

The Upside Down Kingdom



A sample lesson from:

Encountering Jesus and the Kingdom (1)

A Study of Mark and Matthew

A flexible open learning course from
the [Group-based Open Learning Discipleship](#) Project

GOLD

Introduction

Our courses are designed to help you learn by means of:



Home Study

Each Course is made up of five Blocks and each Block has **eight lessons**. If you have about $\frac{3}{4}$ hr to spare (very roughly), you can complete one lesson. These lessons require you to read and interact with the course material as well as with your Bible.

Each lesson is **programmed** to help you check your progress as you work through. To get the maximum benefit it is important that you use the course in the way it was intended:

1. Read section 1 (often referred to by the technical term 'frame' 1).
2. Make the response required, if there is one.
3. Check that your answer corresponds with the feedback given in the 'feedback' section at the end. (Wherever feedback is given, it is marked with a raven.) 
4. Proceed to section 2.

Note that the **course** is programmed—**you** are **not** being programmed! The aim of programming is that:

1. you can check frequently that you have understood the material presented;
2. you are stimulated to active and critical thinking;
3. you reinforce what you learn and are better able to remember it.

Sometimes discussion frames are given. These are clearly indicated by a heading 'For Discussion' and box. Here you should answer the question in your own words and come to the tutorial prepared to discuss the question as indicated.

At the end of each lesson, we encourage you to spend some time in reflection on how what you have learnt applies to you in the situation where God has placed you.

Group Meeting

At the end of each block of home study, you meet in your tutorial group where you have the opportunity to discuss points of interest that have arisen and think through with others how your learning may be applied. You will also normally be given a five-minute quiz.

The group tutorials give the opportunity for you to clarify ideas and to share your own thoughts and to listen to the ideas of others. The process of learning from the Bible in a group is an essential part of the programme. It is here that you are able to think through areas of application and to pray and support each other in your studies.

Mark 9:9-10:52: The Upside Down Kingdom**block 3
lesson 4****Preparing for this lesson:**

- Take a moment to pray that God will help you as you consider the radical values of his kingdom.
- Remember to keep a notebook handy to note down any questions or issues for discussion.

Objectives

- At the end of this lesson you will be able to:
1. list four statements which summarise the radical values of God's kingdom;
 2. give Jesus' ideal view of marriage along with why Moses allowed divorce.

a. The upside down kingdom

1. Starting in Mark 9:33, Jesus begins to teach about the counter-cultural values of the kingdom of God. Picking up on the disciples' argument about who is the greatest, Jesus takes them aside and states:

“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all” (v35).

What do you think Jesus means by this?

- a. His followers should not be ambitious.
- b. His followers should aim to be those who think about the needs of others before themselves.
- c. Other: _____



2. Jesus then takes a little child in his arms (v.36) and says:

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (v.37).

What do you think he means by this statement?

- a. God identifies with little children.
- b. God is concerned about those whom society considers insignificant.
- c. Being a servant of all involves welcoming the weak and vulnerable.
- d. Other: _____



3. It is likely that the young child is an example of someone who would be considered weak, vulnerable and insignificant in ancient society. Although Judaism seemed to have a remarkably positive attitude to children in the ancient world, a boy did not become a fully fledged member of society until he was significantly older than thirteen (the age of the Bar-Mitzvah). As for children in the ancient Greek and Roman world, there is evidence that they were often considered to have a similar status to slaves. Among the poor, and even the relatively wealthy, it was acceptable for mothers (probably at the instigation of the father or head of the household) to give their children up either to be sold as slaves or even to be abandoned to their fate (e.g., Romulus and Remus). Such abandonment of infants is technically known as 'exposure'. N.S. Gill states:

If infant exposure was suitable for their legendary founders, who were the Roman people to say it was wrong for their offspring?

- Exposure allowed poor people to get rid of extra mouths to feed, especially the mouths of baby girls who were also a dowry liability.
- Children who were imperfect in some way were also exposed, supposedly, according to the dictates of the Twelve tablets.
- Exposure was also used to get rid of children whose paternity was unclear or undesirable, but exposure wasn't the only method that was available. Roman women employed contraceptives and received abortions, as well.
- The *paterfamilias* [father of the household] technically had the right to get rid of any infant under his power.

(N.S. Gill, *Roman Exposure of Infants: Selling Children - Humane Alternative to Abandoning, Abortion, or Killing?*)

Now look at Mark 10:13-16, where Jesus states:

“Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

For Discussion

What do you think Jesus means by this statement?

- a. In order to enter the kingdom of God, we should be innocent and naive.
- b. In order to enter the kingdom of God, we should be trusting and dependent.
- c. In order to enter the kingdom of God, we should be vulnerable and weak.
- d. In order to enter the kingdom of God, we should give up our status and rights.
- e. Other: _____

4. Now look at 9:38-41. Here John asks Jesus a question about a person who was driving out demons in Jesus' name. The disciples had told him to stop because 'he was not following us' (v38). What does Jesus respond?



5. See if you can put in your own words what Jesus is saying here and what its significance is:



6. So Jesus is willing to include unexpected people in the kingdom of God as part of what God is doing. However, there are also those we might expect to be included in God's kingdom who are not. Which particular group does Jesus address in 10:17-31?



7. The rich young ruler was an example of an upright, law-abiding citizen. More than that, he was a wealthy individual. The disciples clearly thought that such people would easily be part of God's kingdom. Again, Jesus shows that the values of God's kingdom are diametrically opposed to the values of the world. It is hard (as hard as a camel going through the eye of a needle) for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. However, Jesus suggests that there may even be hope even for the rich. What is that?



8. Even the upright, law-abiding, wealthy members of society are completely dependent on God to enter his kingdom. Although it is not explicitly stated, perhaps this suggests that Mark thinks that even those whom we consider as healthy are in need of a doctor (cf. 2:17).

In Mark 10:35-45, we come back to the question of greatness and ambition. How would you summarise Jesus' words in vv.42,43?



9. Of course, the model of our service is the model of Jesus' own service for the world which we considered above (v.45).

Now let us summarise what we have learnt from this section of Mark's Gospel about the values of the kingdom. See if you can complete the following statements:

- a. Greatness is defined not by _____ but by _____ (9:35; 10:43).
- b. Insignificant people are _____ (9:37).
- c. Entering God’s kingdom requires _____ not _____ (10:15, 24,25).
- d. Leadership is defined not by _____ but by _____ (10:43,44).



b. Jesus’ teaching on marriage

10. In the midst of Jesus’ teaching about the radical values of the kingdom, comes one of the New Testament’s most significant passages on marriage and divorce (10:2-12). We do not have time to deal with all the issues here. However, here are some important questions to consider:

- a. What was the motive of the Pharisees in asking Jesus about divorce?

- b. Who/what does Jesus refer them to for an answer?

- c. Why does Jesus say that Moses (or the Old Testament Law) allowed divorce?

- d. What does Jesus suggest as the ideal model for marriage?



11. The answers to the above questions should have been somewhat straightforward. It is Jesus’ apparently harsh statement in vv.11,12 that we may find more difficult to assess. What do you think?

- a. Divorce and re-marriage is always a sin.
- b. The situation in Jesus’ day was different and we cannot judge our own society by the same standards.
- c. Divorce and re-marriage do not reflect God’s ideal, but there is always the opportunity of grace and a new start in God’s kingdom.
- d. Other: _____



12. For Discussion

Whatever position we take on Jesus' teaching on divorce, it is clear that he sets up an ideal model for marriage based on Genesis 2:24 as an exclusive, life-long relationship blessed by God. What can we do in our homes and churches to support and encourage this high view of marriage?

c. Review

13. List four statements which summarise the radical values of God's kingdom.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

Reflecting on this lesson

Note down in your notebook anything from this lesson:

- that you want to discuss in your tutorial;
- that is significant for your own personal faith;
- that is significant for explaining Mark to others.

Pray that God will enable you to apply what you have learnt.

For Further Study

D. Wenham and S. Walton, Exploring the New Testament: Volume 1: The Gospels and Acts, (London: SPCK, 2001)

For this section see, p.198.


Feedback: Mark 9:9-10:52: The Upside Down Kingdom block 3 lesson 4

- 3.4.1 Your answer. I think b.
- 3.4.2 Your answer. I think all three (a.-c.) are probably true.
- 3.4.4 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us.'
- 3.4.5 Your answer. Perhaps something like: We should not exclude people from the work of God even if they don't belong to our particular group.
- 3.4.6 The rich
- 3.4.7 That nothing is impossible with God.
- 3.4.8 Your answer. What about: leadership is not about lordship? Or, to be important you must be a servant of all?
- 3.4.9 Your words:
- a. Greatness is defined not by ambition but by service of others (9:35; 10:43).
 - b. Insignificant people are actually significant (9:37).
 - c. Entering God's kingdom requires humility not social respectability/wealth (10:15, 24,25).
 - d. Leadership is defined not by lordship but by service (10:43,44).
- 3.4.10
- a. They wanted to trap Jesus.
 - b. The Bible (Moses)
 - c. Because their hearts were hard (i.e., it is not an ideal, but because something is wrong).
 - d. One man and one woman joined together by God (or similar).
- 3.4.11 Your answer. Those Christians who argue for a. would say that Jesus' teaching is clear in this passage and must be seen as the most important argument in any Christian debate on divorce. This doesn't necessarily mean that they think it is an 'unforgivable' sin. I think that b. is a cop-out. It is true that we need to consider the situation in Jesus' day and in our own, but this seems to suggest that Jesus' teaching on this (and presumably a lot of other things) does not have any relevance. Those who argue for c. would say that the words of Jesus here have to be taken alongside other passages in scripture which suggest that there can be grace and forgiveness even when relationships break down (e.g., John 4 – the Samaritan woman – and John 8 – the woman caught in adultery).
- 3.4.13 Check with Frame 9.

This study forms part of an Open Learning programme based on local study groups for anyone who:

- wishes to grow in knowledge of God and understanding of the Christian faith;
- is committed to systematic, disciplined and in-depth personal study;
- is ready to learn from others in small discussion groups;
- is willing to make use of God-given gifts for mission and ministry in the local church.

The programme is designed to be accessible to those who have no previous theological study as well as to those who want to engage with the Bible at a deeper level. The courses are suitable for those who feel called to involvement in different avenues of ministry and mission in the local church as well as those who want to work out how to live more effectively as Christians in daily life, whether at home or in the workplace and society.

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