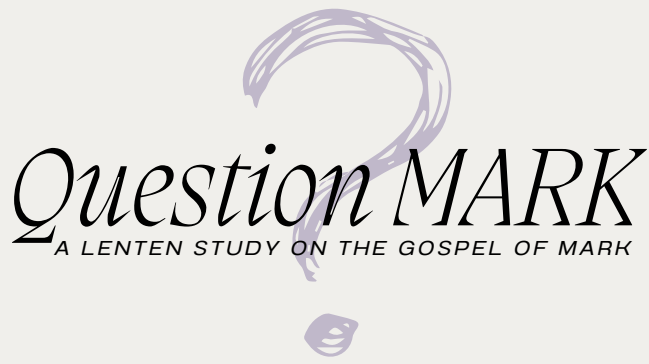




PLYMOUTH READS  
THE GOSPEL OF  
MARK LENT 2024



## Week Five: Chapters Nine & Ten

### Chapter Nine

opens with Mark's story of the Transfiguration, a mystical experience in which Jesus' physical appearance becomes radiant. A voice from a cloud, which we presume to be God, says "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." (This has some parallels to Mark 1.11, when after the baptism of Jesus, a voice came from the sky saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.) The healing of the boy with a spirit begins at verse 14. The boy's father proclaims his faith in Jesus. In verse 30, Jesus alludes to "the messianic secret," a distinctive feature of Mark's gospel, in which Jesus wants to keep his true identity a secret. He also uses a distinctive phrase: "The Son of Man" (in Hebrew *ben 'adam*) which occurs frequently in the books of Ezekiel and Daniel and connotes an apocalyptic figure. In verse 35, Jesus tells his followers that "whoever wants to be first must be last and be servant of all." That would have turned the heads of everyone in the ancient world, but it is a characteristic of the reign of God that Jesus proclaimed.

### Chapter Ten

begins with a teaching about divorce that on the surface seems to de-liberalize the Jewish tradition. Jesus breaks again with accepted social norms in emphasizing the importance of children and even says that we must become child-like in order to receive God's realm. The story of the rich man (which has parallels to the ruler in Luke and the rich young man in Matthew) which delves deep into the soul of the man, who has kept the commandments, but has one aspect of his life that controls him. When Jesus asks him to give his money to the poor, the man turns away. Jesus finishes the episode, saying that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Jesus offers another reminder of socioeconomic reversal in verse 31, saying "many who are the first will be last, and the last will be first." In verse 32, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection three days later. The section concludes with James and John dithering about who is greater and who is lesser. (They missed the point earlier!) "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant [*diakonos* in Greek, from whence our word deacon comes] and whoever wishes to first among you must be slave [*doulos* in Greek, from whence we borrow the word *doula*] of all. The chapter concludes with the healing of blind Bartimeaus, a beggar. Jesus tells him that his trust and faith have made him well.

### Questions for Reflection

1. The social structure of the ancient Mediterranean was very stratified. There was a tiny ruling class, no middle class, and an enormous class of landless peasants and laborers. Given that background how might most of Jesus' hearers feel about the "negative social mobility" he describes as a characteristic of the kingdom of God?
2. Have you ever wondered whether Jesus himself predicted his demise (history prophesied) or perhaps that the author of Mark's gospel added that as "prophecy historicized?" If the latter is the case, why might the author have added that to his story of Jesus' ministry? Does that make a difference in the way you understand the gospel?



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Take a long, curious look into the eye of the person above. Imagine yourself as Bartimaeus...how would you imagine the experience of restored sight? If you are a person with good eyesight, what might the metaphor of being able to see again mean to you?

### **Putting It into Practice**

This week, pick a few situations or people to try and see them from a fresh perspective. With your new eyes, what might you discern this week that you may have been blind to in the past?