

CHRIST CHURCH SMALL GROUPS

Study Guide for November: For All the Saints



For the month of November, we will explore chapters 12 and 13 of Mark, the final two chapters before Mark's passion account. Some scholars call these chapters Mark's "farewell passage," as it contains great final teachings for his disciples prior to Jesus' death.

This guide will give you a primer on the history, authorship, and themes of these two chapters, which we will hear on weekends in November as our gospel passages. There are also lectionary texts and questions for Small Group study.

MARK 12 AND 13

Date: Likely 70-80 AD, after the fall of Jerusalem

Author: Attributed to Mark, an early Christian mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles

Intended Difficult to determine the exact location of the audience Mark's gospel was intended for.

Audience: Traditional location of Rome but likely people closer to Jerusalem. The audience was likely persecuted. Both author and audience are concerned with their current suffering and the continuing of the mission to the gentiles.

Themes: **Criticism of Jewish religious leaders**

Jesus encounters the religious leaders of his time at the temple in Jerusalem. He speaks into silence the following groups: chief priests, elders, and scribes (11:27—12:12), the Pharisees (12:13-17), the Sadducees (12:18-27), and those who promote a false religion (12:38-44). For some time, the religious leaders desired to entrap Jesus to arrest and charge him. Jesus' condemnation of the leaders is as much for them in the moment as it is for us today. Religious leaders of all eras must be kingdom-focused, adaptive to our times, and live in holiness and righteousness if we are to promote holiness and righteousness to the world.

The end of Jerusalem

Jesus leaves the temple and its leaders and moves to the nearby Mount of Olives, where much of Jerusalem is visible. Here, his closest disciples ask him about the fall of Jerusalem, which Jesus predicts will be in their lifetime. Stone will fall on stone (the temple will be destroyed), which happens about 30 years later in 60 AD. The followers of Jesus will face torture and martyrdom (which also happens soon after Jesus' death).

The end of the world as we know it

Jesus predicts the violence and horror of Jerusalem's fall will continue into the capitulation of the world. Nation will rise against nation, there will be great suffering, and there will be shattering earthquakes across the land. Family members will betray each other, and we will turn on one another. The world will go dark. Then, when all seems lost, the Son of Man will come in clouds with great power and glory to gather the elect. We shall be saved.

FIRST STUDY PASSAGE

Mark 12:28-34 (Reading for weekend of November 2 and 3):

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”²⁹ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;’³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”³² Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’;³³ and ‘to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Study Questions:

1. Why do you think the scribe challenges Jesus? How does Jesus respond to being challenged in public?
 - a. Have you ever challenged God or brought a question to Jesus?
2. Jesus combines two passages from Torah into his answer about the greatest commandment: First, to love our one God (Deuteronomy), and second, to love our neighbor as yourself (Leviticus). This is what it means to be Christian and to follow Christ: to love God and each other. Which is easier for you? Which do you need more help with?
3. What does the scribe learn from this encounter? What does Jesus want the scribe (and us) to know?
4. The scribe is “not far from the kingdom of God” (verse 34). How does the scribe draw closer to the kingdom in this story? How can we draw closer to the kingdom of God?

SECOND STUDY PASSAGE

Mark 12:38-44 (Reading for weekend of November 9 and 10):

As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Study Questions:

1. Why do the scribes receive condemnation? What have they done wrong?
2. How does the widow, with her small amount of financial offering, give more than those who put in great sums?
3. When was a time that you had little, were challenged to give much, and did so? How did you feel?
4. When was a time you were challenged to give but refrained? How did that make you feel?
5. What does God desire of our generosity?

THIRD STUDY PASSAGE

Mark 13:1-8 (Reading for weekend of November 16 and 17):

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!”² Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,⁴ “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?”⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray.⁶ Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.⁸ For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

Study Questions:

1. Jesus predicts the fall of the temple, which happens nearly thirty years later in 60 AD. How do you think it felt for his disciples to hear that their religious and spiritual home would be destroyed (for a second time)?
2. If Jesus predicted the end of the building of Christ Church, how would you feel? What would you miss?
3. If the Christ Church buildings were destroyed, would our church go on? How would we carry on? Can the Church (capital C) be destroyed? And if it is, can it be brought back to life?
4. What makes the church, the church? Is God able to raise up things that have been cast down?

FOURTH STUDY PASSAGE

Mark 13:24-37 (Reading for First Advent, Year B):

“But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.²⁷ Then he will send out the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.²⁸ From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.³² But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.³³ Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come.³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.³⁵ Therefore, keep awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn,³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Study Questions:

1. Jesus predicts there will be a period of suffering before his return. Must we suffer? Is suffering an intrinsic part of the human condition and experience? What saves us amid our suffering?
2. Jesus predicts the Son of Man will come from the clouds, dressed in power and glory. Who is this Son of Man? Do you think Jesus is predicting his own return? If Jesus is predicting his return, does that change how we should live, here and now?
3. No one knows the time of Jesus’ return. The first followers thought it would be any day after Jesus’ death. The church still believes it could be at any moment. Are you ready for Jesus’ return? How do you live your life so that you are ready?
4. Here we find one of the great themes of Advent: “Keep awake” (verse 37). How do we “keep awake” as we wait for Jesus to return in glory? What are some practices that might still our beating heart and troubled mind?