

The Gospel according to Mark

Paraphrased,
explained,
for today.

GOOD NEWS

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Look how glorious Jesus is,

who surpasses all beauty!

A Few Notes Before We Begin

The Gospel according to Mark is pretty unusual. It begins with John, the hairy, baptizing prophet, and ends with the brutal crucifixion and the astonishing resurrection of Jesus. Mark tells a disturbing, even unsettling story. With places full of demons, explosive conflicts, amazing miracles of people healed, with the mysterious multiplying of food for the hungry, and with Jesus' power over the forces of nature.

Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is a bit like an adventure novel – action-packed, profound, and full of black-and-white images that leave you breathless and full of questions. *Who in the world is this man?* Mark gives the right answers to that.

The book you are holding in your hands is an explanatory rendering of the Gospel of Mark. Alongside this paraphrased text, take another translation. Ideally a fairly literal translation, for example an Elberfelder, a Luther Bible, or the Einheitsübersetzung (German Bible translations).

Mark is one of four Gospels. They are the complete accounts of the life of Jesus. Mark is the shortest. But probably the oldest. It is a gripping, a lively account. It moves forward without a pause, almost breathlessly, from Jesus' baptism in the Jordan to the end on the cross in Jerusalem. A span of about 3 years.

A child can understand this Gospel. It is like a well with clear water. But a deep well. Deeper than it looks. Hidden treasures lie ready that you do not notice at first glance. This rendering wants to help you get at such spiritual riches.

You can simply skip the following introductory text or read it later if you want to jump straight into Mark's account with chapter 1.

The Author of the Gospel

For a long time people thought Mark was only a short version of the Gospel of Matthew. It did not get as much attention as the other Gospels. Until it was discovered that it was the other way around: the other Gospel writers already knew Mark and worked his account into theirs. The *author* of this Gospel does not reveal himself in the text. Two disciples of Jesus, eyewitnesses, wrote the Gospels of Matthew and John. What about an account from Peter, the spokesman of the twelve apostles? Maybe he did not like to write. He was a fisherman. He preached and taught the life of Jesus, the gospel of the kingdom. His later coworker and confidant, John Mark, listened carefully. And took notes. This coworker of Peter and of Paul is generally recognized as the author of this Gospel. That is why it is called the *Gospel according to Mark*. To a large extent from Peter's perspective. An eyewitness and someone who was very close. Closer even than most of the apostles, except John and James, who together with Peter formed the innermost circle around Jesus. So this account of Jesus' life gets its authority through Mark's connection to Peter.

This Gospel is made up of what Peter remembered and what he preached. It is, so to speak, sermon material, meant to tell *the story of God: the ministry of Jesus, his death, and his resurrection*. That is why Mark calls his account the gospel, because it contains the preached, *the proclaimed gospel*. He writes as a herald who carries God's good news of salvation onward through his Gospel.

Mark did not place great value on the exact historical order of events. It is simply not only a historical report. No, his Gospel is a message! He put it together to fit his purpose.

For an *evangelist*, the exact order of events is not the most important thing. Nor does he work out the message theologically in detail. Others were to do that later. He leaves out any description of Jesus' birth and comes straight to his public ministry. As if he could not wait to begin laying out the gospel of the kingdom clearly, convincingly, and challengingly.

When Mark wrote cannot be determined exactly. Some think before, others after Peter's martyrdom. People think of a span between the years 60 and 70 AD. Whether before or after the destruction of Jerusalem is also debated by the

experts. But nothing speaks against dating it to the time of Emperor Nero, after the fire of Rome and the persecution of Christians that followed.

He probably writes for the Christians in *Rome*. The fire of Rome – so people said – had been set by Emperor Nero himself. He turned suspicion onto the Christians. He used them as scapegoats. This led to the most brutal persecution of Christians in the “Eternal City.” Used as living torches and thrown to wild beasts, they were hit by the persecution in the harshest way. Mark devotes a large part of his Gospel to the story of Jesus’ suffering, the passion of Jesus. He writes about the trials and opposition Jesus experienced. It is easy to imagine that he was especially concerned with encouraging the Christians in persecution and suffering, not simply with a historical report of the life and passion of Jesus.

Who Is Jesus for Mark?

Who does Mark describe Jesus Christ to be in his Gospel? He calls Jesus the *Son of God*. The beloved Son of the Father. Right at the beginning it becomes clear that, as the Son of God, he is God. As the Son he is the Messiah, the Christ, God's Anointed One. He bears the title *Son of Man*. That is an echo of Daniel 7, verse 13, where he stands in a close relationship with the "Ancient of Days," a name for the ETERNAL ONE. So not simply just a man, the son of the builder from Nazareth, but the one who bears this outstanding, unique *title of honor*. He is the *Son of David*, who has the right to the throne of God's eternal kingdom.

Last but not least, he is the *servant*, even though Mark does not call him that directly. But *he came to serve* and to give his life as a ransom for many, for all who trust him.

The Mission of Jesus

When Mark wrote, everything had long been history. The past. What was crystal clear to him in hindsight was not clear to the disciples, the people, and his enemies while it was actually happening. The mission of Jesus was largely hidden from them. Until the cross. Then it was not a Jew but a Roman centurion who, deeply moved, said out loud who he is: *This man truly is the Son of God!* As if Mark had held the suspense about Jesus' identity, from the people's point of view, right up to the end.

The mission of Jesus was *to announce the reign of God* and to proclaim the good news about it. How should people respond to this message? With faith and a change of thinking, that is, repentance.

Through him the *signs of this reign of God* happen: he taught with authority, he drove out demons, he healed the sick, he brought forgiveness, he healed people with leprosy, he raised the dead. All of this belongs to the gospel of the kingdom. Satan and his kingdom are attacked. And defeated. A spiritual battle, without force of arms. But no less dramatic. However, God's kingdom grows slowly. It is simply not there all at once, as expected. The Jews expected a radical upheaval, namely liberation from the Romans. But Jesus begins by making clear that people's hearts must change first.

For Mark, God's reign has dawned through Jesus and in his followers. But this reign – even from today's point of view – will only break in completely in the future and fill the earth when the Son of Man returns from heaven.

The true reign of God comes only by way of the cross. It goes through suffering to glory. The cross is God's victory. Not a defeat. God's standards are different from those of the world, of that time and of today. The principles, the laws, the marks of his kingdom and his reign are love, service, devotion to one's neighbor, humility, and peace. Not violence and subjugation. To receive and live the life of the future of the eternal kingdom already now – that is Mark's good news.

Echoes from the Old Testament

For Mark – and therefore for Peter – the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, plays a big role. But he does not quote from it the way Matthew and Luke do. There are hints and many *echoes from the Old Testament*. Even if they do not always lie on the surface. There are allusions and small hints in great numbers.

Under the following questions, red threads can be seen running through Mark's account: *How does Mark rewrite the story of Israel?* This means that through the Messiah Jesus there is to be a new chance for Israel, a new beginning, even a new exodus. To get spiritually to where God wants his people to be: in his kingdom. *How is the old story of Israel found again in the life of Jesus, who is the true Israel?* It sounds complicated, but Jesus identifies so closely with Israel that he walks the path of this people once more and in this way wants to set Israel free for its true calling. *How does Mark use the writings of the Old Testament to describe the role of the church in the world?* Mark himself is part of the church that came into being through Jesus. It, too, learns from the old writings. At the beginning the church had only one Bible, and that was the Old Testament.

In my rendering I do not quote the other Gospels to fill out Mark. It is his message we want to understand. There are *harmonies of the Gospels*, where texts from all the Gospels are placed side by side to give as complete a picture of the events as possible. That is a different kind of reading, also very interesting, but not the aim here.

The Main Concerns of John Mark

To close this introduction, here is a *short overview of the main concerns* that are close to Mark's heart:

The true identity of Jesus. During Jesus' earthly life it remains hidden from almost everyone. That changes only after his ascension, when the gospel of the kingdom and the Christ who has ascended to heaven and been enthroned are proclaimed by the apostles and the disciples. From this completed perspective we can look at the life of Jesus, so to speak with the enlightened eyes of the heart. We know the secret!

The passion of Jesus, the story of his suffering, which shows who Jesus really is. And directly connected with it: persecution, suffering, and martyrdom as marks of true *discipleship*.

The nature and the coming of the *kingdom of God*, as well as the question of the return of the Son of Man.

A special interest in *Galilee*, the northern part of Israel, but also in the neighboring regions of the nations, to whom Jesus knew he was sent as well.

The gospel and what is really meant by it.

His description of different *groups of people*: the Jewish leaders, the true family of Jesus, and especially that of his disciples, the Twelve.

Everyone who hears Mark's message or reads this Gospel stands personally before Jesus! *He asks each one: Who am I to you? Do you trust me? Will you follow me?*

Now, today, is the day of salvation, not tomorrow, not someday. Mark presents Jesus this way so that we are faithful to him and keep his words and do them. Yes, so that we become his disciples.

Who Is the True Emperor?

Before we go into the text, one more brief addition that takes up everything noted above about Jesus and places it in the political explosiveness of the time when Mark wrote. Jesus is the Son of God, the one loved by God the Father. No emperor can truly make this claim. They did it anyway. The first Roman emperor, Augustus, was called “*Divi Filius*,” son of the divine one. For the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, the emperor was a messiah figure who brought peace, the “*Pax Romana*.” But the Anointed One, the Christ, is Jesus alone. The promised Prince of Peace. Two miracles were credited to Vespasian: the healing of a blind man and that of a withered hand. From this people concluded that heaven approved of him. But it is Jesus who does countless miracles and over whom heaven opens. The Christians in Rome, possible recipients of this Gospel, were to know this: in their suffering under the Roman Empire, under the bestial Emperor Nero, Christ, their Lord and Savior, was greater and had gone ahead of them in their sufferings. Not gone under, but gone up to the ultimate victory in the resurrection. Persecution, the pressure of suffering, and fear bring Christians to their limits. That also leads to failure, betrayal, and denial. But in Christ there is forgiveness and restoration, life that conquers death, and a message of God’s victory over the powers that set themselves against God. Mark does not touch on all these themes without intention. It is a message that was not meant only for Christians in Rome, but that lives on to this day, more than ever.

Chapter 1

This is how *the good news of God's victory* begins: the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's Anointed One, the Messiah! The gospel of the Son of God. Long before, the prophets Malachi and Isaiah had already announced the herald who was to go ahead of Yahweh, the Lord. Who would announce and prepare his coming: Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. Prepare the way of the Lord, of Yahweh, make his path straight, so that he is received worthily! God comes in judgment and in grace to restore, just as Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40 announce. The words from the second book of Moses, from Exodus 23, verse 20, also resonate in this quotation: Look, I am sending an angel ahead of you to bring you to the promised place. It is the voice of grace about a new entry into the land of promise. A new exodus and a new taking of the land by God himself. As back then, God now comes in the person and power of Jesus. *God is on the march to save Israel*. After 400 years in which the prophets had been silent, indeed in which God had no longer spoken, God's wake-up call now came through the prophet John. To a people in despair. Oppressed and unsure whether and when the prophecies would be fulfilled. But everything turned out differently than expected. *The Messiah did not look for a throne, but first for pure hearts and a radical change of life. He wanted to reign in people's hearts.*

The Herald: John the Baptist

John the Baptist, the herald, did not appear in Jerusalem, but in the wilderness of Judea. He preached that the Jews should be baptized and radically change their lives and submit to God. So that they would receive forgiveness of their sins. From Judea and the capital, Jerusalem, people went out to him. Although normally only proselytes, that is, Gentiles who converted to Judaism, were baptized, they let John immerse them in the Jordan River and symbolically wash away their sins. As they did so, they confessed their sins, spoke them out openly, and repented of them. Through baptism they left the world of sin, just as Israel had once fled Egypt through the Red Sea. Through the Jordan River Israel had once entered the land of Canaan, and now, too, it meant a new beginning for

Israel. At least for part of it. John lived without any comfort. Alone in the wilderness. He wore a simple cloak of camel's hair, held by a leather belt. He lived on locusts and wild honey. Like Elijah, the prophet. As the herald of the Christ, the Messiah, he proclaimed what everyone should know: After me, when my ministry is over, comes the one who is stronger than I am. He is so great and glorious that I am not even worthy to stoop down and untie his sandals. I have immersed you in water. But he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. As the prophets announced. For you do not only need cleansing and forgiveness, you also need power to serve God.

John Baptizes Jesus

And then it happened. Suddenly and unexpectedly, even though John had announced him. Jesus, the Son of God, a man the same age as John, his relative from Nazareth in Galilee, was suddenly standing beside John. Among those who came out to him at the Jordan. And although he is the Messiah, not a sinner like the others, he was baptized by John. In this way the Messiah stepped onto the side of those who wanted to begin anew and became the one who went ahead of them. As Joshua once did, who led Israel into the land of Canaan. As John and Jesus came up out of the Jordan River, heaven was miraculously torn open and the Holy Spirit came down on him, visibly, as when a dove glides down from above onto a person. And a voice was heard, from above, saying to Jesus: *"You alone are my dearly loved Son, my one and all, you are my whole delight."* For 30 years he had already lived to God's pleasure, but now his time of public ministry had come. It was to be only three and a half years. Yes, heaven was torn open as an answer to Isaiah's prayer in chapter 63, verse 19, which he cried out in despair over the hard hearts and the power of the foreign nations over Israel. God came by the Spirit upon the Messiah to turn the misery around, to turn things around and to reign again. It was to begin in the hearts of the Israelites.

Jesus, His Life in Service

The good news of God's victory in Jesus is preceded by the battle. It begins immediately after his baptism. For at once the Spirit who had come down on him drives him into the wilderness of Judea. He was there forty days. As Israel was once in the wilderness for 40 years. Satan, the devil and enemy of God,

tried to lead him astray during this time. So that he would give up this battle for people through compromise and disobedience. In those days he was alone, like John the Baptist before him. He was among the wild animals. But God's angels served him, to protect and strengthen him. In this way his heavenly Father let him know that he was there. *This first, important part of the battle for the rescue of people and of the whole earth was decided by the Son of God for himself and thus for us.* After John the Baptist was handed over to death and his voice fell silent, Jesus came back to Galilee. From then on he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God: The time has come now, yes, what was foretold is being fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near and is breaking into the world in power. Now is the time to change your thinking, to repent, to leave sin behind, and to believe the good news of God's victory. Only in this way do you come under God's reign and under God's blessing. This gospel is not doctrine or dogma. It is a person. The Son of God, who has come to us. He takes up the fight against sin, sickness, fear, possession, death, and the devil. *He starts a new, the final exodus, to lead Israel and all people out of the captivity of sin and all its consequences.*

The First Disciples – Jesus Calls Fishermen to Follow Him

As he walked along the Sea of Galilee, he sees two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, casting their nets into the lake. And Jesus said to them: *Come, follow me.* I will make you fishers of people. And at once, without hesitating, they left their nets behind and followed him. And only a short way further there were two more fishermen, mending their nets by their boats: James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother. And he called them too, like the other two. They also followed him at once and left their father behind with the hired men. *Who was this, who could simply say: Follow me?* In the coming years, and soon, they were to find out. They had no idea that they, the simple fishermen, were the ones who would turn the world of that time upside down. They would carry on the work that Jesus began together with them.

In the Synagogue at Capernaum

And Jesus comes into Capernaum with his disciples. And on the Sabbath he went straight into the synagogue. The place of teaching. He, the simple builder, taught there. And everyone was amazed at his words, because he taught like

someone who had *authority*. Alive, engaging, yes, words of life. Completely different from what they were used to from the teachers of the law. They could only quote Moses and their scholars, but he spoke as if he were wisdom in person, like a second Moses.

In this synagogue there was a man who was possessed by an impure, evil spirit. This spirit controlled this man and forced him to do what he would otherwise never do. The spirits were impure and defiled those they took possession of by doing things that completely disfigured their humanity. This man, yes, the evil spirit, this demon in him, said to Jesus: What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Nazarene? Have you come to destroy us? I know you and know exactly who you are, *the Holy One of God!* And Jesus commanded him forcefully: Shut your mouth and come out of him! Unwilling to leave this man, he shook the man back and forth and cried out his defeat with a loud voice. And came out of him. Everyone was horrified, because none of them had ever seen anything like it. And they all asked themselves and said to one another: What is this? What kind of new teaching is this? For with irresistible authority he commands even the evil spirits, against whom we are powerless, and they obey him, yes, they flee from him? *He speaks and it happens just as he says.* And the news of this event spread like wildfire through Galilee.

In the House of Simon Peter

And immediately afterward they left the synagogue and came into the house of Simon and Andrew. James and John were with them too. Simon's mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever. They told Jesus about it without any special expectation. He should at least know. Then Jesus went to her, took her hand, and the fever left her immediately. She was free of fever at once, and she served them right away and made them a meal.

When evening came and the sun had set, the people brought all the sick and suffering and all who were possessed by evil spirits to him. They were still in Simon's house, and the people, yes, almost the whole village of Capernaum, stood at the door. And he healed as many as he could who suffered from all kinds of diseases. And he drove out many demons. Those are invisible, impure, and evil spirits. And Jesus forbade them to speak about him, because they knew him. They had known him long before he came to earth as a man. They knew

that he was the *Holy One of God, who had begun the battle for people in order to set them free from them. And from diseases and their sins.*

The next morning, very early, when everyone was still asleep and it was still dark, he was already up and went out. He went to a lonely, desolate place. To pray alone. He sought fellowship with his Father and pleaded for strength, wisdom, and guidance as the perfect servant of God. When Peter and the others noticed that he was not in the house, they went looking for him. When they had found him, they said to him: Everyone is looking for you. But he said: Let us go on to the other towns too, to preach there, for that is why I have come. I cannot stay in one place. Many more are to hear the good news. And in all the towns they came to, he went into the synagogues and proclaimed the gospel, the good news, and drove out the demons.

The Man with Leprosy on the Road

On the way a man with leprosy comes to him. On the road outside the town, because he was never allowed to enter the town. He throws himself down before him and begs him: If you are willing, you can make me clean of my leprosy! Jesus was deeply moved inside by this desperate cry for help, but also by his confidence. He stretched out his hand in deep compassion and mercy. *He touched him.* Without any fear of catching this highly infectious skin disease himself. Jesus said: I am willing, be clean! And at once the leprosy was gone, he was completely clean. He, who had been condemned to die while still alive, had been given back his life. And Jesus sternly ordered him to keep his mouth shut and sent him off to the priest. He was to go to the priest according to the instruction of Moses in Leviticus chapter 14, bring an offering for his cleansing, and have the priest declare him clean. But he went away and told it everywhere. Yes, he could not keep quiet and celebrated his healing wherever he could.

As a result, Jesus could no longer go into a town openly. So Jesus stayed outside in desolate places. But even there they streamed to him from all sides.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something you want to do in your life?

What excites you about Jesus?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here! Tell him how much you admire him!

Do you have questions, is something unclear to you – write it down!

Chapter 2

Forgiveness and Healing for a Paralyzed Man

After some days he went back to Capernaum. Into a house. That became known in the town. And again everyone came. They stood at the door and everywhere, so that no one could get through anymore. And Jesus spoke the word of God to them, the good news of the kingdom of God. Then *four men came, carrying a paralyzed man on his mat*, to bring him to Jesus. But because of the large crowd they could not get to Jesus. Without further ado they climbed up onto the roof of the house with him and broke open the roof of straw and clay. It was a simple roof that was easy to repair. And they let the paralyzed man down through the hole into the house where Jesus was. Right at his feet. A dramatic action. A request for healing without words. When he saw what these men were doing, and their faith that he could heal this man, he said to the paralyzed man: *My son, your sins are forgiven!* Maybe, thought everyone who saw it, he meant the damage to the roof. But these words went much deeper and meant much more. Although he did not come to Jesus for forgiveness, Jesus first gives him the most important thing a person needs. Healing of the heart and a clean conscience. God's forgiveness is the most important thing. And forgiveness from one person to another is the strongest seed of peace. Some teachers of the law were sitting there who were stunned by these words. What was this man saying? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins – surely only God alone. He must go to the priest and can receive forgiveness only there, in connection with a sacrifice. That is what they were thinking to themselves. Jesus at once sensed their reaction in his spirit. Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which, do you think, is easier: to say to him, Your sins are forgiven, or: Get up, take your mat, and walk around? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth just as God does in heaven, he says to the paralyzed man: Get up, take your mat, and go home. Then the paralyzed man got up at once and took his mat. In front of everyone who had gathered in and in front of the house, he walked past them, sound and healed. Everyone was beside themselves with enthusiasm and praised God. For only he could have brought about this miracle. And God was actually

standing in the house, only they did not know it. They had never seen anything like this before.

Levi, the Tax Collector

Then Jesus and his disciples went back to the nearby lake. Again the whole crowd came to him. There he taught them the things of God with words they had never heard. On the way there he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, where the border ran from the district of one of Herod's sons to another. It was a hated profession, protected by the Romans. No one wanted to pay this toll, especially not to one of their own. He, an Israelite, was avoided like a traitor.

Jesus said to him, as he had said to the other disciples before: *Follow me!* Completely taken aback that someone was interested in him and spoke to him personally by name, he got up at once, packed up his things for good, and followed him. And Levi, that is Matthew, invited Jesus to his house and began a joyful feast. Many of his colleagues came along. And they reclined comfortably at the table. Jesus and his disciples with tax collectors and sinners. Those who were shut out of the synagogue. They were known in the town and were avoided. Many of them followed him, because they saw his mercy and felt drawn to him. When the teachers of the law and Pharisees saw this, they were horrified once again. How could he celebrate together with these people? They said it to the disciples, because they did not dare to say it to him directly. But Jesus heard them and said: It is not the strong who need a doctor, but the sick. Why should the doctor only be with the healthy? *I have come to bring salvation and healing, for Israel and for the whole world.* I have come to call sinners into the kingdom. And not the righteous. Or those who think they are. Sinners are not to remain sinners; I bring forgiveness and healing of hearts. I do not only preach repentance, I also become their friend and share table fellowship with them.

Jesus on Fasting

The disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees were fasting. For a time they took no food. They asked Jesus why his disciples did not fast. Then he answered them: Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? They really cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them. But the

days are coming when they will fast. Then, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, yes, when teachers of the law and Pharisees kill the bridegroom and believe they can end the wedding feast. The great wedding banquet is a magnificent picture of God's new world, which is being created through Christ. A new world in which everyone will have more than enough and there will be peace and justice for all. No one sews a patch of new cloth onto an old garment. Otherwise the new patch tears away, the new from the old, worn-out cloth, and the tear becomes even worse than before. And no one pours new wine that is still fermenting into old wineskins. For the new wine will burst the old skins. Then both will be ruined. New wine belongs in new wineskins. *Jesus brought something completely new. Healing, forgiveness, mercy, closeness to the outcasts, and the chance to begin anew.* That did not fit into the rigid thinking and traditions of the teachers of the law and Pharisees. They had long since inflated the old into a human system of countless commands and prohibitions and unnecessary traditions. In this way they had moved away from Moses and the Scriptures. But the permanent exclusion of sinners from fellowship came to an end in the grace of Jesus. Jesus challenged the Jews of his time, and today all people, to listen to him and follow him. Him, who is life and gives new life. For all, especially the outcasts, the rejected, and sinners. The new had dawned in him, and the old had to give way and be left behind.

Jesus on the Sabbath

On the Sabbath Jesus went through the grainfields. His disciples were with him, and as they walked they picked heads of grain. Then the Pharisees said to him: Look, your disciples are doing something forbidden. If others had done it, they would not have cared. But they watched Jesus and his disciples closely, to find anything they could accuse him of. Then he said to them: Have you not read what David did when he and those who were with him were very hungry? When, in the time of the high priest Abiathar, he went into the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which no one but the priests may eat? And he gave some to all of them. He said to them: The Sabbath was made for people, so that they can rest after a hard week and thank God. People were not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is given for people. People were there first. You should know this: the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Here Jesus was indirectly pointing out that he was the Son of David, the King, who had not yet

been recognized and was not yet crowned on his throne. And as Lord of the Sabbath he was also the one who had created the Sabbath.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Chapter 3

Healing on the Sabbath in the Synagogue

And he went back into the synagogue in Capernaum, on the same day, on the Sabbath. There was a man there who had a hand that was withered and paralyzed. And they watched him closely to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath. That he could do it was already clear to them, but for them that meant nothing now. For they were desperately looking for a reason to accuse him. And Jesus says to the man with the withered hand: Come here and stand in the middle. Everyone should see you. Then he said to those who were lying in wait for him: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil? Is it lawful to save life or to kill by failing to help? They sat there without a word and kept silent. What could they say to this question of conscience anyway? What if they themselves needed help and could get it on the Sabbath? Then he looked at them, all who sat there in silence and could not bring themselves to say that one *must do good at all times* and must, without any question, always and at all times save life, no matter whether it is the Sabbath. He looked at them, around the whole circle, in anger. He did not punish them with the curse of a shriveled hand. No, he was deeply grieved at the stubbornness and hardness of their hearts. Then he looked at the man in the middle and said to him: Stretch out your hand! And he stretched it out, and it was instantly healed. He did good, and they wanted to prevent it.

Then the teachers of the law went out, seething with rage, and plotted with the Herodians, the political leaders, how they could kill him. They themselves had no authority to carry out their intention; they had to join forces with the political authority, but first they had to convince it. In any case their decision was made; the only question was when they could strike.

Mass Healings at the Lake of Gennesaret

And Jesus went away with his disciples to the lake. A large crowd followed from Galilee, also from Judea and Jerusalem. And from Idumea and also from the other side of the Jordan and from the region around Tyre and Sidon. There were so many. They had heard what he was doing and how he did not turn away

a single person. That is why they all came. It was a sensation. So as not to be crushed by this crowd, he told his disciples to keep a boat ready. For he healed everyone who came. The crowd pressed in. And they even threw themselves at him, over the heads of others, to touch him. And when possessed people came, they fell down before him, on their knees. And the impure spirits in them screamed, startled and nervous: You are the Son of God! What they recognized did not help them, and they did not like it, for they were powerless. They sensed that the time of their defeat had come. They suspected that they would lose this battle. That is why they tried to keep control over him with these statements.

But they were not appointed to make known the truth about Jesus. And the time was not yet ripe. And Jesus sternly warned them not to make public who he is.

Jesus Calls the Twelve Disciples

And he went up on a mountain and called to himself all whom he wanted. And they came to him. These were followers and not only people who came for healing. From among them he chose twelve. These were to be with him. They were to learn and experience what Jesus experienced, so as to be equipped. He would send them out to do what he did: to preach and, with authority, to drive out the evil spirits, the demons. The battle goes on. This calling and ministry was to be extended, since Jesus alone, as a man, was limited. And one day he would no longer be visibly with them. And he chose twelve of them. Like the twelve tribes of Israel. In the twelve apostles it becomes visible that God has all of Israel in view and that the restoration of Israel in the kingdom is foreseen. It is not only about a healing mission, but about renewal in every respect. These were *the Twelve*:

- Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter (rock)
- James, the son of Zebedee
- John, the brother of James. These two he called Boanerges, sons of thunder.
- Andrew
- Philip
- Bartholomew
- Matthew
- Thomas
- James, the son of Alphaeus

- Thaddaeus
- Simon the Zealot
- Judas Iscariot, who also handed him over.

The Family of the Messiah – Part One

Jesus comes into a house. And again many people come to him. He and his disciples do not even get to eat their bread. His family heard about this, and they set out to look for him. They had had enough of all the fuss around their brother. They said he had completely lost his mind. People pointed at them; it was embarrassing for them.

The Blasphemy against the Spirit

Important teachers of the law had come down from Jerusalem. They had heard and seen what was happening. They judged him quickly and more harshly than ever before: Beelzebul, the prince of demons, was at work in him. Through him and his power he drives the demons out of the possessed. Then Jesus called them to himself and spoke to them in parables: How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom fights against itself, it will not be able to stand. If a house is divided against itself, it will not be able to stand. If Satan, the prince of demons, has risen up against himself and is fighting himself, then he cannot survive. That would be his end. No one can break into the strong man's house and plunder his possessions unless he first defeats the strong man and ties him up. Only then can he plunder the house. *I am the victor* and am beginning to plunder the possessions, as you can see.

Amen, I tell you: all sins will be forgiven people, and all blasphemies as well. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, in whose power I drive out demons, has no forgiveness for all eternity. In this way he becomes guilty of an eternal sin. Their blasphemy was to accuse Jesus of having an impure spirit, in whose power he supposedly did all these things. Whoever believes that and sticks to it will not receive forgiveness without repentance.

The Family of the Messiah – Part 2

In the meantime his mother and his brothers had arrived and were standing outside the door. The people were sitting around him and listening to him. Then the message got through to him: Your mother and brothers and sisters are

standing outside looking for you. Then he answered them: Who are my mother, my brothers and sisters? And he looked around and looked at all who were sitting around him. Then he said: Look, all of you are my mother and my brothers! *Whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and my mother!*

That is the true family of God, which today, after 2000 years, has spread over the whole earth and one day will live in the Father's house. Forever, as the family of God.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, maybe also something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions, is something unclear to you – then write it down!

Chapter 4

Jesus Illustrates the Kingdom of God in Parables

The Parable of the Sower and the Four Kinds of Soil: “Listen”

And Jesus continued his task of proclaiming. Once again by the Lake of Gennesaret. More and more people came. So as not to be crushed and still reach as many people as possible, he took a boat and went out a few yards from the shore. As in an arena, he reached many people. The surface of the water carried his words on to all who were listening. And he taught the people and his disciples many things in comparisons, in parables. In his teaching he said to them: ***Listen!*** Imagine the farmer goes out to the field with the seed and sows, scattering the seed as evenly as possible. As he did, some fell on the path. The birds came and picked it all up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. There the seed sprang up quickly and grew. When the sun beat down on it, the shoots quickly withered, because they had no deep roots.

Other seed fell among the thorns. They grew quickly too, but among the thorns the growing seed was choked again. Here, too, there was no fruit. Then seed fell on good soil. It sprouted and grew tall and bore fruit. Different amounts: one head of grain with 30, another with 60, and yet another even with 100 kernels. ***Whoever has ears to hear, let them listen closely and attentively and with an open mind!*** Later, when all the people had gone home, the Twelve and all who were still around him asked him: What do these parables mean? What are you trying to say? Then he, who himself is the divine sower, said to them: To you who are with me and follow me, it has been given to understand the secret of the kingdom of God. For you it is no longer a secret, but knowledge and understanding, because it has been revealed to you. But to those who are outside, who do not really listen with an open heart, it is told in parables. As Isaiah 6, verse 10 already says: So that seeing they see and yet do not perceive, and hearing they hear and yet do not understand, so that they do not turn and are not forgiven. There are many hard and hardened hearts that hear and see what I say and do. But what all has to happen for them to believe?

And he says to them: Don't you get this parable? How then will you understand all the other parables? The sower sows the word of God by proclaiming it and passing it on, as I do, so that it falls into hearts, yes, onto the soil of the heart. Those along the path are people who do hear the word, but then Satan, the devil, comes and takes the word away and nothing is left. He wants to prevent at all costs God's reign from breaking through to all people. There are those who receive the word of God, the good news, with joy. That is the seed that falls on rocky ground with only a little soil. They have no roots; they are fickle, people of the moment. When faith is tested by trouble or persecution for the sake of the gospel, they are completely surprised. Disappointed, they then throw faith overboard again. Then there are those who are sown among the thorns. The word has reached their heart and begins to grow. But then come the worries of life, for which there are no quick solutions, which they perhaps expected from the gospel. The lure of wealth and career also turns the goal of life away from the word. Desires for many things get room in their lives. Things like that choke the word of the gospel. It was only a brief awakening. And then there are those where the word meets good soil. Where there is readiness to turn around and faithfulness, where the word is received and bears fruit, and for whom it is more important than anything else. Despite difficulties and questions. Such people bear fruit, some thirtyfold, others sixty- or a hundredfold. Fruit that God himself lets grow and ripen in them.

The Parable of the Lamp

Jesus said to them: A lamp is not there to be put under a pot or under the bed. It has to be placed where it makes everything bright. Everything hidden in the dark will one day be made known, and everything secret will come to light.

My message, the gospel of the kingdom, will not remain hidden. It will be carried into the whole world when I have risen and am on the throne of my Father.

Whoever has ears to hear, let them listen closely and attentively and with an open mind!

With the measure you use, it will be measured and handed out to you. As you judge me, so you will receive. If you receive me, you receive everything. Whoever has me will receive even more of me, yes, everything. Whoever is only

curious about who I am, whoever does not believe and follow me, will lose all interest in me. And will have no share in the kingdom of God.

The Parable of the Growing Seed

The kingdom of God is like a person who goes out and sows seed on the land. After he has done that, he can do nothing more than wait, go to sleep, and get up again. And that many times. Just as the seed also first sleeps in the ground until it sprouts and grows. How the seed grows and how it happens, he does not know. The earth produces fruit as if by itself – like a resurrection – first the blade, then the head, and then the kernels of wheat grow in the head. When the grain is ripe, he goes out with the sickle and brings in the harvest. Yes, it is brought in, as Joel 3, verse 13 already announces. Small beginnings are necessary and valuable. And never to be despised. It takes time to grow. God's reign is not visible and everywhere all at once. Everything needs time to ripen and grow. But God's long-awaited harvest will come. *Yes, it will come. Sow the word and persevere!*

The Parable of the Tiny Mustard Seed

And he said: What else can we compare the kingdom of God with? It is like a mustard seed that is put into the ground as the very smallest and most insignificant seed. But then it comes up and becomes large. Larger than all the garden plants. The bush grows branches so large that birds even build their nests in their shade. It began small, with Jesus and the Twelve, but in the end God's kingdom will spread over the whole earth. He spoke to the people in many more parables. But only in parables. To his disciples he explained them separately and in detail.

Jesus Masters the Storm on the Lake of Gennesaret

On that day, in the evening, Jesus says to his disciples: Let us go over to the other side of the lake. They said goodbye to the crowd. The disciples got the boat ready and took Jesus along, just as he was. Tired and exhausted. Other boats joined them. Then, out of nowhere, a mighty storm came roaring up. Strong downdrafts came from the heights. Like a hostile power. Yes, it was an attack on the Son of God. The waves broke over the boat, so that it was already filling with water. A threatening situation. Jesus was in the back of the boat. He had fallen asleep on a cushion, trusting that the protection of his heavenly

Father was there at all times. The disciples woke him and said reproachfully: Teacher, don't you care that we are perishing? Jesus woke up from his sleep. He rebuked the storm wind and threatened it: Be quiet and be still! And just as the storm had come, it died down. There was a great calm. And he said to them: Why are you so afraid? Do you have no faith? I am here, after all. And the disciples were filled with great fear, almost as much as they had been afraid of the storm. And horrified, they whispered to one another: *Who is this, that the lake and the wind obey him? Who are we dealing with?*

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions, or is there something you did not understand? Write it down!

Chapter 5

The Deliverance of the Possessed Man on the Other Shore in Gergesa

God Reveals Himself to Those Who Did Not Ask for Him (Isaiah Chapter 65, Verses 1 to 5)

They come by boat to the other side of the lake, into the region of the Gerasenes. In those days this was not Israel, but foreign territory, the Decapolis. That was a Ten-Cities area in the province of Syria. When he had gotten out of the boat there, a man came toward him at once. This man had an impure spirit by which he was possessed. He lived in the burial caves, among the dead. He could not live in the town. For he could not be controlled; he was a danger to everyone. Not even a chain could hold him. Many times they had put shackles on his feet and bound him in chains, but he was so strong that he broke them again and again. There was no one strong enough to subdue him, for he was like a wild animal. Day and night he was among the burial caves and in the hills. He was the incarnation of impurity. He was out for the corpses. He embodies the living death. He screamed loudly and beat himself with stones. Naked, isolated, a wreck. He was the most dehumanized and most wretched person who now met Jesus.

Is this man not a picture of the whole world, which in its chaos longs for deliverance and healing?

When this man saw Jesus from a distance, he ran to him and fell to the ground before him. He screamed loudly, but they were the words of the impure spirit: What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Why are you here? I have no chance against you. You are the strong one. I beg you, do not torment me the way I have tormented this man! For Jesus had said to him: Come out of this man, you impure demon and tormenting spirit! And Jesus asked him: What is your name, impure spirit? He replied: Legion is my name, for we are many. A Roman legion consisted of 6000 soldiers and 120 horsemen. The man was possessed not by one, but by many demons. And the demons begged him again and again, urgently, not to send them away from this

area. On the steep bank a large herd of pigs was feeding. And the impure spirits begged him to let them go into the pigs, for they are always looking for a dwelling, people and, if nothing else is possible, animals too. And Jesus allowed them. When the impure spirits went into the pigs, which were unclean for Jews, they continued their destructive work. The herd rushed down the hill into the lake, and they all drowned. Not because Jesus wanted it that way, but the demons. There were about 2000 pigs. Perhaps in this way they wanted to turn the people against Jesus. Which they succeeded in doing. *But the man was now clean and set free.* The swineherds fled when they saw with dismay what was happening. They told it in the town and the villages. And the people came out to see it. They come to Jesus. They cannot believe their eyes, for there sits the man who had been possessed by demons, clothed and completely sensible and normal, with Jesus. The one who had the legion, the great number of impure spirits, is a human being again, not like an animal. Fear rises up in them. This is completely eerie to them. And those who had witnessed everything, the deliverance of the possessed man and the plunge of the pigs into the lake, told it to those who came along. And instead of rejoicing or inviting Jesus, they ask him to leave their region. They are an example of those who are outside, who see and yet do not perceive, and hear and yet do not understand. Jesus went back to the boat and got in. His mission on this shore, his invasion into pagan territory, had ended successfully. The signal of the coming reign of God had been given. As in Galilee, so here too. The healed man very much wanted to stay with Jesus, quite unlike his relatives. To follow him. He wanted to be with his deliverer, forever. But Jesus did not allow him to. Instead he said to him: Go to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how much mercy he has had on you. And he went away and proclaimed in the whole Ten-Cities area how much Jesus, yes, God had done for him. And was obviously ready to keep doing. Yes, he continued the proclaiming ministry of Jesus, who had gone back across the lake. And all who heard it were amazed. And indeed more than they had been annoyed about the lost pigs.

What speaks to you in this text, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something for your daily life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions, or is there something you did not understand? Write it down!

The Raising of Jairus' Daughter – Part 1

Jesus Touches the Unclean – They Can Live Again

When they arrived on the other shore, near Capernaum, many people gathered again by the lake to see him, as usual. Jairus, one of the synagogue leaders, was there too. Despite all reservations and possible risks to his position and the dignity of a synagogue leader. Something specific was driving him. When he saw him, he went up to him and fell down at his feet. He pleaded with him earnestly and said: My daughter, who means so much to me and whom we love so much, is dying. Please lay your hands on her, so that she will be healed and live! Jesus saw Jairus' despair, and he went with him to his house. The people heard this, and a tightly packed crowd followed him.

The Woman with the Chronic Bleeding

In this tightly packed crowd there was a woman who had had bleeding that would not stop for 12 years. Because of this she was unclean according to the law. Without a husband, without fellowship, always separated from people. Isolated and lonely. She had suffered a great deal and tried everything to find healing from the doctors. It had swallowed up all her money. And instead of getting better, it had grown even worse. Yet she had never accepted the illness or given up inside, but had kept looking for healing. Now she had heard of Jesus, the healer, the great physician, yes, the physician of all physicians. She was sure that if she only touched his garment, she would be healed. As an unclean woman she could never speak to him directly. In the crush she managed to touch him from behind, inconspicuously, without looking him in the face. And so it happened: she was healed instantly. She felt it. But Jesus also felt something, namely the healing power that had gone out from him. He had not become unclean through the touch. It was exactly the other way around. For he was *the Holy One of God*. And he turned around at once and asked: Who touched my clothes? Did that matter to him now, on the way to Jairus' house? Time was running out for Jairus' daughter. Why did he want to know that now? Yes, the healed person was to know that Jesus knew her, and her need. His disciples

reacted in bewilderment: The people are crowding around you, and you even ask, who touched me? But Jesus looked around to see her, the one who had touched him. The woman realized that Jesus meant her and became frightened. Now she could no longer hide and fell trembling on her knees before him, before the Holy One. She told him everything she had experienced and that she had seen her last hope only in him. And he answered her: *Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and begin to live again.* You are healed of your suffering. No matter how dense the crush of life is, how hopeless, how unworthy you are or feel, stretch out your hand in faith toward Jesus! Take the healing like a leaf from the tree of life, which is Jesus!

The Raising of Jairus' Daughter – Part 2

While he was still speaking with the woman, acquaintances of the synagogue leader come to Jairus with the terrible news: Your daughter has died. Why bother the Master any further? Come home. Jesus had overheard this and then said to Jairus: *Don't be afraid! Just believe! Trust me!* Then he takes only Peter, James, and John of his disciples with him, the inner circle of the Twelve. They come to the house. The noise, the wailing and weeping, is great. Jesus asks: Why are you making such a noise and why are you weeping? The child is not dead. She is asleep. Then the mourners laughed at him, just as they still do today when people simply trust in Jesus. Then Jesus sent all the people out. Only the father, the mother, and his three disciples were allowed in to the girl. And Jesus takes the child's hand and says: Talitha kourai! Translated, that means: Little girl, I tell you, it is time to get up! And at once the girl stood up and walked around. Life and strength had come back. She was 12 years old. And they were beside themselves and could not put their joy into words. And Jesus gave the order to everyone who had seen this in that room not to tell anyone about it. He did not want to become known as the wonderful raiser of the dead, but as the one who wanted to change and raise up hearts, so that God's kingdom would take shape. And he wanted the girl to be given something to eat, so that she would be strengthened after the illness. *Jesus confronts death, just as he confronts incurable illness. And wins. Death, which holds the whole creation in bondage, will soon have to give way to the life of the Risen One. The kingdom of God is coming. Unstoppably. Where Jesus has been, nothing is the way it was. Because he came, everything will become new.*

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions about the text? Is something unclear to you? Write it down!

Chapter 6

Unbelief in Nazareth, Jesus' Hometown

From there he went away to the town where he had grown up with his family, his hometown of Nazareth. His disciples followed him. When the Sabbath came, he went into the synagogue, as he so often did and as the other Jews did, and began to teach. And because he taught with authority, unlike the teachers of the law, those listening were beside themselves with amazement. And they said: Where did he get all this? What wisdom has been given to him! And what extraordinary miracles are done by his hands! Isn't this the simple craftsman, never a teacher of the law, the son of Mary, whose father is no longer living? The brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters are here with us in town too. (They had already run after him, because they thought he had lost his mind.) And they took offense at him. Their seemingly positive attitude toward him changed. They knew him and yet did not know him. They did not ask themselves what all this meant for them personally. Then they would have known where all the wisdom came from. And Jesus said to them: A prophet has honor and is listened to. But not in his hometown, not among his relatives and in his own house. They did not notice that they were the ones he meant. And he could not do any miracles there, because they were skeptical, even hostile, toward him. *For them he was only the craftsman.*

Yet there were some weak people there, sick people, on whom he laid his hands and healed them. Some who came to him or were brought. *He was amazed at the unbelief* in Nazareth. Again and again he met unbelief, and yet he healed, because people came to him. But here most stayed at home, because they did not recognize who he was and what he was able and willing to do among them too. Whoever cannot bear the scandal that a simple craftsman is in fact God's Son will not break through to true knowledge of Jesus Christ. Then he went through the surrounding villages and taught the people the gospel of the kingdom.

The Mission of the Twelve

Then, with a definite purpose, he calls the Twelve to himself. He put them together in pairs. The way he thought they would fit together. In twos they could support, protect, and encourage each other. And then he sent them out to go into the surrounding area and do what he did. For he gave them authority over the impure spirits, the demons, to drive them out and to demonstrate the beginning of God's reign through Jesus. Part of this was to proclaim repentance and turning around. He instructed them to take nothing with them. No provisions, no bag, and no money. Only a staff. Like that of Moses or the staff of a prophet. They were to lead Israel back into God's presence. And they were to have sandals on their feet. And not two garments either, but only one. They were, like him, to trust in God alone. They were to go out as poor people who have nothing. To the poor. *Repentance was to be visible in their own lives too. They themselves and the way they came across were never to be the reason people rejected their message. Their security, provision, and comfort were never to come first in their mission.* A mission that was urgent, that was to happen immediately and without much preparation. A sending out especially for this time when Jesus was here, in Galilee. At his ascension he sent them out again, and with them all who follow Jesus today. In our time, in other countries, under other conditions. What remains important, as back then, is to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, turning around, but also restoration through healing of spirit, soul, and body. When you are invited into a house on your mission, whether a poor one or a rich one, when ears and hearts open up, then stay there and remain until it is time to move on. Move on, because as many as possible are to hear it. But where they do not listen to you and invite you into their house, shake the dust off your sandals. They must know that the gospel is not something optional. It is an urgent message of grace. To reject it is a great mistake. There is only a yes or a no to God's reign. And they went out and proclaimed repentance, a change of thinking toward God. They drove out many demons. They anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. Where Jesus was and where they were, there was the kingdom of God. Their deeds proved it. They went about in Jesus' authority. In his name. Wherever doors open today, wherever opportunities arise, action must be taken, without losing time, immediately!

John the Baptist Is Beheaded

Although the disciples received spiritual authority, they had to – and the followers of Jesus still have to today – be ready for anything. Whoever proclaims Jesus as King will meet resistance in the world of rulers, kings, and Caesars, of teachers of the law and Pharisees. That is what happened to John the Baptist. His story, this drastic story, makes clear to us the *nature of the world and its kings* and the *nature of Jesus*. King Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, who had ordered the massacre of the children in Bethlehem, heard about Jesus and what was being said about him. The ordinary people were saying things about him that troubled Herod. John the Baptist, whom he had had executed, had risen from the dead, and that was why such miraculous powers were at work through him. Others said of him that he was Elijah. Still others, that he was a prophet. From this Herod concluded that John the Baptist, whom he had had beheaded, had risen. Some time before, Herod had had John arrested and put in prison. All this because of his wife Herodias, who had previously been the wife of his half brother Philip. He had taken her from him and married her. John the Baptist had told him, without hesitating and without fear of the king: According to the law of Moses it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. Herodias could not bear the truth, for John was right. She hounded him and tried to kill him, but did not succeed. For Herod had great respect for John. To him he was a righteous and holy man. He protected him. Often, when he listened to him, he was at a loss, because John told him what he should change. He liked to listen to him, but he did not change. But then came the day when Herodias coldly seized her chance and Herod tied his own hands and could no longer protect John. For his birthday Herod gave a banquet. He invited the prominent people, many dignitaries and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. It was a lavish and intoxicating party. Then the daughter of Herodias came in to dance before the men. Her dance enchanted Herod and all who reclined at the table. Herod was so carried away that he said to her: Ask for whatever you want, and I will give it to you. Up to half my kingdom I will give you if you ask for it. Herod did not know what he was saying. Too much had already been drunk. Without the Romans, who tolerated him, he could never do such a thing. He repeated his offer several times. The daughter went out to her mother to discuss this generous offer with her. She

did not know what to ask for. But Herodias seized the opportunity. Her hour had come: she should ask for John's head. And right away. His head was to be brought on a platter. When Herod heard this request, he was deeply shaken and dismayed. Yes, he had even sworn to grant the girl's wish. And now, since all the guests had already heard it, he could not go back. At once he sent the executioner to the prison, who beheaded John. He brought the head on a plate to the girl, who brought it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and buried it.

The Disciples Return to Jesus from Their Mission

The disciples who had been sent out came back from their mission and gathered around Jesus. Joyfully they told him what they had done and taught, yes, everything they had experienced, and he listened attentively. Jesus saw his disciples and took them with him, so that they could have some rest in a lonely place. For there were constantly many people around them, with their illnesses and questions. They did not even have time to eat. So they went by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people saw them leaving and had heard where they were going. Word got around, and they came on foot from all the villages to this place and were already there when Jesus arrived with his disciples.

5000 Men with Many Women and Children Are Fed

When they got out of the boat, Jesus saw the large crowd. They had run after him. *That touched his heart. He, the good shepherd, was moved with compassion.* For these many people were like sheep without a shepherd. That is what Israel was often called when they were without leader and king. Then he began to teach, at length, for quite a long time, clearly and in a lively way: *words of life and great wisdom.* When some time had already passed, his disciples come to him; they had been worrying about how the rest of the day and the evening would go. This place is remote – that was why they had gone there, after all – and it is already late. There is nothing to eat anywhere here. Send the people to the surrounding farms and villages, so that they can get themselves food. But Jesus looked at the disciples and said something astonishing: *You give them something to eat!* Surprised, even confused, they say: How are we supposed to get bread for so many? We only have 200 denarii; that will never be enough. But he asked them: How many

loaves do you have? Go and see how many loaves you can find here. They came back and had found five loaves and two fish. Then Jesus gave instructions that the many people should divide up and gather in groups. In groups of 50 and 100 on the green grass. It was spring; the grass was young and green. *He, the good shepherd, led them to green pastures.* Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish. He looked up to heaven and turned to his God and Father. He gave thanks and praised him for the food. Then he broke the loaves, so that each disciple could give some to the people. He also divided the two dried fish among the disciples, who passed them on. The great crowd ate, and in a miraculous way the bread did not get any less. Everyone was satisfied. They gathered up the leftovers, and there was much more than they had handed out: twelve baskets were filled with the leftovers and collected by the twelve disciples. And there were about 5000 men, not counting women and children, who were satisfied with the loaves and fish. *This was a sign of the new creation that begins in Jesus and one day will become reality for the whole earth,* when no one has to go hungry anymore and everyone is satisfied. Jesus provides for the people as the true King and Shepherd, in contrast to Herod, who celebrated in abundance for himself in his palace, isolated from the people. Jesus is the new and greater Moses, who has the crowd sit down in an orderly way and gives them bread in a desolate place, as in the wilderness.

Who knows whether the people noticed that a great miracle was happening here. Jesus gives the people rich teaching and food in abundance. The time would come, when Jesus has ascended into heaven, after his death and his resurrection, and the commission goes to all disciples, as here on the shore of the lake: *It's your turn! You have to do it! In my authority and power.* Whatever the challenges are, no matter how long they take to be solved, with miracles or without, *do not give up.* It does not fit disciples of Jesus to lament and send people away. He will be there and act when all possibilities have been exhausted and we dare to act in faith.

Crossing to the Other Shore – Jesus Walks on the Lake

And immediately he tells his disciples to get into the boat and go ahead of him across the lake to Bethsaida. He himself wanted to dismiss the people. When he had dismissed them, he went up on the mountain to pray. *Alone.* For him that was vital. Fellowship and encounter with God. The disciples who were on the

lake were also included in his prayer. When evening had come, the disciples were in the middle of the lake and he was on land. And Jesus saw how they were rowing hard and hardly making any headway against the wind. A situation in which we sometimes find ourselves too, where nothing moves forward. Deep in the night, before dawn, they were still on the lake. Then Jesus came to them. He walked across the lake as if on solid ground. It looked as though he meant to pass by them. Like the appearance of God that passed by Moses. Yes, it was an appearance of God! Not on the mountain, but on the sea, which the Israelites feared. Jesus did not simply want to surprise the disciples, but to show them that God was there. In the flesh, as a man. ***I am here!*** For you! When they saw him, they thought they were seeing a ghost. They were so terrified that they cried out in fear. But he came to them and said: Don't be frightened, it is I. ***The "I am," Yahweh himself.*** Do not be afraid. He climbed into the boat with them, and the wind that had been blowing against them was as if blown away. The disciples were completely horrified and shaken. They were amazed beyond measure. Actually they should have believed Jesus capable of anything, after thousands of people had been fed with five loaves and two fish only a few hours before. Their hearts were still closed. Even they, who were closest to him, still did not know who he really was. He, the Messiah whom they and Israel were expecting, did exactly what the Messiah was supposed to be able to do. He was to have power over everything and yet at the same time be a human being like us. Tired, dependent on God, and in the end even dying. Now that the time had come and he was there, they could not grasp it. What about us, after Mark has told us so much about him? ***He, the same one, is our Lord today.*** He watches over his disciples; from the mountain he had seen them, in the night, and he came to help.

Thousands of Sick People Are Healed

Then they came to Gennesaret, not to Bethsaida, and anchored there. When they got out, the people recognized them. Again the news spread like wildfire. All the sick were brought to Jesus on their beds and mats. They were brought from everywhere. And wherever Jesus went, into the towns, villages, and farms, onto the marketplaces, there they brought the sick out. And they begged him that the sick might just touch the hem of his garment in order to be healed.

And *all who touched him were healed instantly*. Just like the woman with the bleeding, who had touched Jesus from behind and was healed instantly.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, maybe also something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions? Write them down!

Chapter 7

Human Commands and God's Commands

Jesus was in Galilee. There he worked more than in all the other regions. His appearance, his words, and his deeds had become known throughout the whole country and were known in Jerusalem too. So some Pharisees and teachers of the law set out from Jerusalem to check on things in the north of the country. They saw some of Jesus' disciples begin to eat without washing their hands. In their eyes and according to their tradition, without washing they were ritually unclean. For all the Pharisees and all the Jews wash their hands before eating, at least with a handful of water. In this way they keep the tradition of their ancestors. This also applies when they come from the market and then eat. They carry out many such washings and cleansings on jugs, cups, copper bowls, or beds and seat cushions. That is why the teachers of the law and Pharisees asked him: Why don't your disciples observe the traditions and rules of the elders, but eat with unclean hands? Jesus answered them: How accurately the prophet Isaiah prophesied about you, as you can read in his chapter 29: *These people honor me only with their lips and with empty words, for their heart is far from me and is not really interested in me.*

They have abandoned the command of God and now keep the traditions of men instead. You are clever enough to get around the command of God and make it invalid, in order to set up your own commands and rules instead. Moses said: Honor your father and your mother! And: Whoever curses father or mother must die. But what do you do? What your parents need in their old age, what you are supposed to give them, you declare to be a gift for the temple. They do not get what they need. In this way you set aside God's good command and replace it with your own rules. I could list even more such underhanded tricks for you. Then he turned to the crowd and said: Listen to me closely and attentively and understand: there is nothing that goes into a person from outside that can defile him. It does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and from there it is eliminated again. Then he left the crowd and went into a house. There his disciples asked him about what he had said. He said: Are you so dull too, and do you not understand that nothing that goes into a person

can defile him? It goes into the stomach, and from there it is eliminated. *But what comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within a person, from his heart, come evil thoughts and plans: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, debauchery, the envious eye, slander, arrogance, folly, and more besides. All this evil comes from people themselves, from within them. That is what defiles a person, not unwashed hands.* Would anyone be willing to show everyone a photograph of his thoughts and emotions? What would there be to see? Probably also things Jesus lists here. No one can claim that such things do not exist in his heart. No one is unclean before God through ritual, outward impurity. Not even the Gentiles, because they are Gentiles and not Jews. All have sin in their hearts; Jews and Gentiles alike are unclean and need cleansing through Jesus, the only Holy One. Jesus now shows this in the next event too. For the Jews, the Gentiles were unclean as such. But Jesus does not see it that way and proves it by what he does. *With Jesus a new time had begun.*

The Daughter of a Gentile Woman Is Healed

From there he and his disciples went into the region of Tyre. There he went into a house to hide, so that no one would find out he was there. But as so often, it did not work. Immediately, as soon as a woman heard about him, she came to him and threw herself at his feet. Her little daughter had an impure spirit, a demon. She was a Greek, by birth a Syrophoenician. She begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. But he said to her: First let the children eat their fill. It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. She understood what Jesus was saying, since he had come for the Jews as their Messiah. That is why she said something that impressed Jesus: But the dogs also eat the crumbs that fall under the children's table. *Because you have said this and are content with the crumbs, you get the bread.* Go to your daughter; the demon has left. Then she quickly went to her house and was not disappointed. The child was lying quietly on the bed, and the demon had indeed left.

A Deaf and Mute Man Hears Again and Can Speak Clearly

Then he left Tyre and, by way of Sidon, came back to the Lake of Gennesaret, right into the Ten-Cities area. That was where he had healed the possessed man who was bound by many demons. There they bring to him a deaf man who could speak only with great difficulty and could hardly be understood. They beg

him to lay his hands on him so that he will be healed. Then Jesus took him aside, a little away from the crowd. And he put his fingers into his ears, put his spit on his fingers, and placed them on the man's tongue. *Then he looked up to heaven, to his God and Father, sighed, and said: Ephphatha!* That means "Be opened." Instantly his ears were opened, and the bonds that had held his tongue were loosened. He could speak plainly and clearly. Jesus forbade the people to make this known. But as so often happened, the more he told them that, the more the people made his miracles known. They were completely beside themselves over this miracle of healing. They had never experienced anything like it, had not even dared to hope for it. They, the Gentiles, said: *He has done everything well.* He makes the deaf able to hear and the speechless able to speak again.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions? Is there something you did not understand? Write it down!

Chapter 8

4000 People Are Fed

Once again many people were with Jesus. They were in pagan territory. And once again there was nothing to eat. So he called his disciples to himself and said: *I have compassion for all these people*. Because of me they have already been here three days, and they have nothing to eat. If they go home now on an empty stomach, and some have a long way ahead of them, they will collapse. His disciples answered: Where are we supposed to get so many loaves out here in the wilderness? Jesus asked: How many loaves do you have? Seven, they said, and they could have remembered the same words at the feeding of the 5000. Then he directs the people to sit down. He took the seven loaves, said a prayer of thanks over them, broke the loaves into pieces, and gave them to the disciples, who did the same and distributed them to the people. They also had a few small dried fish. He gave thanks for these and distributed them. *Everyone was satisfied*. They even gathered up seven baskets of bread that was left over. There were 4000 people whom Jesus sent home satisfied *in heart and body*. Hadn't the woman said earlier that the dogs would be fed by the crumbs that fall under the table? Here Jesus had fed many non-Jews with words of life and bread to eat. He himself got back into the boat with his disciples, and they went to Dalmanutha.

We Want a Sign from Heaven!

Now Pharisees gathered and started an argument with Jesus. They wanted to tempt him and put him to the test, just as Satan had, by demanding a sign from heaven from him. So that he would prove himself to be the Messiah. A sign that Israel would be set free through him. But Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit, because the criticism and unbelief were so great. Why do these people ask for a sign? So many signs have already happened through me. No, one thing is certain: these people will never get a sign the way they want it. I will not let them get a sign. Nor will they get a Messiah the way they imagine him. Not without faith. He left them standing there, got back into the boat with his disciples, and went over to the other side of the lake.

The Disciples Experience Signs, but They Have No Trust Either

The disciples had forgotten to take bread along. They had only one loaf with them. Perhaps that was Jesus himself, in a figurative sense. In the boat Jesus said to the disciples: Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. Of their hypocrisy and their human commands and their unbelief, demanding signs from heaven. Beware also of the yeast of Herod. Of his tyranny and love of splendor, yes, his godlessness. Do not let this kind of yeast permeate and spoil your hearts.

When the disciples heard the word yeast, they immediately thought that they had forgotten bread and that he wanted to point this out to them. Jesus could not believe it: Why are you thinking about the bread you forgot?! Don't look at the loaves; look to me alone. Do you still not understand? Why don't you get it? Are your hearts still closed? Isaiah had said that about the people (Mark 4:12), but is it like that with you too? You have eyes and do not see. You have ears and do not hear. You cannot even remember when 5000 people were fed with only five loaves. How many baskets did you pick up after the meal? They said: Twelve. When the seven loaves fed the 4000 people recently, how many baskets were left over then? Seven, they said. Then he said: Do you still not understand? We are only 13 people, and you are afraid because we have only one loaf? What are you doing to me with your little faith? But you will see and hear and learn. I am not giving up, and I am not giving up on you. To this day he never gives up on his disciples.

A Blind Man Is Healed

Then they come to Bethsaida. There they bring a blind man to him and ask him to touch him and make him see. He took him by the hand and led him out of the village. There he spat on his eyes, laid his hand on him, and then asked: What do you see? For the first time this man saw something, but still unclearly: I see people walking around like trees. Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes a second time. The man looked around and now saw clearly, as with healthy eyes.

Then Jesus told him to go straight home and not into the village to make everything known. That was a lesson for the disciples. They did see the signs, but still unclearly. They did not recognize who he was. They too needed a second touch to see completely clearly. That was to come when Jesus had risen.

When Peter Said: You Are the Christ!

Then Jesus went on with his disciples farther north, to Caesarea Philippi. There were many pagan temples there. And a source of the Jordan, which was called the gate to the underworld. As they were on the long road, there was time to talk. Jesus asked his disciples: Who do people say I am, after everything they have experienced with me? The disciples had heard a few things and told him: John the Baptist. Some say: Elijah, or one of the prophets. After a few minutes Jesus asked his disciples: You who know me well, who do you believe I am? Peter, the spokesman of the disciples, said straight out: *You are the Anointed One. The Messiah. The Christ.* The one Israel is waiting for. The one who sets Israel free. He commanded his disciples emphatically, even sternly, to say nothing about this. The time had not yet come. *He was not the Messiah the way they imagined him. Something else was to happen, different from what they expected.*

The First Announcement of His Death

Then, after Peter had spoken this true word – also on behalf of all the disciples – Jesus told them, the first of three times, quite openly and in detail: The Son of Man, that is me. I must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. *I will be killed, but after three days I will rise again. That is how it will come about, and that is how it must be. There is no other way for me.*

Peter, for whom Jesus was the Messiah, took him aside and wanted to talk him out of it. In his understanding, such a thing could never and must never happen. He did not know God's plan. For Peter at that moment the cross was foolishness and not the wisdom of God, nor God's power for salvation.

Jesus saw the other disciples, who thought exactly the same. And he snapped at Peter and sharply rebuked him in front of everyone. Get behind me, Satan! You do not think the way God thinks and what he wants. You see everything the way people do. But the way people think and act is not the solution. Something completely different is needed.

Only a crucified and risen Christ will become the Savior and King of the world. Satan wants to prevent me from becoming exactly that for all people. He wants to prevent God from getting his family.

Following Jesus Means Walking the Same Path as He Did

Then he called the crowd to himself, which he had otherwise rarely done on his own initiative. They always came by themselves. But what he had to say was so important. Whoever wants to follow me must deny himself. He must give God first place and control over his life. Let him take up his cross, as I will do, and follow me. For whoever wants to hold on to his own life and save it will lose it. *But listen closely: whoever loses his life for my sake or for the sake of the good news, the gospel, will save it for eternity.* For what does a person gain if he wins the whole world and it belongs to him, but in the end loses his life through death? With what can he buy his life back? Not even owning everything on earth would be enough for that!

Do not be ashamed to confess my name, and what I have taught, before the adulterous and sinful people of this nation. But whoever is ashamed and does not have the courage to do this, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him and will not stand by him when he comes again in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, maybe also something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions, or is there something you did not understand? Write it down!

Chapter 9

Radiant Glory on Mount Hermon

Jesus said to his disciples: Some of you who are standing here with me will not die before they see the kingdom of God come with power. And after six days the time was to come for three of them. They had no idea. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him up a high mountain, Hermon, near Caesarea Philippi. They had hiked up the mountain alone with Jesus. Suddenly he was transformed before them. His clothes became dazzling white. So white that you cannot find anything like it anywhere on earth. Only the Ancient of Days, God himself, of whom Daniel speaks in chapter 7, verse 9, had such a white garment. And suddenly *Elijah* appeared there with *Moses*. They were talking with Jesus. Malachi had spoken of both of them in chapter 3, verse 1, and chapter 4, verses 4 to 6, in the very last verses of the Hebrew Bible. Elijah would come and restore everything. That was common knowledge in Israel, and *the disciples realized that these two had to be a sign of the near end, of judgment and of rescue*. Then Peter, out of sheer embarrassment, made a suggestion. He did not know why he was saying it or what he was saying. Teacher, let us put up a tent for each of you three. The disciples were dazed with fright. Following Jesus is not settling down on the mountain, away from everyday life. But everyday life needs *the vision* on the mountain. This event was a preview, not the disciples' everyday life. They were to meet that again very soon. As Peter was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them. It was the presence of God the Father. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying what had already been heard once at the Jordan when Jesus was baptized: *This is my Son, whom I love above all. Listen to him alone. Not first to Elijah, not to Moses, but to him*. His words count! Even more than what you have seen. *Listen to him!* And then the two had disappeared, and only Jesus could still be seen. *He, the Rabbi, the Messiah, God's Son and God himself, was to complete and fulfill what Elijah and Moses had begun and prophesied. Only the Messiah could establish God's plan and kingdom with power. But only by way of Golgotha*. That was a preview, like a trailer of what was to come. Unlike a political or military intervention, God's reign was to be established on earth through the cross, the resurrection and ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. When they

then came down the mountain, Jesus urgently ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen. Only when he had risen from the dead would everything be accomplished, and then they could tell about it, which they did then too. For by then they were to have understood that the Christ had to suffer before he went into glory. On the way down, the three disciples discussed what this meant, rising from the dead. That occupied them a great deal. For from the Hebrew Bible they knew only of a general resurrection of all people at the end of days.

On the Coming of the Prophet Elijah

The disciples had seen Elijah. They remembered the teachers of the law, who said that Elijah must come before the end. So the disciples asked Jesus: If he was the Messiah, when and where had Elijah been? He answered them: Elijah certainly comes first, to restore the whole people of God. But my dear disciples, why does Scripture also say that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? I tell you that Elijah has already come, namely in the ministry of John the Baptist, who called the people to repentance. And they did with him whatever they wanted. As happened with Elijah, as is written in 1 Kings chapter 19, through the godless Queen Jezebel. John lost his life through a godless woman. Now the mission of Elijah, that is, of John, was fulfilled. And Jesus, whose forerunner he was, was to experience the same as John the Baptist. But through him, the one who died and rose again, there was to be a complete restoration of all things. No one understood that at the time. Just as Moses once went up the mountain in Exodus 24 and 34, into the glorious, radiant presence of God. With a radiant face he came back down to the people. In the same way *Jesus was the true Moses*, whose words are law. And God the Father confirms that we are to listen to him. Jesus and the disciples had been on the mountain and were now coming back down. Into everyday life and daily living.

The Deliverance of a Possessed Boy

When they came back to the other disciples, there was a crowd there. In their midst were the other disciples and teachers of the law, who were arguing with them. When the crowd saw him, they were amazed and greeted him. He was here, the one everyone was talking about. He asked them: What are you arguing about? A man from the crowd said to him: Master, I brought my son to your disciples. For he has a mute spirit and cannot speak. This evil spirit seizes my

son and throws him to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth. Then his whole body becomes stiff as a board, as in an epileptic seizure. But it was not an illness; it was possession. I told your disciples to drive it out. But they were not strong enough. That confused me; your disciples seemed to be helpless. Then Jesus said, so that everyone could hear it, and as if he made no distinction between the crowd and his disciples: What *an unbelieving generation, that trusts God for nothing!* How much longer am I to put up with this? Bring him here to me! So they brought the boy to him. As soon as the evil spirit saw that it was Jesus who was calling him to himself, it reared up and tried desperately to demonstrate its power. For it seized the boy and threw him to the ground, foaming at the mouth. When Jesus saw this, he asked the father: How long has your son had this? From childhood, said the father. And it tries to throw him into the fire or into the water, to kill him. Please help us, if you can, and have mercy on us.

Jesus answered: *If you can? What is that supposed to mean?* Everything is possible for the one who believes God! Then the father cried out: *I do believe – but I just can't. Please help me to trust completely!* With a mixture of faith and unbelief, sometimes believing, sometimes doubting, he stands before Jesus. Just as we do in difficult situations. Jesus noticed that more and more people were coming. Then he rebuked the evil and impure spirit and said to it: You deaf and mute spirit, come out of him and never return to this boy again. And then the spirit suddenly screamed and shook the boy back and forth. Jesus, the strong one, overpowered this spirit, which manifested itself one more time. The last time, before it had to flee. The boy was like dead when the spirit was gone. That is what everyone who saw it thought. But then Jesus took his hand and lifted him up, and the boy stood up. Completely normal, freed from this tormenting spirit, Jesus led him back into life. A lesson for everyone that he himself was to rise from the dead.

Then he had gone into a house with his disciples. After all, they had received authority over the demons from Jesus and were puzzled about what had happened here. When they were alone, they asked him: Why couldn't we drive it out? Jesus answered them: This kind of spirit can be driven out by you only through prayer of special intensity. There are different spirits; this one is especially strong. Were you so busy that you had no time to pray? Your words or technique are not what is decisive, but your relationship with me. Discipline in

prayer and faith are decisive. Beware of trusting in yourselves and your experience. *You must trust God anew again and again, in order to receive his power anew again and again.*

More difficult challenges than at the beginning seem to await the disciples. In general, the path of following Jesus now became harder. For he was to go to Jerusalem. He tried to explain his end to the disciples. Faith is required more and more and grows stronger through it. The greatest faith is not required at the beginning of the journey of faith; rather, it is strengthened piece by piece with ever new, often ever greater challenges. When we dare to rely completely on God.

The Second Announcement of His Sufferings

Then they went on from there through Galilee. And Jesus did not want anyone to know about it. On the way he taught his disciples and made it clear to them: *The Son of Man will be handed over helplessly into the hands of men.* They will kill him. And he will do nothing against it. But after three days he will rise from the dead. This time it was not a parable, but the literal and actual event that was to take place. The disciples did not understand this. Who would hand him over? It was strange to them, and they did not dare to ask him either. Maybe they were afraid of being rebuked like Peter.

Who Is the Greatest?

Then they came to Capernaum. In the house he asked his disciples: What were you arguing about on the way? He knew. Ashamed, no one said anything. They sensed that Jesus would not like it. For they had argued about who among the Twelve was the greatest and most important, or soon would be in the kingdom of the Messiah, their Master. Then Jesus sat down, called the Twelve to himself, and said: If one of you wants to be first, he must be the last: your servant. *Jesus turns ordinary human thinking upside down. And he himself is the greatest example of it.* To illustrate this for them, he called a child over, stood it in their midst, and took it in his arms. In those days children had no honor, no status, few rights, and were not paid attention to. He said: Whoever welcomes such a child in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me at the same time welcomes the one who sent me: my Father. You have to stoop down, all the way down, and make yourself small when you welcome a child. If you welcome Jesus, the

servant who was despised, you have to make yourself small and throw yourself completely on God. And become like him.

Whoever Is Not against Us Is for Us

John said to Jesus: Master, we saw someone driving out demons in your name. But he was not one of us and did not follow us either. So we stopped him from doing it. But Jesus answered: Don't stop him! Whoever does mighty things in my name will not soon speak evil against us. Whoever is not against us is for us! *Don't think you are the most important or the strongest.* Think of the boy you could not help. Now you are stopping someone who drives out demons. In the same way Joshua once said to Moses that he should stop the two men who were prophesying by the Spirit. But Moses said, in Numbers chapter 11, verses 26 to 29, that he would be glad if not just a few, but all would prophesy. Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to me will certainly receive his reward for it. I will see to that. For there will be many, unknown, inconspicuous people who stand out only because they hand someone a cup of water, in my name. And you will come into situations of persecution where a cup of water will be the most precious thing of the moment for you. Then you will be the little ones to whom others stoop down.

Being Led into Sin and the Consequences

And whoever lays a trap for the faith of one of these little and insignificant people and leads him into sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck. That is how bad this leading into sin is for Jesus.

Following Jesus means being at war. Temptation and opposition lurk everywhere. The power of evil is active, also in the life of every disciple. It is not about self-fulfillment, but about a clear stand when evil lures us and comes alive in us. The striving to be first was just such an evil temptation. *Sacrifice and self-surrender are called for on the path of following Jesus and of the cross.* That is why Jesus says something frightening, which is not meant literally, but is no less serious for that: And if your own hand becomes a trap for your faith and leads you into sin, cut it off! For it is better for you to enter eternal life maimed than to go into hell with two hands, into the fire that never goes out. And if your own foot becomes a trap for your faith and leads you into sin, cut it off! For it is better

for you to enter eternal life maimed than to go into hell with two feet, into the fire that never goes out. If your eye leads you into sin, tear it out! It is better for you to enter God's new world, his eternal reign, with only one eye than to be thrown into hell with two eyes. Where the worm does not die and the fire does not go out. Hand, foot, and eye mean the whole person, as he can be led into sin and be active toward sin. Eternal life is so much more important than a temporary enjoyment of sin. *This call from Jesus is, like hell itself, a drastic picture of how seriously sin and being led into sin are to be taken.* Hell, Gehenna, was a real place, the Valley of Hinnom on the southern edge of Jerusalem. A garbage dump where fires were constantly burning and where, because of the waste, which also included corpses, the worms always found new food. This place, which in Israel's history was connected with abominable idolatry and child sacrifice, serves Jesus as the epitome of the place where the unrighteous and unredeemed go. That is also how the Jews saw it in Jesus' day. So he had not said anything new.

Three Serious Words about Salt in the Life of the Disciples

Everyone will be salted and purified with fire. In this way the disciples and the whole church will be purified by the fire of persecution. Just as a sacrifice was purified with salt in those days. Salt is something good. But if it has lost its strength and effect, how can its effect be achieved or restored? Be the salt of the earth by doing what I say and by speaking and acting as I have done. Have among yourselves the powerful effect of salt by living in peace with one another. If you follow the Prince of Peace, let his peace rule you. Live in peaceful fellowship. Share table fellowship also with those who did not want to follow you a short while ago. Also with the little ones, who have no honor. Stop arguing about your status while you do so. You are all brothers and sisters.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

What are you learning about Jesus?

Chapter 10

Jesus on the Way to Judea

Then they set out and came into the region of Judea. And across the Jordan many people came to him again. As usual, he used this opportunity to teach them, for they listened to him.

Pharisees Test Him with the Question of Divorce

Where the crowd was, there was Jesus. A good opportunity for the Pharisees to challenge him in front of everyone. They asked him, with the intention of leading him into a wrong or at least suspicious answer: Is it lawful for a man to send away his wife? In those days there were different opinions among the teachers of the law about how Moses was to be understood. Was it only adultery, or any reason at all, that entitled a man to send his wife away? For the Pharisees it was more convenient that a man could send a woman away even for less important reasons. With a certificate of divorce, though. Jesus had called the washing of hands unimportant, because the inner person was much more important when it came to impurity. What would he answer to this question?

Jesus saw through their completely wrong attitude toward divorce and makes it obvious by his counterquestion: What did Moses say about it? They said: Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send the woman away. But Jesus said to them: Moses did that only because you hardened your hearts toward God and his good order. You only ask what you can get away with, so that you can do what you want after all. You do not ask how the woman and her children will fare if she is simply sent away. You should ask what God wants, and not what is still somehow permitted. For from the beginning it was not so, when God created man and woman. For a man will leave his father and his mother and become a firm and new unity with his wife, in soul and body. Such a unity that they are no longer two, but one. What God has joined together in this way, let no one tear apart. Moses had said that too, in Genesis, and it corresponded to God's intention for marriage. Moses' command about sending a wife away was meant to protect the woman and to keep the terrible consequences of such separations as small as possible. A woman who

had been cast out was helpless and unprotected. Moses did not make divorce or sending away into something good. In the last book of the Hebrew Bible, in Malachi 2, verse 16, the Lord had said explicitly: *I hate divorce!* The Pharisees misunderstood Scripture and did not recognize God's good will for marriage. And as so often, when they were by themselves in a house, the disciples asked him about divorce. He said to them: Whoever sends away his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And it is just the same when the woman sends away her husband and marries another. That is adultery against him.

Jesus contradicts what the Pharisees considered scriptural. The disciples were amazed. But Jesus makes clear what God's reign looks like in his kingdom. His commands apply, his creation order, which always brings blessing. It is not about what Moses permitted, but about what God's will is.

Jesus and the Children

Women and children were often mistreated and raped, because they had no voice in this male-dominated society. Just as Jesus, on the subject of divorce, takes the woman's side and protects her from arbitrariness, he now turns to the children in the same way. For mothers were bringing their children to him so that he would touch them. But the disciples scolded them and told them to stop it. Only just before, Jesus had given them lessons about what, in all their showing off, *they should learn from children*. Jesus saw exactly how the disciples were behaving. And he did not like it at all. He said to them: *Let all the children come to me, and never hinder them!* Truly I tell you: whoever does not receive the kingdom of God the way one receives a child, by making himself small, will not even get into this kingdom. And he held them tight in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them in blessing.

The Rich Man and Eternal Life

As they went out again and were on their way, someone came and fell on his knees before him on the dusty road and asked him a burning question: Good Master, *what must I do to receive eternal life?* Why do you call me good? Only one is good, and that is God! You know his commands: You shall not murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not give false testimony, and honor your father and mother. Then he said: Master, I have kept all these since I was young. When Jesus saw him there before him and heard what he said, he came to love him.

But there was something decisive that he lacked, for Jesus saw into his heart. He said to him: *One thing you lack to have eternal life: sell everything you own and give it to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. Eternal life! And then come, follow me.* When he heard this, he became sad and went away from Jesus, dismayed. This demand was too radical for him, for he had a great many possessions. With these possessions he could not buy eternal life. He had kept all the commands Jesus named. But the first and greatest command, to love God and put him first in his life, he had forgotten. His possessions were more important to him than God. Then Jesus looked around at his disciples, who had seen this, and said: How hard it is for those who have wealth and possessions to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were shocked at these words. Wasn't God's kingdom open to everyone? But Jesus says it once more: Children, how hard it is to get into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the kingdom of God. The rich man trusts in his possessions; he lacks nothing, and the kingdom of God does not offer him much, from his point of view. Then the disciples were completely beside themselves and said to one another: *Who then can be saved at all?* Then Jesus looked at them and said: For people this is impossible, but not with God. *For God everything is possible. He is able to move every heart to believe the gospel and to follow me.*

Is Following Jesus Worth It?

Peter was deeply struck by these words of Jesus. They themselves had given up everything and followed him. Will that be enough to receive eternal life? What do we get out of it at all, Peter asks, if we have left everything to follow you? Jesus answered: There is no one who has left house, brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake or for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much. Already in this present time, in this life, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields – but with persecutions. Certainly and finally, though, eternal life in the coming age of the glory of God's new world. Here the "already – not yet" of the kingdom can be seen. The future of God's new world is already at work in the present of our time. The hundredfold is not material gain in the present time, but a rich share in the family fellowship of the disciples and their possessions.

But many who are first will be last. And many who are last in this life will be first in the future eternal life. What we see in this life does not have to correspond to what it really is for God. God looks into hearts and will honor what pleases him most, what gave him first place in everything in this life.

Jesus Speaks of His Death for the Third Time

They – Jesus and the Twelve and other women and men who followed Jesus – were on the way up out of the Jordan valley to Jerusalem. Jesus was walking alone ahead of them. When they saw him walking ahead of them, they were alarmed. The way he looked frightened them. Something was wrong. It was so different from usual. Then he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the nations. They will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. But after three days he will rise again.

Quarrel over the Best Seats in the Kingdom

Then the two brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come to Jesus with a questionable request: Teacher, we have a request for you. Please grant it to us. Jesus asks: What do you want me to do for you? Grant that when your glorious kingdom begins, we will sit at your right and at your left. Jesus answered them: You have no idea what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup I will drink? Or be baptized with the baptism I will be baptized with? To be able to take this victorious place of honor, you have to drink this cup of suffering and go through this terrible baptism of suffering. Without thinking much about it, they said: We can. Jesus in turn says to them: The cup I drink you will drink. With the baptism of suffering I endure you will be baptized. But to sit at my right or at my left is not for me to decide; it is for those for whom it has been prepared. I told you, didn't I: the last will be first. When the ten heard this conversation and the demand of the two disciples, they became indignant with them.

True Greatness in the Kingdom

Then Jesus called them all to himself and taught them something important: You know well that those who rule over the peoples constantly oppress them.

Those in power have the habit of abusing their power selfishly and to keep their position of power. It will never be like that among you in the family of the disciples. Whoever wants to be great among you must be the servant of all. Whoever wants to be first among you must become the slave of all. For God's standard is the reverse. It is revealed through the Son of Man, who did not come to be served. *He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. His life will be "exchanged" for the redemption and the buying free of many from the captivity of sin and death.*

Blind Bartimaeus Is Healed

Jesus and his disciples reached Jericho. In the town a large crowd had gathered around Jesus and the disciples. It followed him when they left the town again in the direction of Jerusalem. A blind beggar was sitting there, hoping for alms from the pilgrims on their way to the Passover festival in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus was his name, the son of Timaeus. Then he heard that Jesus was there, the Nazarene. Then at once he began to shout: *Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!* He had often heard about Jesus and what he had done. He had hoped for this moment. And now this moment had come. But the people did not help him. They did not bring him to Jesus. Worse: they threatened him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more. *The Rescuer, the Savior of the world, heard him.* Jesus stopped and said: Call him! At once they call the blind man and tell him: You're in luck. Get up, he is calling you. He wants to see you! He let his cloak fall, jumped up, and ran to him. Jesus said to him: What do you want me to do for you? The blind man said to him: My Lord and Teacher, that I may see! Calm down, said Jesus. Because you trusted me so, your faith has healed you. And at once he could see clearly. Then he wanted to stay with Jesus. With his rescuer. He followed him when Jesus went on up to Jerusalem. The eyes of all followers and disciples must be opened to see that Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and to give his life there as a ransom for many. *His life as a ransom to buy free and redeem many from slavery to the devil, to sin, and to selfishness!* John and James were blind when it came to the suffering and the dying and thought only of power. When Jesus asked them, just as he asked Bartimaeus, what he should do for them, they wanted the throne. Bartimaeus sat in the dust and sought salvation.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, maybe also something you want to put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions, or is there something you did not understand? Write it down!

Chapter 11

Jesus Rides into Jerusalem on a Donkey and Is Welcomed as King

As Jesus approaches Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives with his disciples, he sent two of his disciples ahead with a task. In the next village they were to find a young donkey, a colt, on which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it to us. And if anyone asks: What's this, what are you doing? Then say: The Lord needs it and will send it back soon. The two found the colt tied up outside at the door. They untied it. Those standing there said, as expected: What are you doing? They answered exactly as Jesus had told them. And they let them.

Then they brought the young donkey to Jesus, put their cloaks on it, and Jesus sat on it. Then Jesus rode on the colt to the city of the great King. He, the King of peace, humbly riding on a donkey, as the prophet Zechariah prophesied in chapter 9, verse 9. The disciples had hinted that he is the Christ. Much spoke for it, and the people gave him a worthy welcome. They spread their cloaks on the road before him as a sign of royal honor. Like a carpet. Others tore off green branches and laid them on the road. Many people, among them a large crowd of pilgrims who had come with Jesus from Galilee, went ahead of him; others, who followed, shouted loudly: Hosanna – praise be to God! Blessed is he who comes on God's mission! At last the kingdom of David is here! Praise be to God in heaven! Just as Psalm 118, verse 26 says. But Jesus remained silent, for his mission was not, as he had made clear again and again, to become the king who would set Israel free militarily and politically. The cross ruled his life and his kingdom. And his future followers. In just one week he would carry his cross out of the city to Golgotha. When we cheer Jesus, then as the one who came to die for our sins, not as the one who brought us honor. We must first welcome him as the one who gives his life for the kingdom of God, not as the one who builds up the kingdom of David.

In the city the cheering quickly falls silent. Jesus went straight into the temple and looked around there. In the evening he left the city, like many other pilgrims at the Passover festival, to spend the night in the surrounding villages. He went back to Bethany with his disciples.

Old Israel and Its Temple – a Fig Tree without Fruit

The next morning, as they were going back to Jerusalem, Jesus was hungry. From a distance he saw a fig tree with green leaves, as is normal in spring. He went over to find early figs on it. But he found none, only leaves. It was not yet the season for late figs. Then the disciples heard him say to the tree: May no one ever eat fruit from you again!

Never at any other time did Jesus speak such words. His words have power to bless, to heal, to teach, but also to judge. His visit to the temple, and what he was to teach and do there, corresponds to the symbolic act at the fig tree. Israel and its monumental temple center as a place of identity would soon come to its end and make room for something new.

Jesus Drives the Merchants out of the Temple

When he arrived in Jerusalem, he went straight into the temple. There, in the area right around him, he began to drive out those who were buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the dove sellers. He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

Then he taught all who had seen this: Doesn't Scripture say in Isaiah chapter 56, verse 7: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it into a place that shuts out the nations instead of inviting them. You have made this house into your house. To celebrate yourselves. You have made the house of God into a den of robbers.

The temple had degenerated into a den of robbers. Secularized, and led and organized by robbers who declared the temple to be their hideout and their territory. Where their rules applied. As Jeremiah already said in chapter 7, verse 11: lying, stealing, murdering, adultery, swearing falsely – that is the sad picture of those responsible for the temple. So the temple has lost its purpose forever.

By his action Jesus interrupted the sacrificial service for a short time. In this way he symbolically indicated the judgment on the temple and the end of the sacrificial service. *His action points not to restoration, but to the end.* It was to fare like the fig tree. The temple was no longer what it was meant to be. Its time was coming to an end. It would give way to a new, spiritual temple, to which people from all nations were to belong. The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this. They were beside themselves and decided to kill him. Jesus had

exposed them with a single sentence. They were the robbers who had made the temple their hideout. They feared the influence Jesus had on the people. It grew from day to day. For the people were deeply impressed by his teaching. Jesus' action in the temple becomes the reason why Jesus is finally put on trial. With death as the result.

The Fig Tree Has Withered – Praying, Believing, and Forgiving Are What Matter – Not a Temple Building

The next morning, on the way into the city, they passed the fig tree again. It had withered completely. Peter remembers when he sees the tree and said to Jesus: Rabbi, look, the fig tree you cursed. It has dried up. Jesus answered him: It is faith that matters! Trust God! For one thing is certain: if anyone does not doubt in his heart but believes, he can say to this mountain: Be thrown into the sea!, and it will happen. It really is so: whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you will receive it, and it will happen. And when you stand together and pray, first forgive those you have something against, so that your Father in heaven can also forgive you your wrongs. And so answer your prayers.

The mountain Jesus spoke of was Mount Zion with its temple, where God no longer lived. Genuine faith and a readiness to forgive are more important than a building that only serves national identity. *Prayer and faith and forgiveness mark the new Jesus community. This community was to become the real house of prayer, the new spiritual temple made up of all who follow Jesus, from all nations.*

The Question of the Teachers of the Law about Jesus' Authority to Drive the Merchants out of the Temple

Jesus comes to Jerusalem with his disciples on the third day. As he is walking around in the temple, a number of men who are not exactly friendly come to Jesus. They were the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders. They say to him: Who gives you the authority and the right to do here in the temple what you did yesterday? Jesus replied: I also want to ask you something. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. My question to you: was John's baptism from God or from people? What do you say? Then they put their heads together and considered what they should answer. Many people were standing around them. They reasoned: if they said, from God, why then had they not believed? If they said it was from people, then they had to fear the

crowd. The crowd was sure that John was a prophet, sent by God. Finally, meekly and for tactical reasons, they said: We don't know. Then Jesus said to them: Then I will not tell you by what authority I do these things. So on the third day of the last week before his crucifixion, the open confrontation did not happen. The wisdom of the Messiah still held back his murderers. But the tension could be felt all the same.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something you can put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions about the text? Is there something you did not understand? Write it down!

Chapter 12

The Parable of the Leased Vineyard and the Wicked Tenants – Israel as the Vineyard and Its Responsible Leaders, the Violent Tenants: The Indirect Answer to the Question about Jesus' Authority – He Is the Beloved Son, He Is the Cornerstone

Then Jesus began to speak in parables to the people in Jerusalem, the citizens of the city and the many pilgrims from all over the country. A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress, and built a watchtower in the vineyard. He leased it to some farmers and went on a journey abroad. After a certain time the owner sent his servant to collect his rightful share of the *fruit*. God was looking for genuine fruit of obedience and worship from his people. But the tenants beat him up and sent him back empty-handed. Then he sent another one. But they wounded him on the head and insulted him badly. The next one they even killed. And again and again the owner of the vineyard sent people to collect his share. He showed extraordinary patience. Nevertheless: some they killed and others they beat. A disastrous, rebellious tradition lasting for centuries.

Then the owner said to himself: What else can I do now? I will send *my only, beloved son*. Him at least they will respect. But the tenants of the vineyard, who behaved as if everything belonged to them, said to themselves: He is the heir. Come, let us kill him too. Then the vineyard will belong to us for good. That is a great self-deception; the vineyard will always belong to the owner. And when he came, they seized him and murdered him. Then they threw him out of the vineyard.

Then Jesus asked: What will the owner and lord of the vineyard do? He will come and have the tenants killed and give his vineyard to others. Does all this sound unfamiliar to you? Have you not read in Holy Scripture, in Psalm 118, verse 22: The stone that the builders, the spiritual leaders of the people, carelessly threw aside has become the cornerstone, the most important stone for the whole temple building. This came from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes! God has vindicated his Son. He has confirmed him as the divine Messiah. When he said this, they were all the more determined to arrest him

and kill him. But their fear of the crowd, whose leaders they were, after all, held them back. They had understood perfectly that this parable was about them. They were the tenants who in the past had again and again turned away, beaten, and killed all the owner's messengers. As leaders of the people they were responsible for the fruitlessness. This parable needed no explanation, neither for the rulers of the people nor for the disciples. Although through this parable they are now still being pointed to God's patience, their hearts harden once more, and they bring upon themselves the judgment that came in the year 70 AD. And they left him alone once more and withdrew again.

A Trick Question Full of Explosives: Should We Pay Taxes to the Emperor?

Then the rulers, again with deceitful and evil intent, send some Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus. Only such an intent could bring these two groups together. They plan to set a trap for him. With sarcastic praise they say to him: Teacher, we know that you are sincere and objective and do not tell anyone what they want to hear. You are not concerned about your reputation with people. You teach only what God wants from us. Tell us: is it right for us Jews, for God's people, to pay taxes to the Roman emperor? Should we pay or not? This question in the temple square at the time of the Passover festival falls into a heated, explosive atmosphere, in which the Jews were thirsting for freedom and liberation from the Romans. What would the one who had been welcomed as Messiah say to that? If he agreed to paying the tax, he could be exposed as a cowardly collaborator who was giving up Jewish identity. If he rejected paying the tax, that could be brought as a charge of political rebellion against Rome. Either answer on its own was enough to accuse him or take him out of circulation. But Jesus saw through their hypocrisy. Why this trick question? Give me a denarius, so that I can see this coin. He himself did not have one. Not everyone had one. The questioners did. They dutifully paid the tax. They gave him a denarius. He asks them: Whose image is on this coin? They say: The emperor's image, Tiberius, the son of Augustus. Then Jesus said to them: ***Then give back to the emperor what belongs to the emperor, and give to God what is due to God.*** Then they were utterly amazed. He had left them speechless once again. In a brilliant way Jesus distinguishes the sphere of the emperor, tax money, and politics from the kingdom of God. In view of the God of Israel, the Roman

emperor has hardly any significance. Jesus puts God above everything; full and first obedience is always owed to him. Beside him there is no absolute value. *Not violent rebellion against Rome, but obedience to God is the right way to wait for the kingdom of God.* Paying taxes is no contradiction to that. And to give back to the emperor what belongs to him is certainly a passive, nonviolent rebellion. Giving back in the sense of no longer buying and selling with it. Obedience to God with body and life remains the first and most important duty. No one could lay a finger on him.

A Trick Question about the Resurrection

The Sadducees, who claim there is no resurrection, also came to him. They asked him: Teacher, Moses wrote: if a man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife without children, the man must marry his dead brother's wife and father children for his brother. Suppose there were once *seven brothers*. The first married, but died before he and his wife had children. So his younger brother married the woman. But he too died before they had children. The same with the third. None of the seven brothers left any children. Last of all, after all seven brothers, the woman died too. In the *resurrection: whose wife will she be?* For she was the wife of all seven brothers. Jesus said to them: Aren't you wrong precisely because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise, they will no longer marry or be married. Rather, they will be like angels in heaven. There will no longer be procreation and the multiplying of human beings in God's new world. As for the raising of the dead – have you not read in the book of Moses how God spoke to him at the bush: I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? *He is not a God of the dead, but of the living.* You are badly mistaken. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are already living now in the heavenly world beyond, and they will rise when Jesus comes again. Death is not the last word, but the life that comes from God. One of the teachers of the law came up to them. He had heard how they were debating and how well Jesus had answered. So he asked Jesus: What is the most important of all the commands?

The Question about the First Command

What is the most important of all the commands? Jesus answered: The most important command is: *Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the*

Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your fellow human being as yourself!

There is no other command greater than these two. The teacher of the law said to him: Good answer, Teacher, you have spoken the truth: he is the only one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all your heart and with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your fellow human being as yourself, is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him: You are not far from God's kingdom. Now no one dared to ask him any more questions.

The Question about the Christ

As he was teaching in the temple, Jesus said: How can the teachers of the law say that the Anointed One is the son of David? David himself, led by the Holy Spirit, said: The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. David calls him Lord; how then can he be his son? And the large crowd hung on his every word. Jesus is the Messiah not only because he is the Son of David. He is more at the same time. He is David's Lord, because he is the Son of God and the Son of Man, who was before David. Looking ahead, David honors Jesus in Psalm 110. The teachers of the law had lost sight of that or had never seen it that way.

Warning against the Teachers of the Law

In his teaching he advised: Beware of the teachers of the law, who walk around in fine robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces. They crave special seats in the synagogues and at banquets. Those who devour widows' households and, to keep up appearances, pray especially long prayers will receive a harsher judgment. For they knew the Scriptures and will be without excuse. Vanity and status symbols and long prayers do not make anyone godly. Jesus criticizes the group of the teachers of the law harshly. More harshly than all the others, because they boasted of knowing the Scriptures and thus God's will. God's word and sanctimony and hypocrisy have nothing to do with each other.

The Poor Widow's Gift

And Jesus sat down opposite the offering box and watched how the people put in their offerings; many rich people put in a lot. Then a poor widow came alone

and put in two copper coins, which equals a quadrans. Jesus called his disciples to himself and said to them: Amen, I tell you one thing: this poor widow has put more into the offering box than all who put something in before her. *For they all put in a part out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything she had, her whole livelihood.* This is a high point of Jesus' teaching. Not to gather esteem before people, but before God. Giving oneself to him is what Jesus finds and praises in this poor widow.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something you want to do in your life?

What excites you about Jesus?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here! Tell him how much you admire him!

Do you have questions? Write them down!

Chapter 13

The End-Times Discourse: The Destruction of the Temple

As Jesus was leaving the temple building, one of the disciples said to him: Master, isn't this a magnificent building of massive stones! Jesus answered him, and everyone heard it: Do you see all these temple buildings? Not one stone will be left on another. Everything will be destroyed down to the ground. Then they went through the Kidron Valley over to the higher Mount of Olives. From there there was an impressive view of the temple complex. Then four of the disciples, Peter, James, John, and Andrew, came to Jesus alone and asked him: When will it be that the temple is destroyed? And what is the sign that all this is about to happen?

The Beginning of the End-Time Birth Pains

Jesus answered them differently than they and we would have wished: Watch out that no one leads you astray or confuses you! For many will come and claim that they are the Christ. And many will be led astray. Many will trust them carelessly. But my coming again will be different. When you hear of wars here and there, do not be alarmed. That is how it must come. And that is how it will stay until the end. When you hear and experience all this, that will not yet be the end. In an unreconciled world one nation will fight against another and one kingdom will attack another. There will be earthquakes and famines. But that is only the beginning of the end. These are the birth pains, the beginning of the labor pains of the new world. With the destruction of the temple in the year 70 by Titus, a chain reaction of distress begins that lasts until the visible appearing of Jesus at the end of days.

Persecution and Distress Everywhere until the End

Be on your guard! Don't just look and listen around you; look to yourselves! They will hand you, my disciples, over to the courts. You will be flogged and beaten because you are my witnesses. You will stand before rulers and kings because of me. As a testimony to them, so that they hear of my name. Not only

to them; to all nations on the whole earth the good news must be proclaimed before my return. When you are brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about how you are to answer and defend yourselves. Say what is given to you by God in those moments. For it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. It will be difficult for my witnesses and disciples all over the earth. A man will betray his brother and so hand him over to death. Fathers their children. Children will betray their parents and hand them over to death. They do this because they gain advantages by it or so as not to come to harm themselves. *You, my friends, will be hated by everyone because of my name. Hold out! To the end. Until I come again. Whoever stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Distress in Jerusalem in the Disciples' Lifetime

But when you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong — let the reader pay attention! —, then those in Judea should flee to the mountains; whoever is on his roof terrace should not go in to get anything out of his house; and whoever is in the field should not go back to get his cloak. It will be especially terrible for pregnant women and nursing mothers. Pray that it does not happen in winter! For this time will be the worst, worse than everything before and everything after. If the Lord had not shortened this time, no one would be saved. But for the sake of his elect he has cut this time short. If anyone says to you: “Here is the Christ!” or: “There is the Christ!” — do not believe it, for false christs and prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders and try to lead the elect astray. *So watch out, for I have told you everything ahead of time.*

The Appearing of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ

In the days after the worldwide distress, suddenly the time will have come. I am coming again. Visible to all people. Introduced and unmistakably announced by cosmic and political upheavals. The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light. Stars will fall from the sky. Yes, the heavenly powers will be shaken. These signs, which have never happened before, announce the immediate coming of the Messiah in glory.

Then people will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds in the sky. With great power, authority, and glorious radiance. His appearing will bring everything to a standstill. Unimaginable joy among his disciples; terror,

astonishment, and shock among everyone else. He will send out his angels to every point of the compass to gather his chosen people, his disciples, from the whole earth. He will rescue them from all distress. Just as Israel gathered around the temple in the days of Jesus and before, so then, at the beginning of the new creation, the worldwide people of God will gather around the humbled and exalted Son of God.

The Fig Tree

The fig tree is a comparison: when its branches have become full of sap and the leaves come out, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when these things happen, you are to realize that it will not be much longer. Truly I tell you: this generation, this godless kind of people, will continue until the end, until my return. Until everything I have said is fulfilled. They will continue alongside the elect and will oppress and persecute them. But in the end they will pass away and be finally judged.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words remain forever. No matter what happens and how threatening the hostility of the opponents of Jesus and the disciples is, Jesus will come again and make his promises come true.

When that will happen, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son know, but only the Father.

Always be ready! — for you do not know when the time will come.

A Man Goes on a Journey

It is like a man who, before he leaves the house to go on a journey, gives each of his servants his own task and orders the doorkeeper to keep watch. So keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house will come — whether in the evening, at midnight, or in the morning — so that if he comes suddenly, he does not find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone:

Keep watch!

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you want to do in your life?

What excites you about Jesus?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here! Tell him how much you admire him!

Do you have questions? Is something unclear to you? Write it down!

Chapter 14

The Plot and Conspiracy of the Chief Priests

In two days the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were to begin. The determination of the chief priests and teachers of the law was so great that they were urgently looking for some trick to seize him and kill him. Jesus had called their whole existence into question. He had to be eliminated. But they needed a reason that the people would also accept. For the people respected him. It was to happen as quickly as possible, so that it would not happen during the festival, because then there would be a riot among the people.

Jesus Is Anointed in Bethany

Jesus was a guest in Bethany at the home of Simon the Leper. He was someone who had been healed by Jesus. During the meal a woman ventured in, holding an alabaster jar of pure, expensive nard in her hand. She broke the neck of the jar and poured the oil over Jesus' head. It was a strange situation for everyone present. This woman expressed her esteem for Jesus in a unique way. She is a stark contrast to those who were planning to kill him. A reverent silence had fallen over the table. Jesus let all this happen as if it had been arranged. But then the disciples became indignant. Why this waste?, they said to one another. This expensive oil could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and the money given to the poor. 300 denarii was almost a worker's yearly wage. And they rebuked the woman harshly. But Jesus said: Leave her alone! Why are you embarrassing her? She has done a good deed for me. You will always have the poor with you, and as often as you want, you can do good to them. And really do it! *But you will not have me with you much longer. She has done what she could and anointed my body beforehand for burial.* And I assure you: wherever in the world the good news is made known, what this woman has done will also be told. The worldwide proclamation of the good news was to include all the teachings and experiences with Jesus, and so also this event, to which Jesus attaches special and lasting significance.

What no one noticed: Jesus was the poor one who owned nothing. And a suffering one besides, who was to die a violent death. Her good deed finds

favor with Jesus and brings him joy. What seemed so senseless and wasteful is a bull's-eye of good works. For in fact there would be no time, and it would be impossible, to anoint the dead Jesus. She had concretely anticipated it. And unlike the disciples, she had sensed his death ahead of time and valued it.

Judas Becomes a Traitor

After this one of the Twelve, it was Judas the Sicarius, went to the chief priests and offered to hand Jesus over to them. They were delighted. They could not imagine a better opportunity. They promised him money for it. From then on he looked for a favorable opportunity to betray Jesus and reveal where he was staying.

Preparations for the Passover Meal

The first day of the festival week came, during which only unleavened bread is eaten. The day on which the Passover lambs are slaughtered. These had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem.

Every year the Passover festival recalls the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt. With Moses as the leader and the Passover lamb, whose blood was smeared on the doorposts. In this way Israel was spared from judgment. In the days of Jesus this story repeats itself in a higher and at the same time deeper way. Jesus does miracles like Moses and is himself the Passover lamb, whose life is given as a ransom for many. Now it is about rescue from a greater judgment. Now the moment has come when Jesus, in a figurative sense, stands like Moses before the Red Sea and takes on something that could not be more threatening.

Then the disciples asked Jesus: Where should we prepare the Passover meal for you? Jesus sent two of them off with this task: Go into the city! There you will meet a man carrying a jar of water. Follow him until he goes into a house, and say to the owner of the house there: Our Teacher asks: Which room can you make available to me, so that I can celebrate the Passover meal there with my disciples? Then he will show you a large room upstairs, furnished with cushions and already prepared for the celebration. Prepare everything for us there. The two went into the city. They found everything just as Jesus had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal. These preparations have to be made this way because Jesus and his disciples have to remain hidden in view of the plots against him and a traitor in their own ranks.

The Passover Meal – the Traitor Is Present

When evening had come, Jesus came there with the Twelve. During the meal he said: I assure you: one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me now. They were dismayed, and one after another they asked him: Surely you don't mean me? Jesus answered: One of you twelve will do it; one who dips his bread into the same bowl with me. The Son of Man must indeed die, as it is written about him. But woe to the man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had never been born!

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Now Jesus introduces for his followers a new meal, which celebrates the *new covenant* through himself. And at the same time leaves behind forever the old Passover meal, the expression of the old covenant. During the meal Jesus took a loaf of bread, spoke the prayer of blessing over it, broke it into pieces, and gave it to them with the words: *Take it; this is my body!* Then he took the cup, spoke the prayer of thanksgiving over it, gave that to them too, and they all drank from it. As he did so, he said to them: *This is my blood, which is poured out for many. It is the blood of the new covenant.* I tell you: I will not drink wine again until I drink it new on the day when God's reign has begun. My dying at the hands of the rulers and the nations is not my end. I will live! God's kingdom is coming! Then, as was customary at the Passover festival, they sang the Hallel Psalms 115–118 and went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus goes ahead of the Twelve as the “greater Moses.” He goes ahead of Israel, indeed ahead of the whole world. To confront a slave driver who is greater than the old Egyptian Pharaoh. He goes into a storm and a fear that are greater than back then at the Red Sea. To lead the world into freedom. *The Lord's Supper, the breaking of bread, is the unique and deep way, perceived with the senses, of remembering in a meal what Jesus suffered and fought for for them. For the whole world.*

His voluntary self-giving in death on the cross is the true and greater Passover lamb, whose blood redeems forever, cleanses from sins, and makes holy. And establishes an eternal covenant. The Lord's Supper today is not a constant, new sacrifice of Jesus in the symbols of the meal. Bread and wine are symbols. In a figurative sense they speak, as a reminder and at the same time as a proclamation, of Jesus' saving act in the sacrifice of his literal body. The spiritual, invisible, but just as real

presence of Christ is guaranteed wherever this memorial meal is celebrated. But it is just as much there, and with those who gather to him, even without celebrating this meal.

Peter Will Deny Jesus

You will all desert me, Jesus said to them, for it is written in the prophet Zechariah, chapter 13, verse 7: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after my resurrection I will go ahead of you into Galilee as your good shepherd. There we will see each other. Then Peter said to him: Even if everyone leaves you in the lurch – I never will! I assure you, Jesus replied, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. No!, Peter answered with all determination. Even if I had to die with you! I will never deny you! All the others insisted on the same thing. Their opinion of themselves will vanish into thin air when the danger of death arrives shortly. Mark encourages the persecuted church in Rome to stand firm in suffering. And encourages everyone not to look for strength and courage in themselves.

Gethsemane – Jesus' Existential Struggle in Prayer

They came to an olive grove called Gethsemane. The name means oil press. It lay at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Jesus said to the Twelve: Sit here while I pray! He took Peter, James, and John with him. Extreme anguish and terror came over him, and he said to them: I am so weighed down because of what is coming upon me. My soul is in the agony of death. Stay here with me and keep watch! With me! Then he went a few steps farther and threw himself on the ground. He prayed to God with a voice full of anguish that, if it were possible, he would spare him this hard hour. Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you! Spare me from having to drink this cup! Take this cup of suffering away from me. But let what you want happen, not what I want.

This cup of suffering meant falling into the hands of sinners, being helplessly at the mercy of them and of the powers of darkness. Bearing the sins of many. And in the end being overcome by death, the great enemy. This humiliation was part of the Father's saving will. There could be no salvation other than by entering this hour of judgment and suffering through it. Through his cruel death on the cross, salvation for all was to be won in battle. Freedom from sin, death, and the devil, to whom Jesus hands himself over with all the consequences. All this is hidden from the

disciples in this hour. They do not understand what is going on here. Even we look at this unbelievable scene with horror, and we lack the words to appreciate it even approximately and to understand it in its depth. Then he returned to the disciples and saw that they had fallen asleep. Then he said to Peter: Simon, are you asleep? Couldn't you stay awake for one single hour? Didn't you even want to give your life for me? Then he said to all of them: Stay awake and pray, so that you will be strong in the coming test. The spirit in you is willing, but your human nature is weak. You cannot rely on it. A second time Jesus went away and prayed with the same words as before. When he came back, they were asleep again. Their eyes had grown heavy. And they did not know what to answer him. When Jesus came back the third time, he said to them: Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough now, the hour has come! Now the Son of Man is handed over to men, to sinners. Get up, let us go; the one who is betraying me is already here.

Three prayers of the Son to his Abba were not answered. The cup was not taken away. Obediently, Jesus surrenders himself to the events to come. The passion of suffering that begins here – Jesus is arrested in Gethsemane – the Son goes through alone, everything that is done to him and everything the violence of darkness means. Yet his prayers are answered. But only when the cup is empty. In the resurrection at the latest, his pleading cries are answered. Jesus leaves all suffering behind forever.

Jesus Is Arrested

He had hardly said this when Judas, one of the twelve disciples, came with a large band of armed men. They were carrying swords and clubs and had been sent by the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. The traitor had arranged a signal with them: The one I kiss in greeting is the one. Arrest him and lead him away under guard. So Judas went straight up to Jesus. Rabbi!, he called out, and kissed him. Then they seized him and arrested him. In cowardly treachery they come at night, as unnoticed as possible. Judas' sarcastic token of love opens a view into a human abyss of darkness. *He represents the lost and darkened heart of unredeemed humanity.* One of the men who were with Jesus drew a sword. He struck at the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. That could only displease Jesus, who takes the Father's cup without violence and without resistance. It is precisely nonviolence that reveals what God is really like. In

unparalleled humiliation Jesus is the outstretched hand of God. Not for judgment, but for salvation. Jesus said to the men: Am I a criminal, that you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me? Every day I was with you in the temple, teaching there. You did not arrest me then. But what Scripture foretold about me must be fulfilled. *Then all his disciples deserted him and fled.* A young man was following Jesus. He had thrown only a linen cloak over his body, and when they grabbed him, he let go of the cloak and ran away naked. It is assumed that here the author, Mark, is describing himself.

Jesus before the Jewish High Council – His Condemnation

They brought Jesus to the high priest. There all the leading priests and all the elders of the council and teachers of the law gathered. Peter followed Jesus at a great distance. The former closeness is no longer there. He got as far as the inner courtyard of the palace. There he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. The leading priests and the whole council tried to incriminate Jesus through witness testimony, so that they could condemn him to death in advance; but they did not succeed. Many false witnesses did testify against Jesus, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and claimed: We heard him say: I will tear down this temple, which was built by human hands, and in three days I will build another, not made by human hands. But their statements also contradicted each other. Then the high priest himself stood up, because he feared that no valid charge could be found that the people would also support. He stepped into the middle and asked Jesus: Have you nothing to say to what these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent and, as the suffering servant, said not a word. Then the high priest asked him straight out: *Are you the Christ, the promised Savior, the Son of the Blessed One?* This question had arisen from some of Jesus' words that he had spoken publicly and that had perhaps made their way to Jerusalem, and from what he had said publicly in Jerusalem in recent days. And it went for all or nothing. And now the bomb was about to burst. *I am, said Jesus, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming with the clouds of heaven!* Then the high priest tore his robe and said: Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard for yourselves how he blasphemed God. He raises himself to divine honor and so robs God of his honor. Jesus claims not only to be the Messiah, but, as the Son, to be equal with God. What is your verdict? Unanimously they

declared that he deserved death. According to the law of Moses, the penalty for blasphemy was death. Some began to spit on Jesus. They threw a cloth over his head so that he could not see anything; then they hit him with their fists and said: Who was it? You are a prophet, aren't you! Then the court guards took him and slapped him in the face. Everyone present, from the rulers to the henchmen and hangers-on, does not believe his claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God. For all of them he is merely a blasphemer. But because he is a popular figure, they cannot and may not carry out the death sentence. They had no choice but to turn to the Roman governor Pilate.

Peter Denies His Master

Peter was still below in the courtyard. One of the high priest's servant girls came by. When she noticed Peter by the fire, she looked at him more closely and said: You were with that Jesus from Nazareth too! Peter denied it: I have no idea; I don't know at all what you are talking about! Then he went out into the entryway. At that moment a rooster crowed. The servant girl spotted Peter there again and said to those standing around: He is one of them too! But again he denied it. Shortly afterward those standing around started in again: Of course you are one of them; you are from Galilee too, where the Nazarene comes from! Your accent gives you away! Now Peter even let himself be carried away into an oath: May God punish me if I am lying! I don't know the man you are talking about. At that moment the rooster crowed the second time, and Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him: Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times and claim that you do not know me. Then he began to weep. He was ashamed at how quickly his whole oath of loyalty had collapsed into nothing. What happened to him can happen to any Christian!

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you want to do in your life?

What excites you about Jesus?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here! Tell him how much you admire him!

Chapter 15

Jesus before the Roman Governor Pilate – the Summary Trial

Early on Friday morning the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders, indeed the whole Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin, conferred together. They decided to hand Jesus over to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. For they themselves could neither pass nor carry out a death sentence. However, they could not be 100 % certain whether Pilate would follow their verdict. So they bound Jesus and led him, tied up, from the high priest's house in the Essene quarter to Pilate. They handed Jesus over to him in the hope that he would quickly condemn him to death. Pilate usually resided in Caesarea. But at the time of the festival he stayed in Jerusalem for reasons of security policy. With his soldiers he probably resided in Herod's palace. Pilate asked Jesus abruptly: *Are you the king of the Jews?* You say so, Jesus replied. Jesus' affirmative answer gives Pilate reason to consider whether this could mean a danger for the political situation. But the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate was amazed that Jesus did not answer any of their accusations. So he asked him: Aren't you going to answer? Aren't you going to defend yourself? See how many things they are accusing you of! But Jesus said nothing at all, much to Pilate's amazement. Jesus surrenders himself to the role of the suffering servant, obedient to the Father. His silence and his passivity indicate that the Lord of history, God himself, is pursuing a mysterious plan, to which the Son submits despite the greatest opposition and suffering.

Barabbas Goes Free – Jesus Is Sentenced to Death

It was a custom that at the Passover festival one prisoner of the Romans was released. Namely the one the Jews wanted. There was a man named Barabbas who had murdered someone in an uprising. Now the people, stirred up by the leading Jews who wanted to destroy Jesus, came to Pilate. They insisted on their right to have a prisoner of their choice released. Pilate saw the opportunity to release Jesus, who in his eyes was innocent. So he asked: Shall I release the king of the Jews for you? It was a mocking remark. Did he want to change the crowd's mind? It was clear to him that the chief priests had handed Jesus over

to him out of envy. They had stirred up the people to demand the release of the murderer Barabbas. Pilate did not give up and said to the people: What then shall I do with the one you call the king of the Jews? But the people shouted as if out of their minds: *Crucify him!* Pilate asked: What is his crime? What evil has he done? Now they shouted all the more: *Crucify!* Pilate wanted to do the people a favor, as every year, and released the murderer Barabbas, who could hardly grasp his chance good fortune. Because of some insensitive behavior toward the Jews, Pilate was under a certain pressure to act. It would have been extremely inconvenient for him now not to go along with the will of the Jews. To protect his position of power, he sacrifices the innocent Nazarene in place of a Sicarius, a terrorist who is an enemy of Rome. He handed Jesus over to their will, had him flogged, and ordered his crucifixion. Pilate is ultimately responsible for the crucifixion. But along with him, so are all the Jews who did not recognize their Messiah or did not want to recognize him.

The Mockery and Brutality of the Roman Soldiers

The soldiers took Jesus into the inner courtyard of the palace. The whole cohort of soldiers was called together to ensure security and calm during the crucifixion. The soldiers of the execution squad knew the procedure and made a show of it. They put a red cloak on Jesus and set a crown of thorns on his head. Then they cynically greeted the battered and bleeding Jesus: Hail, king of the Jews! They hit him on the head with a reed, to drive the crown of thorns into his scalp. They spat on him and knelt down mockingly before him to pay him homage. When they had finished with this unbelievably unjust show, they put his own clothes back on him, in order to set out for the place of crucifixion.

On the Way to the Place of Crucifixion

Then they lead the condemned Jesus of Nazareth out to crucify him. The condemned man has to carry the wood himself. But he is too weak, and in the soldiers' eyes the risk that he will die beforehand is too high. The flogging with leather straps studded with sharp pieces of bone has torn open Jesus' back and has already caused heavy loss of blood and terrible pain. That is why they force Simon of Cyrene, who happens to be passing by, to carry his cross. He, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was just coming in from the field.

Golgotha – Jesus Is Crucified

They bring him to the place of execution outside the gates of Jerusalem. A place called Golgotha, which translated means the place of the skull. The soldiers gave him wine mixed with myrrh to drink, to dull his pain a little. But he did not take it. They crucified him. They nail his hands to the crossbeam and raise the cross. That happened between 9 and 12 o'clock. The executioners cast lots for his clothing to see who would get it. The belongings of the condemned belonged to the soldiers. The charge for his execution was written on a sign at the top of the cross: *Jesus, the King of the Jews*. This was Pilate's accusation, which made him a potential rebel. At the same time it was sarcastic irony for the Jews. For it was a true statement that the rulers had to accept, even though they wanted to prevent it. At the same time two militant freedom fighters, colleagues of Barabbas, were crucified with Jesus. One on his left and the other on his right. For the Romans, crucifixions were a deterrence routine. This method of execution was not simply there to carry out a death sentence. It was about destruction and deterrence. Viewed from the outside, Jesus was one of many victims of the Roman strategy of deterrence. Jesus' crucifixion was no special case. People who passed by the cross shook their heads and hurled insults at him: Ha, weren't you going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days? If you can do that, then come down from the cross now and free yourself. In the same way the chief priests and teachers of the law, who had finally reached their goal, mocked him too: He saved and healed and made others well, but he cannot save himself. If he is the promised Christ, the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, so that we may believe!

If Jesus had come down from the cross now, which he certainly could have done, he would have proved himself a false messiah. For only by way of the cross was it possible to be the genuine Messiah, the true Christ. The mockery of the rulers and their words about coming down from the cross were a great temptation for Jesus. Precisely because it was possible for him and he could have shown everyone that he had authority. But even for their sake and for all he stayed on this wood until he died. The two criminals crucified with him also heaped insults on him. They insulted him because he offers no resistance and remains passive. They, on the other hand, curse and swear. Suffering, and persecution too, are not to be attributed to God's powerlessness. But in this way,

and no other, God spreads his power and glory – through humiliation, suffering, and persecution. In this it becomes visible what God is like. Unlike people, who, in contrast to him, seek power, use violence, and exploit the lowly. In the humiliation of Jesus God reveals his heart!

Jesus Dies

From about 12 noon until 3 in the afternoon, a thick darkness came over the whole land, indeed over the whole world. This attested natural event is perceived by people as if the universe were falling apart. Not an eclipse of the sun, but darkness that cries out that something unique is happening, something that has never happened before and will never happen this way again. As once in the darkness in Egypt, when the firstborn died through God's judgment. Here God's firstborn dies and takes on the judgment in place of many. An apocalyptic atmosphere. Jesus in the agony of death, forsaken by God and people, cast out, despised, tortured, crucified. He faces the power of darkness. He becomes the sacrifice for the sin of the world. HE carries the burden that we can never carry. Toward the end of the darkness, at about 3 o'clock, Jesus cried out loudly: Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani! Translated from Aramaic, these are the opening words of Psalm 22: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* When some heard him call out, they said: He is calling Elijah. Then one of them ran and got a sponge full of wine vinegar and put it on a reed to hold it to his lips. As he did so, he said: Let's see whether Elijah comes to rescue him. Jesus let out a loud cry and died. At that moment the curtain in the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom. The significance of the temple and its necessity are set aside forever by God with his own hand. Something new and better has begun on the cross!

The Roman Centurion and the Women Disciples of Jesus

The Roman centurion, who was responsible for the crucifixion and stood facing the cross, was touched deep in his hard soul. He had already supervised many crucifixions. But when he saw and heard how Jesus died, without cursing his enemies, even forgiving them, he stammered the words: *Truly this man was the Son of God.* In this whole Gospel a Roman is the only one who says these words and confesses that Jesus is God's Son. The women who were watching not far from the cross saw this too. They wanted to know what was happening to their

Rabbi. They stood by the cross, unlike the disciples, who had fled, except for John. Among them were Mary from Magdala, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and also Salome. These had followed Jesus in Galilee and served him. But many other women who followed him were there as well, who had followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. No disciple could be seen – women were there, true friends of Jesus.

The cross separates the friends and the enemies of Jesus. Everyone faces the question of which side of the cross he stands on. The Roman centurion is proof that you can change sides and may break through to the same recognition as he did.

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

When evening came and the Sabbath began at sunset, Joseph of Arimathea boldly went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. He wanted to bury it. He was a respected member of the council, and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. He was a secret disciple, at least an admirer of Jesus. Pilate was surprised when he heard that Jesus had already died. Sometimes it took days for the crucified to die. To be sure, he had the centurion at the cross asked. He confirmed it, and so he gave Joseph the body of Jesus. Joseph bought a fine linen cloth. He gently took him down from the cross. He wrapped him in the cloth. He laid him in his new tomb, which had been cut into the rock. Then he rolled the great stone in front of the cave tomb. Two women disciples of Jesus watched closely where he laid him. They were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses. Sad moments, watching this and being able to do nothing more than come to terms with the death of the Rabbi.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you can put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

Do you have questions? Write them down!

Chapter 16

Three Women Plan to Anoint Jesus' Body with Oil

When the Sabbath was over on Saturday evening and Jesus' body had already been lying for a day in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, three women bought precious, fragrant oils to anoint Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. They wanted to pay their beloved Messiah a last duty and honor. Very early on Sunday morning, on the first day of the week, just as the sun was rising, they come to the tomb. They were wondering who could roll the stone, weighing tons, aside for them so that they could get into the tomb. They expected nothing out of the ordinary and only wanted to fulfill their sad duty. When they arrive, they are astonished to find that the huge round stone has already been rolled away. When they go into the tomb, they are alarmed. A young man in a white robe is sitting at the head, where the body should be lying. As if this young man had been waiting for them, he says: Don't be alarmed! You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, the one who was crucified. He is no longer here. For he has been raised from death. Look, here is the place where they had laid him. And now tell this joyful news to his disciples. And especially to Peter, who is very depressed because of his denial. He is going ahead of you into Galilee, as he said before his death. There you will meet him and see him.

But they ran out of the tomb and fled. Trembling and bewilderment gripped them. And they did not dare to tell anyone anything about it. Great fear had seized them.

"The raising of Jesus leaves behind the terror of the unimaginable, overwhelming presence of God. The tangible presence of God can be seen on the faces of the women. The reader should know: this eyewitness account is not merely ordinary history, but *God's true intervention in history*."

The Risen One Shows Himself

On the first day of the week, early in the morning, Jesus appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene. He had driven seven demons out of her. She went at once and announced it to the disciples, who were mourning and weeping. When

Mary told them that he was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe a word she said. After that Jesus revealed himself to two more disciples, in a different form than before his death, as they were walking home through the countryside. They too, when they had met him, at once ran back and announced it to the rest. But they did not believe them either, just as they had not believed Mary. Then Jesus himself met the Eleven as they were eating together. He rebuked their unbelief and their hardness of heart, because they had not believed the witnesses he had met.

Jesus' Commission

Then Jesus said to them: Go out into all the world! Preach the gospel of the kingdom to all creation! Everyone is to hear it! Everyone is to believe! Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned. These supernatural signs of the power and kingdom of God and of the gospel will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons and set people free. They will speak in new tongues. They will pick up poisonous snakes and shake them off. If they are given something poisonous to drink because someone wants to kill them, it will not harm them. They will lay their hands on the weak and sick, and they will be well.

The Ascension into Heaven

After the Lord Jesus had spoken with his disciples, he was taken up into heaven before their eyes. *There he sat down at the right hand of God.* Jesus, risen to immortality, is rewarded for his life and his suffering in death and returns to his Father in the heavenly world. The disciples went out and proclaimed the gospel everywhere. The Lord accompanied this preaching, as he had said, and confirmed their word with signs and wonders.

What speaks to you in these events, what touches your heart:

What is new to you:

Have you learned something, something you can put into practice in your life?

What are you praying for? Worship Jesus for what you have read about him here!

In Closing

I very much hope that as you read you sensed how God is speaking to you. How he encourages, teaches, but also warns against everything that does not come from him and therefore harms us.

Thank him for all the good things he has said about you and also directly to you.

If you have questions, write to us: hj-ronsdorf@t-online.de

You can find more texts of the New Testament at www.hans-joerg-ronsdorf.de.

Here Are a Few More Important Tips:

Read the Bible. Regularly, if possible.

Read the Bible together with other people – and talk with each other about it.

Pray that God will make his word come alive for you – as if he were speaking directly to you.

Read the text aloud, twice in a row.

Ask the Text the Following Questions:

What heading would you give this text? What does the text say about God and Jesus? What does the text say about people? What do we learn from the text? What should we do? How does the word encourage us?

When you meet again, talk about your experiences.

Seek contact and fellowship with Christians who love and honor Jesus Christ and who value, read, and take the Bible seriously.