

AIM

- To explain the significance of the cross.
- To explore the different reactions to Jesus' death as recorded in Mark's Gospel.
- To challenge group members to consider the implications of this for their own lives.

EXPLORE

- Ask for any questions over last week's follow-up reading and questions:
 1. *In the earlier chapters (1-5) Mark has built up a picture of Jesus' power and authority. He's shown us various miracles: healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, calming a storm. How does this passage (Mark 6:1-8:29) add to that picture (see Mark 6:32-44, 47-48; 7:31-37; 8:1-10, 22-26)?*
 - Jesus is able to feed vast crowds of people from a handful of food (Mark 6:32-44; 8:1-10).
 - Jesus is able to heal the deaf and mute, and also the blind (Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26).
 - Jesus is able to walk on water (Mark 6:47-48).

These passages are full of Old Testament imagery, pointing to the fact that Jesus is the Rescuer promised in the Old Testament. "Like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34)—in Ezekiel 34, Israel is described as being like a sheep without a shepherd because her leaders had not done their job properly (Ezekiel 34:1-6). As a result, God promised to come Himself to rescue His people (Ezekiel 34:16). Jesus is that rescuer, acting as God's shepherd by feeding the sheep in a miraculous way (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10), as God Himself had done when rescuing Israel from Egypt (Exodus 16:32-35). Jesus is also said to "pass by" the disciples as He walks on water, in language reminiscent of God passing by Moses at the time he received the stone tablets (Mark 6:48; cf. Exodus 34:1-9).

2. *Jesus saw the large crowd in Mark 6:34 as "sheep without a shepherd." What did He do about it?*
 - When Jesus saw the crowd, He "had compassion on them" (v. 34) and so He began to teach them.

If Jesus looked at the faces of people in a busy town today, do you think he would feel the same? Why/why not?

- The crowd in Mark 6 were Jewish, so the Jewish religious leaders should have been "shepherds" caring for them. But most religious leaders failed to be the "shepherds" God wanted them to be, so this crowd were "sheep without a shepherd." In a similar way, in any crowd of people today there are likely to be many who have no clue about the good news of Jesus. Some of them may even attend church services, but have never heard the gospel message clearly explained.

Do you feel the need to have Jesus as your shepherd?

3. *Write down the very different reactions to Jesus' preaching and miracles:*

- a. *in His home synagogue (Mark 6:1-6)*
- b. *among people generally (Mark 6:14-15, 53-56; 7:37)*
- c. *from the disciples (Mark 6:51-52)*
- d. *from the religious leaders (Mark 8:11)*

Why do you think people responded so differently?

- The way people responded to Jesus seemed to be based on what they already thought about Him.
 - a. The people from His home town, Nazareth, had seen Jesus grow up so they thought they already knew all about Him. They were suspicious of Him.
 - b. Elsewhere, Jesus had a great reputation. People had heard of His miracles and crowded to Him hoping to see more of the same.
 - c. The disciples, who knew Jesus best, do not know what to make of Him. They still don't understand who He is.
 - d. The religious leaders are offended by Jesus, and want to "test" Him. In spite of all the miracles, the Pharisees want Him to do something spectacular—just for them.

Do you identify particularly with one of those groups?

4. *Read Jesus' question in Mark 8:29. How would you have answered this before you started Christianity Explored? Now that you're halfway through Mark's Gospel and have read about the amazing things that Jesus said and did, has your answer changed?*

• Have a leader read Mark 8:22-33.

- *Generally speaking, who do people today believe Jesus is? What do they base these views on?* Answers are likely to be both positive and negative. They may include: a good man, a wise teacher, a prophet, a trouble-maker, a mythical person who didn't really exist, etc. These views can be based on things they've heard others say, the media, Sunday school, religious TV channels, books, etc.
- *Peter's statement in Mark 8:29 seems to form a turning point in Mark's Gospel (see Mark 8:31). What did Peter say, and why do you think it was so important?* Peter said that Jesus is the Christ (God's only chosen King). His moment of recognition was so important because none of the twelve disciples had understood this so far, despite all that Jesus had said and done. Now that they recognized the identity of Jesus, He could begin to explain to them what would happen to Him as God's king.
- *Once the identity of Jesus was clear (Mark 8:29), He went on to explain His mission in Mark 8:31-32. Why do you think Peter rebuked Jesus (see Mark 8:32-33)?* Peter was appalled to hear that Jesus was willing to suffer, be rejected, and die before rising again. He was driven to talk Jesus out of His mission by having in mind "the things of men," merely human priorities. This may have meant that Peter wanted Jesus to continue healing the sick and raising the dead, so that His popularity would grow. It may also have meant that Peter hoped that God's King (the Christ) would drive out the occupying Roman forces so that the country was free.

- *Mark records the two-stage healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26. He went from seeing nothing (Mark 8:22) to seeing something (Mark 8:24) to seeing everything (Mark 8:25). How clearly are the disciples “seeing” the identity and mission of Jesus in Mark 8:27-33? Peter appears to be seeing with perfect clarity in Mark 8:29—He gets Jesus’ identity right. But when Peter rebukes Jesus in verse 32, it shows that he is not seeing the nature of Jesus’ mission clearly. Peter sees “something” but he is not yet seeing “everything”—so Jesus warns him and the other disciples, not to say anything about Him being the Christ (v. 30).*
- *Jesus told Peter he had in mind “the things of men.” What phrase did Jesus use to describe His suffering and death (Mark 8:33)? “The things of God”*
What does this tell us about His mission? Jesus was confirming that His mission came from God. It was God’s plan that He would suffer and die.
- *In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” Are you able to give a definite answer to this question yet? If so, how would you answer and why?*

LISTEN (DVD)

- Mark 10:45 – “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”
 - Sometimes there is a world of difference between the way things seem to be and the way they really are. When we look at ourselves, do we only see the way we seem on the surface or are we able to see the way we really are, deep down?
 - Why is the cross—a symbol of a gruesome, agonizing death—the symbol of Christianity? Jesus’ death on a cross wasn’t a tragic waste of life. It was a rescue from the terrible, tragic problem that Jesus told us about in our previous lesson. Thus, the cross is a precious symbol.
 - Jesus taught His followers that He must be killed. He came to “give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Read Mark 15:22-39 for an account of His death.
 - As Jesus was dying on the cross, darkness came over the whole land. God was acting in anger to punish sin. God’s anger is not the product of a quick temper; it is his settled, controlled, personal hostility to all that is wrong—because He is a God of love and justice, He cannot simply ignore wrongdoing as if it did not matter. After all, we care about the wrongdoing in our world; we cannot expect our loving Creator to care any less.
 - On the cross, Jesus was in some way “forsaken” or abandoned by God, as God punished sin. But, Jesus had led a completely sinless life—so, why would God be punishing Him, and why would Jesus be allowing Himself to go through this?
 - Remember—Jesus said He came to give His life a ransom for many. Jesus gave Himself up as a substitute, to be punished on our behalf. He bore the punishment that our sin deserves, so that we can be rescued. Jesus was not an innocent third party being picked on by God—no, Jesus *was* fully God, and at the cross God was rescuing us by sacrificing Himself.
 - All of our secrets—the way we’ve mistreated others and God—have been recorded, and all of this separates us from God. But because Jesus took our sins upon Himself, He suddenly experienced the terrible sense of being in some way separated from His Father (“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”). Jesus was taking upon Himself all the punishment that our sins—our secrets—deserve. He died as our substitute, our place, taking the punishment that our sin deserves. Jesus paid the price for our sin, so that we never have to. It’s as if the sins—the secrets—were being washed away.

- As a stunning demonstration that our sin really has been paid for, that Jesus' rescue really was successful, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom when Jesus died (Mark 15:38). The very tall and thick curtain was like a big "No Entry" sign that divided the people from the place where God was said to live—it physically reminded us that it is impossible for sinful people to walk into God's presence. When that curtain was torn in two, it was as if God was saying, "Because of the cross, the way is now open for people to approach God. Their sin has been finally and fully paid for."
- The people who saw Jesus die reacted in different ways:
 - The soldiers missed what was happening.
 - The religious leaders were convinced they already knew the way to God.
 - The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, gave in to the crowd.
 - The Roman centurion recognized the identity of Jesus: "Surely this Man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39).
- So, what will you do with your sin—will you take it with you to the grave and to the judgment that must fall? Or will you let Jesus take it to the cross, and be rescued?

DISCUSS

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or stuck you from the DVD?*
- *How would you feel if someone else deliberately took the punishment for something serious you had done wrong?* (1) relieved: that you won't be punished; (2) guilty: that someone has taken the blame for something they didn't do; (3) bad: for the person who suffered; (4) angry: that the wrong person has taken the blame for someone else's wrongdoing; (5) grateful: that they've taken your punishment for you
- *Jesus said He came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). What's your reaction to this?* This takes the issues behind the previous "hypothetical" question, and makes them real and personal. Jesus did "take the punishment for something serious"—our sin. A "ransom" was what was paid to give a slave his freedom.
- *Which of the reactions to Jesus' death is most like your reaction?* (1) The soldiers were so busy they missed what was happening right in front of them: are we so absorbed with our busy lives that we don't take time to really think about why Jesus came and our response to that? (2) The religious leaders thought they already knew the way to God: even if we're very "religious," none of us are good enough for God; all of us sin and none of us can deal with our sin by ourselves—religion can't save us; only Jesus can. (3) Pontius Pilate went with the crowd: it's very easy to give in to peer pressure. Choosing to follow Jesus would mean going His way instead of following the crowd—are we ready to do that? (4) The Roman centurion recognized who Jesus is: we don't know much about this centurion, except that He got Jesus' identity right (we don't know what He did after that); recognizing who Jesus is isn't all we need to do—we then need to put our trust in Him to rescue us from the problem of sin and help us live as His followers.

FOLLOW-UP

Sometime during this next week, I encourage you to read through Mark 8:30-10:52 and answer the 5 questions that are in your notes.