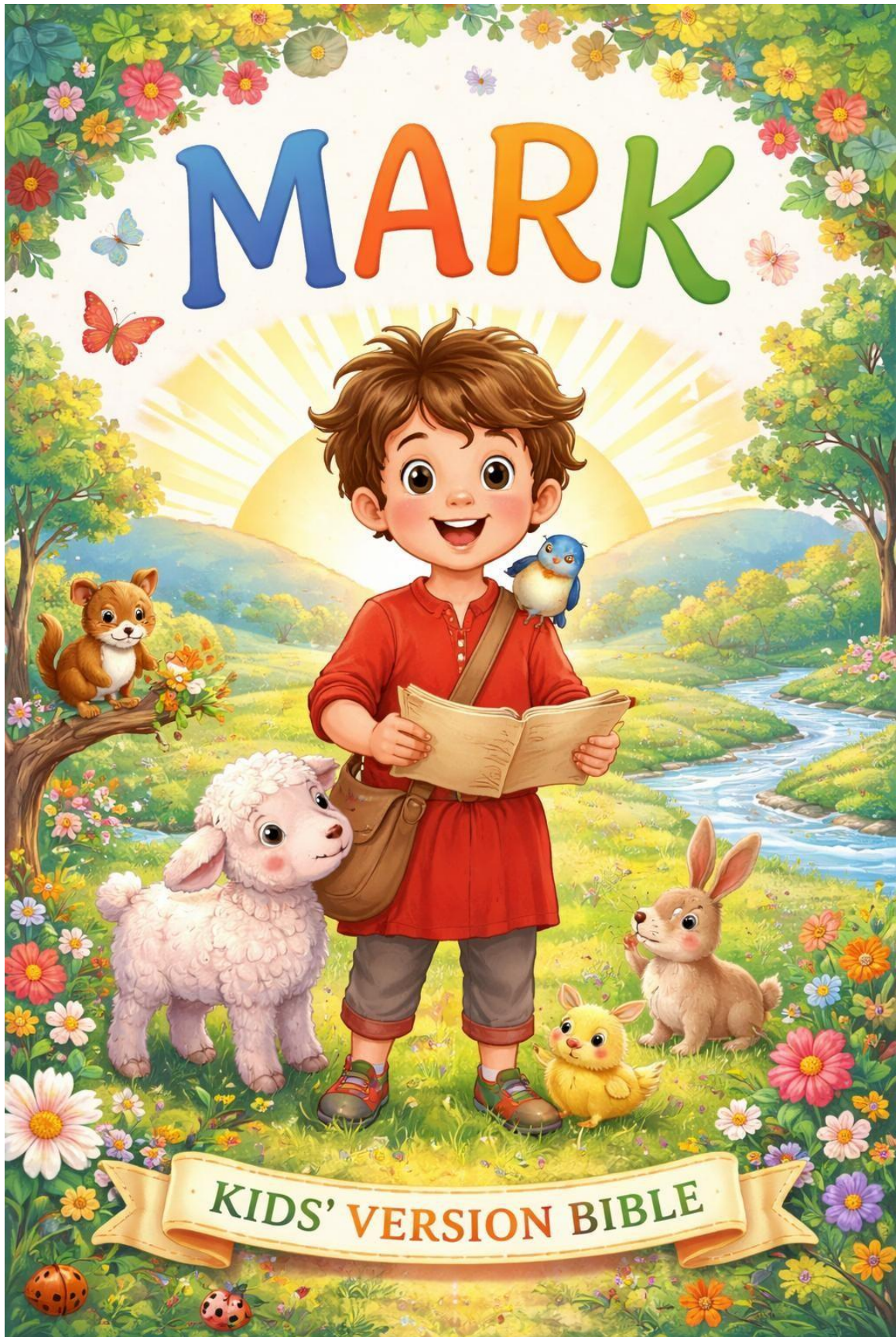




MARK

16 CHAPTERS

Originated from KJV Bible

MARK 1

This is the exciting true story of Jesus Christ, God's own Son!

Long ago, God promised through His prophets that He would send a special helper to get people ready. That helper was John. Out in the wild, empty desert, John wore rough clothes made of camel hair and a leather belt, and he ate wild honey and crunchy bugs! John called out to everyone, telling them to change their hearts, say sorry for the wrong things they did, and get baptized in the Jordan River. People from all over towns and cities flocked to hear him.

John told the crowds, "Someone much more powerful is coming after me. I'm not even important enough to untie His shoes! I wash you with water, but He will fill you with God's Holy Spirit."

Sure enough, Jesus walked down from the little town of Nazareth in Galilee and let John baptize Him in the river. The very second Jesus came up out of the water, the sky split wide open! He saw God's Spirit drifting down toward Him like a gentle dove. Then, a booming, loving voice echoed from the clouds: "You are My dearly loved Son, and You bring Me so much joy!"

Right after that, the Spirit gently guided Jesus out into the quiet desert. He stayed there for forty days, hanging out with wild animals, facing tricky tests from Satan, and being cared for by kind angels.

Once John was put into prison, Jesus traveled to Galilee with some amazing news from God. He smiled and said, "The time has finally come! God's kingdom is right here. Turn away from the wrong, trust this great news, and follow me!"

One sunny day, as Jesus was strolling along the sparkling Sea of Galilee, He spotted two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing their fishing nets into the water. Jesus called out, "Hey! Come walk with me, and I'll teach you how to fish for people instead of fish!" Right away, they dropped their nets and followed Him without a second thought.

Walking just a little farther, He saw two more brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat fixing their nets. Jesus called them too, and they immediately left their dad and the boat behind to join Him.

They all headed into a town called Capernaum. On the Saturday day of rest, Jesus went straight to the local church building and started teaching. Everyone's jaws dropped! He taught with real power and confidence, unlike the usual teachers who just read from old scrolls.

Suddenly, a man inside the church who had a spooky, troublemaking spirit shouted out, "Leave us alone, Jesus of Nazareth! Did you come to destroy us? I know who you are—you're God's Holy One!"

Jesus looked at the spirit and commanded sharply, "Be quiet and get out of him right now!"

The troublemaking spirit shook the man hard, let out a loud screech, and finally popped right out of him.

The whole crowd gasped and whispered to each other, "Whoa! What kind of new teaching is this? Even nasty spirits listen to Him instantly!" Word about Jesus spread through the whole region like wildfire.

Leaving the church, Jesus went with Simon, Andrew, James, and John to Simon's house. Simon's dear mother-in-law was stuck in bed, burning up with a bad fever. As soon as they told Jesus, He walked right over, took her gently by the hand, and pulled her up. Poof! The fever vanished instantly, and she got right up to make them all a snack.

When the sun went down and the stars came out, the whole town crowded around the front door. People carried their sick friends and family members, and even those bothered by bad spirits, right to Jesus' feet. He healed tons of sick people and told the spooky spirits to stay quiet because they knew exactly who He was.

Early the next morning, while it was still pitch black outside, Jesus sneaked away to a quiet, lonely spot to talk to His Father in heaven.

Soon, Simon and the others tracked Him down and said, "Everyone is looking everywhere for you!"

Jesus smiled and said, "Let's visit the nearby towns so I can tell them the good news too. That's the exact reason I came." So, He traveled all over Galilee, teaching in churches and helping people.

One day, a man covered in a tough skin disease called leprosy came crawling up to Jesus. He knelt right in the dirt and begged, "If you really want to, I know you can make me clean."

Jesus felt a huge wave of deep love and pity for him. He reached out His hand, gently touched the man, and said, "I want to. Be clean!"

The moment He spoke, the sickness vanished, and the man's skin was completely healthy again.

Jesus gave him a serious look and told him firmly, "Now listen, don't tell a single soul about this. Instead, go straight to the priest, show him you are healthy, and bring the gifts Moses commanded so everyone knows you are better."

But the man was just too excited! He ran all over town shouting the news to everyone he saw. Because of this, so many people crowded around Jesus that He couldn't even walk openly into towns anymore. He had to stay out in the quiet countryside, yet people still traveled from everywhere just to find Him.

MARK 2

A few days later, Jesus returned to the town of Capernaum. Word spread fast, and soon the house where he was staying was so packed with people that not even one more person could fit—not even out on the porch! Jesus stood inside, happily sharing God's message with the eager crowd.

Meanwhile, four good friends were carrying a man who couldn't use his legs. They wanted so badly to bring him to Jesus, but the crowd was simply too thick. They wouldn't give up, though! Working together, they climbed up to the flat roof, carefully pulled back the tiles, and made an opening right above Jesus. Then, with great care, they lowered their friend down on his sleeping mat, right into the middle of the room.

When Jesus looked up and saw how much faith these friends had, he smiled at the sick man and said, "My friend, your sins are forgiven."

A few religious teachers were sitting nearby, and they crossed their arms, thinking quietly to themselves, *"Wait a minute! Only God can forgive sins. Who does this man think he is saying things like that?"*

Jesus instantly knew what was going on in their heads. "Why are you doubting in your hearts?" he asked them. "Is it easier for me to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk around'?"

Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and proved his point: "I want you to know that I have the power to forgive. So get up, grab your mat, and go home!"

In a flash, the man leaped to his feet, grabbed his mat, and walked right past everyone out the door. The whole crowd gasped in absolute amazement. They cheered and praised God, shouting, "We have never seen anything like this in our lives!"

Later, Jesus went back down to the lakeshore, and a huge crowd followed him so he could teach them. As he walked along, he spotted a tax collector named Levi (also called Matthew) sitting at his tax booth. Jesus looked right at him and said, "Come, follow me." Levi jumped right up, left his old life behind, and followed Jesus.

Soon, Jesus was invited to have dinner at Levi's house. A big group of Levi's friends—people the town didn't usually like—came to eat dinner right alongside Jesus and his disciples.

When the strict religious leaders saw Jesus eating with such a rough crowd, they grumbled to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat and drink with people like that?"

Jesus overheard them and gave a friendly smile. "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do," he explained. "I didn't come to invite people who think they are already good; I came to help sinners turn their lives around."

At another time, when some people were fasting and not eating, they came up to Jesus and asked, "Why do our friends fast so often, but your disciples just eat and have a good time?"

Jesus answered with a smile, "Do wedding guests starve and fast while the groom is right there partying with them? Of course not! They celebrate while he is with them. But the day will come when the groom is gone, and *then* they will fast."

To help them understand, Jesus added two fun examples: "Nobody patches an old, worn-out jacket with a brand-new piece of fabric, because the new patch will shrink and rip an even bigger hole. And nobody pours fresh, bubbling new wine into old, brittle leather bottles, or the wine will burst the bags and ruin everything. New wine needs fresh new bottles!"

One Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a field of grain. As they strolled along, the hungry disciples began plucking a few heads of grain to snack on.

Some Pharisees saw this and immediately complained, "Look! Your disciples are doing work on the Sabbath day that is against the rules!"

Jesus looked at them patiently and replied, "Have you never read what King David did when he and his hungry friends needed food? He went right into God's house and ate the special holy bread that only the priests were allowed to eat, and he shared it with his friends."

Jesus then taught them a wonderful truth: "God made the Sabbath day as a helpful gift for humans, not to trap humans with strict rules. The Sabbath serves us; we don't exist just to serve the Sabbath. That is why I, the Son of Man, am even the Lord of the Sabbath!"

MARK 3

Jesus went back into the busy church, and there sat a man with a hand that was all dried up and didn't work. Several sneaky watchers waited to see if Jesus would break the rules by healing on the Sabbath, just so they could get him into trouble.

Jesus looked right at the man and said, "Step out here in front." Then he turned to the crowd and asked, "Is it better to do good or evil on a Sabbath? Should we save a life, or let someone get hurt?" But everyone stood completely quiet.

With a heavy heart and a flash of anger at their stubborn attitudes, Jesus looked around at them. He told the man, "Hold out your arm." The man did, and *pop*—his hand instantly became as healthy and strong as the other one!

Furious, the Pharisees rushed out and immediately started plotting with the Herodians on how to get rid of Jesus for good.

To escape them, Jesus and his close followers headed down to the sparkling blue sea. Word spread like wildfire! Huge crowds swarmed him from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, across the Jordan River, and even far-off Tyre and Sidon. People traveled for miles just to see him and be healed of their sicknesses. It got so overwhelmingly crowded that Jesus had to ask his disciples to keep a little boat ready so he wouldn't get crushed by the excited mob.

Whenever people with scary invisible sicknesses—unclean spirits—saw Jesus, they would instantly drop to their knees and shout, "You are the Son of God!" But Jesus shushed them firmly, telling them not to tell anyone who he was.

Next, Jesus hiked up a quiet mountain and personally invited a special group of followers to join him. From them, he chose twelve close partners, calling them his apostles. He wanted them to travel with him, preach the good news, and even have the power to heal people and kick out bad spirits.

Here is who he picked:

- Simon, whom he nicknamed **Peter**
- James and John (the sons of Zebedee), whom he called the **"Sons of Thunder"**
- Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon the zealot...
- And Judas Iscariot, the one who would later turn against him.

When they finally went indoors, the crowd crammed in so tightly that Jesus and his friends couldn't even grab a bite to eat. Hearing about

the chaos, his family rushed over to rescue him, shaking their heads and saying, "He has lost his mind!"

At the same time, religious leaders who had traveled all the way from Jerusalem shook their fingers and sneered, "He's got a demon inside him! That's the only reason he can cast out other demons!"

Jesus called the critics over and explained it with a simple puzzle: "How could Satan ever fight against himself? If a kingdom or a family fights against itself, it's going to collapse. If Satan is destroying his own team, he's finished! Besides, nobody can barge into a strong warrior's house and steal his treasures unless they tie up the strong warrior first, right?"

Then Jesus added a serious warning: "Listen closely. People can be forgiven for almost any bad thing they say or do. But if someone looks at God's pure goodness and stubbornly claims it belongs to the devil, they are turning away from forgiveness for good." (He said this because the critics kept insisting he had an evil spirit.)

Just then, his mother and brothers arrived outside and sent a message asking for him. Sitting in the middle of a packed circle of listeners, someone whispered to Jesus, "Look, your mom and your brothers are outside looking for you."

Jesus smiled, looked at the friendly faces sitting all around him, and asked, "Who *is* my mother and my brothers?"

He pointed to the children and followers sitting near him and said, "Look right here! These are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who chooses to do what God wants—that person is my brother, my sister, and my mother."

MARK 4

Once upon a time, Jesus went down to the sparkling blue sea to teach the people. So many people came to listen that the crowd spilled all down the shoreline! To make sure everyone could see and hear him, Jesus hopped into a little fishing boat, pushed off just a tiny bit into the water, and sat down while the crowd gathered all along the sandy beach.

He began telling them wonderful stories to help them understand God's way.

"Listen closely," Jesus said with a smile. "Imagine a farmer walking through his fields, scattering handfuls of seeds everywhere he went."

As the farmer tossed the seeds, different things happened to them:

Some seeds flew and landed right on the hard walking path. *Swoop!* Down dived the hungry birds from the sky and gobbled them right up before they even had a chance.

Other seeds tumbled onto rocky ground where there was barely any dirt at all. Because they were so close to the surface, they popped up out of the ground super fast! But as soon as the hot sun climbed high into the sky, it baked the little plants. Because they didn't have deep roots to drink water, they quickly shriveled up and died.

Some seeds landed in patches full of thorny weeds. As the plants tried to grow, the prickly thorns choked them out, blocking the sunlight so they couldn't make any yummy fruit.

But oh, the rest of the seeds! They landed in rich, soft, dark soil. Those seeds dug their roots deep down, drank up the rain, and grew big and strong. They produced a massive harvest—some stalks grew thirty new seeds, some sixty, and some even a hundred!

Jesus looked around at the children and the crowd. "If you have ears to listen, you really need to hear this!"

Later on, when the crowds had gone home, Jesus was relaxing with his closest friends and the twelve special helpers. They came up to him and asked, "What did that seed story mean?"

Jesus warmly explained, "God lets you understand the secret of His kingdom, but for people who aren't paying attention, everything comes in stories." He wanted them to truly look, listen, and understand with their hearts.

"Do you not get this story?" Jesus asked gently. "If you don't understand this one, how will you understand the rest? Here is what it means: The seed is God's message, and the different kinds of dirt are the different kinds of hearts."

- The **hard path** is like people who hear God's message, but immediately a sneaky troublemaker comes along and steals the truth right out of their hearts.
- The **rocky ground** is like people who hear the message and get super excited right away. But they don't build deep roots, so when trouble or hard times pop up, they quit instantly.

- The **thorny patch** is like people who hear the message, but they get so distracted by worrying about everyday life, chasing after money, and wanting cool stuff that it squeezes God's message right out of them until it can't grow.
- The **good soil**, finally, is like people who hear God's message, tuck it safely into their hearts, and let it change their lives to do amazing, helpful things—multiplying goodness thirty, sixty, and a hundred times over!

Jesus then asked them a fun question: "Do you ever light a bright candle and then hide it underneath a bucket or shove it under a bed? Of course not! You put it proudly on a candle stand so its light can shine for everyone to see."

He reminded them that secrets eventually come out into the open, so they should pay close attention to what they listen to. The more effort you put into learning good things, the more understanding you will get!

Next, Jesus told them another story about God's kingdom.

"Imagine a farmer scatters seeds in his dirt field. Then he goes home to sleep, wakes up, eats breakfast, goes to sleep, and repeats this day after day. Magically—he doesn't even know how—the seed sprouts and shoots up out of the dirt! The earth does the work all by itself: first a tiny green blade pops up, then a stem, and finally a heavy head of grain. And the very second the crop is ready, the farmer brings out his sharp tool because harvest time has arrived!"

Jesus grinned and asked, "What else is God's kingdom like? It's like a tiny mustard seed. When you hold it in your hand, it is the absolute

smallest seed in the whole world! But once you plant it in the dirt, it shoots up and grows taller than all the garden vegetables, sprouting massive leafy branches so birds can fly in and build cozy nests right in its cool shade."

Jesus used lots of fun stories like these to teach the people, sharing only as much as they were ready to hear. When he was alone with his disciples later, he happily explained every single detail to them.

As evening began to cool the air, Jesus told his friends, "Let's sail across to the other side of the lake."

They said goodbye to the big crowd and set off in the boat just as they were, with a few other little boats tagging along. Suddenly, a wild, roaring windstorm whipped across the water! Huge, angry waves crashed over the sides of the boat until it was practically filling up with water.

And where was Jesus? Right in the very back of the boat, sound asleep with his head on a cozy pillow!

Panicking, his friends shook him awake and cried out, "Teacher! Don't you even care that we are about to drown?!"

Jesus sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stood tall. He looked at the raging wind and shouted to the wild sea, "Peace. Be still."

Poof! Instantly, the wind stopped blowing, and the water turned as smooth and flat as a glass mirror. Complete and total calm settled over everything.

Jesus looked at his wide-eyed friends and asked, "Why were you guys so terrified? How do you still have no faith?"

Trembling with total amazement, they whispered to each other, "Who on earth is this guy? Even the howling wind and the giant ocean obey his voice!"

MARK 5

After crossing the lake in a boat, Jesus and his friends arrived in the hilly country of the Gadarenes. The moment Jesus stepped onto the shore, a wild man came running straight at him from the dark burial caves in the hills.

This man had been troubled by a dark, angry spirit for a long time. He lived among the tombs, completely untamable. People had often tried to tie him up with ropes and heavy iron chains, but he was so strong that he snapped the chains like twigs and shattered the leg-irons. Day and night, he wandered the mountains and tombs, crying out in pain and scratching his skin with sharp stones.

Yet the moment he spotted Jesus from a distance, he sprinted over and bowed facedown in the dirt before him.

Shouting at the top of his lungs, the man cried, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of God Most High? Please, I beg you by God, don't torture me!" (Jesus had already commanded the troubled spirit to leave the man's body.)

"What is your name?" Jesus asked him.

"My name is Legion," the man answered, "because there are many of us inside." The spirits began to beg Jesus not to chase them away from that region.

Nearby, a massive herd of about two thousand pigs was snorting and feeding on the grassy slopes of the mountain. "Please," the spirits pleaded, "send us into the pigs so we can go inside them instead!"

Jesus gave them permission. Instantly, the dark spirits left the man and rushed into the herd. The entire pack of pigs panicked, stampeded wildly down the steep cliff, and plunged straight into the lake, where they drowned.

The terrified pig-herders sprinted back to town to tell everyone what had happened. Soon, a curious crowd came rushing out to see the commotion for themselves. When they arrived, they were shocked: the wild, dangerous man who used to break chains was now sitting quietly, fully clothed, and acting completely calm and sensible. Naturally, seeing this made them quite nervous.

The witnesses explained the whole strange story about the man and the drowned pigs. Frightened by Jesus' power, the townspeople nervously begged him to leave their neighborhood.

As Jesus stepped back into the boat, the man who had been healed begged to go along. But Jesus gently shook his head. "No," he told him, "go home to your family and friends. Tell them how wonderful the Lord has been to you and how much mercy he has shown."

So the man walked away and began spreading the news all across the ten cities of the Decapolis about the amazing things Jesus had done for him. Everyone who heard it was completely amazed.

When Jesus sailed back across the water, a massive crowd quickly gathered around him on the shore. Suddenly, a local synagogue leader named Jairus pushed through the crowd, spotted Jesus, and dropped to his knees at his feet.

"My little girl is dying!" Jairus sobbed, begging him over and over.

"Please, come and place your hands on her so she can be healed and live."

Jesus agreed immediately, and a huge, excited crowd followed right behind them, bumping and crowding in from every side.

In that thick crowd was a woman who had been terribly sick for twelve years. She had visited many doctors, spent every penny she owned on treatments, and only gotten worse instead of better.

Hearing about Jesus, she crept up behind him through the mob. *If I can just brush my hand against his clothes, she thought, I know I'll be healed!*

The instant her fingers brushed the edge of his cloak, the bleeding stopped completely. She could feel the sudden rush of health and strength returning to her body.

At that exact moment, Jesus felt power surge out of him. He spun around in the crowded street and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

His disciples stared at him in disbelief. "Master, look at this massive crowd crushing against you from every direction! How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'"

Jesus kept scanning the crowd, looking for the person who had done it. Trembling with fear, the woman knew exactly what had happened to her. She stepped forward, fell to her knees before him, and confessed the whole truth.

Jesus smiled warmly and said, "Daughter, your trust in me has made you well. Go in peace, and be completely free from your sickness."

While Jesus was still speaking, messengers arrived from Jairus's house with heartbreaking news. "Your daughter has passed away," they told the father. "There's no need to bother the Teacher anymore."

Jesus overheard them and turned to Jairus immediately. "Don't be afraid," he said softly. "Just trust me."

He wouldn't let anyone follow him except his three closest friends: Peter, James, and John. When they finally reached the leader's house, Jesus found total chaos—people were crying loudly, wailing, and making a huge fuss.

Stepping inside, Jesus asked them, "Why all this loud weeping and carrying on? The little girl isn't dead; she's just sleeping."

The crowd laughed right in his face, mocking him. But Jesus cleared everyone out of the house. Taking only the child's mother, father, and his three disciples, he walked quietly into the room where the twelve-year-old girl lay.

Gently taking her small hand, he said, "*Talitha cumi!*"—which translates to, "*Little girl, I say to you, wake up!*"

Instantly, the girl sat up and began walking around! Everyone in the room was completely mind-boggled with shock. Jesus gave them strict instructions not to tell anyone what had happened, and then kindly asked them to find something for the girl to eat.

MARK 6

Jesus left that place and returned to his hometown, with his loyal disciples walking right beside him. When the Sabbath rolled around, he stepped into the local synagogue to teach. Everyone who heard him was completely amazed.

“Where did he get all this amazing wisdom?” people whispered to each other. “And how is he able to do such incredible miracles with his hands? Isn't this just Jesus, the carpenter, Mary’s boy, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters right here in our town?”

Because they knew him growing up, they refused to accept him and took offense.

Jesus smiled gently and told them, “A prophet is respected everywhere—except in his own hometown, among his own family, and in his own house.”

Because the people there had such a hard time believing in him, Jesus couldn’t do many miracles in that town, other than gently

laying his hands on a few sick people and healing them. He was honestly surprised by their lack of faith. So, he traveled around the nearby villages instead, teaching the people.

Before long, Jesus called his twelve closest friends together and sent them out in pairs, giving them special authority to help people trapped by dark spirits. He gave them some simple travel rules: “Take nothing for the road except a walking stick. No backpack, no extra food, no money in your pockets, and just wear your sandals without packing an extra coat! When you enter someone's home, stay there until it's time to move on. But if a town refuses to welcome you or listen to your message, simply shake the dust off your feet as you leave to warn them.” Jesus added that on the final judgment day, it would actually be easier for the ancient city of Sodom than for a town that rejected God’s message.

So the disciples set off, traveling everywhere and preaching that people should turn away from wrong and do what is right. They healed many sick people by anointing them with oil and drove out troubles from many lives.

Soon, even King Herod heard all about Jesus, because his reputation was spreading everywhere. Some people were saying, “John the Baptist must have come back to life! That's why he has such amazing powers.” Others guessed, “He must be the prophet Elijah, or one of the great prophets from the past.”

But when Herod heard the buzz, he insisted, “No, it’s John! He’s the one I had beheaded, and now he’s risen from the dead!”

Here is why Herod was worried: Earlier, Herod had arrested John and locked him up in a dark prison because of Herodias, the wife of his

brother Philip, whom Herod had married. John had bravely told Herod, “It is against God's law for you to have your brother's wife!” Because of this, Herodias held a deep grudge against John and desperately wanted him killed, but she couldn't manage it. Why? Because Herod was actually afraid of John, knowing he was a good, holy man. Herod liked to protect John; whenever he listened to him speak, it made him think deeply, and he actually enjoyed listening to him.

Then, a perfect opportunity came up. It was Herod's birthday, and he threw a grand feast for all his government officials, army commanders, and the most important leaders of Galilee. During the party, the daughter of Herodias came in and danced. She did such a wonderful job that she completely charmed Herod and all his important guests.

The thrilled king told the young girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and it's yours!” He even made a big promise, swearing an oath: “Whatever you ask for, I will give it to you—even if it costs half my kingdom!”

The girl dashed out and asked her mother, “What should I ask for?”

Her mother replied instantly, “Ask for the head of John the Baptist.”

The girl hurried right back into the banquet hall and made her request to the king: “I want you to give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter, and I want it right now!”

The king was heartbroken and deeply sorry. But because he had made such a big promise in front of all his important dinner guests, he didn't want to break his word to her. Immediately, the king sent an

executioner with orders to bring John's head. The guard went straight to the prison, beheaded John, brought his head back on a silver platter, and handed it to the young girl. The girl then carried it to her mother. When John's faithful disciples heard the tragic news, they came, gently carried away his body, and laid it safely in a tomb.

Meanwhile, the apostles returned to Jesus and reported everything they had done and taught.

Jesus looked at them and said, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet, lonely place to get some rest." So many people were constantly coming and going that the disciples didn't even have a quiet moment to eat a meal.

They slipped away privately in a boat to a quiet, isolated spot. But many people saw them leaving and recognized Jesus. People from all the surrounding towns jumped up and ran along the shoreline on foot, beating the boat to the destination and gathering around him in a massive crowd.

When Jesus stepped out of the boat and saw the huge sea of people, his heart broke with deep compassion for them. They were like a flock of wandering sheep without a shepherd. So, he warmly welcomed them and began teaching them many wonderful things about God.

As the afternoon began to fade into evening, the disciples came over to him and said, "Lord, this is a very remote, empty place, and the day is almost gone. Send the people away so they can walk into the nearby farms and villages to buy themselves some food, because they haven't eaten anything all day."

Jesus smiled and told them, “You feed them yourselves.”

The disciples stared at him in shock. “Are you kidding? Do you expect us to go spend a small fortune—two hundred silver coins—on bread just to feed all these people?”

Jesus asked them, “Well, how many loaves of bread do you have? Go check.”

They came back and reported, “We only have five small loaves of bread and two little fish.”

Jesus instructed them to have the hungry crowds sit down in neat groups on the lush green grass. The people arranged themselves in orderly rows, some groups of a hundred and others of fifty.

Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up into the open sky, and thanked God. He broke the bread into pieces and handed them to the disciples to pass out to the crowd, and he divided the two fish so everyone got a share.

Miraculously, every single person ate until they were completely full! Afterward, the disciples picked up the leftover scraps and filled twelve large baskets with pieces of bread and fish. And the amazing part? There were about five thousand men there, plus all the women and children!

Right after that, Jesus insisted that his disciples climb back into the boat and sail ahead of him across the water toward Bethsaida, while he stayed behind to send the crowds home.

After saying goodbye to everyone, Jesus hiked up a quiet mountain all by himself to pray.

When evening arrived, the boat was way out in the middle of the lake, battling huge waves, while Jesus was all alone on the shore. He looked out and saw his friends straining hard at the oars because the wind was blowing straight against them.

Around three or four o'clock in the morning, Jesus decided to help. He walked right out across the stormy waves of the lake, as if he were going to walk past them! But when the disciples saw a figure walking across the wild sea, they screamed in absolute terror, thinking it was a ghost. They were all shaking with fear.

Instantly, Jesus spoke to them in a calm, friendly voice: “Courage, everyone! It’s just me. Don’t be afraid!”

He climbed up into the boat with them, and the howling wind instantly died down. The disciples were completely blown away and stared at him in utter disbelief. They still hadn’t grasped the miracle of the bread earlier because their hearts were still stubborn and slow to understand.

They finished crossing the lake and landed safely on the shore of Gennesaret, tying up the boat. The moment they stepped out, people recognized Jesus instantly! Word spread like wildfire across the whole countryside. People began carrying sick friends and family members on mats to wherever they heard Jesus was.

No matter where he went—whether tiny villages, busy cities, or quiet countryside—people gently laid the sick people in the marketplaces and streets. They just begged him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak, and every single person who touched him was completely healed and made well!

MARK 7

A group of strict religious teachers, called Pharisees and scribes, had traveled all the way from Jerusalem to see Jesus. As they watched His followers, they noticed something that bothered them: the disciples were eating their food with unwashed hands!

Now, the Pharisees had very strict rules passed down from their elders. They never ate a single bite without thoroughly washing their hands first. When they came home from the busy marketplace, they wouldn't eat until they washed up. They had all kinds of rules about washing cups, pitchers, brass pots, and even heavy dining couches.

So the leaders marched right up to Jesus and demanded, "Why don't your disciples follow the traditions of our elders? Why are they eating with unwashed hands?"

Jesus looked right at them and said, "Isaiah the prophet wrote the truth about people like you. You are hypocrites! God says, 'These people honor me with their talk, but their hearts are miles away from me.' Your worship doesn't mean anything because you throw away God's commands just to teach human rules. You proudly put aside God's law to make room for your fancy traditions, like washing pots and cups, and you do a hundred other things just like that."

Jesus shook His head. "You are experts at ignoring God's commands so you can keep your own man-made traditions! For instance, God commanded, 'Honor your father and mother,' and said anyone who says cruel things to their parents should face serious punishment.

But you guys invented a clever loophole. You tell your parents, 'I can't help you out with my money because I've already promised it as a gift to God.' And just like that, you won't let your children use their money to take care of their mom and dad anymore. You completely cancel out the word of God with your made-up rules. And that's just one example of many!"

Then Jesus waved the crowd closer. "Listen to me, everyone, and try to understand this: Nothing that goes into a person from the outside can make them spiritually dirty. It's what comes *out* of a person from the inside that truly defiles them! If you have ears to hear, you better listen up!"

Later, when Jesus and His disciples went indoors away from the bustling crowds, the disciples asked Him what that riddle meant.

Jesus sighed. "Are you guys still missing it? Don't you see? Food goes into your stomach, not your heart, and eventually it just passes right out of your body. It can't make your spirit unclean."

Then He explained the real problem: "It is what comes *out* of a person that makes them unclean. From deep inside the human heart come terrible things: evil thoughts, cheating, stealing, murder, greed, wickedness, jealousy, lying, pride, and foolishness. All of those ugly things come from the inside, and *that* is what ruins a person."

After that, Jesus packed up and traveled north toward the region of Tyre and Sidon. He went into a house and tried to stay completely hidden, hoping nobody would find Him. But it was impossible to keep a secret.

Almost immediately, a desperate mother heard He was there. Her little girl was being tormented by a dark spirit, and the woman came rushing in and fell down at Jesus' feet. She was a Greek woman, born in Syrophoenicia, and she begged Him to drive the mean spirit out of her daughter.

Jesus tested her faith by saying, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the house dogs." (He meant the Jewish people were like God's children first, and outsiders were like the household pets).

Without missing a beat, the clever woman answered, "That's true, Lord, but even the little dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs that the children drop!"

Jesus smiled at her incredible answer and said, "Because of what you just said, go on home. The evil spirit has already left your daughter."

She hurried home and found her little girl resting peacefully on her bed, completely cured.

Leaving the coast of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus traveled down through the region of the Ten Towns (called the Decapolis) all the way to the Sea of Galilee. There, people brought Him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak a word, begging Jesus to lay His hands on him to heal him.

Jesus gently took the man away from the noisy crowd, just the two of them. He put His fingers into the man's ears, spit on His finger, and touched the man's tongue. Then Jesus looked up into the sky, took a

deep, heavy sigh, and commanded in Aramaic, "*Ephphatha!*"—which means, "Be opened!"

Instantly, the man's ears popped open, the tight knot in his tongue was untied, and he began speaking clearly and normally!

Jesus told the man and his friends not to tell a single soul about what happened. But the more He told them to keep quiet, the louder they shouted the news to everyone they met.

The crowds were completely blown away, shaking their heads in amazement. "He does everything perfectly!" they cheered. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!"

MARK 8

One day, a massive crowd of people—about four thousand in all—had been following Jesus for three whole days in the empty wilderness. They were completely out of food, and many had traveled from very far away. Jesus called His close friends, the disciples, together and said, "My heart aches for these people. If I send them home on empty stomachs, they might collapse along the way."

The disciples looked around, baffled. "In the middle of nowhere, how on earth are we supposed to find enough bread to feed all these hungry mouths?"

"How much food do you actually have with you?" Jesus asked.

"Just seven small loaves of bread and a few tiny fish," they replied.

With a gentle smile, Jesus told everyone to sit down on the grassy ground. He took the bread, thanked God, broke it into pieces, and handed it to the disciples to share. Then He did the same with the fish. Amazingly, everyone ate until they were completely full! Afterward, the disciples gathered up the leftovers, filling seven large baskets.

Once the crowd headed home, Jesus and His disciples hopped into a boat and sailed across to Dalmanutha. As soon as they arrived, some religious leaders called the Pharisees marched up to pick a fight. They demanded a miraculous sign from the sky just to test Him. Jesus let out a heavy sigh and replied, "Why does this stubborn generation always demand proof?" Without giving them a sign, He turned right back around, climbed back into the boat, and crossed the water again.

On the boat ride, the disciples suddenly realized they had completely forgotten to pack food—they only had a single loaf of bread among them.

Jesus warned them, "Keep your eyes open and stay away from the bad yeast of the Pharisees and King Herod."

Confused, the disciples whispered to each other, "He's only saying that because we forgot to bring bread."

Jesus overheard their worries and gently scolded them. "Why are you stressing over a lack of bread? Don't you understand yet? Are your minds still closed? You have eyes—can't you see? You have ears—can't you hear? Do you already forget? When I fed five thousand people with just five loaves, how many baskets of leftovers did you fill?"

"Twelve," they mumbled.

"And when I fed four thousand with seven loaves, how many baskets did you pick up?"

"Seven," they answered.

"Then how do you still not understand?" Jesus asked.

Soon, they arrived at Bethsaida, where some people brought a blind man to Jesus, begging Him to touch and heal him. Taking the man gently by the hand, Jesus led him outside the village. He spat softly on the man's eyes, laid His hands on him, and asked, "Can you see anything?"

The man blinked, looked up, and said, "I see people, but they look like trees walking around!"

Jesus placed His hands over the man's eyes a second time and told him to look up again. Instantly, his vision cleared up completely, and he could see everything sharply in focus. Jesus sent him straight home with a reminder: "Don't go back into the village, and don't tell anyone there about this."

As Jesus and His disciples traveled through the villages near Caesarea Philippi, He asked them a very important question along the way: "Who do people say that I am?"

They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and some think you're one of the ancient prophets."

"But what about you?" Jesus asked directly. "Who do *you* say I am?"

Peter spoke right up, "You are the Christ!"

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone just yet. Then, He began to teach them something shocking: He, the Son of Man, had to suffer terribly, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, be killed, and then rise from the dead three days later. He spoke about it very plainly.

Peter pulled Jesus aside and actually started scolding Him for saying such things! But Jesus turned around, looked at all the disciples, and sharply corrected Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You are looking at things from a human point of view, not God's."

Calling the crowd and the disciples closer, Jesus shared the secret of following Him: "If anyone wants to be My follower, you must give up your own selfish ways, carry your own cross, and follow Me. If you try to keep your life safe and selfish, you'll lose it. But if you give up your life for Me and the Good News, you will truly save it. After all, what do you gain if you win the whole entire world, but lose your own soul in the process? What could a person ever trade for their soul? If anyone is embarrassed of Me and My words in this sinful world, I, the Son of Man, will be embarrassed of them when I return in My Father's glorious light with all the holy angels."

MARK 9

Jesus once told His friends, "Some of you standing right here will actually live to see God's kingdom arrive in power!"

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a tall, quiet mountain. Suddenly, right in front of them, Jesus changed! His

clothes began to glow, shining blindingly white—brighter than any snow you could ever see, like pure sunlight. Then, two famous heroes from the past, Moses and Elijah, appeared out of nowhere and started talking with Jesus.

Peter was so amazed (and a little nervous!) that he blurted out, "Teacher, it is so awesome that we are here! Let's build three little tents—one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He didn't really know what to say because they were all pretty scared.

Suddenly, a bright cloud dropped down and covered them in a shadow, and a booming voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my dearly loved Son. Listen to Him!"

The disciples blinked, looked around, and realized the cloud was gone. It was just Jesus, standing there with them all by Himself.

As they walked back down the mountain, Jesus whispered a secret to the three friends: "Don't tell anyone what you just saw until after the Son of Man rises from the dead."

The disciples kept the secret, though they whispered among themselves, trying to figure out what "rising from the dead" could possibly mean. They asked Him, "Hey, why do religious teachers always say Elijah has to come back first?"

Jesus answered, "Elijah *did* come back, and people treated him terribly, just like the old books said they would. But more importantly, the Son of Man is going to suffer a lot and be treated like a nobody."

When Jesus and the three friends finally rejoined the rest of the disciples, they found a huge crowd surrounding them, arguing with

the religious teachers. The moment the crowd saw Jesus, everyone gasped in pure excitement and rushed over to wave and say hello.

Jesus stepped forward and asked the teachers, "What are you guys arguing about over here?"

A man from the crowd stepped out, looking heartbroken. "Teacher," he said, "I brought my son to you. He has a rough spirit inside him that makes him unable to speak. Whenever it attacks him, it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and is wasting away. I asked your disciples to chase the spirit out, but they couldn't do it."

Jesus sighed, shaking His head gently. "Oh, you folks struggle to trust. How much longer do I have to be with you? How much longer do I have to put up with this? Bring the boy to me!"

They brought the boy over. But the moment the dark spirit saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a violent fit. He crashed to the ground, rolling around and foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?"

"Ever since he was a little toddler," the dad replied, tears in his eyes. "The spirit tries to kill him all the time by throwing him into fires or deep water. Please—if You can possibly do anything to help us, please take pity on us and help!"

Jesus looked right at him and said, "If I can? Everything is possible for someone who believes!"

Instantly, the father cried out with tears streaming down his face, "I do believe! Please help me overcome the parts of me that still doubt!"

When Jesus saw the crowd rushing closer to watch, He turned and commanded the bully spirit, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you—come out of this boy right now and never, ever go back inside him!"

The spirit shrieked, gave the boy one last awful shake, and slithered out. The boy lay there so completely still that many people in the crowd whispered, "He's dead."

But Jesus calmly reached down, took the boy by the hand, and pulled him up. The boy stood right up, completely healed!

Later, when Jesus and His disciples were safely inside a house together, they asked Him privately, "Why couldn't we drive that spirit out?"

Jesus smiled gently and replied, "That kind of tough problem only goes away through prayer and deep trust in God."

They left that area and traveled quietly through Galilee, because Jesus didn't want anyone tracking them down just yet. He wanted to use the time to teach His close friends. He told them, "The Son of Man is going to be handed over to people who will kill Him. But three days after He is killed, He will burst back to life!"

The disciples didn't understand a single word of it, and honestly, they were too scared to ask Him to explain.

Eventually, they arrived in the town of Capernaum. Once they were inside, Jesus asked them, "What were you guys arguing about so loudly back on the road?"

Total silence. They kept their mouths shut because, truth be told, they had been arguing the whole way about *which one of them was the most important*.

Jesus sat down, called the twelve close friends around Him, and said, "If any of you want to be the big boss, you have to be willing to be last of all, and a servant to everybody."

Then, He called a little child over, picked the kid up, and sat him right in the middle of them, wrapping His arms around him.

Jesus smiled and said, "Whoever welcomes a little child like this in My name is actually welcoming Me. And whoever welcomes Me is welcoming the One who sent Me."

John raised his hand and said, "Teacher, we saw a guy using Your name to cast out bad spirits, but he wasn't part of our group. So we told him to stop!"

"Don't stop him," Jesus said. "No one who uses My name to do a miracle is going to turn around and say bad things about Me right after. Remember: whoever isn't against us is on our side. In fact, if anyone even gives you a simple cup of cold water because you belong to Me, I promise you, they will get a great reward!"

Then Jesus got very serious. "And if anyone causes one of these little kids who believes in Me to stumble into doing wrong, it would be better for them to have a giant millstone tied around their neck and be tossed straight into the ocean!"

"Listen, if your hand causes you to do bad things, cut it off! It's much better to enter life with only one hand than to keep two hands and end up in the never-ending fire of hell.

"And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off! It's better to enter life limping than to keep two feet and be thrown into the fire.

"And if your eye trips you up, pluck it out! It's better to enter God's kingdom with one eye than to keep two eyes and be tossed into hellfire, where the worm never dies and the fire never goes out.

"Every single person will be tested by fire, just like sacrifices are prepared with salt. Salt is wonderful stuff, but if it loses its salty flavor, how can you ever make it salty again? So, keep the 'salt' of God's love inside your own hearts, and always live at peace with one another."

MARK 10

Leaving that place, Jesus traveled to the region of Judea across the Jordan River. Crowds gathered around him again, and as usual, he began teaching them.

Then some Pharisees walked up to test him. "Is it okay for a man to divorce his wife?" they asked.

Jesus replied with a question: "What did Moses command you to do?"

"Moses allowed a man to write a divorce paper and send his wife away," they answered.

Jesus explained, "Moses wrote that rule only because your hearts were so stubborn. But right from the very beginning, when God created the world, he made humans male and female. That is why a

man leaves his father and mother to be united with his wife, and the two become one flesh. They are no longer two separate people, but one. So, what God has joined together, no human should ever tear apart."

Later, when they were back inside a house, the disciples asked him about this again. Jesus told them, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery against her. And if a wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery, too."

Around that time, people were bringing their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

When Jesus saw this, he was upset and said, "Let the little children come to me! Don't stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to people just like them. Truly, I tell you, anyone who doesn't accept the kingdom of God with the simple trust of a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them, and blessed them.

As Jesus started down the road again, a man came running up, fell to his knees, and asked, "Good Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"

Jesus looked at him and said, "Why do you call me good? Only God is truly good. But you know the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, do not cheat anyone, and honor your father and mother."

The man smiled and said, "Teacher, I've obeyed all these rules since I was a little kid."

Jesus looked right at him, felt a deep love for him, and said, "You are missing just one thing. Go sell everything you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, pick up your cross, and follow me."

When the man heard that, his face fell. He walked away very sad because he was super rich.

Jesus looked around at his disciples and said, "How hard it is for rich people to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were shocked. But Jesus said again, "My children, it is very hard to enter God's kingdom when you trust in riches. In fact, it is easier for a huge camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

The disciples were completely blown away. They whispered to each other, "Then who on earth can be saved?"

Jesus looked right at them and said, "For people, it's totally impossible. But with God, anything is possible—because with God, all things can happen."

Peter spoke up, "Look, we left everything we had to follow you!"

Jesus replied, "Yes! Truly I tell you, anyone who leaves house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms for me and the Good News will receive a hundred times more right now in this life—homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and farms—along with plenty of trouble. And in the world to come, they will get eternal life.

But remember this: many who are first now will be last then, and the last will be first."

They were walking up the hill toward Jerusalem, and Jesus was leading the way. The disciples were amazed, but they were also terrified. Jesus pulled the twelve aside and started telling them what was going to happen to him.

"Listen," he said, "we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the leading priests and teachers of the law. They will sentence him to death and hand him over to the non-Jewish rulers. Those rulers will make fun of him, spit on him, whip him, and kill him. But three days later, he will rise back to life!"

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him.

"Teacher," they said, "we want you to do whatever we ask."

"What do you want me to do?" Jesus asked.

They answered, "Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left hand when you rule in your glory."

Jesus shook his head. "You have no idea what you're asking. Can you drink the bitter cup of suffering that I must drink? Can you be baptized with the hard baptism I must go through?"

"We sure can!" they replied.

Jesus told them, "You *will* drink my cup and go through my baptism. But I don't have the power to choose who sits on my right or left. That belongs to the ones God has prepared it for."

When the other ten disciples heard about this, they were furious with James and John.

So Jesus gathered them all together and said, "You know that earthly rulers love to boss people around and throw their weight around. But it must *never* be that way with you. If you want to be great among your friends, you must act like a servant. If you want to be first, you must be a servant to everyone. Even the Son of Man didn't come to be waited on. He came to serve others and to give his life as a rescue payment for many people."

They arrived in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town with his disciples and a massive crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road.

When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was walking by, he started shouting at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, please have mercy on me!"

Many people in the crowd shushed him and told him to shut up. But he yelled even louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped in his tracks and said, "Call him over."

Some people went to the blind man and said, "Cheer up! Get on your feet, he's calling you!"

Bartimaeus ripped off his coat, jumped up, and ran straight to Jesus.

Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man replied, "Master, I want to see!"

Jesus smiled and said, "Go on your way. Your great faith has healed you."

Instantly, Bartimaeus could see clearly, and he followed Jesus right down the road.

MARK 11

As they drew near to Jerusalem and reached the Mount of Olives near the towns of Bethphage and Bethany, Jesus sent two of his disciples on a special errand.

He told them, "Go straight into the village ahead of you. The moment you step inside, you will spot a young donkey tied up—one that no one has ever ridden before. Untie him and bring him here to me. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying that donkey?' just tell them, 'The Master needs him, and he will send him back soon.'"

The two disciples hurried off and found the colt tied by an outdoor doorway where two streets met, exactly as Jesus had said. As they unbuckled the straps, some bystanders asked, "Hey, what do you think you're doing, untying that colt?"

The disciples repeated the exact words Jesus had given them, and the men let them take the animal. They brought the colt to Jesus, tossed their coats over its back, and helped him mount.

Soon, the path was filled with celebration. People spread their own coats out like a grand red carpet on the road, while others chopped leafy branches from the trees to lay along the way. Those walking ahead and those following behind cheered happily, shouting:

"Praise God! Bless the One who comes in the Lord's name! Bless the wonderful kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heavens!"

Jesus rode into Jerusalem and went straight to the temple. He looked carefully at everything going on, but since evening was already falling, he headed back out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

The next morning, as they walked back from Bethany, Jesus felt hungry. Seeing a fig tree in the distance covered with lush green leaves, he walked over to it hoping to find a snack. But when he reached it, there was nothing on it except leaves, because it wasn't the season for figs yet.

Jesus spoke to the tree, saying, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples overheard him.

When they arrived back in Jerusalem, Jesus went straight into the temple and began driving out everyone who was buying and selling things. He flipped over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of the people selling doves, and he wouldn't let anyone carry merchandise through the temple courtyards.

Teaching the crowd, he called out, "Doesn't Scripture say, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have turned it into a hideout for thieves!"

The chief priests and scribes heard about this and started plotting how to get rid of him. They were terrified of him because the crowds were completely amazed by his brilliant teaching. When evening came once more, Jesus left the city.

Early the next morning, as they passed by the same spot, they saw that the fig tree had shriveled up all the way down to its roots.

Peter remembered what had happened the day before and said, "Look, Rabbi! The fig tree you cursed is completely dried up!"

Jesus turned to them and said, "Have strong faith in God. I promise you, if anyone tells this mountain, 'Get up and throw yourself into the ocean,' and truly believes without a single doubt in their heart that it will happen, it will be done for them! That is why I tell you: whenever you pray for something, believe that it is already yours, and you will receive it. And when you stand up to pray, make sure you forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against. That way, your Father in heaven will forgive your mistakes, too. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father in heaven won't forgive your mistakes either."

They returned to Jerusalem once more. As Jesus was strolling through the temple courts, the chief priests, scribes, and elders marched up to him and demanded, "By whose authority are you doing these crazy things? Who gave you the right to act like this?"

Jesus replied, "I'll ask you just one question. Answer me, and then I'll tell you whose authority I use. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from human origin? Answer me that."

The leaders whispered among themselves, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he'll ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From human origin'—" They were terrified of the angry crowd, because everyone genuinely believed John was a true prophet.

So they copped out and told Jesus, "We don't know."

And Jesus smiled and said, "Then I won't tell you by whose authority I do these things, either."

MARK 12

Jesus began teaching the crowds using stories with deep meanings.

"Imagine a man who planted a beautiful vineyard," Jesus said. "He built a protective wall around it, carved out a wine press, and built a watchtower. Then he rented it out to some farmers and went on a long journey.

When harvest time arrived, the owner sent a servant to collect his share of the grapes. But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him up, and sent him away with nothing. So the owner sent another servant, but they hit him over the head and insulted him. He sent a third, and they killed him. In fact, they beat some and killed many others the owner sent!

Finally, the owner had only one person left: his dearly loved son. 'Surely they will respect my son,' he thought.

But when the farmers saw the son coming, they whispered to each other, 'Look, here's the boss's kid—the heir! If we kill him, the whole vineyard becomes ours!' So they grabbed him, murdered him, and threw his body right out of the vineyard.

What do you think the owner of the vineyard will do now?" Jesus asked. "He will come, punish those wicked farmers, and give the vineyard to someone else. Haven't you ever read the Scripture that says: *The stone that the builders threw away has become the most important cornerstone of all? God made this happen, and it is amazing to see!*"

The religious leaders listening knew instantly that Jesus was talking about *them*, and they were furious. They wanted to arrest him right then and there, but they were afraid of what the crowd might do. So, they left him alone and walked away.

A little later, they sent a team of spies—some Pharisees and some Herodians—to trick Jesus into saying something they could use against him.

"Teacher," they said sweetly, "we know you are honest and don't care what people think. You always teach God's truth accurately. Tell us, is it right to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor Caesar, or not? Should we pay them or not?"

Jesus saw right through their sneaky trap. "Why are you testing me?" he asked. "Hand me a coin so I can look at it."

Someone handed him a silver coin.

"Whose face and name are stamped on this?" Jesus asked.

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then Jesus gave them a brilliant answer: "Well then, give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." The spies were completely stunned by his clever wisdom.

Next up came the Sadducees, a religious group that didn't believe people ever come back to life after death. They tried to stump Jesus with a tricky puzzle:

"Teacher, Moses wrote that if a married man dies without children, his brother must marry the widow so they can have a family to carry on the dead brother's name. Well, there were seven brothers. The

first got married and died childless. The second married the widow, and he died too. Then the third, and so on, until all seven had married her and died without children. Finally, the woman died as well. So here's our question: When people rise from the dead, whose wife will she be? All seven of them were married to her!"

Jesus smiled and shook his head. "You are way off base," he told them, "because you don't know the Scriptures or God's power. When people rise from the dead, they don't get married. They live like the angels in heaven! And as for the dead coming back to life, haven't you read in the writings of Moses about the burning bush? God told Moses, *'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'* God is not the God of the dead, but of the living! You are making a huge mistake."

One of the teachers of the religious law had been listening to the whole debate. Impressed by how well Jesus answered, he stepped forward and asked, "Of all the rules and commandments, which one is the most important?"

Jesus answered, "The most important one is this: *Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* The second most important rule is this: *Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.* There are no commandments greater than these."

The teacher nodded in agreement. "Well spoken, Teacher! You've told the truth. Loving God with everything we have and loving our neighbor as ourselves is way more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices in the world."

When Jesus saw how wisely the man understood, he said, "You are very close to the kingdom of God." After that, nobody dared to ask him any more trick questions.

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked the crowd a puzzle of his own: "Why do the teachers of the law claim that the Messiah—the Christ—is just the son of King David? David himself spoke by the Holy Spirit when he wrote: *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.* If David calls the Messiah 'Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?"

The large crowd listened to Jesus with great joy and delight.

Then Jesus warned his disciples: "Watch out for the religious teachers. They love to strut around in fancy, flowing robes and love it when people bow to them in the marketplace. They love sitting in the seats of honor in the synagogues and taking the best couches at big parties. Yet, behind closed doors, they cheat widows out of their homes and put on a show of making long, holy prayers. God is going to judge them very harshly for that."

Later, Jesus sat near the temple's collection boxes, watching people drop in their money. Many rich people walked up and tossed in huge piles of cash.

Then, a very poor widow walked up and shyly dropped in two tiny copper coins—worth barely a penny.

Jesus called his disciples over and whispered, "Listen to this. I'm telling you the truth: This poor widow has given more than all the rich people put together!"

The disciples looked confused.

"Why?" Jesus explained. "Because the rich people only gave a tiny slice of their massive wealth, money they wouldn't miss anyway. But this poor woman, out of her poverty, gave every single penny she had to live on. She gave everything she had to God."

MARK 13

Leaving the big, beautiful temple, one of Jesus's friends whispered, "Teacher, look at these huge rocks and amazing buildings!"

Jesus smiled gently and replied, "Do you see these massive structures? The day is coming when every single stone will be knocked down until nothing is left standing."

Later that afternoon, Jesus was sitting quietly on the Mount of Olives, looking across at the temple. Four of his closest friends—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—walked up to him and asked in secret, "Please tell us, when will this happen? What special sign will show us that all these things are finally taking place?"

Jesus looked at them and gave this important warning: "Make sure no one tricks you! Many people are going to show up pretending to be me, shouting, 'I am the chosen hero!' and they will fool a lot of folks. When you hear scary news about wars starting nearby and far away, don't panic. Those things have to happen, but it doesn't mean the story is over yet. Countries will fight each other, kingdoms will clash, the ground will shake with earthquakes, and people will go hungry. But this is just the beginning of the bumpy ride.

"As for you, watch out! People are going to drag you into courts, beat you up in meeting places, and make you stand in front of kings and rulers because of me. This gives you a chance to tell them the truth. But remember, the good news has to be shared with the whole world first. When they arrest you and hand you over, don't stress out or try to plan a speech beforehand. Just say whatever pops into your head at that exact moment, because it won't really be you talking—it will be God's helper, the Holy Spirit, speaking through you.

"Families are going to fall apart. Brothers will turn against brothers to have them killed, parents will turn on their children, and kids will rebel against their moms and dads. Everyone is going to hate you just because you follow me. But the person who holds on and keeps going until the very end? They are the ones who will be rescued.

"Now, pay attention! When you spot that terrible, creepy thing—the one the prophet Daniel warned us about—standing right where it has no business being (if you're reading this, think hard about what it means!), it's time to run for the hills! If you're chilling on your rooftop, don't even bother running inside to grab your favorite toys or clothes. If you're out working in the dirt fields, don't bother turning back to grab your jacket. Oh, and how awful it will be for mothers expecting babies or nursing little ones in those days! Pray hard that you don't have to escape in the freezing winter, because the trouble coming is going to be the worst the world has ever seen—worse than when it was first created—and nothing like it will ever happen again. If God hadn't decided to shorten those awful days, nobody would survive. But because He loves His chosen friends, He cut the time short.

"If anyone pops up and says, 'Look! Here is the hero!' or 'There he is!'—don't believe them. Fake heroes and tricky liars are going to show up performing wild magic tricks and illusions, trying to fool even God's special people if they possibly can. So be on your guard. I've warned you ahead of time!

"Right after those dark, stormy days are over, the sun will go black, the moon will stop shining, stars will fall from the sky, and the huge forces holding up space will shake like an earthquake. Then everyone will see me—the Son of Man—riding on the clouds with incredible power and brightness. I'll send my flying angels out in every direction—from the very edge of the earth to the edge of the sky—to round up all my chosen people.

"Here's a quick lesson you can learn from a fig tree: when its branches get soft and green and little leaves start popping out, you know summer is right around the corner. It's the exact same way with you. When you see all these crazy things happening, you'll know the end is right at the front door. I promise you, the people alive right now will see all of this happen before they pass away. The sky and the ground might disappear someday, but my words? They are never, ever going away.

"As for the exact day and hour? Nobody knows. Not the angels up in heaven, not even me—only the Father knows.

"So stay awake! Keep your eyes open and pray, because you never, ever know when the time is coming. It's a lot like a man who took a long trip away from home. Before he left, he put his workers in charge, gave each person a job, and told the guard at the front door to stay wide awake.

"So you need to stay awake, too! Because you don't know when the master of the house is coming back—whether it's late at night, right at midnight, when the roosters crow, or bright and early in the morning. You definitely don't want him showing up unannounced and catching you fast asleep.

"And what I'm telling you right now, I'm telling to everybody: Stay awake!"

MARK 14

Just two days before the happy celebration of Passover, the religious leaders were secretly planning how to capture Jesus by tricking him and putting him to death.

"We shouldn't do it during the big feast," they whispered, "or the crowds might get angry and start a riot."

Meanwhile, Jesus was visiting Bethany at the home of a man named Simon. As Jesus sat at the table eating dinner, a woman walked in carrying a small jar made of expensive alabaster filled with pure, sweet-smelling perfume. She gently broke open the jar and poured the fragrant oil right over Jesus's head.

Some of the people nearby were upset and grumbled among themselves, "Why waste such expensive perfume? It could have been sold for a huge pile of money—enough to feed hundreds of poor people!"

But Jesus gently defended her. "Leave her alone," he said. "Why are you giving her a hard time? She has done a wonderful, loving thing for me. You will always have poor people around you who you can help whenever you want, but I won't be with you much longer. She did the best she could; she came early to pour perfume on my body to get it ready for my burial. I promise you, wherever this good news is shared all over the world, people will always remember what she did today."

Right after this, one of Jesus's twelve close friends, Judas Iscariot, sneaked off to meet with the chief priests to see how he could betray Jesus to them. When they heard his offer, they were thrilled and promised to pay him. From that moment on, Judas watched for the perfect, quiet moment to hand Jesus over.

On the very first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread—when families gathered to sacrifice the Passover lamb—his disciples asked Jesus, "Where should we go and set up the Passover dinner for you?"

Jesus sent two of them ahead with special instructions. "Go into the city," he told them, "and you will run into a man carrying a pitcher of water. Just follow him! Wherever he goes inside, ask the homeowner, 'The Teacher wants to know: Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?' He will take you upstairs to a large, furnished room all ready for us. Get everything set up there."

The two disciples went into the city and found everything just as Jesus had said. That evening, Jesus and the twelve disciples arrived. As they sat eating together, Jesus looked around and said, "I tell you

the truth, one of you eating right here with me tonight is going to betray me."

The disciples were deeply saddened. One by one, they asked him with worry in their voices, "Surely it isn't me... is it?"

Jesus answered, "It is one of the twelve of you—the one who is dipping his bread into the bowl with me right now. It is true that the Son of Man must die, just like the Scriptures say, but how terrible it will be for the person who betrays him! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born."

During the meal, Jesus picked up a loaf of bread, thanked God for it, broke it into pieces, and handed it to his friends. "Take and eat this," he said. "This is my body." Then he picked up a cup of wine, thanked God again, and passed it around so everyone could drink from it. "This is my blood," he explained, "which seals God's new promise and is poured out to rescue many people. I want you to know I won't drink wine again until the day I drink it new in God's kingdom."

After singing a joyful hymn together, they walked out into the cool night air toward the Mount of Olives.

"Tonight, every single one of you will lose your courage and run away because of me," Jesus told them. "The Bible says, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter.' But after I rise from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Peter proudly declared, "Even if everyone else runs away, I never will!"

Jesus looked at him. "Peter, truly I tell you, tonight before the rooster crows twice, you will pretend you don't even know me—not once, but three separate times."

"No way!" Peter insisted even more loudly. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples agreed, saying the exact same thing.

Soon they arrived at a quiet olive grove called Gethsemane. "Sit here while I go over there and pray," Jesus told his disciples. He took Peter, James, and John with him, but suddenly a heavy wave of sadness and deep dread crashed over him.

"My heart is so crushed with grief that I feel like I'm dying," he told the three friends. "Stay here and keep watch with me."

Jesus walked a little farther, fell facedown on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, he wouldn't have to go through the terrible suffering ahead. "Abba, Father," he prayed, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. But let your will happen, not mine."

When he walked back to check on his friends, he found them fast asleep. He woke Peter up and asked, "Simon, are you sleeping? Couldn't you stay awake and watch with me for just one hour? Wake up and pray so you don't give in to temptation. Your spirit wants to do right, but your human body is weak."

Jesus went away and prayed the same prayer again. When he returned, he found them asleep once more because their eyes were so heavy with exhaustion, and they didn't even know what to say to him.

When he came back a third time, he said, "Go ahead and sleep now; get your rest. But the time has come! Look, the Son of Man is being handed over to sinners. Get up, let's go! My betrayer is right here."

Before the words had even finished leaving his mouth, Judas—one of the twelve—showed up. Behind him was a large, angry mob carrying swords and wooden clubs, sent by the chief priests, scribes, and elders.

Judas had given them a secret plan. "The man I kiss is the one you want," he had told them. "Grab him and lead him away safely."

As soon as he arrived, Judas walked right up to Jesus, smiled, and said, "Master!" and kissed him on the cheek.

Instantly, the guards rushed forward and grabbed Jesus, arresting him. One of the disciples standing nearby panicked, pulled out a sword, swung it at the high priest's servant, and sliced off his ear.

Jesus looked at the crowd and said, "Did you have to come out here with swords and clubs like I'm some kind of dangerous criminal? Day after day I was right there teaching in the temple courts, and you didn't arrest me then. But all of this is happening to make the Scriptures come true."

Terrified, all the disciples abandoned him and ran away into the night.

One young man, wearing only a linen bedsheet wrapped around his naked body, tried to follow Jesus from a distance. The guards spotted him and grabbed the sheet, but he wriggled out of it and ran away naked into the dark.

The guards led Jesus straight to the high priest's palace, where all the chief priests, elders, and religious leaders had gathered. Peter followed far behind, sneaking into the courtyard and sitting by a warm fire with the guards to try and blend in.

Inside, the high priest and the council desperately looked for people to tell lies about Jesus so they could find an excuse to execute him. But they couldn't find a good story because all the liars kept changing their stories and contradicting each other.

Finally, a few men stood up and lied, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this human-made temple and build a brand-new one in three days without human hands!'" But even then, their stories didn't match up.

The high priest stood up in the middle of the room and looked right at Jesus. "Aren't you going to answer these charges? What do these people mean by testifying against you?"

Jesus kept completely silent and didn't say a single word.

So the high priest asked him directly, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed God?"

Jesus looked him in the eye and said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Almighty God and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The high priest ripped his robes in anger and shouted, "Why do we need any more witnesses?! You've heard his terrible blasphemy for yourselves. What is your verdict?"

And the whole council shouted together, "Guilty! He deserves to die!"

Then some of the men began to spit on Jesus. They threw a blindfold over his face, punched him, and taunted, "If you're such a great prophet, tell us who hit you!" Even the guards slapped him across the face as they dragged him away.

Down in the courtyard, Peter was still trying to stay warm by the fire. One of the high priest's slave girls walked by, looked closely at his face in the firelight, and said, "Hey, you were with Jesus of Nazareth, weren't you?"

Peter panicked and lied, "I don't know her! I don't have any idea what you're talking about!" He quickly stood up and walked out toward the porch. Just then, a rooster crowed in the distance.

Another slave girl spotted him standing there and told the crowd, "This guy definitely is one of them!"

Again, Peter denied it firmly. A little while later, the people standing around walked up to Peter and said, "You really *are* one of them. We can tell because you're from Galilee, and your accent gives you away!"

This time, Peter got so scared that he began to curse and swear, shouting, "I swear to you, I don't even know the man you're talking about!"

At that exact second, a rooster crowed a second time.

Suddenly, Peter remembered the exact words Jesus had spoken to him earlier that night: "*Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.*"

Peter broke down completely, buried his face in his hands, and wept bitterly.

MARK 15

Early in the morning, the religious leaders and the whole council had a big meeting. They tied Jesus up, led him away, and handed him over to the governor, Pilate.

Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "That is what you say."

The leaders shouted many charges against Jesus, but he stayed completely quiet. Pilate was amazed and asked him again, "Aren't you going to answer? Look at all the things they are accusing you of!" But Jesus still didn't say a word, which left Pilate totally puzzled.

During the festival, it was the governor's custom to release one prisoner—whichever one the crowd asked for. At that time, a man named Barabbas was locked up with other rebels who had committed murder during an uprising.

A large crowd came up and started asking Pilate to keep his usual holiday tradition.

Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?" He knew very well that the leaders had handed Jesus over to him simply because they were jealous.

However, the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask for Barabbas instead.

So Pilate asked them again, "Then what should I do with this man you call the King of the Jews?"

The crowd shouted back, "Crucify him!"

Pilate tried reason: "Why? What terrible thing has he done?"

But they screamed even louder, "Crucify him!"

Wanting to keep the crowd happy, Pilate set Barabbas free. Then he had Jesus whipped and handed him over to be crucified.

The soldiers led Jesus into the palace courtyard, known as the Praetorium, and called together the whole guard. They dressed him in a purple robe, twisted together a sharp crown of thorns, and placed it on his head. Then they saluted him mockingly, shouting, "Long live the King of the Jews!" They hit him on the head with a stick, spit on him, and dropped to their knees as if to worship him.

After making fun of him, they took off the purple robe, put his own clothes back on him, and led him out to be nailed to a cross.

Along the way, they forced a passerby coming in from the country—Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus—to carry the heavy cross.

They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which translates to "The Place of the Skull." They tried to give him wine mixed with myrrh to dull the pain, but he refused it.

Then they crucified him. They divided up his clothes by throwing dice to see what each soldier would get. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they hung him on the cross. A sign above his head stated the charge against him: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Two criminals were crucified beside him, one on his right and one on his left.

People walking by shook their heads and insulted him, calling out, "Ha! You said you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Save yourself and climb down from that cross!"

The religious leaders also mocked him among themselves, saying, "He saved others, but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross right now so we can see it and believe." Even the criminals hanging beside him yelled insults at him.

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land and lasted until three o'clock. At three, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some people standing nearby heard it and said, "Listen, he's calling for Elijah!"

One man ran, soaked a sponge in sour wine, put it on the end of a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink, saying, "Wait, let's see if Elijah comes to take him down."

Then Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed his last breath.

At that exact moment, the heavy curtain hanging inside the temple split right down the middle, from top to bottom.

The Roman officer standing right in front of Jesus saw how he died and declared, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!"

A group of women were also watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. These women had followed Jesus and cared for

him back in Galilee, along with many others who had traveled with him to Jerusalem.

As evening approached—and because it was the preparation day just before the Sabbath—Joseph of Arimathea bravely went to see Pilate. Joseph was a respected member of the council who was eagerly waiting for God's kingdom, and he boldly asked for the body of Jesus.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. He called for the Roman officer and asked if Jesus had been dead for long. Once the officer confirmed it, Pilate released the body to Joseph.

Joseph bought a clean linen cloth, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the linen, and placed him in a tomb that had been carved out of solid rock. Then he rolled a large stone across the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James watched closely to see where he was laid.

MARK 16

As soon as the Sabbath day was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought sweet-smelling spices. They wanted to go to the tomb and gently care for Jesus' body.

Early on Sunday morning, just as the sun was beginning to peek over the horizon, they walked out to the tomb.

As they walked, they worried out loud, "Who is going to help us push away the heavy stone door?"

But when they arrived and looked up, they were amazed to see that the giant stone had already been rolled aside!

Stepping inside the tomb, they gasped. Sitting on the right side was a young man dressed in a glowing white robe, and the women froze in fear.

"Don't be afraid," the young man said gently. "I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified on a cross. But he is not here—he has risen! Look, see the place where they laid him?"

He smiled and gave them a mission. "Now, go quickly! Tell his disciples—especially Peter—that Jesus is heading ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just like he promised."

Trembling with a mix of shock, excitement, and fear, the women turned and ran out of the tomb. They were so overwhelmed that they didn't say a word to anyone along the way.

Early on that first Easter Sunday, after Jesus rose to life, the very first person he appeared to was Mary Magdalene—the same woman from whom he had once chased away seven dark spirits.

She ran to find Jesus' friends, who were still sitting together, crying and mourning.

"He is alive!" she told them, sharing what she had seen. But when they heard it, they simply didn't believe her.

Later that day, Jesus appeared looking a bit different to two of his followers as they were walking out in the countryside.

They rushed back to tell the others the good news, but once again, nobody believed them.

Finally, Jesus appeared right to the eleven disciples as they were eating dinner together. He gently scolded them for their stubborn hearts and for not believing the people who had already seen him alive.

Then Jesus gave them an exciting job to do. "Go out into the whole world," he told them, "and share the good news with everyone!"

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but those who refuse to believe will miss out. And remarkable things will happen to those who believe: in my name, they will drive out darkness, speak in brand-new languages, safely handle dangers, and place their hands on the sick to heal them."

As soon as the Lord finished speaking with them, he was lifted up into the clouds and took his seat in heaven at the right hand of God.

And the disciples? They didn't wait around. They went out everywhere and shared the message, while the Lord worked right alongside them, proving the message was true with amazing miracles. Amen!