



Stewardship in the Second Testament

Lesson 2: The Gospel of Mark

Overview

This session explores how the Gospel of Mark understands the Reign of God and invites participants to reflect on stewardship as the faithful use of God-given power in uncertain times. Participants will consider how hope, generosity, and trust shape their response to the present and the future.

Preparation for the Teacher

- Read the texts (found below) ahead of time.
- Watch the video (link below)—it may stimulate additional questions appropriate for your context. Make certain you have tested the equipment necessary for showing the video—it helps to keep the technical gremlins away!
- Do a little homework about your church and community. Can you list items of uncertainty that people are facing within your community of faith? Perhaps there are concerns about finances, leadership transitions, or changes occurring in the neighborhood where your church is located. Is there anxiety about success that other congregations are experiencing that seem to have bypassed your particular church? (This is not the time to try to solve those problems, to “blame” those circumstances, or to create new ones.) The question is more focused on the future—where are we headed? Do we have a future? Are we anxious about the future? Ask the same questions of yourself relative to your community, pressing outward to regional, national, and global concerns. (Think about the stability of some countries either economically or politically. Perhaps there are environmental concerns or issues of safety.)
- Do not leave your research to only the “negative.” What are some signs of hope in your church and/or community? Are there positive trends anywhere to lift up? Most groups will be good at identifying the negative. Your job as the facilitator is to also be able to prompt participants into hopeful thinking as well. While there is difficulty, think about where you see God present in your circumstances.

Background

Mark, of course, has a particular understanding of the Realm of God that is at the center of his Gospel and of our lesson for today. Mark believed that history was divided into two ages—the

present, broken age, a time of idolatry, exploitation, sin, injustice, social inequality, sickness, enmity with nature, and death, and the Realm of God, a new age of wholeness, when the values of God permeate every life and situation, a time of mutuality, forgiveness, justice, equality, health, blessing between humankind and nature, and eternal life.

For Mark, the ministry of Jesus begins this new age in the present, but it will come in its fullness only after the return of Jesus, the second coming.

Pray for your students as you prepare this week's lesson.

Facilitating the Lesson

As the class begins, welcome the class and engage in your usual opening exercises (taking attendance, collecting an offering, prayer concerns, other announcements, etc.).

Opening Activity

Ask the class to define the “Reign of God” (sometimes called the “Kingdom of God”).

- What does this concept mean to them?
- What are the characteristics of the Reign of God?
- Is it a time in the future, or does it have meaning or “presence” now?
- Who gets to participate in the Reign of God?
- How does one experience it?
- What is present or absent in the Reign? How does the world change?

Jesus says the “Reign of God is among you.” He also says the “Reign of God is coming,” implying in some way that it is not here (in its fullness) yet. How do we reconcile those concepts?

Scripture Reflection

Read the following texts from the Gospel of Mark (ask individual students to read different passages):

- Mark 1:14–15
- Mark 3:13–19
- Mark 3:31–35
- Mark 6:14–28
- Mark 6:30–44
- Mark 10:17–27

Video Segment

Have the class watch the video: https://youtu.be/r08YOc8_bhg

Discussion Questions

Invite the class to wrestle with the following:

1. Reluctance and Power

The disciples were reluctant to exercise the power that God gave them to feed the hungry crowd.

- Do you ever feel a similar reluctance?
- Do you have trouble believing that God has given you power to bring the Realm of God into the world in concrete and tangible ways?

2. Wealth and Solidarity

Many people are nervous when Jesus directs the rich person in Mark to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. That was more easily imaginable in those days since Mark believed the rich person would not have to live long until the Second Coming of Christ.

- Today we have to plan for the future, but what can we do that expresses solidarity with the poor and commitment to helping the world become more like the Reign of God?

3. Power and the Future

- How does our view of the future impact our generosity?
- What does it mean to have power in the world today?

(Think of the Herod story in Mark 6:14–28. The world uses power to get its own way and to hold on to power. In what ways does the church see this differently with the power it has been given?)

4. Stewardship of Hope

Mark wrote at a time when the world of his congregation was in chaos and when people were very uncertain about the future. In this setting, we might think of Mark as a steward of hope.

- Do you see ways in which your congregation is in a similar place—feeling like you are in a certain amount of chaos and uncertain about the future?
- How can you help your congregation become stewards of hope?

5. Bearing Witness

- How do we, in the living of our lives (and by the mission of our congregation), bear witness to the Reign of God being present today?
- Are we practicing stewardship as Mark understood it—releasing or channeling the power of God's Rule into the world on behalf of the Gospel message?

Closing

Close the lesson time with prayer.

This is part of a 7-session series on Stewardship in the Second Testament, designed to be used as a Sunday School or small group lesson. Content is provided by Rev. Dr. Ron Allen in partnership with the Center for Faith & Giving (www.centerforfaithandgiving.org).