

“DIGGING DEEPER” IN THE BOOK OF MARK

Mark 8:18.

The **disciples had misunderstood our Lord's warning 'against the leaven** of the Pharisees,' which they supposed to have been occasioned by their neglect to bring with them bread. **Their blunder was like many others which they committed**, but it seems to have singularly moved our Lord, who was usually so patient with **His slow scholars**. The swift rain of questions, like bullets rattling against a cuirass, of which my text is one, shows how much **He was moved, if not to impatience or anger**, at least to wonder.

But what I wish particularly to notice is that He traces the **disciples' slowness of perception and distrust mainly to forgetfulness**. There was a special reason for that, of course, in that the two miracles of the feeding the multitude, one of which had just before occurred, ought to have delivered them from any uneasiness, and to have led them to apprehend His higher meaning.

Lastly, let me say, remember and hope.

Memory and Hope are twins. The latter can only work with the materials supplied by the former. Hope could paint nothing on the blank canvas of the future unless its palette were charged by Memory. Our thankful remembrance of a past which was filled and moulded by God's perpetual presence and care ought to make us sure of a future which will in like manner be molded. And if we feel, as memory teaches us to feel, that God has been working for us, and with us, we can say with another Psalmist: 'Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever

Our remembrance, even of our imperfections and our losses and our sorrows, may minister to our hope. We have so much, that if there be a God at all, we must have a great deal more. The new moon, with a ragged edge, 'even in its imperfection beautiful,' is a prophet of the complete resplendent orb. 'On earth the broken arc, in heaven the perfect round.'

Further, the memory of defeat may be the parent of the hope of victory

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary - Mark 8:11-21

8:11-21 Obstinate unbelief will have something to say, though ever so unreasonable. Christ refused to answer their demand. If they will not be convinced, they shall not. Alas! what cause we have to lament for those around us, who destroy themselves and others by their perverse and obstinate unbelief, and enmity to the gospel! When we forget the works of God, and distrust him, we should chide ourselves severely, as Christ here reproves his disciples. How is it that we so often mistake his meaning, disregard his warnings, and distrust his providence?

MARK- Digging Deeper Research Notes- Will revise as I add more notes – these notes are on Chapter 8-12 as of November 6th, 2020 - Prepared by Salt Shakin Sister Ministry:www.saltshakinsister.com

Mark 8:22-26 – The blind man touched twice before healed? WOWWWWW

[Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary](#)-Mark 8:22-26 Here is a blind man brought to Christ by his friends. Therein appeared the faith of those that brought him. If those who are spiritually blind, do not pray for themselves, yet their friends and relations should pray for them, that Christ would be pleased to touch them. The cure was wrought gradually, which was not usual in our Lord's miracles. Christ showed in what method those commonly are healed by his grace, who by nature are spiritually blind. At first, their knowledge is confused; but, like the light of the morning, it shines more and more to the perfect day, and then they see all things clearly. Slighting Christ's favors is forfeiting them; and he will make those who do so know the worth of privileges by the want of them.

[Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible](#)-And he took the blind man by the hand,.... Not for the sake of touching him, in order to heal him, as they desired, but to be his guide: and led him out of the town; to shun all appearance of vain glory and popular applause, being willing to do the miracle in a private manner; and because of the obstinacy and unbelief of the inhabitants of this place, who were not worthy to be witnesses of such a cure; see [Matthew 11:21](#); And when he had spit on his eyes; not as a cause of healing him; for whatever use spittle may be of to such that have weak eyes, it can have no causal influence upon, or be of any service, in a natural way, to a blind man to restore his sight unto him: and put his hands upon him; as he sometimes did, when he healed persons of any disorder:

He asked him, if he saw ought; any object whatever, whether he could perceive he had any sight at all. Christ's taking the blind man by the hand, and leading him out of the town, and spitting on his eyes, and putting his hands upon him, and then asking him if he saw ought, **are emblematical of what he does in spiritual conversion, when he turns men from darkness to light: he takes them by the hand**, which expresses his condescension, grace, and mercy, and **becomes their guide and leader**; and a better, and safer guide they cannot have; he **brings them by a way they know not, and leads them in paths they had not known before; makes darkness light** before them, and **crooked things straight**, and does not forsake them: he takes them apart, and **separates them from the rest of the world**; he calls them out from thence to **go with him, teaching them**, that, when enlightened by him, they should have **no fellowship with the unfruitful works** of darkness, and the workers of them; **for what communion has light with darkness?** his putting spittle upon his eyes, may signify the means of grace, the eye salve of the word, which, when attended with a divine power, enlightens the eyes; and which power may be represented here by Christ's putting his hands upon the man; for the Gospel, without the power of Christ, is insufficient to produce such an effect; but when it is accompanied with that, it always succeeds.

Mark 8:33

Question: "Why did Jesus say to Peter, 'Get behind me Satan'?"

Answer: The command “Get behind me, Satan,” spoken to Peter by Jesus, is recorded in [Matthew 16:23](#) and [Mark 8:33](#). “Get behind me, Satan” seems harsh and out of character for Jesus, especially when addressing Peter, one of His most devout disciples.

Why did Jesus say this? What was it Peter did to deserve such a rebuke? Without knowing it, Peter was speaking for Satan.

Jesus had just revealed to His disciples for the first time the plan: He was to go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be raised to life ([Matthew 16:21](#); [Mark 8:31](#)). Contrary to their expectations of Him, Jesus explained that He had not come to establish an earthly Messianic kingdom at that time. The disciples were not prepared for this new revelation of the Messiah’s purpose. Though Peter understood His words, he simply could not reconcile his view of the conquering Messiah with the suffering and death Jesus spoke of. So Peter “began to rebuke Him” for having such a fatalistic mindset.

Unwittingly, Peter was speaking for Satan. Like Jesus’ adversary, Peter was not setting his mind on the things of God—His ways, His plans, and His purposes ([Colossians 3:2](#); [Isaiah 55:8-9](#)). Instead, his mind was set on the things of man, the things of the world and its earthly values. Jesus was saying that the way of the cross was God’s will, the plan of redemption for all mankind. Peter’s reaction was most likely shared by the other disciples although, as always, it was Peter who spoke first. Peter was inadvertently being used of Satan in thinking he was protecting Jesus. Satan had purposely tempted Jesus in the wilderness to divert Him from the cross, from fulfilling the grand design of the Father and the Son ([Mark 1:12-13](#)). Innocently, Peter was doing the same thing. He had not yet grasped Jesus’ true Messianic purpose.

Although Peter had just moments before declared Jesus as the Christ, he turned from God’s perspective and viewed the situation from man’s perspective, which brought about the stern rebuke: “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus went on to explain: “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” ([Mark 8:33](#)).

At the time, Jesus’ stern reprimand did not make sense to Peter. However, Jesus’ indictment presents a profound message for us. We can easily see that Peter had the wrong perspective of God’s plan for Christ’s suffering and death. But we must also see how easily we can become an unwitting spokesperson for Satan.

This is especially true when we lose sight of God's plan for us. This comes about when our focus is on our careers, our possessions, our security, the things of the world rather than upon sacrifice and service and the proclaiming of God's message. When Peter's focus shifted to his own desires and plans, Jesus rebuked him in order to get him back on track. May our focus always be on God and His plans, that we may never experience a similar rebuke from our Lord.

Mark 8:22-26 – The blind man touched twice before healed?

[Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary](#)

8:22-26 Here is a blind man brought to Christ by his friends. Therein appeared the faith of those that brought him. If those who are spiritually blind, do not pray for themselves, yet their friends and relations should pray for them, that Christ would be pleased to touch them. The cure was wrought gradually, which was not usual in our Lord's miracles. Christ showed in what method those commonly are healed by his grace, who by nature are spiritually blind. At first, their knowledge is confused; but, like the light of the morning, it shines more and more to the perfect day, and then they see all things clearly. Slighting Christ's favours is forfeiting them; and he will make those who do so know the worth of privileges by the want of them.

Mark 9:5 – Why did Peter want to make 3 shelters? AND Mark 9:33 Anyone Not against.... 9:33 don't be so judgmental of other denominations...

(5-10) Peter's unwise offer to build three tabernacles to honor Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and the Father's response.

Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah";

Let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah: When Peter saw Jesus in His glory, he must have said to himself: "This is good. This is how it should be. Forget this business about suffering, being rejected, and crucified. Let's build some tabernacles so we can live this way with the glorified Jesus all the time."

Because he did not know what to say: We often get into trouble when we speak like Peter did, not knowing what to say. We also see that Peter spoke out of *fear* (for they were greatly afraid). We say many foolish things without thinking and out of fear.

“Peter was openhearted, bold, enthusiastic. To my mind, there is something very lovable about Peter; and, in my opinion, we need more Peters in the church of the present day. Though they are rash and impulsive, yet there is fire in them, and there is steam in them, so that they keep us going.” (Spurgeon)

Luke tells us that Peter, James, and John were all asleep, and when they awoke they saw Jesus transfigured with Elijah and Moses. “Peter, suddenly awakened from sleep in time to see the glory fade, was garrulous in his terror, as some men are.” (Cole)

What Peter said was foolish because he put Jesus on an equal level with Elijah and Moses – one tabernacle for each! But Jesus isn’t just another Moses or Elijah, or even a *greater* Moses or Elijah. Jesus is the Son of God.

For they were greatly afraid: Being in the presence of God’s glory isn’t necessarily a pleasant experience – especially when we are like Peter, not really glorifying God. Sometimes the glory of God is shown in the way that He corrects us.

Mark 9:38-41- **ANYONE**..... Who is NOT against us is for us.... Think about it. Different denominations and religions. Don’t judge them because they don’t believe as you do. God will judge them in any and all their errors in Gods Word and His ways....(10-25-20 bfc)

Barnes' Notes on the Bible Mark 9:33

Forbid him not - Do not prevent his doing good. If he can work a miracle in my name, it is sufficient proof of attachment to me, and he should not be prevented.

Can lightly speak evil of me - The word here rendered "lightly" means quickly or "immediately." The meaning of the passage is, that he to whom God gave the power of working a miracle, by that gave evidence that he could not be found among the enemies of Jesus. He ought not, therefore, to be prevented from doing it. **There is no reason to think here that John had any improper designs in opposing the man. He thought that it was evidence that he could not be right, because he did not join them and follow the Savior.**

Our Lord taught him differently. He opposed no one who gave evidence that he loved him. Wherever he might be or whatever his work, yet, if he did it in the name of Jesus and with the approbation of God, it was evidence sufficient that he was right. **Christians should rejoice in good done by their brethren of any denomination.**

There are men calling themselves Christians who seem to look with doubt and suspicion on all that is done by those who do not walk with them. They undervalue their labors, and attempt to lessen the evidences of their success and to diminish their influence. **True likeness to the Saviour would lead us to rejoice in all the good accomplished, by whomsoever it may be done - to rejoice that the kingdom of Christ is advanced, whether by a Presbyterian, an Episcopalian, a Baptist, or a Methodist. Compare [Philippians 1:18](#).**

The Grace of God (Mark 10:23-31)-

The subsequent words of Jesus ([Mark 10:23-25](#)) elaborate the significance of the encounter, as Jesus stresses the difficulty faced by the wealthy in entering the kingdom. The young man's reaction illustrates the attachment the rich have to their wealth and to the status that goes with it; significantly, the disciples themselves are "perplexed" by Jesus' statements about the wealthy. It is perhaps noteworthy that when he repeats his statement in [Mark 10:24](#), he addresses the disciples as "children," **declaring them unburdened by status. They have already been unburdened by wealth as a result of following him.**

Jesus' analogy of the camel and the eye of the needle ([Mark 10:25](#)) probably has **nothing to do with a small gate in Jerusalem**,^[1] but could be a pun on the similarity of the Greek word for a camel (kamelos) and that for a heavy rope (kamilos). **The deliberately absurd image simply emphasizes the impossibility of the rich being saved without divine help.** This applies to the poor as well, for otherwise "who can be saved?" ([Mark 10:26](#)). The promise of such divine help is spelled out in [Mark 10:27](#), "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." This keeps the passage (and hopefully us, as readers) from descending into a simple cynicism toward the rich.

This leads Peter to defend the disciples' attitudes and history of self-denial. They have "left everything" to follow Jesus. Jesus' reply affirms the heavenly reward that awaits all those who make such sacrifices. Again, the things left by such people ("house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields") potentially have connotations of status and not merely material abundance. **In fact, [Mark 10:31](#) pulls the whole account together with a forceful emphasis on status—"Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."**

Up until this point, the account could reflect either a love for things in and of themselves, or for the status that those things provide. This last statement, though, places the emphasis firmly upon the issue of status.

Soon after, Jesus declares this in explicit workplace terms. “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:44). **A slave, after all, is simply a worker with no status, not even the status of owning their own ability to work.**

The proper status of Jesus’ followers is that of a child or slave — no status at all. Even if we hold high positions or bear authority, we are to regard the position and authority as belonging to God, not ourselves. **We are simply God’s slaves, representing him but not assuming the status that belongs to him alone.**

*“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not **receive a hundredfold now in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10:29–30)*

What Jesus means here is that **he himself makes up for every sacrifice.**

- If you give up a mother’s nearby affection and concern, you get back one hundred times the affection and concern from the ever-present Christ.
- If you give up the warm comradeship of a brother, you get back one hundred times the warmth and comradeship of Christ.
- If you give up the sense of at-homeness you had in your house, you get back one hundred times the comfort and security of knowing that your Lord owns every house.

Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary Mark 10:32-45

10:32-45 Christ's going on with his undertaking for the salvation of mankind, was, is, and will be, the wonder of all his disciples. Worldly honor is a glittering thing, with which the eyes of Christ's own disciples have many times been dazzled.

Our care must be, that we may have wisdom and grace to know how to suffer with him; and we may trust him to provide what the degrees of our glory shall be. Christ shows them that dominion was generally abused in the world.

If Jesus would gratify all our desires, it would soon appear that we desire fame or authority, and are unwilling to taste of his cup, or to have his baptism; and should often be ruined by having our prayers answered. But he loves us and will only give his people what is good for them.

What does the fig tree represent in Mark 11?

The image is taken from the Old Testament symbol of the **fig tree** representing Israel, and the cursing of the **fig tree** in Mark and Matthew and the parallel story in Luke are thus symbolically directed against the Jews, who have not accepted Jesus as king.

What does the fig tree represent?

The first is the **Tree** of life and the second is the **Tree** of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve used the leaves of the **fig tree** to sew garments for themselves after they ate the "fruit of the **Tree** of knowledge" (Genesis 2:16–17), when they realized that they were naked (Genesis 3:7).

What is the lesson of the fig tree?

In either case, the parable reflects Jesus offering a chance for repentance and forgiveness of sin, showing his grace toward his believers. "These three years" logically refers to the period of Jesus' ministry, or simply that is the period it took for a **fig tree** to bear fruit.

When Jesus curses the fig tree this is a symbol of?

The image is taken from the Old Testament **symbol of the fig tree** representing Israel, and the **cursing** of the **fig tree** in Mark and Matthew and the parallel story in Luke are thus symbolically directed against the Jews, who have not accepted **Jesus** as king.

Why Did Jesus Curse The Fig Tree?

By Noel Goetz

The account begins the day following Jesus entering Jerusalem on what we call "Palm Sunday", days before Jesus would be crucified. On the previous day he had visited the temple and saw everything going on at His Father's (God's) house.

He saw the buying, selling and merchandising – the great sin of the priests who were profiting and taking advantage of pilgrims who were faithfully coming to celebrate Passover. After spending the night in Bethany it goes on to say:

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” (Mark 11:12-14)

Later ‘that’ day the account goes on to say that he went to the temple and cast the money changers and merchandisers out, [turning over their tables](#).

Now it probably seems strange that Jesus cursed a tree just because he was hungry and was disappointed, but we’d be missing out on what Jesus was teaching His disciples if we didn’t look closer.

The significance of the Breba crop

Did you know that many fig trees bear more than just one crop? There is something we today call a ‘Breba’ crop, or an ‘out of season’ crop.

The Breba crop is produced on ‘a mature branch’ the previous year’s [wood](#), unlike the main crop of figs that grow on the current year’s new, green wood. The Breba crop is small in number but often produces the very largest, sweet figs, a time when no other tree is anywhere close to ripening fruit.

You see, the leafy tree in the distance was holding out the promise of fruit (blessing... sustenance... life). People had gone all winter without fresh fruit and looked forward to these ‘Breba’ figs, so of course Jesus fully and rightfully expected that the tree would naturally have early fruit growing on ‘a mature branch’.

But there is always more to the story isn’t there?

Jesus was “expecting to find fruit” from the mature wood, and at a time when it was most desired in early spring (at about the time of Passover) and because it was expected and sent him away hungry, it was a tree holding out promise, but upon further investigation it was found lacking. It was a fig tree that didn’t provide what it was created to provide.

Created to bear good fruit

When Jesus had entered Jerusalem the previous day, he was expecting to find the religious leaders feeding spiritual fruit to the hungry pilgrims, many of whom had come to the Passover celebration to find sustenance. They came to the temple expecting to be fed, but only found disappointment.

The religious leaders who were ordained (created) to feed them the good things of God, presented themselves like early leaves; holding out the promise of fruit, but they were in fact fruitless. Instead of providing nourishment, they were taking advantage of the people and sending them away hungry – just as Jesus was left hungry by the fruitless fig tree.

Jesus was conveying both a prophetic and practical message to his disciples: If you are created to bear good fruit, but are rebellious and refuse to bear fruit, you will be cursed. His words were, *“May no one ever eat fruit from you again.”* (Mark 11:14)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, ‘thrown into the fire and burned’. (John 15:5-6)

Many people wander about in our world, hungry for the things of God. As we know, you and I were created and equipped to bear good fruit – both the early and hungrily anticipated ‘Breba’ crop and likewise the ‘main season’ sustaining crop; so that no one, not a single person, should ever have to go away hungry.

Question: "Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?"

Answer: The account of Jesus cursing the barren fig tree is found in two different gospel accounts. First, it is seen in [Matthew 21:18-22](#), and then also in [Mark 11:12-14](#). While there are slight differences between the two accounts, they are easily reconciled by studying the passages. **Like all Scripture, the key to understanding this passage comes from understanding the context in which it happened. In order to properly understand this passage, we must first look at the chronological and geographical setting.**

For example, when did this occur, what was the setting, and where did it happen? Also, in order to fully understand this passage, we need to have an **understanding of the importance of the fig tree as it relates to the nation of Israel and understand how the fig tree is often used in the Scriptures to symbolically represent Israel.** Finally, we must have a basic understanding of the fig tree itself, its growing seasons, etc.

First, in looking at the general chronological setting of the passage, we see that it happened during the week before His crucifixion. Jesus had entered Jerusalem a day earlier amid the praise and worship of the Jewish people who were looking to Him as the King/Messiah who was going to deliver them from Roman occupation ([Matthew 21:1-11](#); [Mark 11:1-11](#)).

Now, the next day, Jesus is again on His way to Jerusalem from where He was staying in Bethany. On His way, both Matthew and Mark record that He was hungry and saw a fig tree in the distance that had leaves on it ([Mark 11:13](#)). Upon coming to the tree expecting to find something to eat, Jesus instead discovered that the fig tree had no fruit on it and cursed the tree saying, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” ([Matthew 21:19](#); [Mark 11:14](#)).

Matthew records the cursing and the withering of the fig tree all in one account and includes it after the account of Jesus cleansing the Temple of the moneychangers. Mark explains that it actually took place over two days, with Jesus cursing the fig tree the first day on the way to cleanse the Temple, and the disciples seeing the tree withered on the second day when they were again going to Jerusalem from Bethany ([Mark 11:12-14](#) and [Mark 11:19-20](#)). Of course, upon seeing the tree “withered from the roots up,” the disciples were amazed, as that would have normally taken several weeks.

Having reviewed the general chronological setting of the story, we can begin to answer some of many questions that are often asked of it. First of all is the question, **Why did Jesus curse the fig tree if it was not the right season for figs?** The answer to this question can be determined by studying the characteristics of fig trees. The fruit of the fig tree generally appears before the leaves, and, because the fruit is green it blends in with the leaves right up until it is almost ripe.

Therefore, when Jesus and His disciples saw from a distance that the tree had leaves, they would have expected it to also have fruit on it even though it was earlier in the season than what would be normal for a fig tree to be bearing fruit. Also, each tree would often produce two to three crops of figs each season.

There would be an early crop in the spring followed by one or two later crops. In some parts of Israel, depending on climate and conditions, **it was also possible that a tree might produce fruit ten out of twelve months.** This also explains why Jesus and His disciples would be looking for fruit on the fig tree even if it was not in the main growing season. The fact that the tree already had leaves on it even though it was at a higher elevation around Jerusalem, and therefore would have been outside the normal season for figs, would have seemed to be a good indication that there would also be fruit on it.

As to the significance of this passage and what it means, the answer to that is again found in the chronological setting and in understanding how a **fig tree is often used symbolically to represent Israel in the Scriptures.** First of all, chronologically, Jesus had just arrived at Jerusalem amid great fanfare and great expectations, but then proceeds to cleanse the Temple and curse the barren fig tree. Both had significance as to the spiritual condition of Israel. With His cleansing of the Temple and His criticism of the worship that was going on there ([Matthew 21:13](#); [Mark 11:17](#)), Jesus was effectively denouncing Israel's worship of God. **With the cursing of the fig tree, He was symbolically denouncing Israel as a nation and, in a sense, even denouncing unfruitful "Christians" (that is, people who profess to be Christian but have no evidence of a relationship with Christ).**

The presence of a fruitful fig tree was considered to be a symbol of blessing and prosperity for the nation of Israel. Likewise, the absence or death of a fig tree would symbolize judgment and rejection. Symbolically, the fig tree represented the spiritual deadness of Israel, who while very religious outwardly with all the sacrifices and ceremonies, were spiritually barren because of their sins.

By cleansing the Temple and cursing the fig tree, causing it to wither and die, Jesus was pronouncing His coming judgment of Israel and demonstrating His power to carry it out. **It also teaches the principle that religious profession and observance are not enough to guarantee salvation, unless there is the fruit of genuine salvation evidenced in the life of the person.** James would later echo this truth when he wrote that "faith without works is dead" ([James 2:26](#)).

The lesson of the fig tree is that we should bear spiritual fruit ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)), not just give an appearance of religiosity. God judges fruitlessness, and expects that those who have a relationship with Him will "bear much fruit" ([John 15:5-8](#)).

MARK 12 – JESUS DEBATES THE AUTHORITIES

A. The story of the tenant farmers.

1. (1-8) A parable about a landowner and his tenants.

Then He began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around *it*, dug *a place for* the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took *him* and beat him and sent *him* away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully treated.

And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. Therefore still having **one son, his beloved**, he also sent him to them last, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But those vinedressers said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed *him* and cast *him* out of the vineyard.”

He leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country: This sort of tenant farming relationship was a common practice in Jesus’ day, especially in the region of Galilee. Archaeologists have discovered records of this same sort of dispute between landowners and tenant farmers. “**In a day when title was sometimes uncertain, anyone who had had the use of land for three years was presumed to own it in the absence of an alternative claim.**” (Morris)

That he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers: Because Jesus spoke to a Jewish audience, they were aware **that the vineyard was used in the Old Testament as a picture of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7)**. Therefore, the vinedressers represented the rulers of Israel and the vineyard represented the people of God as a whole.

And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed: The vinedressers didn't buy the vineyard, and they did not build it. A generous owner allowed them to work in his vineyard, yet they turned against the owner and one day had to answer for it.

Again he sent them another servant... And again he sent another... and many others: **The owner was very patient.** He sent messenger after messenger, even though they were all abused and mistreated. Because the owner of the vineyard was not present at the time, the vinedressers doubted and mocked his authority. They soon found out that even though they couldn't see the owner, his authority was still real.

This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours: The vinedressers were very foolish. They apparently thought that if they killed the owner's son, the owner would then just give up and let them have the vineyard. So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard: **This parable tells us that Jesus knew He was the Son – the Son of God – and that He knew that He would soon be killed.**

The Son was the final messenger. There would be no other. Either they would accept the message of the Son or face certain judgment. "If you do not hear the well beloved Son of God, you have refused your last hope. *He is God's ultimatum.* Nothing remains when Christ is refused. No one else can be sent; heaven itself contains no further messenger. If Christ be rejected, hope is rejected." (Spurgeon)

(Mark 12:13-17)

Taxing Issues (Luke 19:1-10; 20:20-26) more details in Luke.

All along, Luke has identified Jesus as the one who is bringing God's rule to earth. In [chapter 19](#), the people of Jerusalem finally recognize him as a king. As he rides into town on a colt, crowds line the road and sing his praises. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!" ([Luke 19:38](#)). As we know, God's kingdom encompasses all of life, and the issues Jesus chooses to discuss immediately before and after his entry to Jerusalem touch on taxes and investments.

Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1-10)-As he passes through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus comes upon a tax collector named Zacchaeus, who is sitting in a tree to get a better view of Jesus. "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today," Jesus says ([Luke 19:5](#)). The encounter with Jesus profoundly changes the way Zacchaeus works. Like all tax collectors in Roman client states, Zacchaeus made his money from overcharging people on their taxes. Although this was what we might now call "industry standard practice," it depended on deceit, intimidation, and corruption. Once Zacchaeus comes into the kingdom of God, he can no longer work this way. "Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much'" ([Luke 19:8](#)). Exactly how — or whether — he will continue to make a living, he doesn't say, for it is beside the point. As a citizen of God's kingdom, he cannot engage in business practices contrary to God's ways.

Render Unto God What is God's (Luke 20:20-26)-After Jesus is welcomed as king in Jerusalem, there is a passage in Luke that has often been used wrongly to separate the world of work from the kingdom of God: Jesus' saying about taxes. The teachers of the law and the chief priests try to "trap him by what he said, so as to hand him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor" ([Luke 20:20](#)). They ask him whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. In response, he asks them to show him a coin, and immediately they produce a denarius. He asks whose portrait is on it and they reply, "Caesar's." Jesus says, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" ([Luke 20:25, NIV](#)).

This reply has sometimes been interpreted as separating the material from the spiritual, the political from the religious, and the earthly and from the heavenly realms. In church (God's realm), we must be honest and generous, and look after the good of our brothers and sisters. At work (Caesar's realm), we must shade the truth, be driven by worry about money, and look out for ourselves above all. But this misunderstands the sharp irony in Jesus' reply. When he says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," he is not sanctioning a separation of the material from the spiritual. The premise that Caesar's world and God's world do not overlap makes no sense in light of what Jesus has been saying throughout the Gospel of Luke. What is God's? Everything! Jesus' coming into the world as king is God's claim that the entire world is God's. **Whatever may belong to Caesar also belongs to God. The world of taxes, government, production, distribution, and every other kind of work is the world that God's kingdom is breaking into. Christians are called to engage that world, not to drop out of it.** This passage is the opposite of a justification of separating the work world from the Christian world. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's (taxes) and to God what is God's (everything, taxes included).

For a more thorough discussion of this incident, see the section on "[Matthew 17:24-27 and 22:15-22](#)" in [Matthew and Work](#) at www.theologyofwork.org.

[Replying to the Sadducees, Jesus continued,] "But now, as to whether the dead will be raised — haven't you ever read about this in the writings of Moses, in the story of the burning bush? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said to Moses, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' So he is the God of the living, not the dead. You have made a serious error."

— Mark 12:26-27 NLT

Key Thought-Jesus uses skill, wit, and cunning to argue with the religious leaders using their own form of logic. "He is the God of the living," Jesus asserts. So if God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (a truth that these people professed every day), Jesus is saying then there has to be a resurrection. We know that God is God of all — both those who are physically alive and those who are physically dead but whose spirits are still alive. We believe that God will judge all people and their eternal destinies hang in that evaluation. We also believe that he will judge with grace, mercy, and justice. However, **God does not see time as we do**. Years are insignificant in their passing to him. A thousand years can be no more than one little day to God ([Psalm 90:4](#)). Yet because God is, we will continue to exist just as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob do. God is the God of the living. Death does not have control over us any longer.

What does Mark 16:18 mean – handing snakes and drinking poison?

So what are we to make of all this? More particularly, how are we to understand this passage? Several things can be stated. Perhaps most importantly, these verses are not even in the best New Testament manuscripts. We have in fact two questionable endings to Mark. One is a longer one (vv. 9-20) and one is quite short. Neither seems to be part of Mark's original gospel.

Most good Bible translations will mention this fact, whether or not they actually run with these final dubious verses. The technical details are not something to be fully entered into here, but a few quick thoughts.

The content of the longer ending seems to be a collection of bits and pieces from the resurrection narratives of Matthew and Luke.

Given that most scholars believe that Mark was written before these two other Synoptic gospels, then it does seem to be a later addition. And the various extant manuscripts have a number of differing arrangements of these suspect verses. Most good critical commentaries discuss the various bits of textual evidence and concur that the Gospel as we now have it ends at 16:8, and most therefore do not comment on the extra verses.

Thus most of modern textual scholarship is settled on this much: there is almost no scholarly debate about the textual reliability of either the shorter or longer endings. Genuine debate however does still exist over whether or not we should understand v. 8 to have been Mark's intended final verse.

So it looks like this passage may not be part of the inspired original text. Thus we could end our discussion here. But let's look at the passage anyway, and see how it lines up with the snake handlers' claims. Even if it were part of the canonical Gospel of Mark, it is clear right away that this is not a command.

What Jesus says about poisonous drinks – “if they drink any deadly thing” (KJV) – would seem to also apply to the issue of handling snakes. It is not something we are to go out of our way seeking, but if it does occur, there may be healing power available in Christ.

Indeed, there are hardly any other passages which even speak of such things, let alone command believers to make this a vital part of the Christian life. We certainly have no New Testament account of drinking poisons. We do have one narrative account of a snakebite occurring accidentally – and not being sought after.

Paul was bitten by a serpent in Malta while tending a fire, but he flicked it off and was not harmed (Acts 28:1-6). He certainly did not go out of his way looking for dangerous serpents. Indeed, he did not devote entire church services to messing around with a bunch of deadly snakes.

The only other similar sort of text is Luke 10:18-20, where Jesus speaks of having authority over serpents and scorpions. It is mentioned in the context of the downfall of Satan. But both these passages can be taken metaphorically, given how Satan is portrayed as a serpent in Scripture, going back to Genesis 3.

As James Edwards says about the Markan passage, there is the question of “whether the image of ‘picking up snakes in their hands’ cannot be understood metaphorically, that is, that in the age of salvation the curse of the serpent has been overcome.”

Darrell Bock comments on the Lukan text: the disciples “have the right to overcome hostile creation as represented by serpents and scorpions, as well as overcome the enemy’s power, an allusion to Satan. . . . The point is not so much that such beings can be handled safely, as much as that such forces and what they represent can be opposed and crushed. The disciples are secure in God’s hands. Nothing can really hurt them.

“The picture is drawn from OT figurative language, which describes God’s protection in terms of trampling over created beings. . . . This emphasis on power is not the one Jesus wants the disciples to have. He wants them to focus on their gracious and secure standing before God. There is joy greater than their authority: their names are written in heaven.”

Or as David Garland says about the passage in Luke: “Jesus is using these as metaphors for God’s divine protection (Deut 8:15) and the crushing of evil; ‘the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet’ (Rom 16:20). Jesus is not giving clearance to handle snakes (Mark 16:18) to prove one’s invulnerability. The point is that ‘a powerful and resourceful enemy,’ including the forces of nature, will not be able to stop the success of the Christian mission.”

Many scholars take this metaphorical understanding as a valid option. But even if this is not the best way to proceed, surely the emphasis is on having victory over Satan in general, and not in spending time holding snake handling meetings. This is not only presumption and foolishness, but it is losing track of biblical priorities.

Church services are meant to be about worship, ministry of the word, and the sacraments. They are not about foolish displays of human bravado and unnecessarily tempting the Lord in this way. How some Christians can get their priorities so bent out of shape is quite remarkable.

We don't need more gullible church leaders dying from snake bites to prove their faith. Simply dealing with a congregation with the problems and difficulties which that entails needs faith enough as is. That is where we prove our faith, in faithful service to the body of Christ, not in spectacular stunts and gimmicks.

To say all this of course is not to deny that God can and does heal. In any time of crisis, we pray and seek God's healing power. But we are not to major in minors, nor spend our time playing with snakes when much more pressing needs, challenges and callings exist.