

The Gospel of Jesus

Underground Institute - Feb. 15, 2017

Class 4: The Gospel of Jesus

1. "Who Do You Say That I Am?" (Mk. 8:27-30), or What makes Jesus special?

- a. The Gospel writers draw from titles within their cultural & political context for Jesus: Son of Man, Prophet, Rabbi (Teacher), Lord, Savior, Son of God, Word, etc.
 - i. The Gospels emerged out of an oral tradition, with each author writing for a very particular context: Gospel of Mark (~69 CE); Luke (~80 CE); Matthew (~80 CE), John (~100 CE).
 - ii. Preferred title: Messiah (*Christos*) = One seen by the community as anointed to lead them to an ancient & more sustainable way of living. Rooted in the "Little Tradition."
 1. *Christos*: The Greek word for savior that increasingly came to mean salvation from divine condemnation. John's "*Logos*" morphs into abstraction and "Great Tradition" theology.
 2. "Canon within a canon" means Which salvation? "Salvation" as Rom. 10:9 ("believing & confessing" his "lordship") or Matt 25:31-46 (caring for neighbors)? Doctrine or the Way?
- b. The Western church begins with theological & ideological abstraction, drawing typically from Paul or John. But historical context is the ground for sound theology. Wise to focus on Jesus' life, values, ways of relating & culture, and the socio-political-economic context he is navigating.

You have heard it said that Jesus transcends history as the Son of God, and thus his earthly life is incidental, not worthy of emulation, that his instructions point to our inability to take it seriously.

But I say unto you that Jesus is a real historical figure in a specific time & place teaching us how to live, and that when he says "Follow me," he means it. Jesus divorced from history becomes a mascot for human causes, whether racism, sexism, war, colonization or ecocide. This is the implication of Western theology.

2. The "Kingdom of God" is not human empire. It is the untamable wildness of God.

- a. *Baptism into a wilderness social movement*: Jesus had multiple options, but chose to apprentice himself under "the way" of John the Baptist & into the reality of the peasants who had rallied around him.
 - i. *John the Baptist*: Wanderer of the desert region east of Jerusalem, preaches a baptism of repentance & a reinstitution of the Jubilee vision (Mk. 1:4; Lk 3:3,11). "Elijah who is to come" (Mt. 11:13) -- not just an individual, but the voice of the wilderness speaking prophetically to the city.
 - ii. *Jesus' baptism*: Baptized "into the Jordan River," the local watershed, with the Spirit entering Jesus as a wild bird, "immediately" launching him further into the wilderness (1:12).
- b. *Forty Days in the Wilderness*: Jesus driven into radical wilderness solitude where he fasts, and is stripped down & alone: confronts the devil in the wilderness, which turns out to be the spirit of civilization surfacing
 - i. "40 Days" = Israel's 40-year wandering in the wilderness. He is retracing the footsteps of Israel to discover what went wrong. Who is he in reference to the gifts & the wounds of the tradition?
 1. *Manna or Mammon?* Return to the Exodus wilderness, hungering & anxious about bread (Ex. 16). Can he (unlike Moses' followers) trust the economy of "enough for today"?
 2. *Shepherding or Domination?* Satan parades the "kingdoms of the world" and offers Jesus jurisdiction over them as king. Can he (unlike David) resist the lure of centralized control?
 3. *Liberator or Patron?* Satan puts Jesus on the Temple's pinnacle, representing the elitism of the wealthy & powerful. Can he (unlike Solomon) be free from supremacy & paternalism?
- c. *A New Sinai*: Jesus returns from the wilderness, begins calling his disciples, and symbolically forms a new intertribal confederacy with the appointing of *twelve* on a mountain (Mk. 3:13-19).
 - i. Will tutor in alternative social practice, entrusting the "secret of the kingdom of God" (Mk. 4:11).
 - ii. By reenacting a "new Sinai" covenant on the mountain, he is attacking the ideological foundations of the dominant order (which also claimed Sinai). Has formed the *community of resistance*.
- d. *The "Kingdom of God" as a Pioneer Species* (Mk. 4:26-32): A mustard seed invades bare soil that human agriculture exposes. Through succession it gives rise to the more mature and rooted forest.
 - i. The "kingdom of God" opens up memories of other ways that are more viable, and it partially embodies them. It is provisional & tactical. Not about expansionist triumph, but the regeneration of degraded systems, leading to its own succession by more deeply rooted healthy communities.

You have heard it said that the wilderness is a place to be feared, a place of chaos, terror, and darkness that must be overcome by the "light" coming from the city on a hill (civilization).

But I say unto you that it is the centralizing city that is harmful, and that nature/wilderness is where civilizational pathologies are exposed. In wilderness we are tested and can encounter God & our self raw.

3. Galilee as the Place of Jubilee Remembrance & Renewal

- a. *Jesus as Jubilee* (Lk 4:18-19, 21): After return from the wilderness, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 to claim the Messianic anointing of the Jubilee tradition. In Jesus, all things are begun anew: there is healing from sickness, exorcism of evil spirits, liberation from debt, sabbath rest, and economic redistribution.
 - i. *A Great Leveling*: Powerful brought down from their thrones & lowly lifted up (Mary's Song, Lk 1:46-55); valleys filled and mountains & hills made low (John the Baptist, Lk. 3:5).
- b. *Exorcism & Healing*: Roman conquest & Temple-State extraction left people indebted & hungry, plagued by physical & social paralysis, and despairing about the future. Alien demonic forces ("unclean spirits") had taken "possession" of people's life, resulting in self-destructive behavior and disintegrating village life.
 - i. *Exorcisms*: Jesus expels demonic forces working through the Temple-State, like scribal authority (Mk. 1:21-28) & Roman occupation (5:1-20), that had taken "possession" of people's life.
 - ii. *Healing*: Jesus heals members of families & communities. Takes place in public and those healed are restored as integral members of the community. Often involves removing stigma and blame around a physical condition through "forgiveness," removing self-blame & paralysis (Mk. 2:1-9).
 1. The religious authorities oppose his healings & forgiveness of sins, because it disrupts the purity/debt system and its flow of tithes & sacrifices to the Temple.
 - a. *Healing the Leper* (Mk. 1:40-45). Leprosy was understood as communicable & required ritual cleansing. This meant social exclusion & the need to make special payments to the Temple. Jesus heals him, but because he goes public with it, Jesus is now marked & considered unclean by the city.
 - b. *Healing the Paralytic* (Mk. 2:1-12). Lack of bodily wholeness attributed to his own sin or inherited sin, denying him full status in the community. "Your sins are forgiven" releases him from all debt, restoring social & physical wholeness. The scribes charge "blasphemy!" "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
 - c. Jesus' healings threaten to liberate people from fear of the whole system, which would be bad for business. So the authorities conspire to destroy him (Mk. 3:6).
 2. Individual healings also hint at healing social "bodies." The woman hemorrhaging for 12 years & the nearly dead 12-year-old girl also represent the bringing back to life of the people of Israel (Mk. 5:21-43) from the disintegration brought on by Roman imperialism.
- c. *Teaching & Parables*: Jesus' teaching around Galilee focused on the renewal of village communities.
 - i. *Covenant Renewal*: Needy families borrowed from and loaned to one another, but have fallen into quarreling, demanding repayment, and exchanging insults. Seeks to renew the Mosaic covenant.
 1. *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt. 5-7): People believed poverty & hunger were curses for unfaithfulness. Jesus declares they were the true recipients of God's blessings. Could then renew the covenant demands of mutual sharing & cooperation, forgiveness of debts, and solidarity in village community, which together eliminate the need to hoard.
 - ii. *Savvy Pedagogy*: Jesus utilizes parables to resist the trap of binary logic presented to him by the authorities. For those with "ears to hear," they decode the political reality, while for those who "listen, but do not understand," the meaning is obscured (Mk. 4:10-20; Is. 6:9-10).

You have heard it said that Jesus was a religious superhero saving people from sin, death and hell, and doing miracles that we, his followers, cannot match;

But I say unto you that Jesus was a community organizer in rural Galilee, setting people free from the effects of Roman imperialism and a predatory Temple system. He reinterpreted the law of Moses and taught the prophets so that people would be humane again, making possible the renewal of village life.

4. The Way of the Cross & Confrontation with Empire

- a. *Truth-telling & the Way of the Cross*: Jesus predicts his suffering, rejection and execution (Mk. 8:27-9:1), beginning the second half of the story—journeying toward Jerusalem to confront Temple authorities. "Take up your cross" is *literal*, as it is the Roman method of executing dissidents. The disciples are to share this fate, which they resist (Peter in Mk. 8:32-33; 9:5) & instead argue over greatness (Mk. 9:33-37).
 - i. *The Transfiguration*: Jesus & his inner circle on a mountain-top "summit" with Moses & Elijah, the central prophetic figures of Israel. White garments = the robes of martyrs (Dn. 7:9).
 - ii. *Confrontation with Jerusalem Authorities*: Jesus denounces them for the heavy burdens they place on the people while living extravagantly, for their need for reputation & honor, for their posturing & hypocrisy, & implicates them in the killing of prophets (Lk. 11:37-4; Mt. 23:1-36).

- b. *“Triumphal” Entry into Jerusalem*: Jesus enters over Passover with carefully choreographed street theatre designed to *repudiate* Messianic triumphalism (like Simon Maccabaeus when he liberated Palestine from the Seleucids) & Roman procession (Pontius Pilate entered with a military cavalry on the other side that very day to keep an eye on things during the Feast of Passover). Jesus marches into the city on a donkey surrounded by an army of peasants shouting his praise (Mk. 11:1-11).
 - i. The colt is a symbol in Zechariah that is expressly *anti-military* (9:9-10). This is the beginning of a nonviolent siege that seeks, not to *defend* the Temple-State, but to *disrupt* it.
 - ii. Jesus scopes out the temple, then retreats to a house in Bethany. The crowd protects him from the authorities by day, but he needs to retreat undercover at night (Mk. 11:11,19).
- c. *Acting & Speaking Against the Temple*: The temple was an *economic* institution. Jesus returns to disrupt *business as usual*, driving out those “buying & selling,” overturning the table of the “money changers & the seats of those who sold doves,” and blocking further activity (Mk. 11:15-17). A blasphemous & profaning act on the sacred political-economic center of Judea, and a challenge to Roman imperial rule.
 - i. “My house shall be called a house of prayer (Is 56:1-8), but you have made it a den of robbers.”
 - ii. *Destruction & Rising Again of the Temple*: “Forthtells” the fall of the Temple-State, and the possibility of a new social order based on mutual forgiveness of debts (Mk. 11:12-14, 20-24).
 1. Exposes the Pharisees & Herodians for their economic idolatry (icon & epigraph on the denarius, Mk. 12:13-17); challenges the ideology of “Son of David,” which legitimates the temple state (Mk. 12:35-37); and denounces the scribes for “devouring the estates of widows under the pretext of saying long prayers” (Mk. 12:38-44).
 2. Laments what has become of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37-39), announces inevitable destruction (Mk. 13:1-2), and predicts the rising of a new temple “not made by human hands” (Mk. 14:58).
- d. *Betrayal & Arrest*: The Gospels are about Jesus as a marked man. How to kill both his reputation & his body without provoking a riot (Mk. 14:1-2) and inadvertently making him a martyr? He is finally arrested for “agitating among the people” (Lk 23:2,14) & threatening to “dismantle the temple” (Mk. 14:58).
 - i. *The Last Supper & Betrayal*: Jesus & the disciples go underground as a fugitive community, requiring the help of anonymous supporters to navigate the city to a “safehouse” to celebrate the Passover Meal (Mk. 14:12-16). Deep personal trust & loyalty are required at this point, and there is a realism that it is from within the community that betrayal comes (Mk. 14:10-11). Through table fellowship, Jesus invites disciples to solidarity with his impending arrest, torture, and execution (Mk. 14:22-25). They fall asleep, deny him and scatter when the time comes (Mk. 14:26-72).
 - ii. *Trial & Crucifixion as “King of the Jews”*: Jesus is tried by the Temple elite (Mk. 14:53-65) before he is handed over to the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, who accuses him of claiming to be “King of the Jews” (the title of King Herod)--an expression of contempt. Jesus is mocked by dressing him in purple, perhaps in Roman cloaks, symbolizing all that Jesus rejects.
- e. *Jesus’ Death & the Destruction of the Temple*: At the very moment of Jesus’ death, “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mk. 15:38). As a few remaining women watch, along with the whole spectrum of political powers, the Temple is symbolically destroyed.
- f. *The Resurrected Body of Jesus*: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome encounter an empty tomb, with a young man dressed in a white robe. They are instructed to tell the disciples that he has been raised, and they will find Jesus in Galilee. From here, the story begins again. The commission is *not* to go to the whole world with the Gospel, but to return to Galilee & begin the work they had been taught with the discipleship community (Mk. 16:7), channeling the spirit of Jesus just as he channeled the Spirit of Moses & Elijah. This “body of Christ” is the new temple, rooted in the ancient ways & animated by the same spirit as the Little Tradition--that of mutual care & service in local village life.

You have heard it said that Jesus can save our souls while our bodies are intertwined with empire; But I say unto you that Jesus is saving us from misery, dread & dehumanization which are unavoidable in the imperial system. He delegitimizes the Temple-State and thus liberates his followers to inaugurate the kingdom of God, returning Galilee to Sabbath/Jubilee village life.

In summary:

- **When we follow the Son of Man we start to become human/humane again.**
- **When we follow Jesus unto death, we die to the empire that we have become.**
- **When we rise with Christ in his resurrection, we have new life and do God’s will on earth as it is in heaven.**

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“WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?”

WHAT MAKES JESUS SPECIAL?

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MESSIANIC MOVEMENT

THE “KINGDOM OF GOD” AS WILDERNESS REVIVAL

THE DIVISION OF HEROD'S KINGDOM

- City
- Decapolis city
- Decapolis city (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak
- To Antipas
- To Archelaus
- To Philip
- To Salome
- Syrian province



Following the way of John the Baptist



Jesus is baptized into the Jordan River



Forty days spent in the wilderness



Temptations: Manna or Mammon?



Temptation: Shepherding or Domination?



Temptation: Liberator or Patron?



Calling twelve disciples



The Kingdom of God



‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’

-Mark 4:30-32

The Kingdom of God

- Jubilee
- Sabbath & other community guidelines
- Kinship
- Judges
- Gift economy
- Hospitality
- Subsistence agriculture



Archaeology Illustrated
by Balage Balogh



You have heard it said that the wilderness is a place to be feared, a place of chaos, terror, and darkness that must be overcome by the “light” coming from the city on a hill (civilization).

But I say unto you that it is the centralizing city that is harmful, and that nature/wilderness is where civilizational pathologies are exposed. In wilderness we are tested and can encounter God & our self raw.

MESSIANIC COMMUNITY

HEALING, PARABLES & SABBATH-JUBILEE ECONOMICS

First-Century Galilee

0 10 Miles
0 10 Kilometers

Mediterranean Sea



Caesarea

SAMARIA

SYRIA

GALILEE

Ptolemais

Chorazin

Capernaum

Bethsaida

Gennesaret

Gergesa

Tiberius

Sepphoris

Cana

Nazareth

Nain

Gadara

River Jordan

DECAPOLIS

Sea of Galilee

Jesus Starts His Ministry

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the
captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:16-21



Exorcism & Healing



Exorcism of Scribal Authority

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”

-Mark 1:21-24

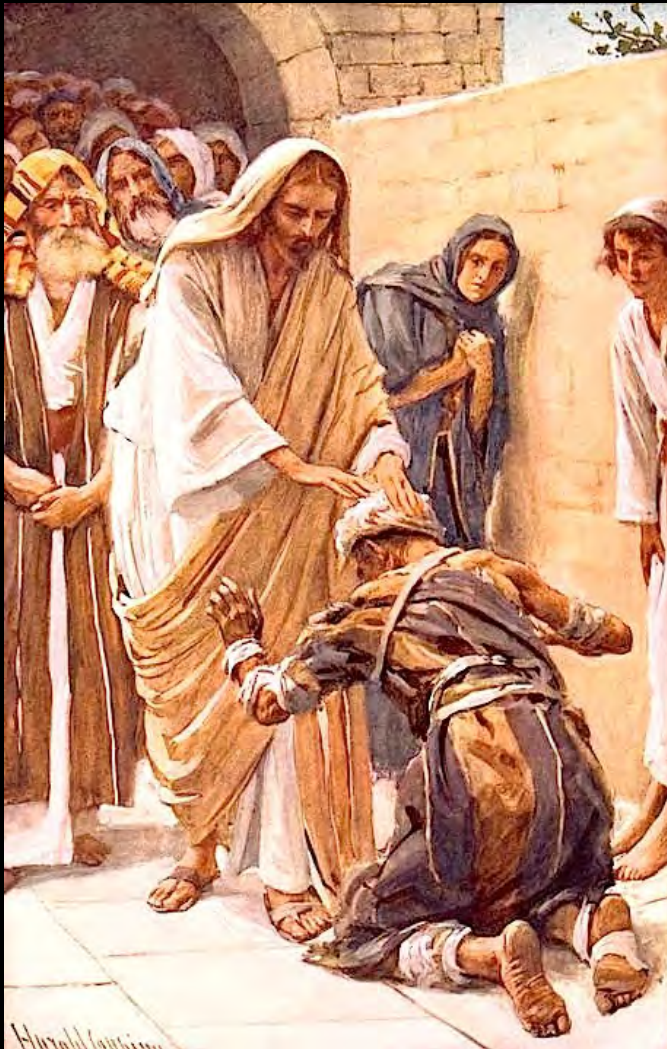


Exorcism of Legion

“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”⁹ Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “**My name is Legion; for we are many.**”

-Mark 5:7-9

Jesus Heals the Leper



A leper to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

-Mark 1:40-42

Healing the Paralytic



When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

-Mark 2:5-7

Healing Society

Hemorrhaging Woman & 12 Year Old Girl



Teaching & Parables



Parables



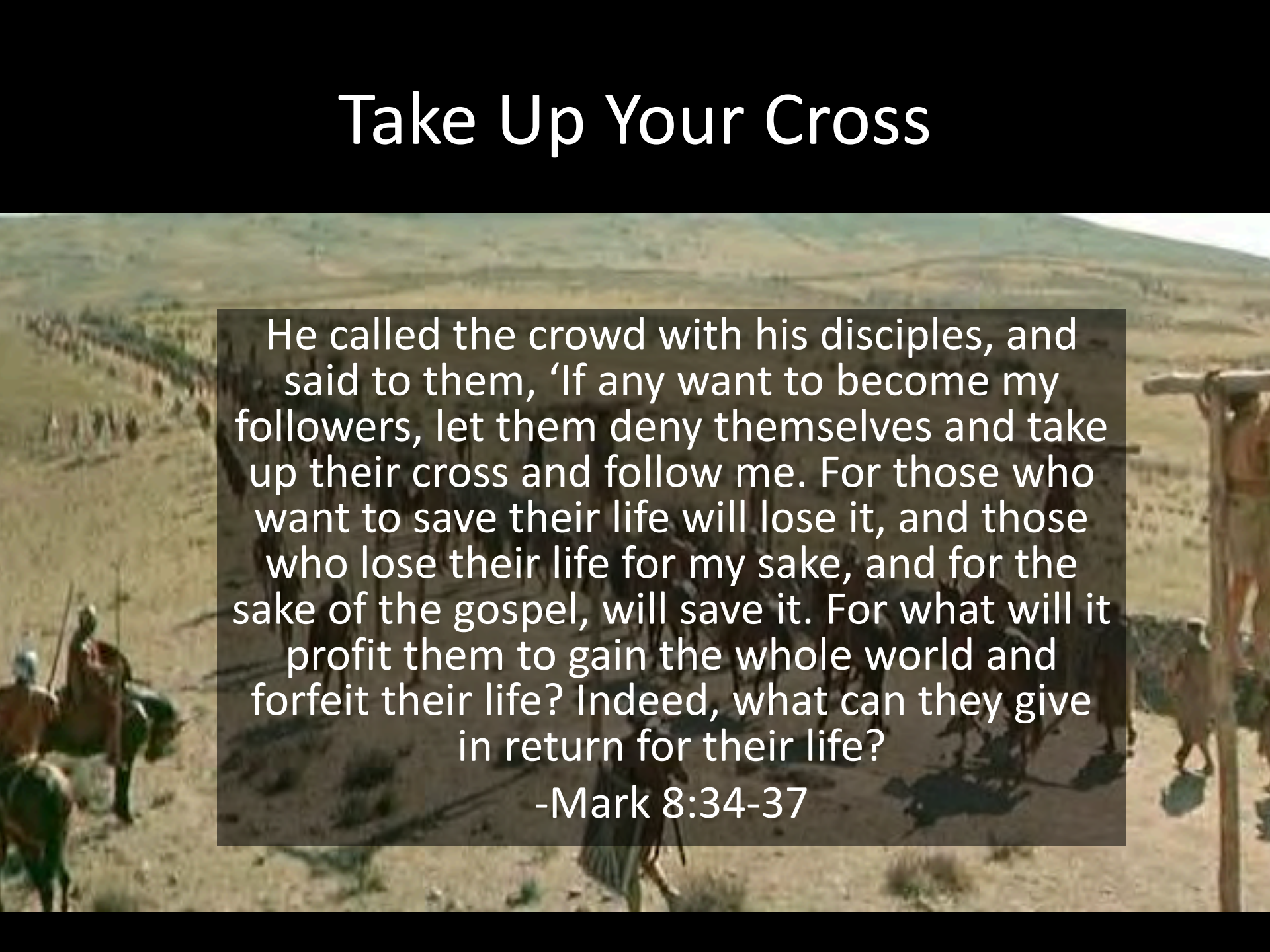
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Jesus' Walk to Jerusalem



Take Up Your Cross

A wide-angle photograph of a desert landscape under a clear sky. In the foreground, a crowd of people is gathered, some on horseback and some on foot. In the middle ground, a person is being crucified on a wooden cross. The background shows rolling hills and a distant city on a hill. The scene is set in a dry, arid environment with sparse vegetation.

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

-Mark 8:34-37

Transfiguration



Confrontation with Religious Authorities



Passover in Jerusalem



Pontius Pilate Comes for Passover



Jesus “Triumphal Entry”



The Temple



Jesus Clears the Temple Court



“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” – Mark 11:17

Woe to You



Lament for Jerusalem



Last Supper



Betrayal



Jesus Arrest











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