

The Gospel for evangelistic house meetings by Mailis Janatuinen

## **More Bible Studies from the Gospel of Mark**

### **Contents**

1. JESUS, THE WINNER OF TEMPTATIONS Mark 1:12–13
2. JESUS AROUSES FAITH Mark 1:29–39
3. FASTING Mark 2:18–22
4. IN THE SERVICE OF THE LORD Mark 3:13–19
5. CHRISTIAN FREEDOM Mark 7:1–13
6. THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST Mark 9:2–10
7. YOUR KING WILL COME AS GENTLE Mark 11:1–11
8. THE TWO COMMANDMENTS OF LOVE Mark 12:28–34
9. NEIGHBOUR Mark 12:41–44
10. KEEP WATCH! Mark 13:31–37

# 1 JESUS, THE WINNER OF TEMPTATIONS

## Mark 1:12–13

**Background:** Jesus faced three temptations in the wilderness: 1) the temptation of unsatisfied needs, i.e. the terrible hunger of 40 days, 2) the temptation of power: would he be content with the way of the cross or would he take the kingdom before his time from the hand of Satan and 3) the temptation of unbelief: would he take his difficult situation from the hand of God the Father or would he demand a miracle to support his faith.

### Questions

- Why did the Holy Spirit drive Jesus to the same situation as Eve had been at the beginning of the world?
- What do you think: does the Holy Spirit lead us to be tempted by Satan and if so, for what purpose?
- Why did Jesus' temptation have to take place in the desert, not in the Garden of Eden?
- What was common and what was different in the temptations experienced by Eve and Jesus?
- Which temptation was stronger: the one that Eve experienced or the one that Jesus experienced? Give reasons for your answer.
- Why did Eve experience only one temptation, but Jesus had to experience three of them?
- Mark is the only evangelist to mention animals in this context. What does he try to say by that?
- What does it mean that angels served him or took care of him in the desert?
- What do you think; will angels serve you when you are in great temptation? Give reasons for your answer.
- Why does Paul call Jesus "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45)?

### Concluding questions

- Why does everyone have to be tempted? (What would we be like if we were not tempted to sin and we didn't fall into it?)
- Why did Jesus have to experience the same temptations as Eve and each one of us?
- Where is the glad tidings in this text?

**Glad tidings:** Eve fell into her temptation, Adam fell into his temptation, and you and I have fallen into temptations for a million times. However, Jesus overcame all our temptations for us as our substitute—and suffered the punishment that we have earned by our disobedience.

## 2 JESUS AROUSES FAITH

### Mark 1:29–39

**Background:** The brothers Simon Peter and Andrew were from Bethsaida. They might have moved to Capernaum as a consequence of Simon's marriage, settled in the wife's home and continued the profession of fisherman. Jesus had just moved into the same town and called those two brothers and their fishing companions James and John to be his disciples (1:16–20). Our text tells about **the first Sabbath of Jesus in Capernaum** when he had just preached in the synagogue and driven a demon out of a man. After the service, Simon called Jesus, James and John into his house for the Sabbath meal. Meanwhile, his mother-in-law had got a malaria attack. Malaria is a life-threatening disease for an old person.

Verses 29–31

- What had Simon's wife and mother-in-law maybe thought when the breadwinners of the family stopped fishing and left to be with Jesus (see also 1:17–18)?
- What do you think Simon's wife's feelings might have been when the men were in the synagogue and the mother lay sick to death in the back room? What about the children's thoughts?
- Whose idea might have been that Jesus and fishing partners were invited to eat? Think of various possibilities.
- What does it show that Simon and his wife did not ask Jesus for a miracle of healing?
- What does a person usually experience when getting a high fever? If you have personal experience or professional knowledge of this matter, let others know.
- Jesus took the mother-in-law by the hand and helped her up (31). Jesus did not cure other sick people in this way. Why did he do so this time? (How did Jesus take into account the nature of the patient's illness? Why didn't Jesus say anything in this situation? How does noises sound like in the ears of a fever patient?)
- How does recovering from a very high fever normally happen? (How long does it take before the patient can get up?)
- Imagine what the mother-in-law experienced in the very moment she opened her eyes? (What did she see in front of him?)
- At which moment did faith come into the mother-in-law's heart?
- What does it show that the mother-in-law immediately began to serve Jesus?
- How do you think Peter's mother-in-law found the situation where his son-in-law began to follow Jesus and left them alone, without a breadwinner and supporter for the family?
- From now on, the mother-in-law's home was also Jesus' home (see e.g. 2:1). Consider how Simon's wife's and mother-in-law's lives changed when Jesus and his friends walked in and out of their home between their journeys?

Verses 32–34. Sabbath ended at sunset. In the dark people didn't usually move.

- Why didn't these people wait for the next morning, but instead they took the sick to the mother-in-law's house in the dark?
- What was the faith of the Capernaum people in Jesus like at the end of that Sabbath? What did they think who Jesus was?
- What does it show that Jesus didn't ask anyone's faith, but healed all the sick brought to him?
- Think about why only one in a hundred is healed in the healing meetings of our time? (Why are no miracles needed in our time to the same extent as during Jesus' public ministry?)
- Why weren't the demons allowed to say aloud who Jesus was (cf. 1:23–25)?

Verses 35–39. Jesus' evangelistic campaign in Capernaum lasted only one day.

- Compare Jesus' morning with your morning.
- Why did Simon and his friends go after Jesus? What was their motive?
- Why didn't Jesus take advantage of the popularity he had gained in his new home town?
- Read verses 38–39 and think about why the Christian church has not spread everywhere in the world even in 2,000 years?
- What do you think about it that later Jesus had to shout a woe cry against these cities because they had seen his great miracles, but did not repent (Matt. 11:20–23)?
- What was the significance of this Sabbath to Simon's family?

**Glad tidings:** Our text is about the one-sided love of Jesus. He healed Simon's mother-in-law though no one did even ask for that. He healed folks in Capernaum, even though he knew they would not repent. He died on the cross for the whole world though the majority of the world rejected him. Today he is coming through this gospel text to you and your family to help you in your present distress.

### 3 FASTING

#### Mark 2:18–22

**Background:** John the Baptist was the last prophet of the old covenant. Some of Jesus' disciples were first his disciples and they were used to fasting. John the Baptist was imprisoned at the same time as Jesus began his public ministry. **Pharisees fasted** twice a week, although the **Law of Moses** ordered to fast only on one day a year. In principle, Jesus was not against fasting, cf. Matt. 6:16–18. He had himself fasted for 40 days at the beginning of his ministry. A **wedding** was the most wonderful thing people knew, and it lasted for many days. Then everyone could get their stomachs full of good food.

Verse 18–19

- What different motives can people have when they are fasting? (E.g. religious and non-religious people?)
- If you've ever fasted, why did you do so and how did you succeed?
- What was the motive of these people who came to present their question to Jesus? Consider various possibilities.
- Why had Jesus never said to his disciples: "We are not eating anything today"?
- Why hadn't the disciples ever suggested to Jesus, "Let's for a few days"?
- What would you think of your friend who came to your wedding and would not eat anything?
- Tell in your own words why Jesus' disciples did not fast?
- In the Old Testament, the Lord had often called himself a bridegroom, and Israel a bride. So what does Jesus want to say in calling himself a bridegroom and his disciples wedding guests?
- How did the being together of Jesus and his disciples resemble a wedding party?
- When do we get to the wedding party where Jesus is the bridegroom? (Answer from outside this text.)

Verse 20

- What does Jesus mean by verse 20? (When did the disciples have to fast?)
- Apply verses 19–20 to the lives of Christians of our time.
- What were the situations like in your life, when you have lost your appetite?

Verse 21. In the Bible, a robe is always an important thing starting from Adam and Eve's leather suits. It often describes righteousness.

- What does Jesus mean by an old robe and a patch made of new fabric?
- Why did Jesus teach this little parable especially in the context of fasting?
- What would have happened if Jesus had fasted with his disciples twice a week like the Pharisees did (although there was no such rule in the Law of Moses)?
- Why couldn't the faith of the Pharisees be patched but it had to be rejected completely? (What would have happened if the teachings of Jesus and the Pharisees had been combined?)
- Why cannot the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith be combined? (What if it were said that God does 99)
- Why did Jesus have to hang naked on the cross?

Verse 22

- Why does Jesus still present this parable besides the previous one, what does he mean by that?
- What does Jesus mean by new and old wine?
- What does Jesus want to say by this parable to the Pharisees? What does he say to the apostles, the founders of the church?
- What were the old forms that shouldn't have been transferred to the Christian church?
- What does Jesus want to say to us by these two small parables?

Concluding question

- Where is the gospel of grace in this text?

**Glad tidings:** The bridegroom, Jesus, was taken away from the disciples on Good Friday. Then the robe of righteousness was stripped of him so that it might be put upon us. It was this gospel of grace that was the new message that cannot be combined with the teachings of any other religion.

## 4 IN THE SERVICE OF THE LORD

### Mark 3:13–19

**Background:** Jesus' first meeting with his disciples had been on a mountain and so was also the last one. By this time, Jesus had called at least five disciples: Peter and his brother Andrew, the sons of Zebedee (1:29), and Levi-Matthew (2:14). (Note: This text is not very well suited to a GTBS group. So now we are deviating from the rules and asking questions for which the answer is not found in the text.)

Verses 13–15

- What draws your attention in verse 13? (Do you think the invitees had freedom of choice? Why did they meet especially on the mountain?)
- Why are there as many apostles as Jacob had sons? (What does the number of apostles show us about the Christian church?)
- Why was the request “to be with Jesus” the very first thing on the disciples’ task list?
- Why should it be more important for a Christian to **be** with Jesus than to **do things** for Jesus?
- What does being with Jesus mean in practice in your life? (How much time do you spend daily/weekly in Bible reading and prayer?)
- Discuss the topic: how could we get our devotional lives in order?
- Why were the disciples given specifically the task of preaching and casting out demons? (What does this assignment seem to be missing?)
- What should we learn from the fact that Jesus found casting out demons such an important thing?

Verses 16–19. Note that specifically these 12 men became apostles and founders of the church.

- Peter means rock. Simon Peter’s name is always mentioned first in every disciple list of NT. What kind of picture have you got of this man: what were his pros and cons?
- If you were to choose a manager for your business, do you think you would end up with a man like Peter? Given reasons for your answer.
- What qualities made Peter fit to lead the group of disciples and later the church?
- Zebedee, the father of James and John, was a wealthy fisherman. The boys also had an ambitious mother. Do you remember any situations in the lives of these brothers that could explain why Jesus gave them the name “the boys of thunder”?
- The other ten disciples were once angry with Zebedee’s boys because these wanted the best places in the kingdom of Jesus. What does this case prove about the ten disciples?
- What impression do you have of the disciple John based on his own gospel?
- Apparently, James was John’s elder brother. Herod killed him as the first of the apostles a dozen years after Pentecost. How could God afford to let one of the apostles die at such an early stage?
- Andrew was first a disciple of John the Baptist and moved on then to follow Jesus. He led his brother Peter to Jesus. What was Andrew’s status like as Peter’s brother among Jesus’ disciples?
- Matthew was originally a customs officer and a follower of the occupying dominion Rome. Simon Cananaean, alias Zealot, had once been a member of the opposition movement i.e. zealots (cf. Luke. 6:15). What problems did these starting points perhaps cause to the group of disciples?
- What should we do to ensure that right-wingers and leftists could serve God in one church?
- Thomas was the one who doubted. Why was also a witness like him needed among the disciples?
- One of the disciples is given three names by the evangelists: Thaddaeus (Mark), Lebbaeus (Matthew), and Judas, son of James (Luke). What do you think this is proof of?
- The Gospels and Acts tell us nothing about what James, the son of Alphaeus or Bartholomew would have said or done. Why not?
- What do you think Jesus felt about Judas Iscariot?
- According to tradition, all the other apostles died as martyrs except John. What does this show about them?

Concluding questions

- Which disciple do you resemble the most?
- How does your character and experience, but also your trauma, help you in your mission in the kingdom of God?
- Where is the gospel in this text?

**Glad tidings:** Jesus wanted also to choose you to the group of his disciples, because he loves you and has died for you. He also wants to give you a task in his kingdom that no one else is able carry out.

## 5 CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

### Mark 7:1–13

**Background:** Jesus had practised extensive teaching and healing activities in Galilee. The leaders of Jerusalem had heard stories about him and they sent a delegation to investigate the matter. Ritual washing was prescribed by the Law of Moses for those who had touched a leper, a deceased or blood. He who had become unclean because of these causes had to wash his clothes and his whole body. However, this text is about the traditional rules that had been added afterwards. Their purpose was to cleanse a Jew who had been in contact with a pagan or with items touched by a pagan, for example at a market. These rituals made it difficult for Jews associate with and be in the company of the Gentiles.

Verses 1–2

- In what kind of situations the teachers of the law were able to observe Jesus and his disciples?
- If the disciples found someone watching them, how would it perhaps have influenced their behaviour?
- Some of the disciples apparently performed the ritual wash. Why didn't others do it?
- What impression do you get: how was Jesus behaving in that situation, did he wash his hands or not?

Verses 3–4

- Why had the traditional rules been added little by little to the Law of Moses? (What was the point of new ritual cleansing according to the Pharisees?)
- How did these rules affect the daily life and relationships of ordinary people?

Verse 5.

- What might the Pharisees and scribes have expected Jesus to answer to their question?
- What was the secret agenda behind this question?
- It is evident according to the Gospel of Luke that Jesus did not always perform ritual washing before a meal (Luke 11:38). What was his motive when he did the washing? And what was his motive when he didn't do it?

Verses 6–9. The Pharisees and scribes were not considered as hypocrites but as true believers who never made any compromises with their faith.

- What kinds of people are considered hypocrites in our culture?
- What might the disciples have thought when Jesus called the religious elite hypocrites straight to their faces?
- What had caused the hearts of the Pharisees to drift away from God?
- Why didn't the Pharisees themselves notice that their relationship with God had changed into mere habit of following the rules?
- How can we end up in a situation where we honour God only with words but without our heart?

Verse 10

- What are the different ways a person can nullify or deny the commandments of God?
- What is your relationship to God's commandments?
- How can we separate the man-made rules and the word of God?

Verses 10–13. According to a traditional rule, a son could hand over his future inheritance to the temple as a sacrificial gift already while his parents were alive. In that case it was not allowed to use the inheritance to support the parents.

- Why is honouring the parents important in every culture?
- What happens in a society where children are allowed to curse at their parents and teachers without punishment?
- Why didn't Jesus abolish the death penalty of the Law of Moses to those who curse their father and mother? (What does this verse show about Jesus' relationship to the death penalty in general?)
- What kind of different reasons people may have had when they donated money to the temple?
- Read verses 11–12 carefully. Who does what to whom?
- How could the parents survive whose child had donated his money to the temple and no longer supported them?
- How are the Fourth Commandment (verse 10) and the word of God (13) nullified in our day?
- What should each of us do for our parents?

Concluding questions

- What is the purity that God requires from us?
- What could we learn from this text concerning the so-called matters of discretion?
- Where is the gospel in this text?

**Glad tidings:** Jesus honoured both his earthly parents and his Heavenly Father. Still, he had to endure the death sentence of those who curse their parents. It happened because we have not treated our parents as we should have.

## 6 THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

### Mark 9:2–10

**Background:** Look at the map. The mountain of our text was apparently **Mount Hermon** which is 2760 m high. **Moses** had encountered the Lord on **Mount Sinai** a thousand years earlier when the Lord had given him ten commandments. The Bible tells about this encounter like this: *Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him* (Exodus 19:18–19). **John** wrote John’s gospel and **Peter** wrote two letters to the New Testament. **James** in turn died a martyr’s death as the first one of the disciples.

Preliminary question

- Have you ever wished to see God face to face? If yes, in which situation?

Verse 2

- Why did Jesus choose only these three for this trip; why didn’t he take all twelve with him?
- How did the three disciples probably feel when Jesus chose especially them for this mountain trip? What expectations did they have for the trip?
- How much time did it take to climb, and what inconveniences may the party have encountered while climbing almost to the height of three kilometres using the shoes and equipment of that time?
- Why did the Transfiguration of Jesus have to happen specifically on a mountain?

Verse 3. The talk of clothing in the Bible begins in connection with the banishment from paradise. Righteousness is generally described as white clothes in the Bible and its lack as dirty rags.

- What would have happened if Jesus had been equally bright all his life, from the manger to the cross?
- Why did Heavenly Father want to show the divine figure of his son to the disciples this one time before the death of Jesus?
- What does it mean that especially Jesus’ **clothes** changed?
- Which Saviour would be easier to deal with: the one who looks like a human being and who has carpenter’s clothes or the one who looks like God and who is wearing the white suit of righteousness? Give reasons for your answer.

Verse 4. Luke tells what those three men were talking about: “Jesus’ departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment in Jerusalem.

- Why was it important that also two representatives from the Old Testament were witnessing Jesus’ transfiguration?
- Think about why God chose Moses and Elijah to witness the transfiguration? Why not for example Abraham or David? (Discuss this based on what you remember.)
- How did the disciples identify the two characters of the Old Testament?
- What may Moses and Elijah have discussed about the death of Jesus on the cross?

Verses 5–6

- What made the disciples feel comfortable in that situation?
- If you have ever experienced such a wonderful spiritual experience that you would not have wanted to return to everyday life, tell others about it.
- What do you think of Peter’s plan in verse 5?
- Peter said he felt good. What is he however afraid of (6)?
- What do you think—does it feel good or bad to be close to the holy God?

Verse 7. In the past, a pillar of cloud was above the tabernacle of Moses as a sign of God’s presence and his guidance.

- What was the meaning of the **cloud** in the light of the Old Testament?
- Heavenly Father had already said in connection with the baptism of Jesus: “*You are my Son, whom I love.*” Why was it important that those words were spoken again on the Mount of Transfiguration?
- Why didn’t God say “Obey my Son!” but instead “Listen to him”?
- Compare the Mount of Transfiguration with Mount Sinai, where also the voice of God was heard. What is common, what is different between these situations? (Discuss based on what you remember.)

Verse 8

- What an important message does this verse have to us?

Verses 9–10. According to the Old Testament, the sinner who sees the face of God, dies.

- Why didn’t the disciples die, even though they saw God face to face?
- Why weren’t the disciples allowed to start telling everyone right away about the things they saw on the Mount of Transfiguration?

- What did this experience mean to the apostles when they established churches and experienced persecution? (What made such a big impression to Peter that he was recalling it in his letter still 30 years later, when his death was approaching? Cf. 2 Pet. 1:18.)
- What does it mean to you that you will see his transfigured face and also you are in a transfigured state when Jesus returns on the earth (Rev. 22:4)?

**Glad tidings:** Jesus left the Mount of Transfiguration to go towards another mountain, namely Calvary. There he had to die naked so that he could give his dazzling white linen of righteousness upon us sinners, as our baptismal dress.



## 7 YOUR KING WILL COME AS GENTLE

### Mark 11:1–11

**Background:** Jesus was coming to Jerusalem for the last time. The disciples hoped he would take control there. Also the people were waiting for the coming of the Messiah King, but not everyone was convinced that Jesus was that king. The Messiah was supposed to be David's son. The day before in Jericho, Jesus had publicly admitted that he was David's son. Everyone knew that the Messiah would ride a donkey to Jerusalem because Zechariah the prophet had so prophesied. "*Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*" (Zech. 9:9) Notice that Jerusalem was full of Roman soldiers during Easter time.

Verses 1–3. The location of Bethphage is unknown, but Bethany was located about 3 km east of Jerusalem, on the slope of the Mount of Olives. It was the village of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, where Jesus had often visited and where he stayed the night throughout his last week.

- Imagine a situation where the prince of a country arrives at the capital for his coronation. What kind of ceremonies are then usual?
- What do verses 1–3 show us about the financial situation of Jesus?
- What does the quality of a vehicle mean to many men and even women of our time?
- What message would Jesus have wanted to give to his people if he had arrived in Jerusalem in wagons pulled by the best quadriga of the country? (What signal did he therefore send by choosing a donkey?)
- Why didn't Jesus pick a donkey up himself, but he asked his disciples to do so?
- A foal that is not used to a rider is usually difficult to control and will not be taken straight to the midst of the crowd where it may be disobedient or refuse to cooperate. Why did Jesus specifically want a foal which no one had ever ridden?
- Jesus had never used the word "Lord" of himself before. Why did he use it now? (How can people know who is the "lord" referred to here?)

Verses 4–6. The donkey stood in front of the house door, but the disciples did not go inside to explain the matter.

- Why did Mark want to write these three verses to his gospel, what is their message?
- Think of various reasons why the donkey stood on the street, not in a stable or at grass.
- What does it show that no one resisted when they took the foal away?
- Why is this donkey such an important animal that it is preached about twice a year in many churches (Advent and Palm Sunday)?

Verses 7–8. The donkey is a low animal so that the rider's legs are hanging close to the ground. The leader reads the quote of Zechariah again. (See the background section above.)

- Do you think Jesus looked noble while sitting on the donkey? If not noble, then what did he look like?
- How did the disciples get the idea to pile their clothes on the donkey's back?
- The Old Testament talks about a case in which soldiers spread their cloaks on the stairs for the newly crowned king to walk on. A cloak however could be ruined when both the donkey and the people walked on it on a rocky road. What made people give perhaps their only cloak for such use?
- How did the people suddenly realize that this is the Messiah King himself riding to Zion? What was the sign that opened people's eyes?

Verses 9–11. Suddenly people started singing Psalm 118. It was usually sung in large festive processions when people were going to the temple to offer sacrifices. Hosanna means: Oh Lord help! Some scholars regard this psalm as a king's psalm.

- If you should describe the atmosphere of that moment in a few words, what would you say?
- Why did the people choose especially Psalm 118 to sing in this situation?
- How did the people expect Jesus to ascend his throne—after all the country was occupied?
- How did the people believe their situation might change if the Romans were driven away from the country?
- How is it possible that the Roman occupiers did not stop this procession?
- Do you think that the whole nation was drawn into the atmosphere, or were there people who did not join the song? (What made some people suspect that Jesus might not after all be the coming Messiah?)
- What message did Jesus want to give to his people by riding right away to the temple?
- Five days later the people cried out the crucify shout to Pilate. There probably have been same persons among them as in this procession. What do these cases show us about human nature?

Concluding questions

- After the miracle of feeding, the people had wanted to make Jesus king, but Jesus had retreated. Why did he want to show his kingship especially in this situation?
- Why didn't Jesus orally announce to the people that he is the Messiah, the son of David; why did he show it by choosing his vehicle? What is the difference between these two ways of communicating?
- Jesus knew that this procession would be for the chief priests and scribes the last straw that would spin the murder machinery in motion. What did he perhaps think about the future opposition?

- How do you think the owner had treated his donkey foal after the death and resurrection of Jesus?

**Glad tidings:** The coronation of Jesus was indeed coming. Five days later he was crowned with a crown of thorns, and his title “*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*” was written above his head. So the Messiah riding on the donkey did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life for many—also for you. However next time when Jesus comes into this world, he will come as the victorious king on a white horse.

## 8 THE TWO COMMANDMENTS OF LOVE

### Mark 12:28–34

**Background:** The teacher of law in our text had just heard the debate about the resurrection of the dead—how Jesus made the Sadducees totally speechless. The question of the greatest commandment of the law was the hot theological topic of discussion. For example, the first commandment, the Sabbath commandment or the commandments to sacrifice were proposed. Verse 28. According to Matthew, this man tried to test Jesus.

- How would our culture answer the question about the most important commandment or life guidance? (Which one of these do you think will be the number one: “Live out and satisfy your dreams and desires!” or “Love your neighbor!”?)
- Think about the relationship of this teacher to Jesus at that moment when he came to Jesus.

Verses 29–30. The double commandment of love is not found in the Old Testament. However, these verses are a direct quote from the books of Moses (Deut. 6:4–5).

- Usually the teachers of that time responded to controversial issues by quoting other authorities: Rabbi such and such says so and so. What do you think of Jesus’ answer based on this background?
- Why did Jesus quote verse 29, which has no commandment but a confession of faith and did not go directly to verse 30, which contains a commandment?
- Why is it not enough to believe in one God, why should we also love him?
- Think of those four words in verse 30. What does it mean to love God with all your heart in everyday life? What about with all your soul? Mind? Strength?
- Do you think you can love God even if you don’t read the Bible and take part in communion? Give reasons for your view.
- If someone really loves God, how does he think of idolatry, the use of the name of God, and the Sabbath day, i.e. of the first three commandments?
- What would your life be like if you could love Jesus in this way?
- How has this commandment been violated in past and how is it violated in our time?

Verse 31. In the Old Testament the word “neighbour” mostly refers to the members of one’s own people only. Here Jesus is quoting only half of a verse of the book of Moses: “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Lev. 19:18).

- Why did Jesus leave out the beginning of the sentence in his quote?
- Why doesn’t Jesus say that you should love your neighbour with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? (What happens to the person who loves someone like this? What happens to the person you love in this way?)
- Why the best criterion for loving your neighbour is that you love him AS YOURSELF?
- What does this command actually oblige us to do?
- What do you think of the claim in our time that a man cannot love another unless he loves himself?

Let’s reconsider verses 29–31, i.e. the double commandment of love in its entirety. Note that Jesus does not claim that to love God is the greatest and to love the neighbour is the second greatest commandment.

- What would the consequences have been to human life if Jesus had said that to love God is the greatest commandment?
- If Jesus had said that loving one’s neighbour is the greatest commandment alone, what consequences would it bring to our human relations and our relationship with God?
- What should we do if loving God seems to conflict with loving your neighbour in our lives?
- If the double commandment of love is a condition of accessing heaven, will you make it?

Verses 32–33. The sacrifices were the foundation of Jewish worship life. There could be no relationship with God without sacrifices because reconciliation with God was made by sacrifice.

- What did the scribe suddenly realize while listening to Jesus’ answer?
- Why is love more important than the sacrifice institution?
- How did the scribe’s attitude toward Jesus change?
- Jesus himself would soon die as a sacrificial lamb of God. What light does this fact bring to this discussion between the teacher of the law and Jesus?

Verse 34

- What was the teacher of the law still missing so that he could enter the kingdom of God? (The teacher of the law now understood the greatest commandment, but what did he yet not understand?)

**Glad tidings:** Jesus loved God above all and you **more than himself**. Sacrifice and love were united in him. He sacrificed himself as a sin offering because we have not loved God above all things nor loved our neighbour as ourselves. Only Jesus’ sacrificial love for us can teach us to love God and our neighbour. *We love because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

## 9 NEIGHBOUR

### Mark 12:41–44

**Background:** In Herod's temple there were **13 trumpet-shaped chests** into which money was raised for the construction and restoration of the temple. Herod's temple was not finally completed in 63 AD and it was destroyed in 70 AD—about 40 years after the events of the text. The temple was the most important means of grace, i.e. the place for the forgiveness of sins and encountering God. Note that there are many promises in the Old Testament for widows and orphans. Probably the widow in our text had heard them in the synagogue.

#### Preliminary questions

- Why do people usually sacrifice (in all religions)?
- Why does one give to a collection out of his poverty, another doesn't give even out of his wealth?

Verses 41–42. The copper coin was the smallest in use in Israel. Its value was perhaps about 20 cents in our currency. With that amount, one could probably have bought the ingredients of vegetable soup or a couple of eggs at the market of Jerusalem.

- There was no social welfare or employment of women in the Jewish society of that time. Imagine what problems this woman had faced after the death of her husband.
- What might the mother's relationship with her half-orphan children have been like?
- Why had Jesus sat down to watch the treasury of the temple?
- What made some rich people give a lot of money to the maintenance of the temple; think of various motives.
- The treasury had been placed in a prominent spot in the temple of Jerusalem. To what extent do you think donating is affected by the awareness that others know how much each one gives?
- What might the widow of our text have thought if she had known someone was watching her?
- The poor widow knew that only one single brick at the most could be purchased with her pennies for the maintenance of the temple. Why did she however want to give that insignificant amount?
- If you were in that widow's situation, to whom or for what could you imagine donating your last money?
- Imagine the widow had felt that God was **demanding** her last coin with which she had thought of buying food for her hungry children. What would she have thought of God like that?
- This widow had lost a lot, but what had she however also received from God?
- Why was the temple such an important place for the widow, so that she donated her last pennies to maintain it?
- Which reason is more likely: a) the widow donated her last pennies because she was grateful for what she had received from God? Or b) she donated her coins to receive something from God? Give reasons for your answer.

#### Widow's faith

- What did the widow believe of God for whom she wanted to give his last penny?
- How had the widow gained the confidence that God would take care of her and her children?
- Is it easy or hard for you to believe that God will take care of you and your children also financially? Why is it easy, why is it hard?
- Do you think the widow's children went to bed hungry that night? Give reasons for your answer.
- Which is more harmful to your children/grandchildren: that they sometimes suffer need, or that they get everything they ask for?

#### Verses 43–44

- Why did Jesus talk about the widow's coin with his disciples?
- Why isn't the amount important when someone gives money to the work of the kingdom of God?
- What makes a person donate "everything that she needs for living /all her living" to the work of the kingdom of God?
- What legacy did the widow leave to her children?
- Compare the widow's legacy with the legacy of the rich of the text left to their children?
- What would you like to leave to your children?
- Look at verses 13:1–2. Jesus knew that the temple would be destroyed after 40 years. What was the benefit of the widow's coin nevertheless?

#### Concluding questions

- What happens if the temple of our time, i.e. the Christian church, runs out of money?
- What would God want you to donate to the "temple" of your own, i.e. your local church? What about to the global church? (You can also answer quietly in your heart.)

**Glad tidings:** The widow's coin was a type of sacrifice Jesus made to save us from hell. He gave not only everything he needed to live but his life.

## 10 KEEP WATCH!

### Mark 13:31–37

**Background:** Before this Jesus has told about the signs of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. He has spoken about the persecution of Christians, delusions, wars and catastrophes but also about the signs of spring. Now he starts talking about the time of his return. Verses 34–35 contain a small parable of the master of a house, who is going abroad and arranges works in his house during his absence. As the master Jesus means himself and as the house he means his church.

Verses 32–33. (Verse 31 will be dealt last.)

- What would have happened if Jesus had announced the exact date of his return?
- How is it possible that Jesus himself does not know the day of his return, even though he is Almighty God?
- What scares or cheers you the most when you think of Jesus' return?
- What kind of images do you get from the expression "keeping watch"? What is a Christian like who is keeping watch?

Verse 34. At that time there were many slaves in a house. The only duty of a certain slave was to stay awake at night and guard the door. Night watchmen are still employed by private homes in many countries of Asia and Africa.

- What can a person do to keep himself awake even when he feels very sleepy?
- What do you think about the role of a doorkeeper, do you think it is easy or difficult? Give reasons for your answer.
- How might a doorkeeper have been equipped for a thief at the time?
- What could the duty of a doorkeeper mean in the Christian church and to whom does it belong?
- If you are a Christian, God has given you duty in his "house." What could be your duty? (You can also answer quietly in your heart.)

Verse 35. The night was then divided into three-hour watches, which were: the evening (nine o'clock), midnight, cockcrow (three o'clock), and dawn.

- Think of various reasons why the master of the parable did not come back during daylight hours?
- What would happen a) to the master and b) to the doorkeeper if the doorkeeper slept when the master returned home?
- Imagine that a doorkeeper had guarded every night for ten years and nothing would ever have happened. How would it affect his work motivation?
- Think about how the relationship between the master and the doorkeeper affected the work motivation of the latter? a) If he did not like his master or b) if he loved the master.)
- What is meant by the evening, midnight, cockcrow and dawn in the history of the Christian church? What hour do you think we are now living?

Verse 36

- If Jesus came back tonight, would his return happen unexpectedly? Give reasons for your view.
- Have you ever been afraid of falling asleep before Jesus' return? In what situation did you feel that kind of fear?
- What happens to those church doorkeepers who sleep when Jesus returns on earth?

Verse 37

- To whom "all" does Jesus say these words? (What is the message in these words of Jesus to indifferent people or even to those who hate Christianity?)

Verse 31

- Heaven, earth and everything we own are only temporal. What conclusions should we draw from this fact?
- What light does this verse bring to the following text about keeping watch? (How can the word of God keep us awake until the end?)
- How did the asleep fallen church doorkeeper perhaps react to Jesus' words?

Concluding questions

- Where is the cross of Jesus in this text?
- Based on this text, do you think it is possible that Jesus would come twice, before and after the Great Tribulation?

**Glad tidings:** Jesus kept watch in Gethsemane while shedding blood sweat. Our watch keeping means that we stick to the word of God in both major and minor things without forgetting what Jesus has done for us.