

THE GREATEST

IF JESUS

A good friend is a very competitive guy—perhaps you relate. For his honeymoon, he and his new bride went on a cruise. The cruise hosted a tug-o-war competition while in port and my friend signed up. Again, he’s very competitive. He battled so hard he literally ripped the skin off both palms. He’d been married less than 72 hours and spent the remaining two-thirds of his honeymoon cruise with both hands completely bandaged above his wrists.

Many people treat life and faith like my friend playing tug-o-war. They’re battling, pulling, doing the best they can in hopes to pull the rope to their side. They struggle to have a good life, to please the Lord, or to succeed in whatever way they think success looks like. But, there are a few problems with approaching life like a tug-o-war match.

If Jesus is who he says he is and did what the Bible says he did, then no middle ground exists—you’ve already lost. You can pull until the skin leaves your hands, but you can never pull hard enough to win. If the claims of Jesus are true, you’ve got a big problem. However, if the claims of Jesus are true, you also have hope.

MARK 1:1-8

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Every Week, this section will include bonus material—articles, videos, or other resources to aid you in your understanding of the Scripture, challenge you in your development, or to encourage you in your worship.

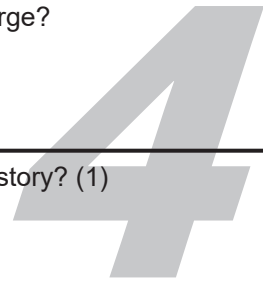
For example, this Week we’ve provided an overview of the book of *Mark*. Scan the QR-code for more.



DISCUSSION

What are some common beliefs about Jesus held by classmates or the culture at large?

ICEBREAKER



1. Who is at the center of this story? (1)

OBSERVATION

2. Whose prophecy is observed? What is predicted? (2-3)

3. According to what is spoken, who is the focus of attention in this passage? (7-8)

4. Based on our passage, how has Mark begun answering the question, "Who is Jesus?"

INTERPRETATION

5. What are you trusting God to do this semester through this study?

APPLICATION

While this study is written for students, as you look around you may see someone...significantly older. Your Coach is studying a more in-depth study of Mark and your best resource for questions and support. Talk to them!

THE GREATEST

STUDY NOTES

THE GOAT

When boxing fans hear, “The Greatest,” they automatically think of Muhammad Ali. Today’s basketball fans debate the G.O.A.T... LeBron James? Michael Jordan? Larry Bird? Such debates over relative greatness have persisted as long as we’ve recorded personal achievements. Further, these competitions extend beyond the “worldly” crowd and into the Church. Believers have had their own “best” speakers, authors, and models for nearly 2,000 years.

Indeed, the Bible itself contains a “greatness” competition among Jesus’ own disciples, James and John (Mark 10:35-37). It became so personal, even their mother got involved (Matthew 20:20-21). However, a quick read of any New Testament book silences the entire debate. Even secular Yale historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, recognized the influential power of “The Greatest” in writing, “Regardless of what anyone may personally believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure of Western culture for almost 20 centuries. It is from his birth that most of the human race dates its calendars, it is by his name that millions curse, and in his name that millions pray.” Clearly, whether a follower or not, only One can truly be called, “The Greatest”...Jesus, the Christ.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mark wrote his account of Jesus’ life primarily to a Roman audience. A significant portion of *Mark* seeks to answer one of the most important questions in all of human history, “Who is Jesus?” In fact, *Mark* clearly stated in the beginning and end of his gospel exactly what the readers should know, “**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God**” (see the Roman centurion’s words, “*Truly this man was the Son of God,*” Mark 15:39.)

Mark is a master story-teller carefully weaving Jesus’ story in short, rapid-fire encounters of Jesus’ life. Mark skips the birth narrative, genealogies, and full-length sermons. In fact, if Mark slows down and gives significant space to a specific encounter or speech, pay attention because it’s significant.

Mark’s Roman audience, like you, may be skeptical at another so-called “holy man.” They might ask, “How is this guy any different?” We’ll see several encounters where Jesus displays his power with authority much greater than any lesser gods like Zeus or Jupiter. However, God typically offers only one kind of “proof”—he says he’s going to do something, then does it.

To validate Jesus’ story, Mark cites prophecies written centuries before Jesus’ birth. Mark attributes the quote to the very well-known *Isaiah the prophet*, but actually quotes *Malachi* as well; “**Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’**”

When ancient nobles traveled, crews would go first to “straighten paths.” They would make sure the path was ready to safely travel. In the same way, **John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.** Likewise, **he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

WHY STUDY MARK

Psalm 16:11 says, “*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*” By knowing Jesus, your life’s “path” can find hope, meaning, and mission. Instead of a life well-wasted, it can matter on an eternal Kingdom-shaping scale.

Our hope through this study is that you experience the presence of Jesus and thereby experience the fullness of joy. Not *some* joy. Not joy *if...* But the full, complete, eternal joy.

Finally, through Jesus we experience, “pleasures forevermore.” This is not found by going to church, nor studying the Bible, nor being a good person, nor any other rope-pulling, do-it-yourself, self-made hoopla. On our own, humanity can only achieve temporary pleasure, wealth, or success. It will not last and will usually only leave us feeling more empty than before.

Jesus came as God’s rescue plan to redeem humanity from sin. Sin isn’t just an act, it has corrupted the very core of every person. That’s why we can never win life’s tug-o-war—even if we were trying to fight sin, which we usually don’t, we’re pulling with grease covered hands, on slippery ground, against an immovable object. We will never win.

We study *Mark* that we may know Christ. That we experience brokenness toward our sin, repentance, and surrender to the gospel for eternal life. The greatest gift God can give any of us is more of himself. Through Jesus, we can experience life, joy, and pleasure forevermore.