Lesson 10—Collisions (Mark 9:33–10:45)

Following in the Way – A Study of Mark's Gospel

Warm-Up: Who Sits Where?

Well, good morning. If you got coffee this morning, that's okay. What I know about when it's cold is that it's not the coffee in the cup that makes you warmer on the inside. It's holding the cup that makes you warmer on the outside. When I go to get coffee every morning, I ask for a ceramic mug, because I don't get the coffee because it tastes good. I get the coffee because I want to keep my hands warm. So you can do that today. We have some catching up to do, and I'll tell you a little more about that in a moment. But to get started, I wanted to ask you some questions.

The Head of the Table

Thanksgiving's coming up, so the question is: who sits where at the Thanksgiving table? What's their place? Who sits at the head of the table? Usually the father of the family sits at the head of the table. Now, why is that? Tradition. You know what happens at our house? I sit at the end of the table. I don't know why I sit there, but I do. Well, that's kind of a commentary, isn't it, on life? Mine's closer to the kitchen, but that doesn't seem to bother anything. I'm oblivious to the distance. We're going to talk about that today a little bit.

Four Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

I also want you to answer these. They're just fill in the blank.

1. Getting to Be Somebody

If you want to be somebody, you've got to do what they do. If you want to be somebody important, you've got to act like nobody. That's a nice Church of Christ answer. But take a college classroom, a bunch of students about to graduate, and think about the advice they'd be given: make yourself known, differentiate yourself somehow. It's one of those interesting ideas.

2. Staying in Control

If you want to stay in control, you've got to... well, you have to be in control. But does that stop people from wanting to be in control? There are always people who say, "I want it to be different." My father-in-law, in the early days of computers, wanted to use a computer, and I knew how to do it. I said, "Here's what you've got to do." He said, "I don't like it that way. I want

it to do this way." I said, "Too bad." He didn't like my answers. He never quit asking, but he never liked my answers.

3. Staying Safe

If you want to be safe, you've got to know your surroundings. And put a napkin in your lap. I usually have to move mine a little higher than just my lap. I'm getting to the point where I need what my mother had. She had a bib that went around her neck with a trough at the bottom that collected all the stuff after she ate, because she had Parkinson's disease.

4. Getting to the Top

And the last one: if you want to get to the top, you've got to be a politician. You've got to climb the ladder, don't you? Tell people what they want to hear, make exorbitant promises that you probably won't keep, whatever it is.

Now, I want you to think about those questions, because that's the core of what we're going to talk about today.

Catching Up: The Hinge of Mark

First of all, I have to tell you that last week we skipped class, and I wish we hadn't. The whole point of the Book of Mark was in last week's lesson, and the instructions given to teachers were just keep moving, don't go back. Well, I'm not going to do that. So I'm going to try to incorporate two classes in one, which is a dangerous thing, because you'll never do justice to both of them. But if you don't get the lesson we had last week, you're going to miss the hinge around which the whole Gospel of Mark revolves.

From Galilee to Jerusalem

You may remember, a few months ago when we started Mark, I showed you a chart. It's an outline of the Gospel of Mark, and all this time we've been in one location. We've been in Galilee. And the question keeps coming up: Who is this guy? They are intrigued. They are amazed. What is this teaching? This man can cast out demons. Who is this man who can feed 5,000 people? The questions are always coming. This period we've been in takes three years. Now, the class may have felt like three years, but the action takes three years, and it's all in Galilee. And in all of this, the big question is: Who is this man who calls me to follow him? Opposition increases, because the Pharisees get irritated at him, and then they start making plots to kill him.

That's last week's lesson, and it sets up everything else, because from now on we're here, and it's going to take a single week. The rest of this class

covers about seven days. It'll feel like a month, but it's just seven days. There will be opposition and death. He's going to start talking about different things. This is basically in Judea, in Jerusalem. Today we start the journey. He's rejected and abandoned, and then the resurrection will come. But now the question is not "Who is this man?" It's "Where is the man who calls me to follow him going? What's going to happen? What's the direction of all of this?"

Two big stories from last week we did not get to, and I think they're vital. The first is a story about Jesus healing a blind man (Mark 8:22–26). The second is the right answer given to the right question, with the wrong idea. I'll explain that in a moment, but both are critical to understand what's going on from here on in the Gospel of Mark.

The Blind Man Who Needed Two Touches (Mark 8:22–26)

This is a different kind of healing than Jesus usually does. He gives the man sight, but he does it differently. Jesus spits in the guy's eyes. If you go to an ophthalmologist and they spit in your eyes, I suggest finding another doctor. But he spits in his eyes, puts his hands on him, and asks an interesting question: "Can you see?" The man says, "Not completely. It's unclear. Men look like trees walking around." So Jesus puts his hands on him a second time, and his eyes are opened, and he can see. And what it says is, he saw everything clearly. Big idea. The point of the Gospel of Mark is so that people can see who Jesus is clearly.

Someone asked why Jesus restored the man's sight in stages instead of all at once. I think it was to teach a lesson. He needs the blind man not to see, and then to see, so he can tell the disciples, "You don't see it. I've got to help you see it better." Isn't that the way we are? Things are not as clear as you think they are. They don't work out that way. Most people become Christians without a clear idea why they're becoming Christians, or what's going to happen in 5, 10, 15, 70 years. I was baptized when I was 13. If you'd asked me where I was going to be at 71, forget it. That wasn't what was in my head. And yet here I am.

Who Do You Say That I Am? (Mark 8:27–33)

We've been dealing with this question under the surface. Herod, for instance, a few weeks ago was asking, "Who do you think this guy Jesus is?" And they had all kinds of ideas: a prophet, John the Baptist come back from the dead, Elijah. Now the question comes to the disciples, after three years: Who do you say that I am? And Peter says, "You are the Messiah."

Right answer. Right? Well, we're going to find out the right answer doesn't mean you got it right. There are a lot of right answers in life. It's like the

little boy in Bible class. The teacher asks, "What's brown and furry and eats nuts?" And he says, "Well, I know it sounds like a squirrel, but it's got to be Jesus." We like to give right answers in Bible class, but you might not have in your head what's really happening.

Because the very next thing Jesus says is that he's going to suffer and die. That's going to be repeated many, many times. And Peter rebukes Jesus. Other places say Peter said something to the effect of, "We will never, ever, ever let that happen to you. We're not going down that road." So Jesus turns and rebukes Peter. "Get behind me, Satan! You don't have the concerns of God in your head. You have the mind of men." Men saw this differently than God saw it. That's the whole idea Mark is trying to get to. God has a bigger idea than what you think it is, and he's going to show it to you.

A Messiah Without a Cross

So what kind of Messiah is Jesus? Here's the problem: Peter wanted a Messiah without a cross. In Judaism there's this concept of the kingdom that is going to come and restore everything: the borders to the extent of Solomon, the glory of David. There would be the Messiah, the Anointed One, and he would ride in through Palestine and drive the Romans out and set God's order back up again. That was the expectation. And one thing you know for sure is that you usually only want to get what you expect to get. You don't want to be surprised. But Jesus says, "I can only be the Messiah if there is a cross." That's a heavy idea. I'm not going to be the Messiah you want. I'm going to be the Messiah God wants, and God's idea is not your idea. So Jesus is going to help them, in this lesson, see more clearly.

We See the Jesus We Want

The problem is that we see the Jesus we want to see. We always want to make Jesus into somebody else that we like. I have a youth minister friend who would go in and ask teen groups, "If Jesus came to your high school, where would he sit? At which table would he sit?" In high school, the band kids sit together, the jocks sit together, the cheerleaders sit together, the kids who don't fit into anything sit together, and the kids who don't fit in with the misfits go somewhere else. So where is Jesus going to sit? And they say, "He's going to sit with us." Meaning we have made him into our image. Then we become Christians who conform to the vision we created.

If Jesus is this loving person who just accepts anything and everything, we make him very passive, very compliant. Pat us on the head, go on and do what you want to, you'll be okay in the end. We want him to conform to that vision. It's been happening since the beginning of time. Or think about it this way: if you want Jesus to take over the world, you become a crusader.

You don't want him dying on a cross. You want to take over the world for Christ. You don't want to win the world. You want to take it over. We see that happening all the time. But we'll never be followers of Christ until we get the idea of the real Messiah we're trying to follow.

Now, that's last week. I said in my notes it would take three minutes. Boy, was I nuts!

The Road to Jerusalem

A Pattern That Keeps Repeating

There's a turn toward Jerusalem and the cross. As we pointed out, there's a shift from three years to a single week, where Jesus is no longer teaching in Galilee. Now he's headed to the cross. And in this section you get a pattern, repeated several times. "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." He says that in Mark chapter 8, verse 31. You come a little farther, another chapter down, and he says it again. You go further, chapter 10, and he says it again. And each time it's followed by a failure of the disciples.

Why do you think Jesus keeps repeating himself? They don't get it the first time. It seems simple, doesn't it? They were prepared for sabers and cannons and howitzers. (Those weren't invented yet. But if Jesus could heal and raise the dead, he could make a howitzer. At least that would be their reasoning.)

Why We Tell the Same Story

I heard a guy once who makes a lot of sense. He said you go into assisted living centers and memory care, and older people tell you the same thing over and over and over again, the same story. I know, because I feel myself doing this all the time now. Have you ever heard that? Do you know anybody like that? Maybe you're like that. I don't know. You know why people do that? He said, "Because nobody ever listens to the story and gets it. If you ever get the point of the story, they'll quit telling you the story." So listen carefully. I like that. It explains a lot for me.

The Whiskey and the Egg

People don't always get the lesson you're teaching. I was teaching a group of junior high kids early in my ministry. I'd read an illustration from Dwight Moody, and I thought, that's cool. You try anything when you're young. It was about the dangers of alcohol. Now, it's hard to explain to a 13- or 14-

year-old kid, "Don't drink." They may not be drinking, but they're about to be, probably. So you have to explain it. And the illustration needs whiskey.

I've got to tell you, if you're a preacher in town and you go to a liquor store, it's a little awkward. The guy selling the stuff said, "How much?" I said, "As little as you can give me." He said, "What kind?" I said, "I don't care. I'm not going to drink it." He looked at me like, what kind of nut are you? I was expecting to see the cops come next. I said, "Look, it's for an illustration." He didn't care one way or another. So he sold me this cheap whiskey. I don't know if it was good or not. I'm not going to taste it. But it smelled horrible, which was exactly what I needed. Rotgut.

Here's the illustration. You take a glass, crack open an egg, put the egg in the glass, and pour about this much whiskey over it, which is about the same amount of absolute alcohol as in a beer, by the way. You let it sit there while you talk. After about ten minutes, you take a fork and hit it, and it's like rubber. Now I can just see you going out and buying whiskey and eggs this week. There you go, a great breakfast, the breakfast of champions. But it really did that. And I said, "Your body's made of the stuff that's in that egg, and this is what happens when we put alcohol in it. So what lesson does that teach you?" One kid raised his hand. I said, "What did you learn?" He said, "I'm never going to eat eggs again."

People don't always get the lesson you're teaching. It's just that way, and Jesus has to keep repeating this. So there are collisions taking place, two ideas colliding on the road to Jerusalem, on the way to the cross. The question that guides the rest of this lesson is: What do people want Christian discipleship to look like?

Collision One: Rank (Mark 9:33–37)

Who's the Mega Disciple?

They're quarreling on the road. Jesus has just said again, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. I'm going to suffer and die." And Mark says they did not understand him. They did not see clearly, and they were afraid to ask him. So Jesus lets them sit there.

When they settle in the house at Capernaum on the first night of the journey, Jesus says, "What were you arguing about on the road?" Can you imagine how uncomfortable that question would have been? I can just see it: twelve guys all staring at their shoelaces. They kept quiet, because they had been arguing about who was the greatest. The word in Greek is megas. Who's the mega disciple here? Who's got it more together than everybody else?

We don't do that today, do we? I knew a guy once, really irritating. I wanted to throttle him most of the time. He was a preacher, and he'd go around saying stuff like, "Well, those of us who take our spiritual reality seriously..." and I'm going, what a nitwit. You're saying everybody else is bad except you. I'm the mega disciple.

The Last Will Be First

So Jesus sits down, and instead of saying, "Stop that," he uses an aphorism we're going to see over and over again: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." There are two concepts in here: the death of Jesus and the life of the disciple. And instead of telling them exactly what the problem was, he brings them a little child, puts him in his arms, and says, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me."

The Place of a Child

That sounds cryptic unless you understand the role of children. The role of children in the first-century world is not the role of children today. Today, children tend to become the centerpiece of the home. Bad idea. When everything revolves around the life of the kid, guess what's going to happen? He'll rule the roost and be a hellion one day. If you want to know what's wrong with society, I'm full of opinions, and that's one of them.

A child that day had no status. He was just there. You had a kid and raised him the best you could, and he grew up and became a productive adult, you hoped. But he wasn't the center of everything. He had this lowly status. He didn't produce anything. My grandfather was one of eleven children, for one reason. They farmed cotton in Delta County, and that's called labor. You have lots of kids, not because you want a house full of kids, but because you need a farm to run. That really shocks you, but that was reality.

So Jesus is saying, "These are the lowest in society. If you really want to welcome me, you'll welcome one of them." That must have perplexed the disciples a lot, because they were looking for a position somewhere, and Jesus shows them someone who has none. That's the only position that matters in the kingdom: last place. An upside-down world.

Collision Two: Territory (Mark 9:38–41)

John Wants Control

John figures prominently in some of these. John's an interesting fellow. We think of the John of First, Second and Third John, or Revelation, who is much more pastoral and calm. "Little children, love one another." Oh, isn't

that sweet? That's not who John is in the Gospels. It's who John became under the tutelage of Jesus and through time. Here he's much more competitive, much more mercurial. He comes to Jesus and says, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

Hear that? This is our bailiwick. And there's a story just preceding this, which we didn't get to last week, that I've got to bring in. A man brings his son, who is possessed by a demon, to the disciples, and they can't cast it out. Can you imagine the irony of this little situation? This other man is casting out demons, and the disciples couldn't. It makes them look bad. "He's not one of us. This is our territory, not his. Tell him to stop it."

Let Them Do It

Jesus says, "Don't stop him. No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me. If they're doing the right thing for the right reason, in my name, let them do it, because the message is being proclaimed in some way. Instead of worrying about your territory, find out what you really need to be doing with life.

So John wants control. We want to be in control. We don't want this fellow over here getting into our territory. This is our church. We control this. We want exclusivity. Nobody else can do this. You haven't seen that in the church, have you? You walk up and start doing something, and you're not supposed to do that. That's what somebody else does. "Well, they haven't done it in five years." "But they're in charge." My question is: if they're in charge, why don't they do something? "Well, you at least need to get their permission." Really? To do something good, you've got to get their permission? But see, that's what the disciples were saying. So Jesus gives them a task: give something to someone who cannot repay you, and quit worrying about your position. Try worrying about other people. It's a good idea.

Collision Three: Security (Mark 10:17–31)

The third collision is security, and if I'm moving quickly, it's because I'm down to 15 minutes. That's what happens when you treat two lessons in one.

The Man Who Asked the Right Question

We know this story well. A young man, at least we call him a young man. Mark doesn't call him that. Another Gospel calls him young, and another calls him a ruler, so we say "rich young ruler," although that appellation

doesn't appear anywhere in Scripture. He comes to Jesus, falls on his knees, and says, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Notice again, the right question is being asked. Jesus first says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." I want to reframe your idea. "But you know the commandments," and he quotes: "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother."

What Jesus Left Out

Something's left out of that list. What's missing? No idols? That's the first one, and it's above there too. You know what the last of the Ten Commandments is? "You shall not covet." Why do you think Jesus didn't put that there? That's his problem. Jesus is going to make that point: "You've been keeping these. Here's the one you didn't keep. Let's talk about that one."

I always like what Benjamin Franklin did. He had this plan for personal development with a list of virtues, and he would concentrate on one a month to see how he could do. He finally had a Quaker friend come to him and say, "Mr. Franklin, you think you're doing pretty well? You need a thirteenth one there. The thirteenth one is humility." Franklin said he never could get it perfect, because he never could be humble enough. Well, that's what this man has a problem with. It's called being covetous. He wants more.

Jesus Looked at Him and Loved Him

Mark says Jesus looked at him and loved him. He did care for him. He knows he can make this guy what God wants him to be if he'll just do this. There's no anger here, no ax to grind. He really does want him to succeed. So he says, "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." The man's face fell, because he was rich.

Now I want to point out something quickly. This is a specific command given to one individual, not a general command given to everybody. Jesus doesn't say, "If you're going to be my disciple, you have to sell everything you have and live as a homeless person, pushing a basket you found in the parking lot at H-E-B, dumpster diving for your next meal." That's not what this says. It says this man had this problem. If that's your problem, here it is.

Then Jesus says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed. This echoes what Agur said in Proverbs 30. Agur was a wise man who wrote some of the proverbs at the end of the

book. Proverbs are not always from Solomon. There are three or four other people in there, and Agur is one. His prayer: "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." Agur had it kind of right: there's the problem of wealth, and there's the problem of poverty.

The Camel and the Needle

Jesus says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. I've heard preachers all my life try to press literalness into everything in Scripture, and Jesus uses hyperbole. Hyperbole means stretching something so far out of shape that you figure out there's something real behind it. I've heard preachers say, "No, no, no, we can't call it a real needle. There was this gate in Jerusalem's wall so low you had to stoop down and crawl underneath it." Hogwash. I've never seen it. It's not real.

I grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and there's a place there tourists go: America's oldest house. It's been there since before the Pilgrims. I didn't realize how small it was when I was living there, because I was this tall. We went back a few years ago, and my wife, who's this tall (and depending on the day, maybe even shorter), stood in the doorway, and it fit her just fine. I told her I'd found the house for us. She said, "I'm not living here." My granddaughter takes great pride in being taller than her. She's ten. She keeps asking, "Are you ever going to grow?" No. But this is about how impossible things are if you have a human mindset. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, that itty-bitty hole that you and I can't see when we're trying to put a button on a shirt. Imagine a camel trying to get through that. That's what it's like trying to be rich and get into the kingdom of God.

The disciples were perplexed. "Who then can be saved?" Jesus said it may be impossible with man, but it's not impossible with God. Someone has said there are three stages of Christian maturity. The first is conversion of the heart. The second is conversion of the mind. The third is conversion of the purse. It's always the last one, and that's what Jesus was talking about here.

Greater Security

Peter says, "We've left everything," and Jesus says, "Good. The things you leave behind will give you greater glory in the kingdom of God." The rich man was seeking security by keeping what he had. You want to keep what you have, don't you? If you give it all away and have nothing, what do you do when you get hungry? Well, you trust God. Really. It's easier to trust God

with a full pantry. So Jesus gives security by saying, "If you'll give it up, I'll give you greater security, because many who are first will be last, and the last first." Same refrain.

Collision Four: Seats of Power (Mark 10:32–45)

The Fourth Time

They were on their way up to Jerusalem. Jesus was leading the way, the disciples were astonished, and those who followed were afraid. So he took the Twelve aside and said, "Guess what? I'm going to die." Still they hadn't gotten the message, and he's still telling them, because they still have problems. They want a seat at the table.

James and John Ask a Favor

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, are the particular bad guys in this little element. (Other Gospels tell it a little differently.) They come to Jesus and say, "We want something." "Well, what do you want?" It's like my grandson coming up and saying, "Can you do something for me?" I say, "What is it? How much is it going to cost me?" That's my first question, because I know it's always going to cost.

They say, "Let one of us sit at your right hand and one at your left in your glory." Those are two positions of power. In the American system, the president sits in the middle of the cabinet table. I don't know if you've ever noticed. On one side is the Secretary of State and on the other the Secretary of Defense. Why? The two most important parts of the government. How do you keep America safe? That's the way you do it. That's what they were looking for.

The Cup and the Baptism

Jesus doesn't like the request. "You don't even know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" You're not seeing clearly. "Oh, yeah, we can." And he says, "You will." And it would happen. James would be the first disciple to die. John would be the last, as an old man exiled on Patmos. They would taste that, and they would find out positions of power are not what they think.

Now the ten heard about it, and they were angrily indignant, because James and John had beaten them to the punch. This was the question everybody wanted to know. So Jesus says, "That's not the way it's going to be with you. Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." Same refrain.

The Son of Man Came to Serve

If you want to know what the kingdom of God is like, look at what the Son of Man does. "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." If you want those positions, there you go. Are you ready to do that? That's an eye-opener. If you're expecting power in a military kingdom rather than servanthood in a spiritual kingdom, you'll be disappointed. James and John wanted glory. But glory doesn't come from going up the ladder. It comes from coming down the ladder and being the servant.

The Idols We Make With Our Minds

Jesus turns the whole world upside down. It's not as it seems. It's not about who's important. It's about who's serving the most, and the servant is the important one. The world's upside down, always has been.

There are idols we create with our minds, not with our hands. They're ideas. First, the desire to be important. We want the name on the door. We want the title. We want to be recognized. Second, the need to control my life. I don't want somebody else taking control of it. I want to know what I've got to do today for myself. Third, the thirst to be secure and protected. I don't like the feeling when the money gets too tight in the bank account. I need to have more. And fourth, the goal of being on top. I want to be bigger and better than everybody else.

What Jesus Offers Instead

If you want to be important to God, serve other people. If you want a controlled life, let Christ guide you, because you don't even know which way to go. He does. If you want security, he'll give you something death can't take away. No one else can tell you that. You can't make enough money to keep from going to the cemetery. You just can't. And if you want glory, you have to give what Jesus gave, and you get the kind of glory he got. You take up your cross and serve.

Next week we continue the journey to Jerusalem. And I am done right on time. Two lessons. How about that? Thank you very much.

Notes on This Transcript

Corrections and Cleanup

- Removed class members' comments, including the answers to the Thanksgiving and fill-in-the-blank questions. Kept your reactions to them, restated so they stand alone. The question about why the blind man was healed in stages is now introduced as "Someone asked..."
- Corrected "Augur" to "Agur" (Proverbs 30:8–9), "H E B" to "H-E-B," and the garbled "the more the the oldest house" to "America's oldest house." Left out the garbled line about the weather turning cold, and the unclear fragments after the Thanksgiving questions.
- Cleaned false starts, repeated words and run-on fragments into readable paragraphs. Your phrasing and stories were left in place.
- Several Scripture quotes are given in paraphrase or merged (Mark 8:31; 9:35, 37; 9:39; 10:18–21, 24–27; 10:38; 10:45). If you want exact wording, check them against your translation.

Facts Worth a Quick Check

- Three years in Galilee: the "three years" for the Galilean ministry is stated several times. Mark gives no length. This is a common scholarly estimate drawn from the Gospel of John.
- Passion predictions: you cite 8:31, 9:31 and chapter 10 (10:33–34), and at 10:32 you say "fourth time." Mark's three formal predictions are 8:31, 9:31 and 10:33–34, so "fourth" may need a second look.
- The six commandments in 10:19: Mark's list is murder, adultery, steal, false witness, "do not defraud," honor father and mother. "Do not defraud" is not one of the Ten, so "the last six of the Ten Commandments" is approximate.
- Rich young ruler: "young" is from Matthew 19:20, 22 and "ruler" from Luke 18:18. Mark says only that the man had great wealth.
- Benjamin Franklin's virtues: Franklin's Autobiography lists thirteen virtues, and humility was added as the thirteenth after a Quaker friend told him he was proud. You said "12 virtues" and then a thirteenth, which fits.
- Santa Fe's "oldest house": the transcript has you saying it predates the Pilgrims (and giving a 15th–16th century date). I kept "before the Pilgrims" and dropped the garbled dates. The Oldest House is usually dated to the early 1600s at the earliest, so you may want to soften this.
- Cabinet table seating: in the transcript, the Secretary of State is on the left and Defense on the right. I left out left/right in the text, since the usual arrangement is State on the president's right and Defense on his left. Worth a quick check.

- Delta County, Texas, is assumed for your grandfather's cotton farm.