



RESOURCES

Mark



St Philips

Mark

CONTENTS

This series is called KINGDOM PEOPLE.

We'll be looking at the first 9 chapters of Mark's gospel and the series will take us on a journey of discovering who Jesus is and who God says we are; we'll see that the Kingdom work of Jesus reveals to us the character of God; we'll think about the enemy's opposition to the Kingdom and our authority in Christ as Kingdom People to rebuke and defeat him; and we'll learn that walking in great authority and power is not about finding a formula but about intimacy and sacrificial love.

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Timing:	20-40 minutes, then leading into prayer/ministry
Buzzgroups:	Groups of 3-4 work best, there are feedback notes for the speaker
Illustrations:	Where relevant, suggestions are made but speaker's own stories are preferable
Approach:	Use these resources to curate and steer group discussion, rather than seeing this material as a talk to delivery straight.
	Trust the group discussion to create an environment for mutual growth, deepening relationships and intimate encounter with the Spirit. Feel free to tailor and pitch the talk as best suits your group.
"Go Deeper":	Suggestions for deeper exploration are noted.
Ministry notes:	Follow the Spirit but suggestions are included if desired.

WEEK 6 WALKING IN GREATNESS

Last week we considered how miracles flow from intimacy, rest and faith.

Introduction

Welcome to the last session on Mark's gospel!

This series has taken us on a journey of discovering who Jesus is and who God says we are; we've seen that the Kingdom work of Jesus reveals to us the character of God; we've thought about the enemy's opposition to the Kingdom and our authority in Christ to rebuke and defeat him; but most of all, we have understood that **intimacy is the key**.

The relentless pursuit of our relationship with Abba is foundational to our walk as disciples. Walking in authority and seeing Kingdom breakthrough is directly connected to how intimate we are with Him.

In this final session we are reminded that walking in great authority and power is not about finding a formula but about **intimacy** and **sacrificial love**. Identity, faith, humility and love are key themes.

Read: Mark 9:2-36

1. Faith and identity both necessary for Kingdom breakthrough

Our passage today begins with the transfiguration of Jesus where Peter, James and John saw Jesus glowing white in His glory and then being joined by Elijah and Moses. It is a hugely significant event. On one level, the presence of Moses (who represents the law) and Elijah (who represents the prophets) confirms that Jesus is the fulfilment of both. The disciples would have remembered what Jesus said to them at Matthew 5:17 during the sermon on the mount ("Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them."). This moment is contextualising and confirming so much of what they have learnt and experienced so far with Jesus – even though they still do not at this stage understand the fullness of His ministry (see 9:10 and 9:31-32).

But despite their, as yet, incomplete understanding, on another level this event is, in itself, a major encounter with the power and authority of Jesus. They see Him in His glory as we will when He returns. Just as we began the series with Abba's declaration of Jesus' identity (see Session 1 and Mark 1:11), so in this last session we witness the second declaration by Abba that Jesus is His son: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" (9:7). The context again is identity.

You can imagine the conversation as they walked back down the mountain (a little

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of which we get to eavesdrop at vs 11 and 12). Though their understanding was incomplete, Peter, James and John have just had a major upgrade of their revelation of Jesus and their faith in Him. As we noted in Session 6: a revelation of God's identity always results in an increase of faith.

Identity and faith walk hand-in-hand. The more we discover who Jesus is, the more our faith in Him grows. The more we discover who we are in Him (our identity), the more faith we have to do what Jesus did and see His Kingdom come.

When Jesus, Peter, James and John return from the mountain and rejoin the other disciples we see a stark contrast between those who have just had a fresh encounter and revelation of Jesus' identity and those who have not. While Peter, James and John are full of faith, the disciples who had not seen the transfiguration are embroiled in an argument with the teachers of the law concerning a man whose son is possessed by an unclean spirit. What was the argument about? The man had brought his son to them so that they could drive out the spirit but the disciples had been unable to do anything about it (v. 18). They had been unable to do the miracle.

Buzzgroup

Discuss in groups of three (2 minutes): Can you identify why the disciples were unable to drive out the spirit?

Feedback (2 minutes): See what the groups have identified. Possible answers: lack of faith – v. 19; demon too powerful for them; they didn't pray enough – v. 29; or that they didn't fast – v. 29 (depending on the translation). Note that the issue that Jesus primarily identifies at v. 19 is lack of faith. It was not because the demon was too powerful for them - this is not about whether we are spiritually mature enough to do bigger, more "impressive" things for the Kingdom, as if only "spiritual giants" can do these things but not us. The power is not actually the measure of maturity of a disciple. According to what Jesus is looking for here, the measure of maturity is faith. Jesus addresses them all (disciples included) and says they are lacking in faith. The groups that identified prayer (and fasting) are not wrong but we will now discover that in referring to prayer (and fasting), Jesus is still talking about faith.

Let's now turn to faith, prayer and fasting.

2. Faith not a formula but a fruit of intimacy

We have just noted in the buzzgroup that the measure of maturity is not how powerful the miracle but how deep the faith. Why does Jesus want His disciples to understand

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this? There are two elements to His teaching here.

i) Faith not a formula

Jesus highlights the disciple's lack of faith. Why? What had they been doing? No doubt they had been doing what they had seen Jesus doing. They knew whose power and authority they were to exercise. Jesus had commissioned them to go out and do the Kingdom stuff in His name. And yet on this occasion, it had failed. Simply praying "in Jesus name" was clearly not enough. So what does Jesus say they need to do? Answer: to pray and (depending on your translation) to fast.

But note - this is not a formula. Jesus is not saying, "if you had prayed and fasted the spirit would have come out." If He had meant to establish a fasting and prayer formula for deliverance ministry, He would have said for how long and in what way. In any case, we see that there was no way that the disciples could have fasted on this occasion - they did not know that morning that a man would bring his demon-possessed son to them. This is not about establishing a formula.

In fact, Jesus doesn't establish a formula in any of the miracles we see in the gospels - sometimes He lays on hands but on this occasion he did not; sometimes He prays for the person but on other occasions He simply walks past and the person is healed by touching His cloak; and sometimes He calls from outside a tomb to raise someone from the dead while on another occasion He spits on the ground and rubs mud on a man's eyes. Faith is not a formula.

ii) Faith a fruit of intimacy

There is nothing of formula about any of the miracles of Jesus - save one thing: He does it all from a faith born out of intimacy with Abba. Jesus' instruction to pray and fast is a call to a pattern of pursuing intimacy and operating out of relationship with the Father. Jesus is saying: "If you want to see demons of this sort banished, then you have to pray and fast, you have to pursue God, you have to be the sort of person who lives in a state of perpetual pursuit of intimacy. Only then can you respond with the powerful faith that you see in me."

So faith is not a formula, rather, it is a fruit of intimacy. This is because intimacy, as we have noted time and time again during this series, results in a revelation of identity. This is where faith to see Kingdom breakthrough comes from: **certainty of identity born out of the pursuit of intimacy**. And as faith flows from identity, so authority and power become a reality. Where do we see this in our passage today?

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Verse 20 – the spirit has not responded to the disciples at all, but as soon as it is faced with Jesus (it literally “sees” Jesus) it knows exactly who He is...and it responds accordingly. It ramps up its attacks on the boy, like a pit bull on a chain responding to an intruder stepping onto its owner’s property. It *knows* who Jesus is; it recognises His identity. And we see that Jesus has faith to defeat it; He knows the authority He has over it and so He exercises that authority. And the demon flees, as only demons can when faced with the power of God.

Identity flows from intimacy, faith flows from identity and authority and power flow from faith.

We see that same thing in Acts 19 where the sons of Sceva are attempting to cast out a demon using Jesus’ name. For them, invoking Jesus name is a formula. They do not use His name from a place of intimacy, identity and faith. So at v. 15 the spirit responds: “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” The spirit is acutely aware that they are not operating out of an identity rooted in Jesus and so it refuses to submit to the authority they claim to possess. This is a case of authority without intimacy – it is powerless. They do not know Jesus, so they do not have His authority to overcome.

Buzzgroup

Discuss in groups of three (5 minutes): Do you fast? What do you understand as the purpose of fasting?

Feedback (5 minutes): Invite some responses. (Use your own personal stories). For some people fasting is about sacrifice, solidarity with those in need or an aid to prayer. Others may not really know what fasting is about but might be aware that it is something that we are called to do and is connected to breakthrough in prayer – in that sense fasting seems to increase the power of our prayers. Suggest that all of these are relevant but note that fasting is not simply about giving up vices, like chocolate or technology, nor has it much to do with the traditional sin of gluttony. According to Jesus in our passage today, fasting is not a formulaic prayer technique, it is about **intimacy and identity**. Lent is traditionally a season of fasting. It is an invitation to spend a season pursuing a deeper revelation of who God is. The purpose is that we prepare for an encounter with the risen Jesus at Easter, more intimate with Him, surer of our identity in Him, more full of faith and walking in more authority and power. We come to Easter with a greater awareness that the same power that conquered the grave lives in us. We are, and were always meant to be, a channel for His resurrection power so that we can heal the sick, raise the dead, set the captives free in His name.

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So, at v. 29, Jesus is telling His disciples that authority to cast out spirits of this scale comes from intimacy. He is encouraging them to press into the Father in prayer, rather than simply telling them to pray more over the boy in the passage. The answer to your lack of faith, He says, is to pursue God...to operate out of intimacy, as He does.

3. Final word: authority and power lead to greatness

Perhaps the main thing we have seen about the Kingdom of God in this series it is that it does not reflect the measures of the world. In fact, it is the opposite. Some people refer to it as the "Upside-down Kingdom" – although perhaps a theologically better way to refer to it is the "Right-way-up Kingdom"! It is the world that is upside-down. The Right-way-up Kingdom says that miracles and supernatural authority are the natural characteristics of humanity as it was created. We were made to walk in this stuff! Jesus is the model of authentic humanity.

A key example of the right-way-up of the Kingdom in our passage is vs 33-37. What does it mean to be great? We see that the pursuit of worldly greatness is a vanity project. It is rooted in pride and selfish ambition, which are the enemies of intimacy with God. James 3:15 says that this "does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." The disciples are demonstrating this worldly pursuit in vs 33-34. What does it look like? Argument, jealousy, disagreement and the dislocation of relationship. Pride leads to relational isolation.

Does this mean that we should not pursue greatness? Not at all! We should aspire to do well. We should be ambitious and conscientious. We should set our sights high. It's just that Jesus redefines greatness here and with it the correct object of our desire for greatness. His definition – as a final word in our series on Mark – therefore sets in context everything we have discussed. Set your sights on Abba. He is to be our primary focus, desire and ambition.

Walking in great intimacy with God, entering into greater revelation of Him, realising how high His opinion of you is, growing in greater spiritual maturity, exercising greater power, seeing greater miracles, getting greater results when you lay on hands – all these lead to spiritual greatness.

But Jesus makes something very clear at v. 35: don't confuse the world's definition of greatness with the Kingdom's definition. By all means pursue greatness in the Spirit but understand that if you want true greatness, if you want to walk in Kingdom power and authority, if you want to be able to heal the sick and liberate people from the demonic, you need to realise that this true greatness looks like servanthood. In this, as in all that we have looked at this term, Jesus is our model. "The first must be

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the very last, the servant of all.” Sacrificial love is the hallmark of the Kingdom.

Conclusion

As you grow in spiritual greatness according to the pattern of Jesus' ministry in Mark's gospel and the relationship He had with Abba, walk in humility and love. In this you will walk in your identity as God's children and the enemy will retreat from you.

Jesus said at Mark 9:37 that whoever welcomes the least in His name welcomes Him; and whoever welcomes Him welcomes His Father. **It begins and ends with intimacy.**

Prayer ministry

Here are some suggestions:

- Invite the Spirit and then remind each other of the fruits of intimacy that we have discussed throughout this series. Declare identity, authority, love, God-perspective, Kingdom power, faith and servanthood over each other.
- Submit to one another in love and pray for each other in the power of the Spirit, approaching God with boldness, confidence and faith for Kingdom breakthrough.