?

- *Prepare the way for someone to come: the LORD.*

The original context of the quotations (Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3) tells us that when the LORD comes he will do two things: save his people, and judge unrighteousness.

But what does this have to do with Jesus? Let's find out...

c) **John?**

What does John teach?

- *v4 A 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'; someone far mightier than John will come after him*

What links are there between v2-3 and v4-8?

- *John is the messenger in the wilderness who prepares the way for the LORD.*

--> *Jesus is the promised LORD, come to save and judge*

d) **God?** *See above: the Son of God*

Who is Jesus?

The King, promised by God

2. Why did Jesus come, according to...

a) **John?** *To baptise with the Holy Spirit (v8)* (this is associated in the Old Testament with cleansing from sin)

John prepared for Jesus by calling people to 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. This suggests that Jesus has come to build on this work

At this point it is worth giving a brief explanation of the meaning of the word 'sin', perhaps using Psalm 2:1-3: sin means rebelling against God's authority, as the people in Psalm 2 do. Later weeks will help answer this question more fully, so keep reading to understand more!

b) **Jesus?** *To proclaim 'the gospel of God' - i.e. that the kingdom of God is at hand (v14-15)*

3. What does Jesus ask people to do?

- *Repent and believe in the gospel*

Where else have we seen the word gospel (gospel = good news)? *v1,14.*

What is this good news? (v1) *That Jesus is the promised King*

4. What unanswered questions are you left with?

(write these down)

- What kind of king is Jesus?
- What is the kingdom of God like?
- What does it mean to repent?
- What does it mean to believe the gospel?

... These are all questions which Mark will answer as we keep reading.

Sum up: Jesus is the promised King, come to deal with sin: this is big, good news.

5. a) When thinking about kings, what ideas might people from China have in their head?

- *Tyrannical, distant, violent, oppressive*

b) Why is a good king good news?

- *Great power used for the sake of helping others is a wonderful thing!*

6. How would you describe the Jesus of this passage in 3 words?

- *Important, mighty, authoritative, divine...* (Contrast with the Starter Question)

7. How does this introduction make you want to continue reading Mark?

Why did Jesus come?

- To save his people
- To judge unrighteousness
- To cleanse from sin
- To proclaim good news

What does Jesus demand?

- Repent
- Believe

Study 2 Mark 1:16-39

Main Point: Jesus has amazing authority (but his main purpose is to preach)

Starter Question: What people can you think of who have authority? How do people respond to them?

E.g. a respected teacher or boss; the leader of a country; a senior family member.

1. Fill in the table:

	Who is involved?	How do the people respond?	What do we learn about Jesus?
16-20	<i>Fishermen</i>	<i>Leave everything and follow him</i>	<i>He calls people, and they listen!</i>
21-28	<i>People in synagogue; unclean spirit</i>	<i>Astonished, amazed! His fame spreads Spirit obeys Jesus</i>	<i>He teaches with authority; he commands evil spirits with authority; he opposes evil</i>
29-34	<i>Simon's mother-in-law; whole city</i>	<i>Bring many people to Jesus</i>	<i>He has great power to heal and cast out demons</i>

In going through the table, you may want to use the following questions or explanations:

- Explain 'Sabbath' (v21): a weekly day of rest in the Jewish religion, when people gathered together for teaching.
- The person you are studying with may well ask: *Why does Jesus not want the spirits to say who he is?* (v25,34). This is a good question - and it is a theme that reappears throughout the first half of Mark's Gospel as Jesus commands those he helps not to tell anyone about himself. Mark doesn't tell us the answer to this question yet - so why not write the question down and revisit it later? We'll get to the answer in chapter 8 (see Study 5)!
- Note the time markers: v21-34 all happen in one day!
- Imagine if this happened in Beijing or Shanghai: a man turned up who could heal all kinds of diseases. How would people respond?

Evil Spirits/ Unclean Spirits/ Demons

The person you are studying with may well have questions about these: what are they; do they really exist??

- Mark clearly presents them as a reality, not an outdated superstition.
- The main point Mark wants us to grasp is that Jesus has power to overcome evil spirits - therefore he has power to overcome evil.
- The person you're studying with may be skeptical about the existence of spiritual forces of evil - but they are still likely to believe in evil. While we want them to see that the Bible teaches that evil spirits really exist, this is not a point to have a long discussion over. Focus on how amazing it is that Jesus has authority over evil - and point out that this clearly shows he is on the side of good.
- This is especially good news for anyone who fears the power of evil spirits or ghosts: they do not need to fear, as Jesus is stronger than evil.

2. Revisit these **unanswered questions** from the previous study:

a) What kind of king is Jesus?

- *He has authority; he is good, doing amazing things to help others. This passage helps us understand what it means that Jesus is "the Christ" (Mark 1:1)*

Who is Jesus?

The King, promised by God
Has authority

b) What is the kingdom of God like?

- *Like the scene described here: a place where Jesus has complete authority, and will end all evil and illness. This is wonderful!*

3. Read v35-39. What is surprising in these verses?

(Why has Jesus come?)

Jesus says that his priority is to preach, not to do more miracles!

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people
To judge unrighteousness
To cleanse from sin
To proclaim good news - **more important than miracles!**

We may be wondering about the content of Jesus' preaching - Mark has already summarised this for us back in 1:14-15, so this is a good opportunity to be reminded of Jesus' core message: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"*. We still don't really know what it means to repent and believe in the gospel, but we have learnt more about what the kingdom of God is like.

However, v38 suggests that the kingdom will not be established through Jesus doing lots of miracles. The miracles are just a taster, to help us understand the real thing. They are a bit like a show home: it shows us what the completed house will be like and attracts us to live in it - but it is just a model, not yet the real thing.

4. How does this passage make you feel about Jesus?

Study 3 Mark 2:1-12

Main Point: King Jesus came to forgive sin - our greatest need!

Starter Question: What answers would your friends give if you did a survey asking “What is the biggest problem facing our world today?”

1. What do you think the paralysed man wanted Jesus to do for him?

How much did he want this? (v1-4)

- *He wanted Jesus to heal him. He was desperate for this - he even came down through the roof when there was no room to enter through the door!*

2. How do you think the paralysed man would feel when he heard Jesus’ words in v5? Why?

- *Surprised - he didn’t come to Jesus to have his sins forgiven!*

3. How do the scribes respond to this? Why do they respond in this way? (v6-7)

- *They say that Jesus is ‘blaspheming’, which means telling lies about God.*
- *Jesus forgave the man’s sin - but the scribes say that this is something only God can do.*

4. What do you think when you hear the word “sin”?

This is a chance for you to gauge what your friend thinks “sin” means. Depending on how they reply, you can use the suggestions in the box below to help explain what the Bible means by “sin”.

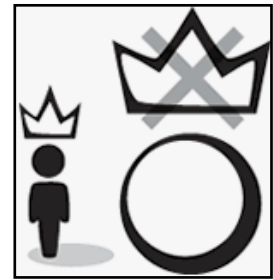
Explaining Sin

This passage introduces sin as an important concept in Mark’s gospel, so it is important that we explain clearly what Jesus means by “sin” and why it is such a big problem. The Chinese word for sin (*zui* 罪) has the connotations of “crime”, so when a Chinese person reads Mark 2:5 (“My son, your sins are forgiven”), they may be wondering *What terrible crime did this paralysed man commit??* Certainly, a non-Christian Chinese person is unlikely to consider him or herself to be a sinner. Therefore it is important to consider how to explain sin in a way that shows it is a universal problem.

Rather than defining sin as the bad things we do, explaining sin in terms of a relationship is more likely to resonate with our Chinese friends. You could build on the ideas of kingship and authority which have been introduced in Mark, explaining that God is the rightful, loving King of our lives, and sin is saying to God that we don’t want him to be King - we want to be our own king. This definition of sin is backed up by the scribes’ reaction in 2:7 “*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” They are saying that all sin is an offense against God, therefore only God has the right to forgive sin. Just like if I kicked you, only you would have the right to forgive me - it would be crazy for an

onlooker to say “I forgive you”! The second picture from the Two Ways to Live gospel outline (see illustration*) explains the idea of sin very clearly: saying “No” to God’s kingly authority and wanting to be my own king instead.

Likening our relationship with God to the relationship between a father and child is likely to resonate even more deeply with Chinese people, who have a deep-seated sense that it is right to honour and love our parents (“filial piety”). Sin is us, the child, saying to God, our loving Father, that we do not want to have a relationship with him, despite all his goodness to us. You can think of some creative examples to help people feel how shocking this is!



*More information about this gospel outline can be found at <http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/2wtl/>

5. What is the answer to Jesus’ question in v9?

- *Both are things that only God can do - they are equally impossible for anyone else to do. The onlookers can’t see that Jesus has forgiven the man’s sin, but they can see him heal the man. Therefore by healing the man, Jesus proves that he has the authority to forgive sin - an authority that must have come from God. This shows in more detail what it means that Jesus is “the Christ”.*

Son of Man

Jesus refers to himself as the ‘Son of Man’ in v10. This is a title used in Daniel 7:13-14 to refer to a man to whom God gives eternal dominion over all nations - this is a very powerful man! It’s a very meaningful title, and by calling himself the Son of Man, Jesus is claiming great authority.

6. a) What does Jesus think is the man’s biggest problem?

b) How would Jesus answer “What is the biggest problem facing our world today?”

7. Look back at 1:38. How does this passage help us understand why Jesus’ priority is to preach, not heal?

- *Jesus has come to solve a deeper problem than illness: sin. His preaching helps people to understand their need for his forgiveness - therefore it is more important than healing.*

8. Why is it good news that sins can be forgiven?

Who is Jesus?

The King, promised by God
He has authority to forgive sins, as the
“Son of Man”

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people - by forgiving sin
To judge unrighteousness
To proclaim good news

Study 4 Mark 7:1-23

Main Point: External cleansing is useless: uncleanness comes from our hearts

Starter Question: What sort of actions make a person very 'religious'?
(e.g. burning incense, making offerings etc)

1. How would you describe the Pharisees?

- *Keep lots of rules*
- *Very religious*
- *Hypocritical*

2. What is the Pharisees' attitude to God's commandments and human tradition? (fill in table)

God's commandments	Human Tradition
<i>Leave (8)</i>	<i>Hold to (8)</i>
<i>Reject (9)</i>	<i>Establish (9)</i>
<i>Make void (13)</i>	<i>Hand down (13)</i>

(How does the example in v10-13 illustrate this attitude?)

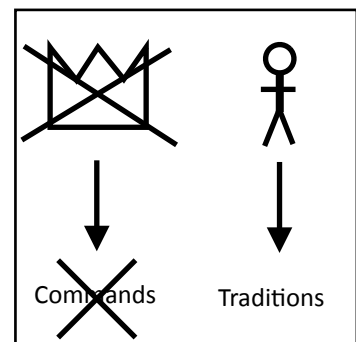
3. According to the Pharisees, what makes a person clean?

- *Having clean hands (and other religious observances)*

"Unclean/defiled" = Dirty in God's eyes. To be "unclean" was very serious, as this meant that one was not in a good relationship with God.

4. What was the Pharisees' relationship with God like?

- *Their hearts were far from him (v6)*
- *See picture: rejecting God's word meant rejecting God himself. Even though they seemed so religious, they were in fact miles away from God.*



5. Read v14-23: According to Jesus, what makes a person unclean?

- *Not external things (v15)...*
- *... But an unclean heart (v20-23)*
- *In the previous study we started to look at the idea of "sin" (Mark 2:5). This passage helps us define sin: having an unclean heart in God's eyes.*

6. How does Jesus' description of the human heart make you feel?

7. Why were the Pharisees' religious traditions useless?

- *They were merely external, and could not solve the true problem: human hearts.*

8. Think back to the religious actions we mentioned at the start.

How much can they help us? Why?

- *They are useless, as they are also merely external. The following illustration might help you explain this point:*

Imagine that you are on the bus going to work, when suddenly the person next to you is sick all over you! What would you do?

... Would you pretend to ignore it, hoping that no one else will notice, and continue on your way to work? Of course not!

... Would you take out some perfume, spray it all over you to cover the smell, and continue on your way to work? Of course not!

... Rather, you would get off the bus, go home, have a shower (or two), change your clothes, and only then go to work.

So what will we do with our dirty hearts? Ignore them? Try to cover them up with some religious activity? Or will we realise that we need a drastic solution - a new heart?

9. How does Jesus' diagnosis of the human heart differ from what we tend to think?

These questions might help you think this through:

- **Why can education not solve the problem of human evil?**
- **Do you think that Jesus would say people are born good or evil?**

10. Revisiting unanswered questions:

a) Study 1: What does it mean to repent?

- *To recognise that my own heart is dirty before God, and that religious actions cannot solve the problem.*

b) Study 3: How does this help us understand why Jesus' priority was to forgive, not heal illness?

- *Our problem is deeper than physical illness - we have sinful hearts. By forgiving sin, Jesus tackles the root problem.*

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people by forgiving sin -
**this is something we all need because
our hearts are sinful**

To judge unrighteousness

To proclaim good news

What does Jesus demand?

Repent - **this means to recognise our
own sinfulness**

Believe

Study 5 Mark 8:22-9:1

Main Point: Jesus Christ must suffer and die; so must his followers

Starter Question: When I say 'king' or 'emperor', what sort of person do you think of? What would it feel like to be one of his followers?

Read 8:22-26

1. What is unusual about the healing miracle here?

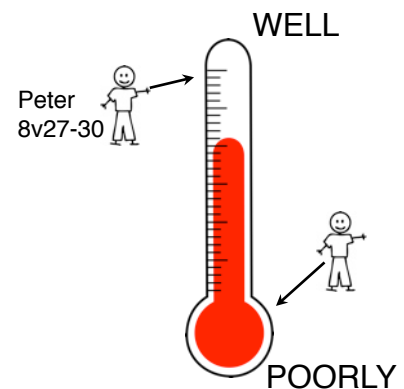
- *Jesus only half heals the man at first... He seems to need two attempts!*

What's wrong: is Jesus a little tired, needs an energy boost? No! He's shown himself capable of doing huge miracles already in Mark's Gospel... So why does he choose to heal this man in two stages? We will revisit this question at the end.

Read 8:27-30

2. a) How good do you think Peter feels about himself at this point?

- *(Use the Mood Chart, right) He probably feels pleased with himself answering Jesus' question correctly!*



b) Why is what Peter says in v29 so significant?

- *Look back to Mark 1:1: the big point of Mark's Gospel is that Jesus is the Christ (Christ = promised King).*
- *If you have been reading the 'extra bits' between the last few studies, you'll notice that the disciples fail again and again to understand who Jesus is (4:35-41, 6:45-52, 8:14-21). It's amazing that Peter suddenly gets it right!*

c) Remember our answer to the Starter Question. What do you think Peter expects that life will be like for Jesus and his followers?

3. Read 8:31-9:1

a) How do you think Peter feels about himself now? (Show this on the Mood Chart)

b) Fill in the table:

	NOW	FUTURE
Not follow Jesus	Life	Death forever
Follow Jesus	Suffering	Life forever

c) What is life *really* like as Jesus' follower?

To "deny self" means to stop living for ourselves and what we want, and instead to live for Jesus and what he wants.

d) How does this passage help you understand what changes might happen in your life if you became a Christian?

Examples: Standing up for Jesus when family or friends disapprove of you being a Christian. Obeying Jesus' teaching about money/relationships/lying etc... even when it seems inconvenient!

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people by forgiving sin - this is something we all need because our hearts are sinful
To judge unrighteousness
To proclaim good news
To die and rise

What does Jesus demand?

Repent - this means to recognise our own sinfulness
Believe **that he is the Christ**
To die and rise with him

4. a) Why do you think Peter found this so hard to accept?

- *If Jesus is a great king, how can it be that he will die?? (this question is not answered until later in Mark's Gospel...)*

b) Why do we also find it hard to accept?

c) How does this challenge what we often think about 'religion'?

- *Christianity is not a philosophy that we add on to our lives to make us feel more satisfied. Becoming a Christian is not like a smartphone app: we can easily download an app that we think will make life easier, and just as easily delete it if we don't like it. Rather it is a complete life change; it means being willing to give up everything to put Jesus first.*

d) Following Jesus sounds so hard - why would anyone choose to do it?!

- *The things we must give up are temporary, but the life we will gain is eternal.*
- *Jesus first went this route of dying and rising.*
- *Jesus is wonderful: it is worth making sacrifices in order to follow someone like this!*

Remember the healing of the blind man at the start... Just as Jesus gave him sight in two stages, so Jesus gives Peter faith in two stages. Peter now believes that Jesus is the Christ, but he cannot yet believe that the Christ must suffer and die. This emphasises that:

1. It's important to believe two key things about Jesus: he is the Christ, and he must die.
2. Like Peter, we often find the truth about Jesus hard to accept because we are spiritually blind. We *cannot* believe just by trying really hard.

Response:

Perhaps there are things you've learnt about Jesus that you find difficult to believe.

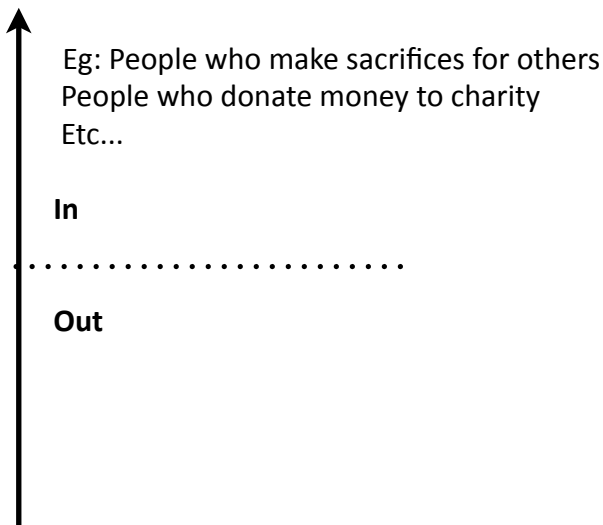
Why not ask Jesus to do a miracle in you and make you able to believe that Jesus is the Christ, who must die, and who demands his followers to suffer with him?

Study 6 Mark 10:13-31

Main Point: Humbly receive the kingdom; no one can earn it

Starter Question: What might people in China say if you asked them: "If there is such a place as heaven, who is most likely to get in?"

You could illustrate this on a diagram:



Read verses 13-16

1. a) Why do you think the disciples wanted to stop people bringing little children to Jesus?

- *In the culture of Jesus' time, children were the most insignificant people, so the disciples may have thought that Jesus was too important to spend time with children. In order to understand this, we should note that their view of children was opposite to many of our cultures, where children are often the centre of attention.*

b) Why does Jesus welcome the children?

- *He says that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like little children*

--> Look back to Study 2 and remember what we learnt there about the **kingdom of God**: it is a place where Jesus has complete authority and will end all illness and evil. It is similar to what we often describe as "heaven".

Look at v15: "*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*"

c) Think of a child you know, and imagine you offered them a toy or some sweets. What would they do? How would they receive it?

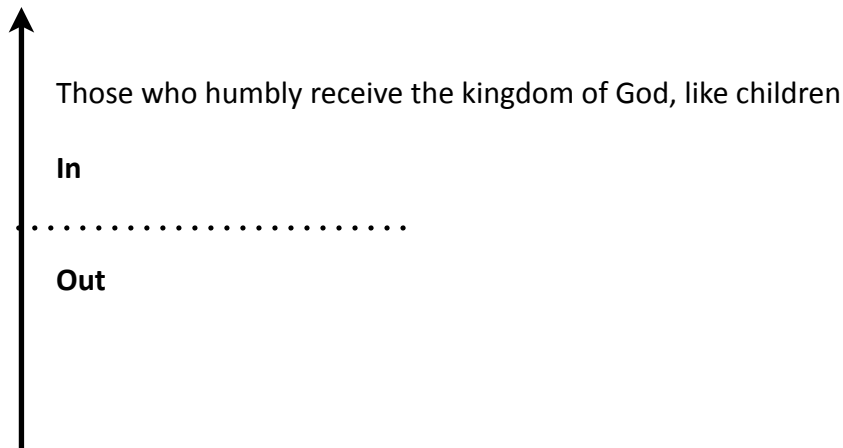
- *Children receive things eagerly, not offering to pay for the gift!*

d) So what does it mean to receive the kingdom of God like a child?

- *To recognise we have nothing to contribute to the kingdom, and receive it as a gift.*

- (Note: Jesus' point here is not that children are pure or innocent - Jesus has already made clear in chapter 7 (see Study Four) that all of us have dirty hearts before God; this includes children.)

Add this to the diagram:



Read 10:17-22

2. a) What does the man want? (v17)

- *Eternal life. This is the same concept as the kingdom of God; his question could also be phrased: "What must I do to enter the kingdom of God?"*

b) How good is he?

- Try to place him on the diagram - do you think he is good enough to enter the kingdom?
- Why/why not?
 - *He has kept all the commandments in v19 - he is a very moral person.*

When Jesus refers to "the commandments" in v19, he is quoting from the 10 commandments that God gave the Jewish people 1500 years previously. However, he does not quote all of them - most significantly, he omits the first commandment: "I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2-3).

c) Has the man kept this commandment? How do you know?

- *In v21 Jesus gives the man a choice: his wealth, or following Jesus. In v22 we see that the man chooses his wealth. He loves his wealth more than he loves God - and so he has failed to keep the first commandment. Wealth is his god.*

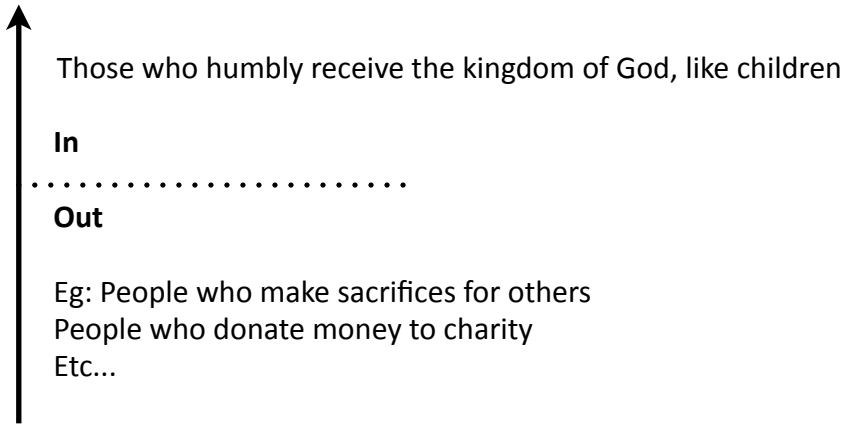
Read 10:23-31

3. a) Why are the disciples amazed in v24 and v26?

- *This man seems so good: he is very moral and he is rich. In Jesus' time, people often saw wealth as a sign that someone was blessed by God. But even he is not good enough!*

b) What is the answer to the disciples' question in v26: "Who then can be saved?"

- *It is impossible for anyone to be good enough. But God can make it possible for people to be saved (v27).*
- *Show this on the diagram:*



To help convey the shocking impact of what Jesus is saying, you could compare this rich young man to the people who feature on the Chinese television show *People Who Move China* (感动中国), which recognises ten people each year who have made contributions to society and moved people by their sacrifices on behalf of others. However, according to Jesus' words even these outstanding men and women are not good enough to enter God's kingdom, because God's standard is 100%.

- 4. a) What is the difference between the man's attitude, and the attitude of little children (v15)?**
- *The man came to Jesus thinking that he could do something to earn eternal life. But Jesus said that we can only have eternal life if we receive it like little children, not attempting to earn it, pay for it, or be good enough for it, but accepting it as a gift.*

- b) **In v21** Jesus asked the man to give away all his wealth, to reveal that wealth was this man's god. He doesn't ask every Christian to give all their money away - but **what question might Jesus ask you to determine whether you deserve the kingdom?**
- *Eg: Would you sacrifice your career for Jesus? Would you risk your relationship with your family for Jesus? Would you be willing for others to ridicule you for Jesus?*

5. What would Jesus say in response to these comments:

- a) "Christianity's just like Buddhism - they're both ways of living a good life."
- b) "I'm embarrassed to receive so much from God; I want to rely on myself too."

This passage has not yet answered the question:
How can people be saved?
 But we have seen hints already in Mark's Gospel: Jesus told us he has come to forgive sins, and that he must die and rise from the dead. Keep reading to learn how these things fit together!

What does Jesus demand?

Repent - this means to recognise our own sinfulness. **Therefore we cannot earn our way into God's kingdom; we must humbly receive it as a gift**

Believe that he is the Christ
 To die and rise with him

Study 7 Mark 10:32-45

Main Point: Jesus will save people by dying as a ransom - so trust him

1. Read verses 32-34: What do we learn about Jesus' death?

- *Details: he will be mocked, spat on and whipped.*
- *These details suggest a criminal's death, as does the word 'condemn' (v33).*

2. Read verses 35-45:

a) What do James and John want Jesus to do for them?

- *They want the highest positions in Jesus' kingdom.*

b) How do you feel about their request?

- *It is shocking that they only care about their own glory - we can understand why the other disciples were 'indignant' (v41). It is especially shocking after what Jesus has just told them about how much he will suffer in verses 32-34.*

c) How do James and John form a contrast with Jesus?

- *James and John seek to be greater than others; Jesus came to serve others.*

3. a) What do we learn about Jesus' death from v35-45?

- *He will die as a 'ransom for many'.*
- *'Ransom' = a price paid to set someone or something free. For example, if someone was a slave, their relative could pay a 'ransom price' to the owner to set the slave free.*
- *This means that Jesus' death will be a price paid to set people free.*

Old Testament Background

In v38 Jesus refers to his death as a 'cup' that he will drink. In the Old Testament the imagery of drinking from a cup usually referred to being punished by God (for example, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15-16). This suggests that his death will be a punishment from God.

b) From what you have read in Mark's Gospel so far, what do people need set free from?

- *Chapter 7 showed us that people have unclean hearts: we have rejected God and are unacceptable to him. Chapter 10 showed us our inability to earn eternal life. Rather than eternal life, we deserve eternal death. So we need set free from sin and death.*

4. Re-read Mark 10:26-27: Jesus says that with man it is impossible for anyone to be saved, but that God can do the impossible.

From this passage, how will God do the impossible?

- *People can be saved through Jesus' death as a ransom: he will 'pay' the death that we deserve, so that we can have the life he deserves. He will take punishment like a criminal, even though he is innocent.*

5. **So why must Jesus die?** (unanswered question from ch8)

- *He must die as our substitute, so that our sins can be forgiven.*

This is a very important idea which is right at the heart of understanding the gospel, so it is worth spending time making sure your friend has clearly understood it. You could think of an illustration to help explain the idea of one person taking another's punishment to set the first person free.

6. **How would you now answer the man's question in 10:17: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

- *There is nothing we can do ourselves. We can only have eternal life through Jesus' death in our place. As we saw in the last study, we must accept Jesus' offer of eternal life "like a child" - by trusting Jesus.*

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people by forgiving sin - this is something we all need because our hearts are sinful. He will do this by **dying as a ransom** and rising
To judge unrighteousness
To proclaim good news

If you have time... you could read verses 46-52. Notice that v51 is the same as v36.

- How does Bartimaeus' request contrast with James and John's?
- How does this help us understand what it means to have 'faith'? (v52)

- *Faith is to recognise we are helpless, and to cry out to Jesus to have mercy on us.*

7. **What would you say to someone who said that Jesus' death was just a good example, to inspire us to be kind to others?**

- *Jesus' death is so much more than a good example: he died to set us free from sin and death so that we can have forgiveness and eternal life.*

Study 8 Mark 12:1-12

Main Point: Honour God by honouring his Son Jesus, the righteous judge.

Start by explaining the background to this incident: Jesus is speaking to the Jewish religious leaders who challenge his authority. He tells them a story... **Read 12:1-12.**

1. Would you say this story has a happy ending or a sad ending? Why?

(At the end of v8 who seems to have won? What about end of v9?)

2. What words would you use to describe:

- a) the tenants? *Disrespectful, unreasonable - shocking!*
- b) the owner? *Patient, fair, not to be messed with!*

Imagine a modern day equivalent: your father lives in the UK, but has a house in China which he lets out to a group of tenants - but after signing the contract and moving in they refuse to pay the rent! He texts them, emails them, phones them - but no reply. He contacts the letting agency and asks them to send someone round to collect the rent. Not only do the tenants refuse to pay up - they are incredibly rude to the agent. The agency sends someone else round - and this time the tenants beat him up. Wanting to give the tenants another chance before calling the police, your father finally sends round your older brother - surely the tenants will respect him?? But, thinking that once the landlord's son is out of the way the house will be theirs' to enjoy, they kill your brother.

This is shocking behaviour!

3. Look at verse 12: How do the religious leaders react to Jesus's story?

4. Who do the different people in the story represent? (You may need to explain some of this)

- a) Tenants? *Jewish religious leaders*
- b) Owner? *God*
- c) Servants? *Prophets - messengers that God send to the Jews. Include John the Baptist*
- d) Son? *Jesus*
- e) 'Others' (v9)? *Non-Jews*

This is a good summary of the Old Testament where God patiently sent messengers again and again to warn his disobedient people, the Jews. A vineyard was often used in the Old Testament to represent God's people, Israel - so we know that this story is about the Jewish people. If you want to read more about this you could look at Isaiah 5:1-7 (but it will probably be too confusing if you turn to it during the study).

5. a) What similarities do v10-11 have with v7-9?

(v7-8 What is the tenants' attitude to the son?)

b) How does this help us understand what will happen to Jesus in the end?

- *Jesus will be seen to be victorious ('cornerstone' = most important stone) and he will judge (v9; see Mark 13:24-27 for more on this)*

Verses 10-11 assume that Jesus will rise from the dead - otherwise, he could not become the 'cornerstone'.

6. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for the people who reject him?

- *He will punish them*
- *He will give the 'vineyard' to others*

7. a) This story was originally told about Jewish religious leaders. What does it teach us about their attitude to God?

- *They reject God's Son, which is equivalent to rejecting God himself.*

b) In what ways are we like them? (Why did they kill the son?)

- *We often want to enjoy the good things of God's world, while ignoring God himself*

8. According to this passage, why is it so serious to reject Jesus?

- *Rejecting Jesus represents rejecting God*
- *Rejecting Jesus has serious consequences: God will judge and reject us*

What does Jesus demand?

Repent - this means to recognise our own sinfulness and inability to earn our way into God's kingdom. Rather, we need Jesus to die in our place
Believe that he is the Christ who died as our ransom
To die and rise with him
Honour Jesus as God's Son

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people by forgiving sin - this is something we all need because our hearts are sinful. He will do this by dying as a ransom and rising
To judge unrighteousness - **particularly, to judge those who reject him**
To proclaim good news

This passage might make people question why the father in the story sent his son to the vineyard. This could seem like an unloving, irresponsible way for a father to treat his son.

- Firstly, be prepared for this question, and be ready with an answer if it comes up! Verse 6 makes it clear that the father loves his son and expects the tenants to respect him, not harm him. However, don't let this issue distract you from the main point.
- You can use this question as an opportunity to emphasise how close the relationship between father and son is, and therefore to show that disrespecting the son is equivalent to disrespecting the father. The father does not let them get away with this! This helps to emphasise the point that we cannot claim to have a good relationship with God if we reject his Son Jesus.

Study 9 Mark 15:1-39

Main Point: See Jesus die as a ransom, and believe that he is King

Starter question: If you asked friends back in China “what makes a person ‘great’”, what answers might they give?

1. Table:

Characters	Attitude to Jesus
<i>Religious leaders (chief priests, elders, scribes, Council)</i>	<i>Envy; hate Jesus; arrange his death v1,10,11. Mock him v31-32</i>
<i>Pilate</i>	<i>Believes he is innocent, but condemns him because he fears the crowd v15</i>
<i>Crowd/ passers-by</i>	<i>Influenced by others, they call for Jesus to be crucified v11-15. Mock Jesus v29-30</i>
<i>Soldiers</i>	<i>Mock Jesus v16-20</i>
<i>Centurion</i>	<i>Recognises Jesus is the Son of God v39</i>

2. What titles are given to Jesus in this passage?

- *King of the Jews/Christ (2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32)*
- *Son of God (39)*

--> Look back to Mark 1:1 ‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God’. Now, as Jesus dies, Mark wants to emphasise Jesus’ identity as the Christ and the Son of God. Remember our first study - both of these titles mean God’s Chosen King.

--> But if he is the great King, why does he die in this way? Why doesn’t he use his mighty authority to stop himself dying?

Who is Jesus?

The King, promised by God
Has authority
The “Son of Man”
He is shown to be these things even in his death

3. a) What unusual things happen as Jesus dies?

1. v33 Darkness over the whole land. The sixth hour is noon, and the ninth hour is 3pm - a strange time for darkness! In the Bible, darkness is often an indication that God is punishing someone.

Who should be punished by God in this passage? *Those who crucify Jesus and mock him.*

2. v34 Jesus cries out ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ God has forsaken (= abandoned) Jesus!!

So who is punished by God in this passage? Jesus.

3. v28 The curtain of the temple is torn in two. The temple was the place where God’s people, the Jews, went to meet with God. It represented the old covenant/agreement between God and people, which said that people could have a good relationship with God if they kept his commandments. The curtain formed a barrier between people and the most special part of the temple - it represented a barrier between people and God. This barrier had to be there because people’s hearts are too dirty to have a relationship with perfect God (see study 4).

So what does it mean that the temple curtain is torn in two? No more barrier between people and God; they can have a good relationship.

b) So why did Jesus die?

- *This passage reinforces what we saw in Study 7 - Jesus died as a substitute, an innocent man taking God’s judgment in place of people who deserved God’s judgment.*

4. In what different ways would Jesus’ death have been painful for him?

- **Physically:** *beaten (15, 19), crucified (the most painful death penalty), killed*
- **Socially:** *mocked (17-20, 29, 31, 32), deserted by his disciples*
- **Spiritually:** *forsaken by God, his Father*

--> This helps us to understand Jesus’ love for us: he faced this pain so that we would not have to.

7. Look back at the responses of the different characters in this incident.

a) How do people today respond to Jesus in a similar way?

Characters	Attitude to Jesus	How do people today respond to Jesus in a similar way?
Religious leaders Soldiers	Envy; hate Jesus; arrange his death Mock him	<i>Someone who actively opposes Christians or laughs at them</i>
Pilate	Believes he is innocent, but condemns him because he fears the crowd	<i>Someone who thinks Jesus’ claims make sense, but is afraid of what their family/colleagues will think, so decides not to become a Christian.</i>
Crowd/ passers-by	Influenced by others, they call for Jesus to be crucified and mock him	<i>Someone who just believes the same as their family or friends without questioning it</i>
Centurion	Recognises Jesus is the Son of God	<i>Someone who read Mark’s Gospel, seen how Jesus lived and died, and decides to believe that he is the Son of God and submit to him as their king</i>

b) Think about your own attitude to Jesus.

Which character is your response to Jesus most like? Why?

c) Think about your answer to the Starter Question. How 'great' is Jesus in this passage?

- *He might not be 'great' in the way our friends would define greatness. But here we discover that he is truly great: he chose to give up his life to save people like us. Think of human kings or influential people: would they do that? Jesus is a wonderful King, even in his death.*

What does Jesus demand?

Repent - this means to recognise our own sinfulness

Believe - **that Jesus' death shows him to be the Christ, the Son of God.**

Honour Jesus as God's Son

Study 10 Mark 15:40-16:8

Main Point: Jesus really died and rose - so how will you respond?

1. Before reading the passage: **After the last study, what questions do you still have?**

- Will Jesus rise from the dead as he said?
- What will happen to Jesus' disciples?
- How can I be sure that Jesus' death really does forgive sin?

2. a) How does Mark show us that these events really happened?

Main Claim	Evidence
Jesus really died	The women <u>saw</u> Jesus die, and saw his body buried v43-45 emphasise that Jesus really died - 'body... died... dead... corpse...' He didn't just faint on the cross and revive later!
Jesus really rose	The women <u>saw</u> where Jesus was buried, <u>saw</u> the stone rolled back, <u>saw</u> the young man, <u>saw</u> there was no body - this is eyewitness testimony! The women are named - people at the time could go and ask them about what happened In the first century, the evidence of a woman was not counted valid in court. Therefore, if someone had made up this account they would have chosen more impressive witnesses! The big stone was moved away from the tomb (16:4) - who moved it?

b) Can you think of any alternative explanation of the facts?

Mark's explanation of the evidence is that Jesus really rose from the dead. He presents this as a historically verifiable event. It may feel like a difficult claim to believe - but if we refuse to believe it, we must do justice to the evidence and come up with a viable alternative explanation.

3. a) How would you feel about Jesus if he had not risen from the dead?

- He would be a liar (he predicted his resurrection in Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:34, 14:28)
- This would make us doubt everything else he said: that he is the Son of God, that his death can forgive sinners

Who is Jesus?

The King, promised by God
Has authority
The "Son of Man"
He is shown to be these things even in his death - and his resurrection proves his identity

b) How would Peter and the disciples feel when they heard this news?

- *It would give them great confidence in who Jesus is and what he came to do: he really has dealt with sin.*
- *It would be especially good news for Peter: Jesus specially mentions him (v7), even though he betrayed Jesus (see Mark chapter 14). This is a clear sign that Jesus' death is effective at bringing forgiveness for sinners.*

Why did Jesus come?

To save his people by dying as their substitute, so that they can be forgiven and cleansed from sin.

To judge unrighteousness - particularly, to judge those who reject him

To proclaim good news

--> **Jesus' resurrection proves that his death really did achieve these things!**

4. a) How does Joseph respond to Jesus' death? (15:43-46)

- *He takes 'courage' (v43), and is unashamed to associate himself with Jesus*

b) How do the women respond to Jesus' resurrection? (16:5-8)

- *They are afraid, run away, and disobey the young man's command to tell others that Jesus has risen.*

c) How do you feel about these different responses?

d) Why might it require courage to follow Jesus?

- *You could discuss examples from the lives of Christians you know, or things that may be particular worries for your friend, for example: opposition from family, living for Jesus in the workplace, telling others about Jesus.*

5. a) What things prevent you from believing that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is a good opportunity to discuss any doubts or questions that your friend still has, and to think how this passage (and the whole of Mark's Gospel) helps us to have confidence that Jesus really is the Son of God.

b) How has your view of Jesus changed through studying Mark's Gospel?

What does Jesus demand?

Repent - this means to recognise our own sinfulness

Believe - that Jesus' death shows him to be the Christ, the Son of God, **and that he rose from the dead. This takes courage**

Honour Jesus as God's Son

Appendix 1: Olympic Games Illustration (see Study 1)

How is Mark's Gospel like the Olympic Games?

If you grew up in China you would have good reason to think that Christianity must be irrelevant because it's so *new* - Chinese civilisation has been around since at least 3000BC, and influential philosophies such as Confucianism and Daoism flourished around the 6th century BC. If Christianity only began after the death of Jesus in 1st century AD, then how do Christians account for the thousands of years of history before Jesus??

We've seen that part of Mark's purpose is to show that Jesus is *God's promised King* - this is important. Because once we know a little bit about the Old Testament we see that Jesus is not 'new', and God was not absent from human history for thousands of years before suddenly deciding to intervene and send Jesus. Rather, God has been working throughout history to tell people about Jesus and to prepare the way for Jesus. Rather than being a late addition to the world religions, Jesus' life is the climax of history. Wow!

You could use the Olympic Games to illustrate this. A country is selected to host the Olympics seven years before the event itself (this is a recent memory for China and the UK!). This begins years of large-scale planning, building stadiums, upgrading the transport system, publicity, etc etc. The Games themselves are only two weeks long, but they are the culmination of many years' preparation, and they leave a legacy that lasts for years into the future. Similarly, Jesus only lived on earth for 32 years, but the preparation for his life began millennia before he was born, and the impact of his life and death can still be felt today. We only need to look at a Bible to see this: Mark's Gospel is preceded by hundreds of pages of Old Testament - which was all written to help us understand Jesus.

Appendix 2: Bible Timeline

