

**On the move  
with Jesus  
in  
MARK  
(chapters 13-16)**

**A unique, verse-by-verse,  
life-application commentary  
by Terran Williams**

## You may own a Bible, but does your Bible own you?

- It's not enough to own a Bible. Our Bible should own us. After all, it's the main way God speaks to us.
- Did you know that God put every verse in the Bible so that our minds could be totally renewed, so that our lives could be deeply changed, and so that our calling could be fulfilled? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 if you're not persuaded.) That's why reading the whole Bible again and again is one of the most important things we can do.
- Sometimes, however, the Bible is hard to understand. That's why commentaries are so useful. Most commentaries help you understand the *technical* meaning of each verse. These commentaries do a little of that too, but more than that, they focus on the meaning of each verse *for our lives now*.

## What's unique about this commentary?

- Most importantly, it helps you to find *the meaning for your life now* in every single verse of the Gospel of Mark.
- It is written with 21<sup>st</sup> century everyday people in mind.
- It builds on the scholarship of brilliant theologians and commentaries, but doesn't focus on the exhausting technicalities that fill most commentaries.
- It comes with a Group Guide so that you can explore Mark along with others.

## A suggested approach to going through Mark

- Make time every day. Allocate as much time as you need to really hear from God for your life. Read until you are full – don't just *snack* on the Bible, rather enjoy a *solid meal*.
- Take your time as you go through Mark, starting at chapter one. It doesn't matter if you do the whole Bible in a year, or in five years, just as long as you're moving *steadily* through it.
- Trust God to speak to you every time you read the Bible. Expect to receive just what you need for each day. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your primary teacher as you read.
- Keep two questions in your mind as you read: 1) What do these verses mean? 2) What do they mean for my life now? ***If you can't find solid answers to either of these two important questions then refer to this commentary.***
- Carry into your day what you sense God saying to you. Perhaps write down the main things you sense God telling you each day. Pray to God about what he has just said to you. Make any needed adjustments in your heart and life as God reveals more and more of his Word, will and ways to you.

## Main sources used

Special thanks to (and warm commendations of) ...

- The *Today's New International Version Bible (the updated version of the NIV)*
- Michael Eaton's *Preaching through the Bible: Mark*
- Tom Wright's *Mark for Everyone*
- Donald Guthrie's *New Bible Commentary: Third Edition*
- David Guzik's online commentary ([www.enduringword.com](http://www.enduringword.com))
- John Stott's *The Incomparable Christ*

## About the Gospel of Mark

God has given us four windows into the earthly life of Jesus. They are the Gospels. Each author captures a different aspect of Jesus. Mark's Gospel is the shortest, and was also written first. It appears that the Gospels of Luke and Matthew used Mark as a major source in the writing of their own Gospels.

“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). That means that though Mark describes the life of Jesus 2000 years ago, his character and wisdom and power are still available to us. His earthly disciples knew him physically, but we get to know Jesus with the help of the Spirit. Though we don't know everything we'd like to know about Jesus' life on earth, God made sure that we'd have enough information about him so that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we too can say that we “know” Jesus.

The Gospel is written by Mark. Mark was the son of a widow named Mary whose home was used by the earliest Christians (see Acts 12:12). Mark was friends with the apostle Peter, from whom he no doubt drew most of his information. He wrote it fairly soon after the events described, probably in the AD50s.

One thing that sticks out in the Gospel of Mark is its pace. Again and again, the word “immediately” is used (40 times in fact!). We see Jesus packing a whole bunch of travel, ministry and teaching into short periods of time. Jesus is a man on the move. That's why this commentary is titled, *On the move with Jesus in Mark*.

## Outline of the Gospel of Mark

*1:1-20 - The beginning of Jesus' ministry*

*1:21-3:6 - Jesus' authority begins to arouse opposition*

*3:7-6:13 - Jesus withdraws to teach his disciples*

*6:14-8:26 - A further outreach with even greater rejection*

*8:27-10:52 - Jesus teaches his disciples while travelling to Jerusalem*

*11:1-15:47 - Entry into Jerusalem and the events that lead to his death*

*16:1-8 - Jesus rises from the dead*

*16:9-20 - A later addition to the Gospel*

## Experiencing Jesus in blue, green, red and orange

There are four main ways that God seems to speak to us through the Gospels.

1) In some parts of Mark, God highlights to us the wonderful and awesome uniqueness of Christ as Lord and Saviour. When we read these sections, we realize that we certainly can't imitate him in these regards. All we can do is bow down in humility, trust and surrender. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded blue.

2) In other parts of this Gospel, God reveals aspects of Jesus' character and ministry that we can imitate. We can literally be inspired to follow his example. And amazingly, we have the Spirit of Christ in us making it possible to actually do just that. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded green.

3) In yet other parts of this book, God reveals to us pure wisdom through the recorded teachings of Jesus to his disciples, the crowds, and to us. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded red.

4) Lastly, the Gospels at times allow us to see Christ through the eyes of people, whether friends or foes. By looking at how these people responded to Christ, we can learn both how and how not to respond to Jesus ourselves. Insights based on these parts are colour-coded orange.

**Colour-code summary:** the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

*Blue* = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

*Green* = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

*Red* = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

*Orange* = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

# Mark Chapter Thirteen

**Colour-code summary:** the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

*Blue* = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

*Green* = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

*Red* = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

*Orange* = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

## THE END OF THE TEMPLE APPROACHES (13:1-37)

*The destruction of the temple and signs of the end times*

1 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

- **Jesus' words are awesomely accurate.**
  - The temple was the centre of Jewish aspiration. It was originally built by Ezra (see Ezra 5:15), but King Herod had started rebuilding it in 19 BC. By the time of Jesus it was only half rebuilt. It would only be completed in AD 63. Made of marble, gold and limestone amongst other precious things, it was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was so great that to speak against it was considered blasphemy (see Acts 6:13).
  - But Jesus wasn't impressed with the building, because he was so deeply concerned about the state of the hearts of the people who used the building. When he cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple, these were symbolic acts of judgment on the pretentiousness of the temple (see 11:11-18).
  - Amazingly, Jesus made a dramatic prophecy here: "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down" (v2). So, was the prophecy fulfilled?
  - Yes! D Guzik writes, "Some 40 years after Jesus said this, there was a widespread Jewish revolution against the Romans in Palestine, and the rebels enjoyed many early successes. But ultimately, Rome crushed the Jews. Jerusalem was levelled, including the temple – just as Jesus said. It is said that at the fall of Jerusalem, the last surviving Jews of the city fled to the temple, because it was the strongest, most secure building in the city. Roman soldiers surrounded it, and one drunken soldier started a fire that soon engulfed the whole building. Ornate gold detail work in the roof melted down in the cracks between the stone walls of the temple, and to retrieve the gold, the Roman commander ordered that the temple be dismantled stone by

stone. The destruction was so complete that today, they have true difficulty learning exactly where the temple was.”

- Josephus, the famous historian of the first century wrote, “Now, as soon as the army had no more people to kill or plunder ... Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple ... this was the end which Jerusalem came to.” (*Wars of the Jews*, 7.1.1) Interestingly, Josephus tells us that the Romans never intended to destroy the temple, but were driven to destroy it by the fierceness of Jewish opposition and by accident. (*Wars of the Jews*, 6.4).
- Jesus’ prophecy was fulfilled exactly. The point is that when Jesus makes a promise he keeps it. We best remember his words, “One greater than the temple is here” (Matthew 12:6). As awesome as the temple was, Jesus is far more awesome. The temple came to an end, but Christ lives on. If Jesus was right about this point, which can be proven from history, then we can know for sure that he is right about all those other points that cannot be proven (or disproven for that matter). We can take him at his word.

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

- **Don’t assume that every terrible tragedy in the world is a sign that God is doing or is even about to do something climactic in world history.**
  - Jesus and the disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives, on the other side of the Kidron valley to the temple. The disciples wanted to know when Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed (as he had just prophesied (v1,2)). They wanted to know the warning signs (v3,4). So Jesus answered them.
  - Notice that these verses do not speak about the end of the world (as many wrongly interpret it to mean) but the end of the temple.
  - Jesus answers the question by telling them what will happen between that time (AD 33) and the destruction of the temple, which we now know happened in AD 70. Here is what Jesus told them to expect in that period of time:
    - 1) Many people would seek to deceive the disciples by claiming to be sent by Christ, or to even be the Messiah themselves (v5,6).
    - 2) There would be wars all over the place, wars that result from ethnic group rising against ethnic group, and king rising up against

king (v7,8). There would also be earthquakes and famines (Acts 11:28 speaks of one that swept Judea in that time). The point Jesus was making with all these descriptions is that the Jerusalem Christians shouldn't assume that all the bad things happening in the world and nature meant that the time had necessarily come for the temple to be destroyed. This is Jesus' way of saying, "Stay calm despite the crazy situations."

- 3) The whole process would be like a birth (v8). There would be birth pangs, which speaks of waves of intense suffering, followed by a new season of expansion and growth for the church, as the church (after AD 70) would move its centre from Jerusalem and would become increasingly decentralized in its global mission.
- What does this mean for us now? It is Jesus' way of saying, "Every wave of suffering in the world is *not* a sign that God is doing something climactic in human history. Stay calm. Keep your head on. Stay focused on the mission." This counsel from Christ is what helped the Jerusalem Christians for the next 37 years, as they waited for the true climactic moment when God's judgment came on the temple in AD 70.

9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but those who stand firm to the end will be saved.

- **Great gospel advance, great persecution and great supernatural help go together as the church seeks to fulfil its mission.**
  - Jesus was still answering the question about what would happen between that day in AD 33 and the destruction of the temple, which happened in AD 70:
  - 4) The apostles would experience great suffering and opportunities to witness to councils, synagogues, governors and kings (v9). We see this coming to pass in the book of Acts.
  - 5) The gospel would be preached in nations all over the world (v10). We see Paul and others doing just that (see Romans 15:18-20).
  - 6) The apostles would be given supernatural help in what to say when being brought to trial (v11). We see an example of this coming to pass in Acts 4:1-22.
  - 7) Christians would experience the pain of profound betrayal by non-believing family members (Mark 13v12). In fact there will be all-rounded hatred from everyone. This came to pass as emperor

Nero declared open persecution on Christians describing them as “notoriously depraved” and holding onto “a deadly superstition”.

- 8) But Jesus makes the amazing promise that no Christians in Jerusalem would get destroyed along with the temple (v13). In Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* we read that no Christians perished in Jerusalem in AD 70, because they all fled (just as Jesus warned them to in verse 14) to Pella in Perea.
- What does this mean for us? It tells us that great gospel advance is closely associated with great persecution. This is true in church history, so much so that a famous slogan of the church has been, “The blood of the martyred Christian is seed. For every drop of blood planted, a new Christian will spring up in its place.” Although most Christians in the world are free from violent persecution, we must not forget that every day over 500 Christians are martyred and that since Jesus’ time on the earth over 44 million Christians have been martyred! But for every martyr, there is also the wonderful story of many Christians who were supernaturally preserved from dying (as in verse 13). And amazing witnessing opportunities emerge (as in verse 11). This suggests that supernatural help is also part of the great gospel advance / great persecution equation.

14 “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ [*Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11*] standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now – and never to be equalled again.

20 “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. 21 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

- **Trust God’s sovereignty and prophetic wisdom when facing unusually tumultuous times in your life.**

- Jesus was still answering the question, “What will be the sign that the temple is about to be destroyed?” In verses 5-13 he told them what would happen in the years leading up to the destruction of the temple. Then in verses 14-23 he described the final “sign”; the sign that the time for the destruction of the temple had come. What is this final sign?

- Jesus says it will be “the abomination that leads to desolation” (v14). Eaton writes, “It is a phrase taken from Daniel 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11. It was a prediction of a time when pagans would enter a very sacred spot in Jerusalem. Jesus adds ‘Let the reader understand’; he is urging that the disciples should read the Old Testament and understand it. When they see a desecration that fulfils his words they must know that Jerusalem is about to fall, and they must take action to escape.”  
We’re told by Josephus in *Wars of the Jews* that the Romans “brought their idols to the temple and there they offered sacrifice to them”. So this did come to pass literally. However, Luke’s retelling of Jesus’ words emphasizes that the main sign would not be idols in the temple, as much as it would be the very approach of a vast Roman army toward Jerusalem (see Luke 21:20). So the “abomination that leads to desolation” could refer metaphorically to the Romans coming en masse to Jerusalem, with the intent of entering the out-of-bounds, sacred places within the temple. The fascinating thing about this time is that the war of Rome against Jerusalem, and all the pain that came with it, was intersecting directly with the purposes of God. As out-of-control as the situation may have seemed, we see that it is a fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy as well as of Jesus’.
- In verses 15-18 Jesus counselled them to flee without delay, and to start asking for God’s alleviation of suffering before the event even happened.
- In verse 19 Jesus made it clear that the suffering that would come to Jerusalem would be extreme. According to Josephus’ *Wars of the Jews*, thousands of Jews were crucified, but while under siege more Jews killed each other than even the Romans killed.
- In verse 20 Jesus said that God had already decided to “cut short” the devastation of Jerusalem. His reason: he didn’t want the “elect” (i.e. his chosen disciples or his church) to suffer too much.
- In verses 21 and 22 he warned that there would be many false messiahs and prophets as the devastation drew near, and that they would do great things to convince people to listen to them. Again, Josephus in *Wars of the Jews* tells us of many would-be messiahs and prophets who offered rescue from Rome, sought to gain a following, and promised signs and wonders. But they all came to nothing. In verses 22 and 23 he warned the “elect” (i.e. his chosen disciples and church) not to get their hopes up and follow any such people.
- How does this apply to our lives? It doesn’t apply directly to us at all – since this war of Rome against Jerusalem was a one-of-a-kind moment in history. This wasn’t just another war, but a key prophetic moment in history where God, at one time, was:
  - 1) delivering the threatened judgment to Jerusalem (Luke 21:22);
  - 2) vindicating Jesus by causing his prophecy to come to pass; and
  - 3) launching the church into a new season of decentralized international impact without the constraint of having a Jewish centre in Jerusalem. If there is any application to our lives, it’s

this: God is sovereign. You can trust him. He is also loving and will give you the prophetic perspective you need to make sense of some unusually tumultuous moments in your life, and will give you the specific wisdom you need to deal with it. That is, after all, precisely what he was doing for the disciples here.

24 “But in those days, following that distress,  
‘the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
25 the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ [Isaiah 13:10; 34:4]

26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

28 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

- **Jesus is the exalted Son of Man worthy of our devotion, and his words are worthy of our trust.**
  - Verses 24-27 are amongst the most misunderstood of Bible verses. People immediately assume that it speaks of the end of the world, and the second coming of Jesus. But there are two problems with this view: 1) the context of the whole passage is the imminent fall of the temple; and 2) in verse 30, Jesus said that “all these things”, referring to verses 2-29, will happen within his generation (and we know that Jesus has not come back 2000 years later). However, although these verses do not refer directly to the second coming of Jesus, they certainly do indirectly foreshadow it. Lets’ look at it verse by verse:
  - In verses 24 and 25, he quoted Isaiah 13:10 and Isaiah 34:4 which vividly and prophetically describes the fall of Israel’s enemies. But then Jesus used that same vivid imagery to describe the fall of Jerusalem herself. Many people wrongly think that verses 24 and 25 refer to the end of the world. They don’t. Rather, this is symbolic language referring to the demise of the temple, which is an event so radical that it deserved to be spoken of in cosmic terms, with mention of a darkening sun and falling stars.
  - In verse 26, Jesus was quoting Daniel 7:13-14, which speaks of “someone like the son of man” coming to God and starting to rule the world with power and glory, and setting up an eternal kingdom. But notice that Daniel 7:13 speaks of the Son of Man **coming to** God not coming from God Jesus was not speaking of his

return but his exaltation. And he was saying that through the events of the fall of Jerusalem, people would see and recognize that he really is the exalted Son of Man. And, of course, this is what happened. When Jerusalem and the temple fell in AD 70, the church could point out the prophecy of Jesus in this passage, and this helped them recognize that he really was the Son of Man.

- Of verse 27, Eaton says: “This may refer to earthly ‘messengers’ preaching the gospel. The word ‘angels’ can also be translated ‘messengers’. However it may also refer literally to angels – but it must be remembered that the blowing of trumpets (Matthew 24:31 tells us that the angels gather people with “a loud trumpet call”) in the Old Testament was God’s way of announcing a new move in the progress of God’s people (see Numbers 10:2 and Isaiah 27:13 for example).”
- In verse 28, Jesus referred to a fig tree (not the one he cursed in 11:14). He mentioned how summer was coming for this fig tree. Probably Jesus was here referring to the fact that a “summer-time” was soon to come for his disciples, which is what happened in the early stages of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 2:47). But he was also saying that eventually the Romans, in their readiness to destroy the temple, would be right at the city door (v29). On this point, some translations wrongly imply that it is the Son of Man standing at the door, but this is not what the original language implies.
- Verse 30: Jesus made it clear that what he spoke of (in verses 2-29) would happen within the generation – and less than 40 years later, it came to pass.
- Verse 31: Jesus was using “heaven and earth passing away” as a figure of speech, not literally. He was saying, “Everything is temporary and will not stand forever”, but his words, this prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem, would prevail.
- The main lesson for us from these verses is: Jesus’ words prevail, and Jesus, the exalted Son of Man, is worthy of our devotion.

*The day and hour unknown*

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with an assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

35 “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

- Jesus is coming, so be faithful and be watchful!

- As I already said, verses 24-31 don't refer directly to the second coming of Jesus – but certainly do indirectly foreshadow it. In light of this, there are three possible ways of interpreting verses 32-37. Here Jesus could be referring to:
  - 1) The fall of Jerusalem;
  - 2) The second coming of Christ (after all, the phrase “but about that day” seems to suggest a change of subject); and
  - 3) Christ coming to us suddenly in other ways.
 Let me apply it to all three meanings:
- 1) *The fall of Jerusalem*: Although they knew that it would happen within a generation (v30), they didn't know the exact time (v32). Jesus told them to faithfully do the tasks he was giving them (v34) but also to be highly alert to the time when God would stand at the door of the city ready to judge the city (v34-37).
- 2) *The return of Christ*: While on earth, Jesus didn't know the exact day of his return (v32). And since he has not told us the day, neither do we know (v33). Christ has assigned to churches and Christians specific responsibilities in his kingdom, and when he returns he wants us to be faithfully doing them (v34). There may be a great delay (v35).
- 3) *Christ coming suddenly to our lives*: Eaton writes, “Jesus comes in more than one way. If it is not his final coming we shall experience, then he will come in some other form. Sometimes Jesus can do something which, although it is not the end of the world, it's the end of *our* world (by this I mean he may come to take us to himself). Sometimes he decides to ‘take a look’ at what is happening in our lives (and churches as he did in Revelations 2-3), and reward or chasten according to what he finds.’ The best thing we can do as Christians and churches is to faithfully do the work he has given us, and to keep reminding ourselves that any day could be our last, or any day could be the day when Christ comes to ‘take a look’, so-to-speak, and intensify his discipline or reward in our lives, depending on what he finds. We had better stay alert!

## Mark Chapter Fourteen

**Colour-code summary:** the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

*Blue* = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

*Green* = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

*Red* = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

*Orange* = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

### PASSOVER AND PERFUME (14:1-11)

**Countdown:** At this point Jesus has three days to live. It's Wednesday today and Jesus will be crucified on Friday.

1 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 2 “But not during the Festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

- **On the cross, Jesus became the fulfilment of the Passover Lamb.**
  - The Passover was a time when thousands of people would gather in Jerusalem to remember and celebrate the way God's punishment “passed over” them while they were in Egypt. (God told the Israelites that if they were in a house marked with the blood of a sacrificed blemish-less lamb, death would pass over them.) Instead of punishing them, God punished their enemies so that the Israelites could escape from Egypt and flee to the Promised Land (Exodus 12:1-13).  
And they remembered how when, as they were escaping, Pharaoh pursued them, but they were rescued again by the miraculous dividing of the Red Sea, and the subsequent drowning of their enemies who tried to follow them. Passover was a time of celebrating freedom. And they would sacrifice a blemish-less lamb in remembrance of the price that accomplished their freedom.
  - Amazingly, of all the times Jesus could have died, he died during Passover – while innocent lambs were being sacrificed all over Jerusalem. This is obviously symbolic: Jesus himself was God's Passover Lamb.
  - But a fascinating detail emerged: verse 2 tells us that the religious authorities, who were looking for an opportunity to arrest and kill Jesus, knew better than to do it during Passover (at a time when emotions were running high and the Jews had high hopes of liberation from the Romans), yet they ended up doing it at that time anyway.
  - This shows that it wasn't the religious leaders that were sovereign over Jesus, but rather the power and wisdom of God that was sovereign in making sure that Jesus died at just the right time. And indeed, Jesus was the Passover Lamb (see 1 Corinthians 5:7), the innocent sinless lamb, whose blood would result in the liberation of all those who were “marked” by his blood – the blood that would cause God's judgment to pass over us, and instead allow us to experience forgiveness and freedom.

### *Jesus anointed at Bethany*

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages [a] and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

6 “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, [b] and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11 They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

- **Worship Christ with all you are, and all you have.**
  - These verses give us insight into a life of worshipful devotion to Christ.
  - *Worshipful devotion to Christ flows out of our experience of his grace.* John 12:1-3 tells us that this woman was Mary, the same Mary whose brother, Lazarus, Jesus had resurrected from the dead (John 11:32-44). The same Mary who sat at Jesus’ feet and listened with wonder as he taught (Luke 10:38-42). She had experienced Christ’s grace, and his grace had melted her heart with love, trust and gratitude towards him. Today, our experience of Christ’s grace should overflow in a readiness to worship him.
  - *Worshipful devotion to Christ is a life whole-heartedly poured out for him.* The expensive jar of perfume must have been her inheritance from her mother, and probably the most valuable thing she owned. Yet, instead of pouring out a drop on Jesus, she poured out the whole thing – everything! The jar was a picture of her life, her heart. As she poured out the jar, she poured out herself! Today, it is an honour to pour out our entire life for Jesus, holding back nothing, thinking nothing of the cost. He is so worthy of our one and only life.
  - *Worshipful devotion to Christ brings him great pleasure.* In verse 6, Jesus said that she had done something “beautiful” to him. He experienced her affection and adoration, as well as the wonderful fragrance of her offering as something beautiful. Today, as we worship Christ with abandonment he experiences deep pleasure. After all, worship is not about us, and what we can get out of it – it’s about what Jesus gets out of it.
  - *Worshipful devotion to Christ is about “doing what we can”.* Listen to Spurgeon on this point: “There’s a tendency within us all to look at this story and to say, ‘I love Jesus also. Tell me what I should do to show it.’ But part of the woman’s great love was displayed in the fact that she came up with the idea to express her love for Jesus in this way. If there was a command to do this,

it could never have been this precious. ‘Oh,’ cries a brother, ‘tell me what I could do for Jesus!’ Nay, but, brother, I must not tell you. The better part of the whole matter will lie in the hallowed ingenuity of your spirit in inventing something for him out of your own fervent soul.”

- *Worshipful devotion to Jesus should be cross-centred.* Although Jesus had been telling his disciples that he would soon be executed, they kept on refusing to believe what he was saying. Mary was the exception. It seems that she knew that he was soon to die, and used the opportunity at hand, to pour out her affection on him. Jesus said of this that she was anointing his body for burial. No wonder Jesus promised that this story would be told of her wherever the gospel spread. She was the first one to really take Jesus at his word. Today, we no longer need to prepare Jesus for his death, but we can look back on the cross, and see how the cross accomplished our forgiveness and new life, which in turn makes it possible for us too to approach Christ and express our affection to him, and pour out our lives in total abandonment, not fearing the wasting of our lives, nor fearing what people think.
- *Worshipful devotion to Christ can manifest itself in hundreds of ways.* Whole-hearted worship is evidenced in more than just the exuberant singing of songs to God on Sundays – although it certainly includes that! It can also include:
  - The personal, passionate pursuit of Jesus through personal prayer and time in his Word.
  - The willingness to serve Christ’s purposes. Interestingly the word “worship” can also be translated “serve”. Think of Hebrews 6:10, “God will not forget ... the love you have shown him as you have helped his people.”
  - The willingness to do all you can to strengthen Christ’s body. In this event, Mary was anointing Jesus’ body. Nowadays we don’t have access to Jesus’ physical body, but we do have access to his spiritual body, the church. Like Mary, we can do what we are able to do – whether it’s in giving of our time, treasure or talents – to strengthen his body, the church.
  - Literally all of life – work, play, eating, lovemaking and a million more activities – can be done in an attitude of worship (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).
- *Worshipful devotion to Christ is the way to **not** waste our lives.* To the critics, it looked like Mary was wasting her perfume, and wasting her life. She was criticised for this. John 12:4-6 tells us that money-hungry Judas was the chief critic. It turns out that Judas had been a “pretender” the whole time, following Jesus for what he could get out of it, and never really believing that he was anything more than a miracle-worker. (John 13:10-11 tell us that Judas was not a real believer.) It seems that the lavish worship of the woman, and Jesus’ readiness to receive it, disgusted him, and was “the straw that broke the camel’s back” – causing him to, that night, betray Jesus for a mere 30 shekels, the price of a

slave! No wonder Jesus elsewhere said of him, that he was doomed to “destruction”, which is the same word translated here as “waste”. Ironically, it was not Mary who wasted her life – it was Judas who, failing to worship Christ, wasted his! This is why we can say that worshipping Christ is the best way to **not** waste our lives. Yet another irony is that it was this very act of apparent “waste” by the woman that made Jesus tell everyone to remember her (v9). In this sense, worshipfully “wasting” our lives on Jesus is the most significant thing we can do with our lives!

## THE LAST SUPPER AND THE MEANING OF THE CROSS (14:12-26)

**Countdown:** At this point Jesus has two days to live. It's Thursday today and Jesus will be crucified on Friday.

### *The Last Supper*

12 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

13 So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. 14 Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

- **The last supper is a time of great importance.**
  - When were lambs sacrificed and eaten in Jerusalem? The Gospel of John tells us that Jesus was crucified on Passover when lambs were sacrificed and eaten, whereas verse 12 tells us that Jesus seemed to do so the night before Passover. The most likely explanation is that, with so many thousands of people in Jerusalem – and limited space – it seems most likely that it was spread over two days, with out-of-towners (like Jesus and his disciples) having it the day before.
  - In verses 13-16, we see how Jesus seemed to supernaturally guide his disciples to find a place to have the Passover meal, now known as the Last Supper. Interestingly, it was usually women who carried jars of water, so the instruction to look for a man who was doing so was unusual. Such a man would be easy to spot.
  - Why was Jesus making such a fuss about where to have the meal? It was because Jesus was: 1) keeping it a secret where they would meet (he was after all a “wanted” man in Jerusalem); and 2)

giving careful attention to creating the right, uninterrupted environment for this last memorable moment where he would “download” so much to his disciples. (For example, over and above the new meaning of Passover, which we will read of in verses 22-25, John 13-17 tells us that Jesus had hours of teaching he wanted to give to his disciples.) Mark, by including this information about the unusual methods of preparing for the meal, seems to be saying to us, “The last supper is incredibly important in the life of the disciples of Jesus, then and now.”

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me.”

19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely not I?”

20 “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

- **Be careful not to betray Christ.**

- In that culture, the greatest act of betrayal would be to betray someone with whom you shared a meal as a friend. Jesus told them that devastatingly one of his meal-sharing friends would betray him (v18,20). Of course this shocked everyone, yet interestingly no one guessed it would be Judas (v19).
- Jesus could have exposed Judas right then and publicly shamed him, but instead he lovingly gave him the chance to repent. And he said that although no one can change God’s fore-ordained plan for the Son of Man to be crucified for the sins of the world (v21), he warned that there would be serious punishment for the one who betrayed him (v21).
- Although Judas was not a real disciple of Jesus, only one who pretended to be so, we as real disciples must take the warning: it is possible to be close to Jesus, so close that we eat with him in close fellowship, and yet in a moment of madness we do him great harm through our wicked hearts. And if ever we’re on such a path of destruction, we can expect Jesus to lovingly warn us.

22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

23 Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 “This is my blood of the [‘new’] covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 25 “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

- The last supper, and every time we re-enact it in the Lord’s supper, speaks of the meaning of the cross!
  - Jesus was to be crucified the very next day – in fact by nine the next morning he would be on the cross. His death was looming large in his mind. He wanted desperately to explain the *meaning* of his death to his disciples. Although Mark and Matthew do not mention that Jesus was at this point instituting the regular practice of Christians keeping the Lord’s supper, Luke (Luke 22:19) and Paul (1 Corinthians 11:23-25) do. Until Christ returns disciples of Jesus are to, in a sense, re-enact this meal, and remind themselves of the meaning of Christ’s death for their lives.
- On the cross, Jesus accomplished the new Exodus.
  - *Jesus’ death accomplished the new Exodus, which we can now experience.* We must remember that Jesus and the disciples were celebrating the Passover and the Exodus (see verse 12) during this meal. The Exodus was the time when Moses, with great courage, confronted Pharaoh and with great courage led the nation across the Red Sea. The Exodus was the time when, by smearing the blood of a sacrificed, blemish-less lamb, the fierce wrath of God “passed over” them. The Exodus was the time when God acted in power to set his people free from oppression and slavery, and took them to a new land, a land given to them by God. Despite the oppression of the Romans, the Jews celebrated this meal affirming that they were free people, freed by God himself, with the certainty that all their oppressors would eventually be destroyed. Jesus was himself the fulfilment of Exodus. Through his death he was accomplishing the new Exodus, the ultimate Exodus, to which the former was merely a foreshadow. Through his death, Jesus acted as the new Moses, confronted something more terrifying than Moses (death and sin itself). Through his death he “was baptized” (see 10:38) in something far more daunting than the Red Sea (i.e. death, the punishment for our sins) only to emerge the other side as victor. Through his death, Jesus became “the lamb of God” who, though sinless, died on our behalf, taking God’s punishment for our sin on himself, so that the wrath of God would pass over us. (Perhaps the reference to eating of him picks up on the theme that he is the sacrificial lamb that would be eaten.) Through his death, God acted in power to set us free from slavery to sin, death, demons and hell, graciously ushering us into a new land, salvation itself.
- On the cross, Jesus launched the promised new covenant.
  - *Jesus’ death was God’s way of launching the promised “new covenant”, which radically impacts the basis of how God relates*

to us. A covenant is simply an agreement about how two parties will relate to one another. The Jews lived their lives under the Sinai covenant, which was mediated by Moses. In Exodus 24:8 Moses had even sprinkled the nation with the blood of sacrificed animals (covenants were initiated by blood sacrifices). An interesting prophecy was Jeremiah 31:31-34 in which the prophet said that the Sinai covenant would eventually be replaced by a new covenant that would be superior to the old Sinai covenant. This new covenant would focus on God's powerful ability to transform people from the inside out (as opposed to the legalistic nature of the Sinai covenant). In this new covenant, God would write his will and word directly onto the hearts of people (as opposed to on stone tablets); he would enable people to have a direct personal relationship with himself; he would forgive people's sins in a more effective way than was possible through animal sacrifices. So when Jesus announced that his blood (which was vividly symbolized by the wine) was the blood of the new covenant, it was as if he was saying, "Through my sacrificial death, I will launch the new covenant, which will make it possible for people to relate to God in a whole new way. They will experience God working deep in their lives, revealing himself to them in a very personal way, and forgiving their sins." A whole new way of relating to God is possible because of the new covenant.

- **On the cross, Jesus atoned for the sins of the world.**
  - *Jesus' death is an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, including our own.* In verse 24, Jesus spoke of the wine symbolizing the blood "that is poured out for many". Why "many" and not "everyone"? The answer is that "many" is a Hebrew way of saying "everyone" since Hebrew doesn't have a precise way of saying "every person". We know that Jesus' death was the fulfilment of the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb, but we must remember that it was also the fulfilment of the all-year-round blood-sacrifices extensively practiced under the Sinai covenant, where the blood of animals represented their violent death on behalf of the sinful person who was making the offering. The word "atone" introduced in the Old Testament speaks of God's ability, through the sacrifice, to "cover over" sin, blotting it out from his sight. Jesus' death on the cross was the final and ultimate blood sacrifice that makes it possible for believing people to have their sins "covered over" and blotted out of God's sight.
  
- **On the cross, Jesus launched the kingdom more fully.**
  - *Jesus' death was part of the launching of the kingdom, which we can now experience more fully.* In verse 25 Jesus told his disciples that he was about to fast until "that day ... in the kingdom of God". So when does or will Jesus' kingdom come? In one sense it only fully comes at the launch of the new heavens and the new earth, when "the wedding supper of the Lamb" happens, which

celebrates the “wedding” of Christ and his church. But we must remember that Christ broke his fast and ate and drank with his disciples soon after his resurrection (see Acts 10:41). This seems to tell us that Jesus understood his kingdom being more fully rolled out through his death. Although Jesus announced the presence of his kingdom when he started his earthly ministry (see Mark 1:14,15) and taught extensively about it, and demonstrated it, it was only once he died on the cross that it could be more fully experienced by his followers – including us now. The kingdom is the new thing God is doing in the world. Although God started to work in this world through Jesus when he started his ministry, it was the death of Jesus that has intensified even more the new thing he is doing in the world. The freedom, power and forgiveness of the kingdom have been potentially in the reach of all since the cross.

- On the cross, Jesus made possible a new level of one-ness between his disciples.
  - *Jesus’ death is the basis for the one-ness we can enjoy with other disciples. The original Passover meal was a family event (see Exodus 12:1-12), and since then the Israelites would celebrate not only their freedom but their common experience of their God-given freedom. In this sense, their vertical relationship with God was the basis of their horizontal relationships with each other. John 13-17 tells us what else Jesus said at this particular meal, and one of the main threads is the need to “love each other” (see John 13:34, 35 for example). Although Mark doesn’t mention it here, Luke makes it clear that Jesus was initiating the practice of repeating this model meal, and celebrating the body and blood of Jesus. Jesus’ death was not just reconciling us to God, but to each other – and how more to celebrate our reconciliation to, and one-ness with, each other than to share a meal with each other? We must also remember that the sharing of one cup and one loaf is a powerful picture of our one-ness (see 1 Corinthians 10:17).*
- On the cross, Jesus made it possible for us to keep coming back to it as the sustaining source of the Christian life.
  - *Jesus’ death is something for which we should be thankful and something we should keep coming back to. Jesus “gave” the bread and “gave” the cup to his disciples. This is a picture of how Jesus graciously “gave” himself for us and to us. We don’t deserve the benefits of his death anymore than the disciples deserved that bread and wine. Jesus also modelled to them and us the appropriate response to such grace – he “gave thanks” (v22,23). We must never stop expressing gratitude to God and Christ for the incredibly costly death of Christ where his body and soul was violently and painfully torn apart (so to speak) for us. But gratitude is not enough. We need to keep on “eating” and “drinking” (v22,23) of Jesus’ sacrificial death – it’s not enough to once-and-for-all receive God’s atoning grace in our lives and then*

to keep on like nothing happened. No, we need to keep on coming back to the cross, and through persistent faith enjoy, drink of, eat of, depend on and apply that grace to our lives. The cross is not just something we come to at the beginning of our faith. It's something we keep coming back to again and again, every day of our lives, and every time we share the Lord's supper with other believers. It's the source of our life, our forgiveness, our freedom, our joy, our fellowship with God, our one-ness with each other, our power, our healing, our strength to carry on and our courage to overcome! And we don't just find some kind of imaginary inspiration from the cross. No, by persistent faith in the cross, we experience grace powerfully flowing from it into our lives!

26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

- **Sing to God!**

- Jesus sang to God! And so should we. Jesus sang despite the fact that the shadow of the cross already hung over him (he knew he would die the very next day). There is no circumstance that should hold us back from trusting the Father and rejoicing in his wonderfulness. A few years later, while in prison, Paul and Silas were "singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). Where did they get this example? From Jesus himself. Jesus was a Jew who had grown up with the rich heritage of hymns and psalms. He would have known of the at-least 40 verses in the Psalms where God reveals that he wants us to sing to him (an example is "Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" in Psalm 147:1). Spurgeon wrote: "What! A Christian silent when others are praising his Master? No, he must join in the song. Satan tries to make God's people mute, but he cannot, for the Lord has not a tongue-tied child in all his family. They can all speak, and they can all cry, even if they cannot all sing, and I think there are times when they can all sing; yes, they must, for you know the promise, 'Then shall the tongue of the mute sing.' Surely, when Jesus leads the tune, if there should be any silent ones in the Lord's family, they must begin to praise the name of the Lord."

## FAITHLESSNESS AND PRAYERLESSNESS (14:26-42)

*Jesus predicts Peter's denial*

26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:  
'I will strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep will be scattered.' [Zechariah 13:7]

28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

- **When you lose faith, Christ remains faithful.**
  - Late at night, after the supper in the upper room, Jesus took them to the Mount of Olives (v26), a hillside just outside of Jerusalem, on the other side of the Kidron valley.
  - In verse 18-21 Jesus had already told them that one of them would betray him. But all were convinced it was not them – but here in verse 27, he says that according to the prophecy in Zechariah 13:7, all of them will fall away when he, the shepherd, is struck. This refers to his arrest.
  - But Jesus, who knew that he would die, also knew that he would rise again from the dead (v28). This reminds us of Hebrews 12:2: “For the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross.” But notice what he does. He goes ahead of them and meets them again in Galilee. This is amazing. Despite the fact that he knew they would give up on him, and run for their lives, he still plans on meeting up with them afterwards. What love! What faithfulness!
  - This should encourage us: though, at times, we lose our grip on Christ and lose faith, in his resurrection-power and mercy he doesn’t lose his grip on us. He remains faithful to us!

29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

30 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today – yes, tonight – before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

31 But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

- **Beware of being over-confident.**
  - 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, “Be careful when you think you are standing firm, because then you may fall.” This verse warns us against being over-confident in our walk with God. And this is what we see happening in Peter. It seems that he didn’t really believe Jesus would die and rise again (apparently the disciples only believed the resurrection was a reality once Jesus actually rose from the dead). Peter was sure that he could withstand anything in his devotion to Jesus – even torture and execution! Yet we know that it would be only hours later that he would disown Jesus to a mere servant girl (see 14:66-72). We too mustn’t have inflated confidence in our ability to withstand trouble in our devotion to Christ. We will learn that instead of self-confidence, the best way to prepare for the troubles that threaten to undermine our devotion to Christ is God-dependent prayerfulness.

## *Gethsemane*

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

- **Allow pressure to drive you into God’s presence.**
  - Jesus was experiencing phenomenal pressure – he literally felt like he was going to die from the sheer weight of the sorrow and heaviness (v34). He knew that it was a matter of hours before he would be arrested, and that within a day he would be dead. But instead of fleeing, or panicking, he got alone with his Father and he prayed. In fact, rather than withdrawing from God he seemed to intensify his pursuit of God. This is evident by the phrase “a little farther” in v35.) He poured out his soul to God (like Psalm 62:8 tells us to do and he asked God to help him make it through this dark night of the soul.
  - Notice that Jesus did this in front of some disciples. He was allowing them to see how his weakness deepened his dependence on God, how pressure drove him to prayer. He wants to teach us the same thing. When under pressure, don’t panic, don’t make plans, don’t run for your life – rather run for God and fall on your face before him and pour out your soul before him.
  - We will find that if we do this, our most intimate times with God will often be times of deep pain. Notice how Jesus calls God “Abba” which is the Aramaic word for father (v36). Pain-motivated prayer has the power to drive us to the father-heart of God, the Father who loves us as his very own children.
- **Allow pressure to drive you into community.**
  - Of the 12 disciples (11 at the time with Judas departing hours before), Jesus chose his closest three (Peter, James and John) to go with him to Gethsemane, a garden on the side of the Mount of Olives. Notice how Jesus opened up his soul to them, confessing profound grief (v34). He also asked them to watch and pray with him, although he was just a little deeper in the garden than them so that he could pray (notice how Jesus never prayed with his disciples to his Father as though could approach the Father on equal footing – because the disciples and Jesus were not equals before the Father).
  - Today, we must learn to allow our problems and our pressures to drive us deeper into community, where, without substituting community for God himself, we share the state of our heart with

trusted brothers and sisters in Christ, asking them to join us in prayer. We must not let the pressure drive us away from each other, but rather toward each other. At the same time, we mustn't pour out our souls to everyone, but to some people with whom we have formed a relationship. There is one more motivation to deepen our relationships with other Christians: when tough times come, these relationships may prove to be our life line, and how tragic it would be to have not made the effort to build relationships while times were good, and to drown when the tough times come!

36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

- **The cross, and the cross alone, is the means by which we are saved.**
  - The cup that Jesus spoke of here is the cup of God's judgment. In Jeremiah 25:15 and Isaiah 51:17, the cup refers to God's anger and punishment for sin. It appears that what really weighed heavily on Jesus was not the prospect of physical death, but the experience of God's judgment against sin – as he was soon to become the sin-bearer on that cross (see 2 Corinthians 5:21) – and separation from the presence of his own father as a result.
  - It seems that Jesus, who was fully human, wondered in that dark hour if there was any other way for him to fulfil the mission of ransoming people (Mark 10:45), and accomplishing their salvation – other than experiencing the cup of God's punishment. He even prayed, "everything is possible for you", which was his way of saying, "Are you sure there is no other way?" But it seems that as he prayed to the father he freshly realized that there is no other way to rescue humanity but the cross, which is why he said, "Not my will, but what you will."
  - Think about how important this is. Acts 4:12 says it like this, "There is no name by which man may be saved, but by the name of Jesus." This verse seems to say something similar to, "There is no way that you can be saved from the guilt and power of your sin, but by the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross." Jesus alone is the saviour of the world. This is what makes faith in Christ so distinctive from every other so-called path to God. Jesus alone is the mediator between God and humanity who gave himself as a ransom for all people (see 1 Timothy 2-5,6).
  - What an amazing God. Rather than demanding that we offer our own blood in payment for our sins, he offers his own – through his Son Jesus Christ! Jesus has drunk the cup of God's punishment on behalf of all those who trust in him!

37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?"

38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

- **The heart of prayer is trust-based intimacy and surrender.**
  - In verse 36, Jesus spoke so intimately to his father calling him “Abba” which is almost like saying, “Papa” or “Daddy”. The heart of prayer is to touch the Father’s heart. Prayer is a love relationship with God who is our father. Jesus is *the* Son of God, but if we have been adopted through faith in Christ, then wonderfully we too are sons and daughters of God. We too can call him Abba, Papa, Daddy (see Galatians 4:6). We can trust him. We can be intimate with him.
  - But prayer is not just intimacy with God – it’s also surrender. We see how Jesus prayed, “not my will, but your will be done”. This prayer captures a trust-based surrender to God. It was as though Jesus was praying, “Father, right now I can’t see what you can see, and it feels like your will might not be the best option from the way I see it now, but I’m trusting you – no matter what. I know that you have my best in store, so I give myself totally to do what you want me to do.” And we too should pray this way.
- **The first obstacle to prayer is a lack of dependence.**
  - On the one hand, we see Jesus on his face in deeply dependent prayer to his father. On the other hand, we find the three disciples sleeping. Yet Jesus had told them to keep watch (v34), which means he wanted them to open their eyes to the coming danger and to be prayerful. Jesus knew that danger was drawing near, but his disciples failed to hear his warning. As a result they slept while he prayed.
  - The first time Jesus found them sleeping, he addressed Simon Peter (who had just an hour before confidently announced that he could withstand any amount of pressure in his loyalty to Christ). In verse 38, he reminded Peter why prayer is so important: temptations and trials are coming, and the way to prepare for them is to “watch and pray”. In other words, the reality that temptations, which are coming, cannot be overcome in one’s own strength should drive us more deeply into prayer, and a deeper dependence on God.
  - Devastatingly, Peter was soon to be tempted to deny Jesus, and because he wasn’t spiritually prepared would give in to it and “fall”. Compare Peter’s imminent failure with the way Jesus dealt

with his arrest. He was the only one who didn't fall into temptation, but was ready to face assault, betrayal and so much more, without buckling spiritually. From 14:42 onwards, we see that Jesus was spiritually prepared when danger finally arrived. All because he prayed beforehand. I don't think it's a coincidence that Jesus would fall in prayer three times before his Father, and Peter would later deny Jesus three times (14:66-71).

- The main reason we don't pray today is because we are naïve about the reality of spiritual warfare and the reality of the uncountable temptations life and the devil will throw at us, and because we are naïve about our ability to withstand them without sinning. Let us consider the spiritual warfare that will continue to wage against us, and let us consider our total inability to withstand the temptations and attack in our own strength. And then let these two considerations drive us to our knees in prayer.
- **The second obstacle to prayer is a lack of discipline.**
  - Jesus told Peter what else hindered him from prayer: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”. This simply means that although you know you should pray, you're tired, and your physical need to sleep is influencing you more than your spiritual need to pray.
  - Although the greatest obstacle to pray is a lack of dependence on God, a second obstacle also plays its part: we lack the discipline to pray. We show that we lack discipline when we allow our physical appetites for things like sleep, entertainment, ease, food or whatever to influence our obedience to God and our need for closeness with him. We must learn to pray.
  - However, let us take comfort that when we do lack discipline, we aren't alone – even the disciples lacked it. And we mustn't think that Jesus was harshly criticizing them in verses 37 and 41 – probably he was lovingly calling them to more. And still today, Christ gently calls us to embrace the discipline that we so desperately need to “pray and watch”.

## JESUS KNOWS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE (14:43-72)

- In Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15 we're told of how God allowed Jesus to experience all kinds of suffering so that we'd be convinced that he knows what it feels like to suffer, and to be tempted – and so that we'd turn to him for help. In this section (14:43-72) we see some of the ways that Jesus experienced suffering and temptation.

**Countdown:** At this point Jesus has his last day to live. It's just past midnight – Friday has begun.

*Jesus arrested*

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him.

- **Jesus knows what it feels like to be betrayed.**
  - Jesus must have looked like all the other disciples. Why else would Judas have to single him out? Horrifically, Judas is willing to even call him "Rabbi!" affectionately and kiss him. What betrayal! If you ever experience betrayal, there is one to whom you can turn for comfort. Notice how Jesus didn't lash out at Judas with expletives or cursing. In the temptation he didn't sin at all. And with Christ's help, neither will we when we're betrayed.

47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled.

51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, 52 he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

- **Jesus knows what it feels like to be deserted by friends.**
  - Regarding verse 47, John 18:10 tells us that it was Peter who lashed out with a sword, cutting off a man's ear. It seems that Mark, the author of this gospel and friend of Peter, tried to cover up Peter's shameful behaviour by not mentioning it. Peter tried to deal with the situation in his own strength, but only ended up making it worse.
  - In verses 48 Jesus made it clear that this arrest was totally inappropriate, since he clearly was not leading some kind of violent insurgency.
  - In verse 49 he drew attention to their secrecy: why are they arresting him in the dark of night when they could have arrested him during the day, while he was in public? But he isn't thrown by them since he knows that God is in control, and that even their evil is a fulfilment of prophecy.
  - In verse 50 we're told that everyone fled. Throughout the book of Mark so far they have been called "disciples" but in this instance they're not worthy of that name.

- Verses 50-52 fascinatingly mention a young man, not one of the Twelve, who somehow also got caught up in the arrest, and managed to escape naked. Who was this young man? Church tradition says that it is Mark himself. The argument is: in Acts 12:12 we're told that the early Jerusalem church used to meet in Mark's mother's house, which may have been the very same place where the last supper took place (see Acts 1:13 and 12:12). If this is so, it makes sense that Judas would have, before going to Gethsemane, first taken the soldiers to Mark's house in search of Jesus. In this case, it's plausible that Mark would have jumped out of bed and put on a linen garment and followed them.
- Regardless of who this young man was, in the end we have a picture of shame: fleeing disciples, one of them naked in the garden – much like the first fall of humanity when Adam and Even, aware of their nakedness, tried to hide from God in a garden.

### *Jesus Before the Sanhedrin*

53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. 54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

- **Jesus knows what it feels like to be persecuted by religious leaders.**
  - The horror of Jesus' arrest is that it was orchestrated not by ordinary people, or by the Romans, but by the religious leaders of the day.
  - As we look back on the history of the church, it's heartbreaking to see how often the church has turned on herself, especially when the church had fallen into a state of power-hungry godlessness. Yet every person who has ever suffered at the hands of so-called spiritual leaders, who acted with wrong motive and in godless ways, has been able to turn to Jesus who experienced the same, and yet did not sin.
  - Interestingly, Peter who had just fled (see verse 50) obviously changed his mind, and decided to try help Jesus instead, but this time by pretending to be an ordinary person. Amazingly, even his attempt to try again to stand by Christ (in his own strength unfortunately) is part of the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy (see 14:30).

55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. 56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’” 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

- Jesus knows what it feels like when people tell lies and half-truths about you.
  - They tried to slander him outright, making up lies about him (v55-56). But that didn’t work. So instead they took things he had said (in John 2:19 Jesus said, “Destroy this temple [referring to his body] and in three days I will raise it again.”) and twisted it to say that he was referring to the earthly temple. But even their half-truths were contradictory (v59). After all, it’s harder to agree on a consistent lie than to tell the simple truth.

60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” 61 But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”

62 “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

63 The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. 64 “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”

They all condemned him as worthy of death.

- Jesus knows what it feels like to be forced to incriminate yourself.
  - There is serious doubt whether this middle-of-the-night court case was in any way legal, and certainly forcing a man to incriminate himself was unjust.
  - Verse 61 shows us that Jesus, far from defending himself against the lies and twisted truths of verses 55-58, instead remained silent. This was in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7, which speaks of how the Suffering Servant will one day remain silent in the face of those who want to destroy him.
  - In verse 63, we see that Caiaphas finally had what he was looking for: he could present Jesus to the Roman governor, Pilate, as being a rebel king (after all, the messiah is a king), and he could present Jesus to the Jewish nation as a blaspheming prophet who had claimed to be the messiah.
- Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord, the Son of Man and the Son of God!
  - Up until this point Jesus’ claims to be the Messiah have been cryptic, and have remained top secret with his disciples. Jesus

had not wanted to attract the attention of the Romans (who would quickly crucify a would-be rebel king) nor from the Jews (who had wrong understandings of and their own expectations of what the Messiah would be like). But his time had come – and he no longer needed to keep it a secret. So he publicly declared to the most powerful religious leader in Israel that he in fact was the Messiah.

- Looking at his words in verse 62, we notice how explosive and clear was his claim to be Messiah. Firstly, he said “I am” which quite likely was a cryptic claim to be divine (the name “I am” was God’s personal name; John’s Gospel would develop this theme more fully (see John 8:58 for example)). Secondly, he claimed to be the Lord of David in his mention of “sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One” (see Mark 12:35-37 as well as commentary). Thirdly, he claimed to be the great Son of Man, who is the triumphant Messiah-king mentioned in Daniel 7:13. Fourthly, he claimed that Caiaphas would see him “coming in power”. As we have already established in the commentary of Mark 8:38-9:1 and Mark 13:26, this was not a mention of his Second Coming but rather refers to his resurrection from the dead, the outpouring of his Spirit in power and the collapse of Jerusalem. It’s as though Jesus was saying, “God will show you that you and the court are wrong, but that I am right. He will vindicate me, and you will realize that in the future.”
- Verse 62 serves as the exclamation mark of the gospel of Mark. Here all the threads come together. The truth is out: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of Man, God himself, and Lord of the universe!
- For more insight into Caiaphas’ description of Jesus as “the Son of the Blessed One” see commentary on 15:39).

65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

- **Jesus knows what it feels like to experience physical violence.**
  - Shockingly, these great religious leaders, these theologians of the Old Testament beat up Jesus, with their guards following their example. We must not be too surprised today when persecution against Jesus’ followers comes from unexpected places. And we must not be surprised that we experience violence and ridicule. Jesus will be there for us when this happens.

*Peter disowns Jesus*

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

“You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said.

68 But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway.

69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” 70 Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”

71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.”

72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

- **Jesus knows what it feels like to be disowned by a close friend.**
  - In the garden of Gethsemane only Jesus had got himself ready for his arrest and trial. Peter on the other hand, full of self-confidence, never prepared himself. Instead, he tried to deal with the situation in his own strength. But this failed.
  - It’s not a co-incidence that Jesus, hours before, prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane, asking his father for help to withstand temptation. But Peter, who wasn’t prepared spiritually for the arrest and trial of Jesus, denied him three times.
  - We must be comforted by Christ’s faithfulness even in Peter’s failure. He would soon restore Peter, who would become the leader of the Jerusalem church in days to come. We must also be humbled by Christ’s deep knowledge of us. He saw what was in Peter (who himself did not see his own capacity for disowning Christ under pressure), prophesied his disowning of Jesus, and loved him still (see 14:30-31). Christ is faithful to us even when we fail. And Christ, who knows the dark parts of our heart that we ourselves have not yet seen, loves us still.

## Mark Chapter Fifteen

Colour-code summary: the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

*Blue = something about Jesus’ uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender*

*Green = something about Jesus’ character or ministry that we can imitate*

*Red = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives*

*Orange = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him*

### THE HORRIBLE SUFFERING AND THE AMAZING MEANING OF THE CROSS (15:1-39)

### *Jesus before Pilate*

1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

2 “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate.  
“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

- On the cross, though apparently destroyed by political power, Jesus released a kingdom power that would outlive and eventually replace all political power!
  - Jesus was sent off for a second trial with Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who was in Jerusalem at this time. Pilate was there because of the mass gathering of Jews in Jerusalem for Passover and the possible threat of a revolt against the ruling power of Rome. The Jewish leaders took Jesus to Pilate with the charge, “This man is claiming to be king of the Jews, and is thereby leading a revolt against Rome.”
  - When Pilate asked Jesus if he really believed he was king of the Jews, he said he did. We must remember that Jesus understood from the prophecies of Daniel (see Daniel 2:31-44 and 7:2-14 for example) that his own kingdom would outlive, overthrow and ultimately replace the Roman kingdom (which was the greatest kingdom of that day).
  - Jesus’ death was aided by power-hungry Rome (who had already crucified thousands of people who had threatened to revolt). Ultimately, however, the kingdom of God that would advance through the death of Jesus would replace the Roman kingdom that executed him. In this sense, Jesus’ death was political – it was about power. The violent power of Rome against Jesus would ultimately experience the backlash of God’s kingdom released through that very death. This is what led the early church to proclaim that one day all of the kingdoms of the world would be replaced by the kingdom of Christ (see Revelations 11:15).
  - Yet another irony is that Jesus who had spoken in Mark 13 of how Rome would, in time, crush Jerusalem, was now about to experience the crushing power of Rome himself. Not only was Jesus pronouncing coming judgment, but on the cross he was willing to experience that judgment on our behalf!

3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.”

5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the Festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

9 “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

12 “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

13 “Crucify him!” they shouted.

14 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

- [On the cross, Jesus received the punishment your sins deserve.](#)
  - Jesus refused to answer the accusations of the chief priests. This was because there was no sincerity in what they were saying. Answering them would accomplish no good. Motivated by envy and malice, they had already made up their mind to destroy Jesus. Jesus’ silence was ultimately a fulfilment of Isaiah 53:7, “... He was led like a lamb to the slaughter ... so he did not open his mouth”. Jesus on the cross was the innocent Passover Lamb who was dying on behalf of sinners.
  - This picture of Jesus’ death as a substitute for ours is again echoed in the way that guilty Barabbas (who was probably scheduled to be crucified during that time) went free, and innocent Jesus died in his place. It appears that every Passover, Pilate would, as a way of gaining favour with the Jews, release one prisoner. He had wanted to release Jesus, whom he knew to be innocent. After all, what kind of revolutionary doesn’t bother to gather his army – and Jesus was at this time without a band of supporters. But the chief priests managed to persuade the crowds to shout for Barabbas’ release instead.
  - Imagine Barabbas in his prison cell. The soldiers go to him and say, “You’re free to go.” He answers, “But on what basis?” To which they reply, “There is a man, Jesus, he will die in your place.” It’s the same with us. We’re guilty of sin before a Holy God. Jesus was innocent. We deserve to die as punishment for our sins. Jesus didn’t. Yet he died and we go free because of it!
  - For those who claim that God is an angry God, let us always remember that on the cross, he didn’t demand our blood (though in light of our offence against his holiness, he could have) but

rather he shed his own. And note that his blood started flowing before the actual crucifixion: the flogging he received (v15) refers to a life-threatening beating by the Roman soldiers using the skin-lacerating “cat-of-nine tails” whip.

#### *The Soldiers mock Jesus*

16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

- **Freely recognize and receive Jesus as your king, before it’s too late.**
  - The word was now out that Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah-king. But these soldiers didn’t believe it. Yet they mockingly acted as though he was king: they gave him a royal purple robe, put a crown on him, and knelt before him. Of course, Jesus really was and is the king – and the exact treatment he deserves is that we would bow before him, and recognize his authority. We’re told that the day will come when everyone will see Jesus as the king he really is, and will bow down before him (see Philippians 2:10,11). Already now, by faith, we recognize that he is king. And as a result we receive mercy from him. But if we, like the Roman soldiers, fail to recognize that he is king, then on that day when we see him as king, we will bow down before him and receive judgment. Best we bow now because we choose to, than only bow then because we have no other choice but to.
  - If we trust in Jesus as our saviour and king, then we will be spared from the punishment our sin deserves. But if we fail to, then all of Christ’s suffering is a foreshadow of the terrifying judgment that will one day fall upon us.

#### *The crucifixion of Jesus*

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

- **Be ready to take up your cross.**
  - The cross is first and foremost the way of salvation. But secondly, as Jesus had already taught his disciples, it’s a symbol of discipleship. In Mark 8:34 Jesus told his disciples that if anyone wants to follow him, they would need to take up their cross.

When a Christian carries their cross it means two things: 1) Be willing to embrace whatever pain, inconvenience and cost may come your way in your obedience to God; and 2) Be willing to lay down your life so that God's life can flow through you to others.

- It seems that God allowed this dramatic moment when a man called Simon was forced to help Jesus (who, after a sleepless night and many beatings was too weak) carry the heavy beam upon which he would be crucified. In a sense, it's as if God is saying to us as we read of this, "Remember that the cross is not just the means of salvation – it's also the picture of the discipleship I call you to."
- Interestingly, we're told that Simon was the father of Rufus, who very possibly became a Christian and lived in Rome years later (see Romans 16:13). Probably the reason that Mark mentioned Simon's sons, "Alexander and Rufus", was that they became well-known Christians in the early church. No doubt, seeing their father carrying the cross became a vivid picture of Christ-following for them.

22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27-28 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

- [On the cross, Jesus answers the world's fists of hostility with the kiss of saving grace.](#)
  - Jesus was crucified at Golgotha, "the place of the skull", the eerie execution place (where thousands had been executed by the Romans) outside the western wall of the city (v22). He probably refused to drink the anaesthetic that the soldiers offered him because he was intent on drinking to the dregs the cup of punishment and suffering that the cross was meant to be (see Mark 10:38)(v23). And he was crucified naked, with the soldiers greedily gambling for his clothing (which is in itself a fulfilment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:18) (v24).

- In fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:12 about being numbered with the transgressors while he poured out his life unto death, Jesus was crucified between two political revolutionaries (v27-28). Fascinatingly, it seems that this could be a fulfilment of what Jesus was saying in Mark 10:40 when he said that God would choose who sits on his right and on his left at the time of his enthronement, and with the sign “King of the Jews” above his head this was a kind of enthronement.
- They taunted Jesus for his apparent inability to save himself from the cross, meanwhile his ability to stay on the cross was his way of saving the world from its sin. Breathtakingly, Jesus refused to save himself because of his willingness to save us. All the time sinners heaped abuse on him, he answered their hostility with his sacrifice, his kiss of grace. And to this day, Jesus’ saving grace is available to the most God-hostile of sinners. But we cannot experience it unless we change our shaking fist of hostility into an open, empty hand that humbly reaches out for help.

#### *The death of Jesus*

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). [*Psalms 22:1*]

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

- **On the cross, Jesus bore both your sin and God’s punishment against it.**
  - Jesus survived the cross for six hours, from nine (see verse 25) until three in the afternoon (v34). During the first three hours he experienced the physical and emotional anguish of execution, but in the hours between noon and three, it seems that he was most aware of how God his Father had forsaken him.
  - Eaton writes, “It seems that everything that happened so far is still only preparation for the high point of the cross, the three hours of mysterious darkness. The darkness stands for total abandonment. It was a sign of the end of the Old Testament era and the beginning of the new covenant. It is one of the themes of the Old Testament. In a special day of the Lord ‘the sun will be darkened’ (see Amos 8:9; Isaiah 13:10). The very universe frowns on Jesus, as the Father abandons him and withdraws fellowship from him.”

- Although Jesus refused to drink the previous cup that would reduce his suffering (see verse 23), he accepted this second cup (v36), probably to give us a picture of how he was drinking the cup of God's wrath against the sin of humanity. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Christ was at this point becoming sin for us. It was as though, while Jesus was on the cross, all time compressed and like a giant sponge he reached out and absorbed the world's evil and sin into himself. Not only did he bear our sin, but he bore the punishment and wrath of God upon our sin. God took our sin and put it upon Jesus, and punished it there!
- His loud cry to God, "Why have you forsaken me?" reveals that there was something in the cross that even Jesus didn't expect. The horror of the cross was not the physical or emotional suffering, but rather it was that Jesus who had for all eternity experienced unbroken fellowship with his father was torn from his father by the filth of the sin he absorbed in that moment on the cross.
- It seems that his cry to "Eloi" (which means God) was misunderstood as a cry to Elijah to rescue him (v35-37). This wrongly caused some witnesses to expect a last-minute miracle.
- On the one hand, the last cry of Jesus (v37) was an expression of agony. Jesus died from the sheer agony and anguish of it all. The physical, emotional and spiritual agony was so overwhelming that he breathed his last breath with a loud cry. His last breath was also the last gulp from the cup of wrath.
- But on the other hand, the last cry of Jesus is a cry of victory and surrender. John (see John 19:30) tell us that Jesus' last words were, "It is finished!" In this sense, Jesus' cry was both a victorious cry that suggested the ransom price for sin had been paid (Mark 10:45 tells us that Jesus saw his death like this) and also a cry that showed us that Jesus was now, with his mission accomplished, surrendering his life into the father's hands.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
--

- On the cross, Christ made it possible for you to experience the immediate presence of God and to become part of the living temple of the Spirit.
  - Mark tells us that as soon as Jesus "breathed his last" the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. This verse and the following one (verse 39) are perhaps the most significant verses in the gospel. The temple curtain was the thick leather curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple. It seems that God supernaturally tore it right down the middle at the same time as Jesus' death. Another gospel writer tells us that an earthquake at the time did the damage, but still there is little doubt that it is God's doing. But what did this tearing of the temple curtain mean? Three things:

- 1) *It tells us that God was done with the temple and its system.* The temple had been known as the place where God dwelt on earth. If a person wanted to come close to the place where God lived, they needed to come to the temple. However, Jesus had clearly announced to his disciples that the temple's days were numbered (see 13:2). He made it clear that the temple, being in the hands of corrupt, unjust and violent leaders, was under God's judgment (see the commentary of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and the overturning of the temple tables – Mark 11:11-17 – to understand that these were his way of expressing judgment on the temple).
- 2) *It tells us that God was making himself accessible to people by the sacrifice of Jesus.* The message of the temple was not only “God lives here” but also “you can't come too close to him”. One of the remarkable things about the temple's Most Holy Place is that no one was allowed to enter it, except the Most High Priest and only once a year. In other words, the temple demonstrated that your sin made it impossible for you to come directly into a Holy God's immediate presence. Yet amazingly, somehow the blood of Jesus tore the temple curtain in two as a way of saying, “Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, anyone is welcome to come directly into the immediate presence of God.” This theme would later be beautifully stated in verses like Ephesians 2:13 (“But now through the blood of Jesus you who were once far off have been brought close through the blood of Christ”), Ephesians 2:18 (“For through Christ we have access to the Father by the Spirit”) and Hebrews 10:19,20 (“Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...”).
- 3) *It tells us that Jesus was in fact creating another temple.* Twice his enemies accused him of saying that he wanted to destroy the earthly temple and rebuild a spiritual one (see 14:58 and 15:29). Although we have no evidence that he actually said this (John 2:19 tells us he said something similar, but different, to this) we need to see that his enemies actually got it right. The early church leaders certainly began to teach that somehow Christ's death created a new and living temple, the church of people who could enjoy the presence of the indwelling Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Ephesians 2:22).

39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

- On the cross, a new era began in which people of all nations could now come to God.
  - Centurions were the Roman commanders of a hundred soldiers. Fascinatingly, the moment the temple curtain tore (see verse 38 plus commentary) one of the soldiers who had been torturing and

mocking Jesus hours before suddenly realizes, no doubt through the Spirit's work in his heart, who Jesus is: the Son of God!

- This is a revolutionary moment: in the mind of Jews, God had no interest in saving non-Jews. But the first thing that happens is that a non-Jew has his eyes opened to who Jesus is. This theme of God's desire to draw Gentiles all around the world to his son would become a dominant theme of the early church and the New Testament in the coming years – but already at the very moment of Christ's death, the new era had begun.
- We must also remember that Mark was probably writing this Gospel in Rome, so he draws attention to how Christ is not just for Jews, but for everyone – even bloodthirsty Roman soldiers! All they need is to see (metaphorically speaking) Christ on the cross, crucified there for their sins! This is exactly how people today come to faith in Jesus: they hear someone preach about Jesus, and about how he was crucified for them (see John 12:32,33, 1 Corinthians 2:2 and Galatians 3:1 for example). Oh, let the church never stop proclaiming Christ crucified for the sins of the world! For this is the message that the Spirit uses to open people's eyes to Jesus, the divine messiah!
- **Jesus is the Son of God, but give thought to how the earliest Christians progressed in their understanding of that title.**
  - When Mark refers to Jesus as the Son of God during his earthly ministry what did he mean? We too quickly assume that he meant what the apostles John and Paul would mean when they used the title, namely that Jesus is the divine messiah (see Galatians 4:4 for example). In the mind of a first century Jew the title "Son of God" referred to the messiah promised in Psalm 2:7. And they were not sure whether this messiah would in fact be divine or not. And this is *mainly* what Mark meant when he used the title five times previously in the gospel (see 1:1, 1:11, 9:7, 12:6 and 14:61).
  - But this use of Son of God is different, because it's from the mouth of a Roman centurion, not a Jew. In the mind of a Roman, the title Son of God did have a divine connotation, since they understood Caesar to be the Son of God, and to be divine.
  - How can we understand the New Testament use of the title Son of God? Firstly, we must realize that it dawned slowly on the disciples that Jesus was in fact the messiah. And secondly, we must realize that it dawned even more slowly on the disciples and the early church that Jesus was in fact God!
  - In hindsight it all makes sense that Jesus was in fact God:
    - 1) a closer reflection on the Old Testament prophecies about the coming messiah show that he is divine (just think how the messiah receives worship in Daniel 7:13,14 and Isaiah 9:6 for example);
    - 2) the calming of the storm, the transfiguration and the resurrection are signs that he was divine. But we must not retrofit this insight into the minds of the disciples at the time. Probably it was only after Christ's resurrection that they would

realize, “Oh my goodness, Jesus is not only the messiah, he is God in the flesh!”

## DEAD, BURIED AND RESURRECTED (15:40-16:8)

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

### *The burial of Jesus*

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

- Stay faithful to Jesus even when it looks like he's no longer in control.
  - Judas had betrayed Jesus, and the rest of the Twelve had fled, in fear of being associated with Jesus who had been charged with sedition. We have no evidence that they even came to his crucifixion, with the exception of John (see John 19:26). So largely the people closest to him let him down.
  - But not everyone let him down. Mark tells us that two Marys (neither referring to Mary, the mother of Jesus, although John 19:25 says she was there, nor Mary the one who anointed him for burial the week before in Bethany) and Salome, as well as other women who had supported Jesus throughout his ministry were there at the cross, supporting him to the end.
  - And then there was the surprise supporter, Joseph, one of the Sanhedrin council who declared him guilty of blasphemy the night before (14:55), turned out to be someone who seemed to have a growing faith in Jesus. He had been awaiting God's kingdom (and therefore the messiah) (v43) and seems to be increasingly convinced that Jesus was that messiah. Although he had lacked the courage to withstand the illegal trial the night before, he built up the courage to approach Pilate to take the body down. This simple step came at a great price: he was willing to face the suspicion of being associated with Jesus, a man who had just been executed for sedition; he was willing to give up his own tomb to Jesus; he was willing to take up the family responsibility of

making sure that Jesus didn't land up in a common grave; he was willing to forfeit involvement in the Sabbath the following day because of his contact with a dead body. And yet he did this all! His newfound loyalty to Jesus cost him!

- What's the lesson for us? There are times in our lives and in our history when it seems like Jesus has lost control, and is no longer actively advancing his kingdom. These times can make us want to withdraw our loyalty to him, much like the Twelve did. But let us rather follow the example of the women and of Joseph, and be loyal to him no matter what.
- **Jesus was dead and buried, good and proper.**
  - Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Some people then and now claim that the better question is, "Did Jesus really die?" It seems that Mark makes sure that the reader knows that Jesus was dead and buried, good and proper.
  - We see that the centurion confirmed his death (v45). We see that Joseph took down his body, wrapped it in linen cloth, and placed it in a tomb, sealing it with a giant stone (v46). And to confirm that it was really Jesus' body that was placed in that tomb, and not another, Mark lets us know that the watching women confirmed it all (v47). To all those today who claim that Jesus never really died, read these facts again. Jesus was dead and buried, good and proper.

## Mark Chapter Sixteen

**Colour-code summary:** the four main ways God speaks to us through the Gospels...

*Blue* = something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender

*Green* = something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate

*Red* = something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives

*Orange* = insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

### *Jesus has risen*

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they

laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

- **Jesus is alive and that changes everything!**
  - The women certainly weren't expecting Jesus to rise from the dead. After the Sabbath ended at 6pm on Saturday night, they purchased spices to go anoint Jesus' body the next morning. The only problem they had was how they would get to the body. They must have hoped some people could help roll back the large stone (v1-3).
  - What a shock it must have been to discover the tomb already open, and a man, who is described in such a way that he appears to be an angel (v5), who tells them that Jesus has risen (v6) and they must go tell his disciples (v7). They were shocked to the core of their being by the whole event (v8).
  - Notice that it is women who first witness the resurrection. For the early Christian preachers this was a problem, because a woman's testimony did not carry weight in a court of law. But for us, thousands of years later, it's a strong sign that this really happened. Some people claim that the church made up the story about Jesus' resurrection, but if they did want to make up a story they certainly would never have made women the first witnesses. The fact that it was women shows that this really happened!
  - Here is the point: Jesus is alive! And that changes everything. Think of the difference that it makes:
  - 1) *The fact of the resurrection means that we live in a supernatural world.* Today, many people claim there is no such thing as the supernatural, as angels, as life beyond death, as miracles. But the resurrection says that this view is wrong.
  - 2) *The fact of the resurrection is, to use Eaton's words, the foundation of everything else in the story of the Christian faith.* Eaton summarizes some of the New Testament's teaching on the implications of the resurrection for us: "It is proof of Jesus' claims. It is the indication and sample of the fact that death has been conquered. It is the defeat of Satan, the one who holds people in the fear of death. It is the sample of future resurrection for believers. It is the foundation of Christian experience, in which it is said of us that we have been 'raised with Christ', joined to the power of the resurrection."
  - 3) *The fact of the resurrection means that the grace of Christ's cross is available to us.* We must remember that the disciples, and especially Peter, had badly let Jesus down, and yet the instruction given to the women to "tell the disciples and Peter" to meet him in Galilee is a sheer invitation of grace. Jesus had explained to the disciples that the cross was the basis of forgiveness, but now he

makes it clear that the resurrection is the basis of ongoing relationship with Christ, even after we have badly let him down!

- 4) *The fact of the resurrection means that the church has a future.* Notice that the resurrected Jesus has no interest in revealing himself to Caiaphas or Pilate or other unbelievers, he wants to reveal himself to the church, the community of disciples. Those who believe are promised many experiences of Christ's presence and the reality of his life, even today – and this encounter with the living Christ is what gives us the boldness to join the women in their mission to “go and tell” (v7).

9 When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

12 Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. 13 These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

- **Realize that Mark 16:9-20 is not inspired Scripture.**
  - It's not until the fourth century that some well-meaning copyist added in Mark 16:9-20, which are not present in any ancient documents that precede it.
  - *But why would copyists add to the Bible?* Simply, Mark 16:8 is an unsatisfactory ending to the gospel of Mark. It leaves you hanging. Most likely the last section of the original document was destroyed (think how often the back pages of a book tear off). So this copyist tried to imagine what Mark would have written, and

took bits and pieces from Matthew and Luke and added in a few extra thoughts too.

- *But how could God allow the last bit of the gospel of Mark to be destroyed?* Some theologians believe that Mark did intend to end on Mark 16:8 because his intent in writing the gospel was not to tell of Jesus' ministry in and around Galilee (1:14-9:1), on the way to Judea (9:2-10:52) and in Judea itself ((11:1-15:47) and to this he merely added a brief introduction (1:1-13) and a brief ending (16:1-8). In other words, it's not like he didn't know about the resurrection appearances or Pentecost, it's just that he wasn't writing about that. However, it's still more plausible that indeed Mark did have an ending which was lost, but that God allowed this to happen because the point of Jesus' resurrection had already been made!
- *But what are we meant to do with Mark 16:9-20?* In short, draw encouragement from it, but do not try to establish doctrine from it – even though most of it is doctrinally compatible with the rest of the New Testament.
- *What parts of these verses are questionable in both fact and doctrine?*
  - 1) We can't be sure that Mary Magdalene had seven demons driven from her (v9).
  - 2) It's not true to say that baptism saves us, the rest of the New Testament teaches us that it is faith alone that saves us (v16).
  - 3) Although the early church did speak in tongues once the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, we can't be sure that Jesus taught them that this would happen (v17).
  - 4) Although Jesus has often protected Christians from poisonous snakes (see Acts 28:5) this is certainly not a universal promise to all.Other than these four questionable parts, every other part of these verses echo truths clearly taught elsewhere in the New Testament.