

Study guide in Mark's Gospel

INTRODUCTION

Mark is the shortest of the Gospels. It is full of action! Miracles and events all come in a rush! Mark would like Africa, because, like us, he wants action NOW! Mark likes to use the word "immediately" many times, because he wants to tell his story. He is on fire with it.

The Gospel is divided into 3 sections:-

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Chapters 1–12 | Jesus and his work. |
| 2. Chapter 13 | The end times. |
| 3. Chapters 14–16 | Death and resurrection of Jesus. |

Mark's message is simple and powerful. Jesus, God's Son, came to save us from our sins. He proved his calling by many miracles, and by the power of his teaching. The religious leaders of his day opposed him, and ultimately had him killed. But Jesus, by his resurrection, offered the proof that he was who he said he was— God in human form.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark gives us no stories of the birth of Jesus, and very little after his resurrection. The reason for this is simple. Mark believes that in his Gospel he has given all the evidence necessary for anyone to put their faith in Jesus and nothing more is needed.

1:1-8 The beginning

Mark doesn't waste any time. He tells us that this Gospel is about Jesus **"the Son of God."** (John also tells his listeners that this Jesus will be powerful, and full of the Holy Spirit). All this in the first 8 verses! Mark likes "action now!"

What do you think it will mean for people to be baptised "with the Holy Spirit?" (verse 8)

1:9-13 Baptism and Temptation

Jesus was not baptised for the forgiveness of his sins, (he had none), but as a mark of his identification with sinful men - with us. God confirmed the rightness of this identification **with a voice, and a dove**. But there was no time to rest. He is driven into the desert by the Spirit, so that he might prove his victory over all that Satan could do. Mark doesn't tell us what happened. Matthew and Luke do. (Matthew 4:1-11) Perhaps we should look at these passages - they tell us a little more.

Why do you think the temptation experience came so early in the ministry of Jesus?

1: 14-15 The message

After his return from the desert, Jesus announced the content of his work - **the kingdom is near, so it is time to repent and believe**. We are familiar with this message, so it doesn't strike us with such force as it would to the first hearers. It certainly troubled the first hearers—by the end of chapter 3, some were planning to kill him for it. This message contains great challenge—the call to repent always does.

What was it in the call to repent which upset people in Jesus' day?

1: 16-20 First followers

Luke tells us more about this incident (Luke 5:1-11) Mark doesn't have time to waste. Have a look at Luke's teaching.

Why do you think these four men were willing to leave everything?

1: 21-28 Evil shows itself

The demonic forces knew exactly who Jesus was, but he was not prepared to allow them to speak. He put them in their place, with a minimum of fuss. **He was not interested in making a big show of his power—we should take careful note of this**. The power of Jesus opened the minds of the people,

but this was only the beginning of faith. Full faith comes not just in seeing, but in seeing and believing. The people were not able to do this yet.

When we deal with the demonic, do we adopt Jesus' way, or are we too showy?

1: 29-34 Healing ministry begins

Jesus was able to heal every disease, and when he healed, it was done. Peter's mother in law was very sick, yet in no time at all, she was serving Jesus. She was healed AND she entered into her healing.

How do we encourage people to enter into their healing?

1: 35-39 Preaching and traveling begins

Jesus moved on to other places. Why? Because he had to spread his message widely. He had come to deliver good news, not just to perform miracles. He never lost sight of the main purpose of his mission.

How do we keep our minds focused on our call, and prevent ourselves being distracted?

1:40-45 News of Jesus travels

This man was healed, and he was disobedient. Jesus set him free, and commanded him to obey the Bible—to go and show himself to the Priest. But he told everyone what had happened to him. It looked like a good thing, but in fact it hindered Jesus' work.

How do you think Jesus felt about the disobedience of this man? We must make sure that our calling has a foundation of obedience. How do we do that?

2: 1-12 Forgiveness

Here is one of the key happenings in Mark's Gospel. Jesus claims to be able to forgive sins, and shows his claim by healing the man he had forgiven. This is central to our understanding of the place of the work of Jesus in our lives. *If he can forgive sins, then we can be forgiven.* If he cannot, then he becomes the same as every other religious leader and teacher. This claim which made the religious leaders of his day so angry.

What does it mean to you that Jesus can say to you "Your sins are forgiven?"

2: 13-14 Call of Matthew

Another disciple receives his call. Notice that Levi (Matthew) doesn't have any questions. He just accepts. We see the same in the prophet Isaiah. (Isaiah 6: verse 8)

Why is it that many cannot respond, obediently and without question, as Levi did?

2: 15-17 Matthew's feast

Our job is to take the Gospel to ANY PLACE where we can get a hearing. In this story, the religious people didn't like the company Jesus was keeping. But Jesus was quite content.

Are you prepared to go to ANY PLACE where Jesus calls you, or do you feel that some places are not "suitable?"

2: 18-22 New wine

This is another key passage in this Gospel. Jesus is warning the Jews that something new is happening. Although it has its roots in the Jewish religion and history, it will be a new thing, which will have to break out in new ways. The first Christian Churches, established in Jerusalem, found this very hard to accept. But St. Paul understood it very quickly, as the Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. The Christian faith changes us, and goes on changing us until we die.

2: 23-27 Sabbath was made for man

Here the new wine is bursting the wine skins already. Jesus tries to help people see that the Sabbath was made to be a blessing, not the bondage which it had become. This was true of the whole law. It was meant to bless, not to bind. But the religious people couldn't see it like this. Trouble was bound to come.

Are you free in Jesus, or too bound by the rules and regulations of faith?

3: 1-6 Trouble with the authorities

Trouble finally came after the healing story in the previous chapter. The Old Testament allowed certain things to be done on the Sabbath. Jesus saw that freeing this man from his suffering fell into that category. The religious leaders did not. At this point, they set their minds to kill Jesus.

Look back over these first three chapters, and see how the minds of the religious leaders gradually became more and more opposed to Jesus. Pray for Christians who live in countries where they are persecuted.

3: 7-12 More healing

Yet again the people crowd round Jesus for healing. The healing ministry takes up nearly half the verses in Chapters 1-11. Works of power were always happening wherever Jesus was working. Notice that Jesus did not accept testimony from demons, but using his authority, he silenced them.

When powerful things come through our ministry, how are we going to prevent ourselves becoming proud? (Mark 8:34)

3: 13-19 Disciples called

Jesus called twelve men. He knew them all by their names, and they received a very clear call. Jesus would give more and more time to these men, as he equipped them to be leaders. We are obsessed with size. We think we must train hundreds. Jesus knew better—he knew that by picking a

few, and giving them real quality training, the Church would grow. Jesus also gave value to women, and Apostle Paul used women in key positions in the church.

Jesus teaches us to look for quality, not quantity.

3: 20-30 Binding the strong man

The religious leaders accused Jesus of destroying demons by the power of Satan. (Beelzebub) Jesus pointed out the foolishness of this thinking. If Satan is driving out Satan, then his kingdom is falling. The religious leaders may have seen this point, but failed to make the next step - that indeed it was falling, not by division, but under the authority and power of the stronger man – Jesus.

Then Jesus warned about the sin against the Holy Spirit. Christians have often worried about this, imagining all sorts of things they might do which cannot be forgiven. *But the sin against the Holy Spirit is in believing that the works of God are really the works of Satan.* This sin, very rarely committed by Christians, is totally unforgivable.

Jesus has already shown his power over evil. Do we have that same power?

3: 31-34 The true family of Jesus

This is a difficult passage. Jesus knew that the Bible commanded obedience and respect to parents, yet here he seems to ignore them. (See Luke 2:51) This kind of thinking is missing the point. What Jesus is teaching is that relationships inside the kingdom are stronger than any human relationship. He is not saying that our family relationships have no value. In fact it is possible to believe that after making this point, he went with his family. But families can easily drag us away from the Lord's path, if we are not careful. (See Luke 9: 59-61) We have to have our relationships in the right order.

How do we manage to respect our parents and also love Jesus and our Christian brothers and sisters?

4: 1-9 Parable of the Sower

In this very well known story, it is the soil which changes, not the seed. The hard soil, the shallow soil, the thorny soil and the good soil all receive good seed, but only one soil produces a harvest. This is a good warning to us as God's workers – a lot of what we sow will be wasted. We should not be down hearted, but push on with our sowing, knowing that when the seed does find good soil, it will bring an abundant harvest.

Spend some time thinking about the four different types of soil. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you about them, so that when you meet them, you will know what to do.

4: 10-12 Purpose of parables

This is a strange passage. On the surface, it suggests that Jesus deliberately obscured his teaching. But if we think this, we are missing the point. Jesus is saying that those who want to understand the things of God have to make an effort to see beyond the words to the heart of faith. It is this willingness to seek out truth which marks out those who are being called to know Jesus. The Kingdom of God is only hidden from those who do not want to see.

This parable seems obvious to us – why do you think people would not understand it?

4: 13-20 The soil of the heart

In the explanation of the parable to his disciples, Jesus spoke of the condition of the soil. Take a careful look at the reasons for failing to understand - the work of the enemy, shallow commitment, the pressures of the world, the deceitfulness of wealth. Yet to the ones who seeks, these things are no obstacle at all. The call of Jesus reaches their hearts, and they respond with joy.

Can you think of other reasons why people fail to find Jesus?

4: 21-23 Parable of the lamp

This parable has usually been taken as referring to Jesus himself, the light which makes all things known. It points ahead to the revelation of his mission at the cross and in the resurrection, when those who want to can know and understand.

If we live in the light of Jesus, what does that light show up in us? Spend time in allowing the light to examine your life.

4: 24-25 Parable of the good measure

The challenge here is simple. If we are open to the things of God, then we get more. But if we are closed to the things of God, even the little we have will be taken from us. In Kingdom terms we might put it like this—grow or die.

Are you open? Do you want more? Or are you content with what you have? What is the danger in this last position?

4: 26-29 The parable of the growing seed

The growth of the seed in our hearts is the process which takes place between the sowing (see the parable of the Sower) and the harvest, which is what the good seed produces. It is a slow and steady process, ultimately only understood by God. The enemies of God may say that the seed has died, but they fail to understand the slow growth which is preparing to produce a harvest.

It is slow growth which produces fruit. Ask God to prepare you for the steady and slow study and discipline, which will bring a harvest in you.

4: 30-34 Parable of the mustard seed

The Kingdom of God may appear small and weak. Jesus was, apparently, only one man with a few followers, and no real power. But this is to totally misunderstand the truth. What appears small will grow to be majestic.

Spend time reflecting on the size and power of the Kingdom of God. Then spend time in praise and adoration.

4: 35-41 Stilling the storm

This is the first of a number of miracles, which show the power of Jesus over all parts of creation. In this miracle, Jesus shows that he has control over nature. His people are not in the grip of natural events, over which they have no control. Jesus is in control. Notice the behaviour of the disciples in this story. They soon surrender their faith, giving way to fear. (verse 38.)

Do you give in to the spirit of fear? Ask Jesus to strengthen your faith.

5: 1-20 Authority over evil

Having established his power over nature, Jesus now shows that he has power over the demons. This is a really powerful demon, but Jesus deals with it as easily as he has dealt with all the others. Notice in verse 15 that the result of the ministry of Jesus is that the man is restored to his right position – clothed and in his right mind.

Why do you think the people wanted Jesus to leave the region? (v17)

5: 21-43 Jairus' daughter: Woman with bleeding

These two miracles overlap each other. Each is teaching us about the power of Jesus. In the woman with the bleeding, we see again his power to heal. Two interesting features in this miracle are:-

* Jesus knew that power had gone out of him. (v30)

* He calls the woman “daughter.” (v34)

In the second miracle, Jesus shows that he has the ultimate power – the power over death. “Talitha Koum” (v41) is Aramaic. Jesus and his disciples probably spoke this language, although our Gospels are written in Greek, the world wide language of Mark’s day. This Aramaic quotation is very precious to us - some of the actual words spoken by Jesus. They suggest that someone who was present remembered this story, and passed it on to Mark, and so to us. In this story we stand very close to Jesus.

Spend some time thinking about the power of Jesus, over nature, evil, sickness and death. How are we going to release this power into our ministries?

6: 1-6 Nazareth. Jesus is amazed

This is an interesting passage for prophets! Jesus makes a statement which all of us can agree with—a prophet is without honour in his own town. But please notice what he said—a prophet is without honour. He did not say that this was right, or that it had to be this way. A prophet is entitled to whatever honour his calling brings to him, wherever he is. When his home town do not honour him they are wrong.

Jesus was “astonished” at their unbelief. Imagine that – the king of kings being astonished! Nazareth must indeed have been a very cynical and unbelieving place.

Pray that your home town will be a believing place.

6: 7-13 Sending out the Twelve disciples

The disciples traveled light - very little personal belongings, but a lot of power. They did not force their ministry on anyone, but allowed the Spirit to reveal the hearts of the people they met. Those who received were blessed, those who did not receive were pushed to one side. We often try too hard to make people accept our calling. Here we learn that we must allow the Spirit to make the way, or bar the way, and respond accordingly. People who are young in ministry always try too hard! But we are working for God, and

He must be allowed to do the work his way.

Pray for the insight to know what the Spirit is saying, how he is leading, and the courage to follow, whatever the consequences.

6: 14-29 Death of John the Baptist

This small piece of history is very important. Now that John is dead, the last of the Old Testament prophets has left the stage. Prophets today are New Testament prophets, and we behave differently to the Old Testament prophets, although we come from the same background, and have the same kinds of experience.

With the death of John, the Old Testament prophetic stream is ended. No one like him would ever come again. The Old Covenant is dead, and the new, in Jesus, is coming into life. With this new covenant come also the new prophets, inheritors of all that John the Baptist had, and yet different in our relationship to the Church, and our submission to the Church.

New Testament prophets are under the covering and authority of the Church, delivering words which bring us back to the Bible, equipped to serve, to guide and to help. If you are a prophet, think about your position in this, and read Ephesians 4: 11-12

6: 30-32 Time to think

Every worker needs time to rest and time to think and reflect on what they have been doing. If we work on and on without a rest, we are denying our basic human need for refreshment, and we will never really understand the things of God. Thinking and reflecting are a part of our calling. If we fail to do this, we are failing God's people.

When do you take time to be apart from your work, so that you can think and pray?

6: 33-44 Feeding 5000

This is a very detailed story. We know exactly what Jesus used, how many people were there, how many baskets were left over. We can safely assume that someone who was there remembered this story. Traditionally, we have focused on two things:-

- * Jesus was able to do a lot with a very little.
- * The people were satisfied.

Spend some time thinking about these two points in the light of your own experience and your own life.

6: 45-52 Walking on the water

There have been many attempts to explain this story away but these explanations miss the point. If Jesus could raise the dead, he could certainly walk on water! The more significant point is in the last verse:- “they had not understood about the loaves: their hearts were hardened.” This is a powerful warning to all who follow Jesus. We must make every effort to keep our hearts open to him, to his moving and to his will. Whatever he does, we must seek understanding, not unbelief.

By this point in the Gospel, we know that the enemies of Jesus had hard hearts, and were planning to kill him. It is disturbing to see that they are not alone in their hardness. This can also afflict God’s chosen ones, if they allow it. The Good News of Jesus is powerful and challenging. It challenges everyone who hears it, friend and enemy alike. Walking the way of the Good News is not an easy option. It is very tough and very challenging.

Spend time examining your own heart. Is it open to the things of God, or is it becoming hardened? Pray for an open heart all the days of your life.

6: 53-56 Healing

More healing! Jesus never stopped healing, and here people just want to touch the edge of his cloak, knowing that they would be healed. He allowed

them –he was always available to people in need.

The power going from him must have been enormous. How did he stand the strain?

7: 1-8 Inner purity

If you have been to any of my prophetic schools, you will know that we spend many hours studying and discussing the lifestyle of prophets. How we live is as important as what we say. Jesus had the same perspective, and he began his teaching on purity with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah. Jesus says that his listeners may keep hundreds of detailed laws, about cup washing and the like, but easily lose sight of the fundamental truth of following God –listening and applying the truth of His law to our hearts.

How can we make sure that we do not make the same mistake?

7: 9-16 Setting aside God's law

Now Jesus goes even further. First he quoted some of the “laws” which teachers were commanding should be followed, and yet these small details were obscuring the great principle of Scripture. As an example, he quoted the practice of Korban, by which a person was allowed to dedicate everything to the Temple, and then fail to obey the GREAT principle of honouring their father and mother. The point is this—we have to be very aware of the danger of believing that what we DO is what matters, and what we are on the inside is irrelevant. Jesus states this as clearly as possible—it is what is on the inside which makes a man pure or defiled, not external rules and regulations. This teaching, completely in line with the prophetic teaching of the Old Testament, did not go down well with the teachers of his day.

Let God examine your way of living. Does this result in a pure life? If not, confess your failings, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you seek the pure heart.

7: 17-23 Jesus makes things clear

Apparently, the disciples did not get the message, so Jesus had to explain it again. This time he added a list of the evil things which flow from the heart of a man.

It seems amazing at first to think that the disciples did not understand, but this just underlines the problem. So often, our hearts are hardened to the things of God. We don't want the things on the inside to be exposed and changed, so we settle for the rules and regulations. This is as much a danger for believers as it is for unbelievers. Incidentally, this is not the first time the disciples have failed to understand the teaching of Jesus, and things will get worse for them.

Read the list in verses 21 and 22. Are any of these in you?

7:24-30 Demon sent out from girl

This is an important miracle because of where the woman came from. She was not a Jew. Jesus did not restrict his blessings to his own people, and the Early Church would soon have to learn this lesson, as the Gospel blazed out across the Gentile world. There were those who found it hard to think that God would want to redeem and bless Gentiles. Jonah had the same problem. But God will not be confined to geographic areas. He looks for faith, and when he finds it, he acts.

Are there people which you think are beyond the Good news of Jesus?

7: 31-37 Ephphatha!

Another unusual miracle, where Jesus used actions as well as words to heal. But how else could the man know what Jesus was doing? He was deaf, and could hear no explanation. "Ephphatha" is another Aramaic word.

At the end of the miracle, the people use an Old Testament verse to give honour to Jesus.(See Isaiah 35:5) These two miracles show again that the power of Jesus in his healing is also in his teaching. We must not make the

mistake of thinking that there is no power in the teaching.

Spend some time reading the teaching on purity again, and at the same time, ask that your teaching may be powerful.

8: 1-10 Feeding 4000

This is not the same miracle as the feeding of the 5000. There are many differences—less people, less loaves, less baskets left over. If Jesus can feed 5000, he can certainly feed 4000, or four million if he likes! Yet again we see his compassion for the needs of people, and his willingness to help. He can do great things with just a little commitment.

Do you sometimes feel that you have very little to offer Jesus? Put the little you have into the hands of a great God, and watch him do great things.

8: 11-13 Asking for a sign

The religious leaders have already seen many signs and miracles, but it was not enough for them. Jesus knew that even if he answered their request, it would not be enough for them. They had no faith, so no amount of signs were going to open their hearts to the Good News. There is a clear warning to us here. Miracles and signs have their place in vindicating the Gospel, but without faith they are nothing.

Pray that those you speak to will have faith in their hearts. Without it, all your work might be lost.

8: 14-21 True bread

Jesus warned against the errors of the Pharisees, but the disciples fail to understand—again! They think he is speaking about the lack of physical bread. He reminded them that physical bread was not the issue—had they not seen the feeding miracles? Basically, the disciples had missed the point. They had not seen the dangers in the teaching of the Pharisees. They only

saw the power of Jesus, and secretly hoped to have positions of importance by being close to him. As the Gospel proceeds, their inability to understand becomes ever clearer. They had not learnt the lesson, and their hardness of heart was growing.

This Gospel has warned us before of the danger of a hard heart. Here, Jesus warns of the danger of failing to understand the spiritual realities of following him. Pray for deeper understanding of the things of the Spirit. Pray that Jesus will never have to say to you “Do you still not understand?”

8: 22-26 Blind man healed

This is another interesting miracle. We have already seen Jesus use actions in healing with the deaf man. Here he uses other actions, in what is a two stage miracle. First the man sees “trees moving” and then he sees clearly.

It has been suggested, and with good support, that as well as being a healing miracle, this story is a parable of the faith of the disciples. They also have a dim understanding of Jesus, which often seems confusing and shallow. They see spiritually, “men which look like trees walking.” In the next section of the Gospel, they are going to be painfully exposed to the things of God, but ultimately they will “see clearly.”

Pray that you will always have a clear vision of Jesus, and a clear insight into his working.

8: 27-30 Who is Jesus?

This incident marks a big turning point in the Gospel. From now on, Jesus will concentrate on teaching his disciples, against the background of increased hostility, and plans to kill him.

The section opens with the question “Who do men say that I am?” The disciples make an attempt to answer this question, and then Jesus comes out with a bigger question – “Who do you say that I am?” Peter confesses “you are the Christ!” But from the text, Jesus is clearly not happy with this

statement. “The Christ” does mean the anointed one of God, the one predicted in the Old Testament. From that point, Peter is right. But people expected the Christ to be a powerful political and religious figure, who would overthrow the Roman occupying force, and re- establish the Jewish State. This would not be the way of Jesus.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

8: 31-32 Jesus speaks of his death

Now Jesus clearly spells out the truth - he is going to die. Opponents of the Christian faith have said that Jesus’ death was an accident, or a surprise to him. Nothing could be further from the truth. Look how detailed these verses are. Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to him.

Spend some time reflecting on these verses, and give thanks to Jesus for his willingness to go through with what is written here.

8: 33 Peter rebuked

Now we see why Jesus was not happy with Peter’s confession. He did not understand that the Son of Man must suffer. Peter didn’t like this idea at all. It was not what he expected from the Christ. He clearly had triumph and success in his mind. He didn’t like the idea of being associated with failure.

In his response, Jesus saw the enemy at work, trying to deflect him from Calvary. As always, he powerfully rebukes the enemy. I wonder what Peter felt about these words.

Be on your guard at all times. Make sure the enemy can never use you to deflect others from the path of service.

8:34 Denying self

Perhaps Peter needed to reflect on these powerful words. Denying our self

is so very hard for us. Humanly, we are the centre of our world. But spiritually, Jesus must become the centre, and other people come next, before we look to our own needs. We have to accept the hard way in which we must walk, (take up the cross) and we have to follow, wherever Jesus leads us. This makes our discipleship tough, hard and exciting.

It is the nature of our humanity that we do not want to accept this way. It is the nature of our spirituality that we do want to accept this way. The Christian life is a struggle between these two opposed positions. We must be always on our guard, seeking by the power of the Holy Spirit to “deny,” to “take up,” and to “follow.”

What selfish thoughts and ways in your own life must you crucify today?

8: 35-37 Losing and saving

When we are struggling to walk the way of Jesus, sometimes we feel that the struggle is not worth it. We get tired, worn down, and appear to be very unsuccessful. At these times, we have to ask ourselves a question— what are we losing, and what are we gaining? Ultimately, we are losing nothing, except the things of this world, which will pass away anyway. We are gaining LIFE! Life here with Jesus, and eternal life with Jesus, first in heaven, and then in the new heaven and the new earth. It is when we lose sight of this truth, that the struggle seems impossible. When we keep this in our minds, all things are possible.

Are you looking too much to the things of the earth? Lift up your eyes to heaven in prayer, and see what you are gaining.

8: 38 Being ashamed of Jesus

Finally, in this powerful section of teaching, a warning to anyone who thinks that it doesn't really matter how we respond to Jesus. Ultimately, he will be the judge. If we have failed to hear his voice, and failed to surrender ourselves to him, then he will fail to recognise us when he returns. Sharing the good news is our responsibility. How people respond to it is not our responsibility. People may choose to scoff, to mock, and to reject. But they

are playing a dangerous game - one which they will lose.

Pray again for those you know who do not know Jesus.

9:1 Jesus' return

Just in case we have forgotten it, Jesus reminds his followers that His Kingdom is a Kingdom of power, and there is more power to come. Before some of the hearers die, they would see this greater power. In Mark's Gospel, we do not learn of the greater power. It is left to Matthew, Luke and John to explain the resurrection power in their Gospels, and for Luke to show it in the Acts of the Apostles.

But the point is this – there is greater power coming! Spend some time looking again at the miracles of Jesus, and pray for greater power in your ministry.

9: 2-8 The true glory of Jesus

Jesus was fully man and fully God. In this story we catch a glimpse of his God nature, his position in the heavenly Kingdom, and of his glory. For a moment, the disciples see him as he really is, and Mark describes the view as “clothes dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.” The truth is that Mark doesn't really have the words to describe the glory of Jesus. John tries, with a little more success in Revelation chapter 5. The most important men of the Old Testament appear with Jesus, and then the cloud of glory overshadows him. This is the shekinah cloud of glory which filled Solomon's Temple. (2 Chronicles 7: 2-3) Finally God himself speaks, confirming Jesus' sonship.

This passage needs to be prayed over, thought about and reflected on by all God's people, but especially prophets, who spend their time in the presence of God. Take time now in meditation and prayer.

9: 9-13 Jesus and Elijah

The disciples are thinking of Malachi 3: verse 1 (“The Lord you are seeking will come into his Temple”) and the widely held belief that before the Christ (that’s the all powerful figure that Peter expected) would come, Elijah would return. They have failed to recognize John the Baptist, who was indeed the forerunner to the Messiah, and who operated very much in the style of an Old Testament prophet. See Matthew 17:11-13.

Jesus accepts that Elijah must come again before the Messiah comes, but he again underlines the suffering nature of the Messiah.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus understood the suffering nature of their ministries. Prophets are called to suffer – are you willing to walk in this suffering way, or are you looking for triumph, fame and popularity?

9: 14 -27 Healing a sick boy

Another very interesting miracle, with many teaching points:-

*The disciples could not defeat this demon.

*Jesus is weary with unbelief. It happens, but it is not to be welcomed.

*Jesus challenges faith in the boy’s father. Jesus never misses an opportunity to challenge and call for faith.

*The father’s words have encouraged millions of others like him

“I believe. Help my unbelief!”

*Jesus casts out the demon, and some have argued that as a consequence, the boy died, (“Many said ‘he is dead.’”) and that Jesus raised him from the dead. (“took him by the hand.”) Compare Mark 5:41, where Jesus does the same to the daughter of Jairus.

Much to learn here. Spend time studying this miracle, especially the points raised above.

9: 28-29 Much prayer

The secret of successfully defeating the demons? There is no secret code, no magic rite, no special spell or incantation. In the Kingdom of God, all things are in the open. The secret is much prayer.

Spend time in prayer now for your own ministry. Ask God to increase your

faith.

9: 30-32 Jesus speaks of his death

For the second time, Jesus makes it plain what is going to happen. For the second time, the disciples failed to understand. But this time the Bible adds “they were afraid to ask him about it.” Why was this? Probably because the last time they asked him about it, they received some very hard teaching (Mark 8: 32-33) and didn’t want the same to happen again. Even more, every time Jesus spoke of his death, it upset their expectations of a conquering Christ, who would rule in power, and give them privileged positions. They could not understand serving and suffering.

Do you accept serving and suffering, or are you too caught up with success?

9: 33-37 Who is the greatest?

The disciples seem to be very slow to understand the teaching on suffering. The first time one of them rebuked him, the second time they were too afraid to speak about it, and now they are found discussing not what Jesus had been saying, but who would be the greatest. They cannot escape from their belief that the Christ would be a triumphal figure. Jesus is very patient. “The first shall be the last, the servant of all the others” he says. Time will show that they did not understand.

Continue to pray for the heart of a servant. Study Philipians 2: 5-11

9: 38-41 Another using the name of Jesus

Why did John want this man, who was driving out demons in Jesus’ name, stopped? Surely he should have rejoiced that demons were subject to the name of Jesus? But he wanted Jesus to do all the casting out, so that Jesus would be seen to be great, and if Jesus was seen to be great, all the disciples would be seen to be great also. Jesus had to teach a very different understanding.

Jesus has the right to allow his name to be used wherever he wants it used. Pray that your heart will be open to this.

9: 42-48 Warning against temptation

Jesus is not asking his followers to go round cutting off their hands, or pulling out their eyes! This teaching is picture language, but the message is profound. Sin is dangerous, and we must do everything in our power to resist it, or we will lose our power, and our closeness to Jesus

Examine your heart today, and confess any sin. Ask for the power to resist all sin in your life.

9: 49-50 Salt

Salt preserves, and gives flavour. If it cannot do these things, it is useless. If God's people lose their power, and give way to sin, they will be useless in the service of Jesus. We must encourage each other to be clean, to be passionate, and on fire for Jesus.

Pray that you will not lose your saltiness.

10: 1-12 Teaching on divorce

Jesus makes the position on divorce very clear. In the plans of God, marriage is forever, a lifetime commitment to another person. Anything which breaks a marriage, apart from death, is outside of his will.

This teaching has never been comfortable for any culture, especially in those where marriages can be ended so easily. We should look for the positive in this teaching. Marriage is a blessing to God's creation, whatever cultural ways we have of entering into it. His plan, and ours, should be for that marriage to last and when we work hard to make our marriages last, we are working inside of his will. Some marriages do break, and we have to accept this, and live with the consequences.

Pray for your marriage, if you are married. Pray for the marriages of your friends, and the marriages within your Churches if you are not married. Marriages need as much prayer as they can get.

10: 13-16 Let the children come

In the middle of his busy life, Jesus found that parents were bringing their children to him, that he might bless them. The disciples, seeing this as an intrusion into the ministry of Jesus, turned the parents away, and received a severe rebuke.

Everyone has access to Jesus, whenever they want to come to him.

Pray for your children, or the children of your fellowship. Pray that these children will be brought to Jesus for his blessing, and that eventually, these children will come to know Jesus.

10: 17-22 A rich man

This man wanted to know how to be saved, but he didn't want to know how to live. He would accept Jesus as "Saviour" – he wanted to know the way to heaven. But he would not accept Jesus as "Lord" – he wouldn't change his life. So many people – even those who follow Jesus – are caught in the same trap. But accepting Jesus as saviour is not enough. Our lifestyle must also be surrendered to Jesus. This man could not accept this truth, and went away very sad. Many do the same.

Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your lifestyle, to show you where you are not surrendered to Jesus. Make the changes to your lifestyle which the Spirit desires.

10: 23-31 True riches

The disciples are astonished at what they had just seen. A rich man should be treated well – he could bring much to the work of Jesus. Yet Jesus had let him go! The disciples are still trapped in their worldly thinking. A rich man who has not surrendered his wealth to Jesus is no use to the kingdom of

God. In fact he becomes an obstacle, because he believes, and others believe, that his wealth gives him some position in the Kingdom. Jesus had to explain what true wealth is – to be known and accepted by God. At this point in their experience, this does not appear to be enough for his disciples.

Are you sometimes blinded by wealth and power in others, believing that these things will help your life and work? Ask Jesus to show you true wealth.

10: 35-40 James and John's request

How disappointed Jesus must have been by this conversation. He had just told his followers that the future was going to be really tough, and does he find them discussing how they are going to face it? No! They are discussing who will be the greatest when Jesus reigns in power, as they fully expected him to do, despite his clear teachings. It isn't only James and John who are discussing their positions. When the other disciples find out, they are angry, because they all want to be great, and are angry because James and John have got in first! Jesus tells them that these key positions are for those the Father has chosen, and that the ones chosen would have to suffer greatly, in order to enter their positions of authority and responsibility.

True greatness is a servant position, and very costly. Are you prepared to pay any cost to follow Jesus?

10: 41-45 To serve

Jesus makes it very clear, so that there can be no misunderstanding. True greatness is to serve. The willingness to put others before ourselves is the key to Kingdom ministry. Just in case we don't like it, Jesus teaches us "for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." He sets the standard of service and follows it himself. He asks no more or no less of us.

This teaching has always felt uncomfortable for us. We are the centre of our own world, and humanly speaking, we want position and power for

ourselves. But we must surrender this natural human desire to the kingdom principle of service. There is no other way.

Ask the Spirit to examine your heart again. Commit yourself to the kingdom principle of service.

10: 46-52 Bartimaeus

The story of Bartimaeus marks the end of another section of the Gospel. From now on, the story of Jesus in Jerusalem will take the main position. There are some key things to see in this story:-

1. Bartimaeus gives Jesus one of his key titles “Son of David.”
2. Bartimaeus persists in his desire for the mercy of Jesus.
3. Many rebuked him, but he knew what he wanted.
4. Jesus called him personally
5. Jesus healed him immediately, and commended his faith.

Spend some time thinking about these five points, and ask the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insight into this story.

11: 1-3 Jesus sends for a donkey

The way to the cross begins with Jesus sending for a donkey. Jesus is not a conquering military king. He is a humble servant king, and he chooses the most humble of creatures for his arrival in Jerusalem. He is well aware of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. “See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

We cannot get away from the servant nature of Jesus. However much we want to be successful and powerful in our ministries, Jesus keeps bringing us back to the servant position. Reflect again on this, and ask again for the servant heart.

11: 4-11 Hosanna to the son of David

More prophetic fulfillment by Jesus. Here he is again fulfilling Zechariah 9: 9. (See also Psalm 24: 7-10 and Psalm 118: 26) There is a lot of cheering, but for who? The people were cheering the Christ, the coming military and political saviour, who would deliver them from Roman occupation. Few, if any, saw the suffering saviour.

Jesus must always be welcomed into our daily lives with shouts of rejoicing and praise. Spend time welcoming him into your life now.

11: 12-14 The fig tree

This is the beginning of a two part event. It has to be understood as a prophetic action. Jesus speaks words, which few, if any, understand. Time has to pass before Jesus can give the explanation.

Not everything in our kingdom experience can be explained quickly. We live in an instant age, and we want action now! But sometimes, we must allow time to pass, while God prepares the way for understanding, in his time and in his way.

Pray today for the gift of patience. Give God the time he needs to lead and teach you.

11: 15-17 Cleansing the Temple

Jesus combines two prophetic words in this experience:- “for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Isaiah 56:7) and “Has my house which bears my name, become a den of robbers to you?” (Jeremiah 7:11) The prophetic heart is burdened with the desire for purity in the people of God, and cannot tolerate any lowering of that purity. By this demonstration, Jesus is underlining the prophetic message, and challenging us to look for the highest standard of purity in our worship and our daily lives.

Is the house of God in which you worship pure? Pray for the Pastor and the people, that greater and greater purity will come into the worship and

life of the family of God.

11: 18-19 Plans to kill Jesus

The opponents of Jesus have already made clear their plans to kill him. (3:6) So it is hardly surprising that, after this incident they should try even harder. They did not see the incident in the Temple as a prophetic statement, but as a personal insult. But they cannot act in public, because they are afraid of the people, who are supporting Jesus. Satan prefers to work in the dark, where his plans cannot be seen.

Are all your motives clear and pure? Pray that your life will be transparent and honest, for all to see. Then Satan will have no chance to work in the dark places of your life.

11: 20-23 Have faith

We return to the fig tree, which Jesus has already spoken about. Now it is withered, and Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach about faith. With it, we can move mountains. Without it we can do nothing.

In the Kingdom, we get what we can believe for. This is not a magic formula – “I believe, so I get!” It is putting the little faith we have into the hands of a big God, and allowing Him to work through our little faith, achieving great things. God can do a lot with faith, but will do nothing where it is missing. He needs us to be committed first, before he acts. He doesn't have to be like this – he can do what he likes. But he chooses to be limited by our faith, and in this way we grow into faith and maturity, which is what he wants.

Pray for more faith, and the courage to act on it.

11: 24 Asking and believing

How should we handle this teaching? After all, if we can ask and believe for anything, what will stop us asking for foolish things? We would all like millions in the bank, and a big car! The secret is this—we have to be so close to God that we know what he wants us to ask for! This verse challenges us

in the area of our closeness to God, and our understanding of his will and ways. Think of Jesus. His desire in this Gospel has been to get to Jerusalem where he can suffer, because he knows that this is the Father's will. He does not ask for comfort, for an easy life, or even for legions of angels. We have to behave in the same way

Do you know what the Father desires to give you today? Seek him for this knowledge, and then ask him for it.

11: 25 True prayer

One of the main reasons for not being able to know the Father's will is the holding of unforgiveness in your heart. The Bible says "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." (Ps.66:18)

Jesus is teaching us many truths here about prayer, and this one is central. Make sure that you have forgiven everything, and confessed everything as you come to prayer. Have you?

11: 27-33 True authority

The religious leaders, annoyed about the incident in the Temple, tried to trap Jesus. If he said his authority was from God, they would accuse him of blasphemy, but if he said from himself, they would ridicule him. But Jesus was not to be trapped in this way. He asked them a question which put them in a difficult position. If they said that John's baptism was from God, he would point out that John testified to Jesus. But if they said from men, the people would be furious, as they believed that John had his ministry from God. They made no answer, which showed that they were not really interested in truth, only in trapping Jesus, to destroy him

Jesus had his authority from heaven, and so do we. Do you claim authority in your life and ministry? Do so now.

12: 1-12 The parable of the Tenants

This parable is clearly spoken against the religious leaders. Jesus wanted to make it clear that he knew all about their motives. The Jewish leaders had been killing God's messengers for centuries, and now they were planning to kill his Son. But judgment was coming, and it could not be avoided. Only those who believe in Jesus can have any hope and any future.

Rejoice in prayer that your name is written in heaven, and pray for those who oppose God's ways, that their hearts will be softened, and that they will come to know the capstone (v.10) for themselves.

12: 13-17 Paying taxes

The religious leaders never seemed to learn their lesson. Having been made to look foolish over the question of authority, now they are made to look foolish over the question of taxes. The Roman tax was paid with coins carrying the Emperor Caesar's portrait and inscription. The Jews used these coins, thus acknowledging their recognition of Caesar, and his right to impose tax. Jesus made them look at the coin, and then said "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." The leaders were amazed – but they didn't change their plans.

We have responsibilities—to God and to those in authority over us. Make sure you spend time praying for those in authority, and that you are in line with the laws and regulations of your country.

12: 18-27 Resurrection teaching

Yet another question, this time from the Sadducees, a group of leaders who did not believe in the resurrection. They ask this strange question, and it allows Jesus to give us a thrilling insight into heaven. All relationships there are so much deeper than any marriage relationship. Everyone there will be closer to us than any relationship we know on earth. The reality of the heavenly place is underlined by the words of Jesus— "God is not God of the dead, but of the living." In other words, there is life beyond death, where relationships are unique and deep beyond our comprehension. The Sadducees denied all this, to their great loss. But their position is rubbish, or as Jesus rather more tactfully puts it "You are badly mistaken."

Spend time thinking about what Jesus has taught about heaven, and rejoice that you are going to experience in reality what you read about here.

WEEK 17

12: 28-34 The greatest commandment

Not everyone who asks questions is an enemy. Some questions reveal that the questioner is in fact an enquirer. This man asked his question, and Jesus gave him the answer which is based on the Old Testament. (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18) It was this appeal to Scripture which so impressed the questioner, and led him to receive commendation from Jesus.

We have to answer questions by using the Bible as our foundation. Learn this verse, and begin to pray into it:- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

12: 35-37 David’s son

Now Jesus himself asks a question, about the relationship between Jesus and David. The traditional teachers said that the Messiah must be David’s son. They used this argument to deny the position of Jesus. But Jesus uses the Scriptures to show that David viewed the Messiah as “Lord” rather than son.

This is a theological question and answer. Jesus again uses the Bible to challenge and shake his enemies. The crowds, however, were delighted in this answer.

The Bible—do you read and study it enough? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a greater hunger for the word of God, and a deeper understanding of it. We do not have to be highly educated to understand the Bible—just highly committed to reading, and highly empowered by the Holy Spirit.

12:38-40 False religion

God cannot bear religion! He wants hearts and lives devoted to him, not the wearing of certain robes and the carrying out of religious practices, although such practices are not wrong in themselves.

Isaiah the prophet put it like this:- “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Isaiah 29:13)

Be sure that you are following the living God, not going through the practices of “religion.” God knows the difference!

12: 41-44 A poor widow gives

In verse 40, Jesus speaks about those wanting position and importance. Such people usually have plenty of the things of this world, but lack a heart given to God. When he sees a poor widow give all she has, he sees in her the heart which God looks for – the heart which will give everything, holding nothing back. She is the one who receives his blessing and commendation. This is not just a teaching about money. The principle of “putting in everything” must apply to every aspect of our Christian lives. God has sacrificed everything for us in Jesus. He only asks for the same in return.

What things are you holding on to? Surrender them now to God, and you will receive his blessing and commendation.

13: 1-4 End times

This chapter is a powerful teaching on the end times. Matthew and Luke have similar passages –see especially Matthew 24 and 25. We have to study the end times, and we have to know what is happening. But at the same time we must not be so attracted by “end times thinking” that we fail to learn the messages which Jesus wants to teach us for today. The passage begins with Jesus prophesying the destruction of the Temple, which did take place in 70 A.D. This prophecy disturbed the disciples, and they asked for a

fuller teaching.

Prepare your own heart for receiving this teaching. Wait on God in worship and praise, in preparation for the teaching which is to come.

WEEK 18

13: 5-8 Deceivers

The end times are marked by a number of things, and Jesus begins by warning against deceivers –“false Christs.” There have been many of these over the centuries, and we still see them today. There will be wars, famines, natural disasters and rumours. These things are all designed to put fear into people, and bring confusion, within which the enemy can work. As in all end times teaching, we have to be strong in our faith, and not be put off from our work and witness, even though things are falling apart around us.

Pray that your faith will be clear and strong, and your eyes fixed not on what is happening, but on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

13: 9-11 Persecution

One of the key features of the end times is the persecution of those who believe in Jesus. This is the inevitable consequence of the rise of the power of the enemy. As he grows strong, so he will be able to inflict great suffering on the people of God, just as he did on Jesus. Jesus commands us “do not worry.” The testimony we will need to give will be given us by the Holy Spirit.

“Do not worry.” Ask the Spirit to give you inner peace and confidence.

13: 12-13 Divided loyalty

The end times will divide family loyalty, and even those we love and trust could betray us, in the same way that someone he loved and trusted betrayed Jesus. The key is not to worry about what is happening to us, but to “stand firm to the end.” If we stand firm, not only we will come safely to

our destination, but many others, seeing our endurance, will be drawn to Jesus as well.

Enduring is an evangelistic weapon. Pray for the gift of endurance.

13: 14-23 The “Abomination of desolation”

“The abomination of desolation” is a coded message, to remind the readers that the Temple had already been desecrated in the past. When they see it happening again, they must flee, for then the enemy will come in like a flood. There will be terrible natural phenomenon, false prophets and Messiahs, and attempts made to deceive the elect.

These are terrible things, and if we should be called to live through them, we will find it a really tough time. But the key to this section comes in verse 23:- “Be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.” We do not need to fear. Jesus knows all about the end times. He is in control, even if the enemy does not believe it, and the world does not believe it. He knows what is happening, and we have to be watchful and ready.

Are you always on guard? Ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your heart and spirit today, for whatever is to come.

13: 24-27 Coming of Son of Man

The end times are full of confusing things, but one thing is very clear – when Jesus returns there will be no misunderstanding, no mistake, no confusion. The elect do not need to fear. There will be no mistake.

His arrival will mark the end of history, as he gathers his people from the ends of the earth. Then follows the judgment, and the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth. (Revelation Chapters 20 and 21)

Our destination is secure, so we can have courage and confidence. Give thanks to God for this, and commit yourself to pray for those who do not yet know Jesus.

WEEK 19

13: 28-37 Watch!

As Jesus comes to the end of his end times teaching, he wants to leave one message firmly planted in our minds - BE ALERT! We do not know the exact times of all these things, only the Father knows them. We must not be caught out, or be surprised as a man is by a thief entering his house. We must do what the disciples are about to fail to do in Gethsemane. We must watch and pray.

Ask the Spirit to keep you awake and alert in your watchtower so that the hour does not catch you unprepared.

14: 1-2 Plans for betrayal

Now we come to the final section of the Gospel – the last weeks of the life of Jesus. Matthew and Luke have almost the same stories. John has additional ones. The beginning of this section can hardly surprise us. The religious leaders have made their decision, and now they are looking for the opportunity to arrest Jesus. This theme has been with us since Chapter 3, but now thoughts and plans are about to give way to action.

Spend some time preparing your heart for the story which is to follow. You may have read it and heard it many times. Ask the Spirit to make this story fresh to you – as if you had never read it before.

14: 3-9 Jesus anointed

In this story there are two types of people. One only see waste, and the other see love, faith and commitment. Prophets have the same experience regularly. We speak a simple message. Some are deeply moved, and others ridicule us. It is a comfort to know that Jesus had the same experience.

This woman would stop at nothing to show her love for Jesus. She is a great challenge to us. How far will we go to show our love to Jesus? Think about this today.

14: 10-11 Betrayal

So at last, after 14 chapters, we arrive at the betrayal. Should we be surprised that Judas does this? Yes and no. Yes, because other Gospels tell us of his greed, his deceit, and his desire for Jesus to be successful. Yes, because the Old Testament speaks about his actions. No, because we really do not know why he did what he did. After two thousand years of study, we are still not completely sure. One thing we do know, "Satan entered into him," (Luke 22:3) and that really tells us everything we need to know about Judas.

Pray that you will always be protected by the Holy Spirit, and that Satan will have no opportunity to work in your life.

14: 12-16 Passover preparations

Jesus knows that he is to be the true Passover sacrifice on the cross, but he wants to use the Old Testament Passover meal as a means of teaching his disciples this profound truth. So he makes preparation for the place.

How do we explain the apparently strange instructions to go to the city, find a man carrying a jar of water and so on? Don't worry about them. Jesus had supernatural knowledge concerning Nathanael (John 1:44-51) and he could raise the dead. So there's not a lot of problem with him knowing about the man with the water jar.

Read about the first Passover in Exodus chapter 12. This will give you a good understanding of what is to follow.

WEEK 20

14: 17-26 Passover meal

The Passover meal was the remembering of a great deliverance, through the blood of a lamb. As Jesus broke the bread and shared the wine, he was

taking that first Passover, and transforming it into a new one. This time it would not be the blood of a lamb which would deliver, but His own blood. The deliverance would not be for a Nation, but for the whole world. In such a simple way, Jesus reveals the plans of God from before the foundation of the world, for simple people like you and me. What a mighty God we serve.

Spend time in reflection over this new Passover. Let the greatness and the seriousness of the moment touch your spirit, and move into worship and intercession.

14: 27-31 Warning to Peter

Poor Peter! He was not going to betray Jesus, but he was going to deny him. But he didn't know his own heart. When Jesus warns him, he replies with an indignant "Of course I won't betray you! I'm strong, and I am ready even to die for you."

Do you know your own heart? Do you know your own weaknesses? By being honest about these things, we allow Jesus to warn and direct us away from danger. Examine your own heart now, to see that all is humble and open to Jesus.

14: 32-42 Gethsemane

There are so many things happening in this passage, that it is hard to know where to start. Reflect on these things:-

- 1.** The pressure of his calling was so great, that Jesus was almost crushed by it. (v 34) When we are struggling with our faith and our calling, Jesus knows exactly what we are going through.
- 2.** The struggle was over obedience – "not what I will, but what you will." How much we face this struggle every day. It's encouraging to know that Jesus faced it as well. Unlike us, who often stumble, he was victorious.
- 3.** The disciples are so weak – told to watch, they sleep. We can be critical of them, but how often this is true of us as well.
- 4.** Finally, when Judas arrives, Jesus has won the struggle in the heavenly places. Now he can face his calling with confidence. It is in the heavenly

places that we have to struggle and win.

Pray over these things, and ask the Spirit to strengthen you.

14: 43-50 Arrest

Another very busy passage:-

1. The crowd came out armed for battle, even though Jesus was not a violent man. They still saw him as the conquering military Messiah, and came out equipped to do battle.
2. The kiss—a sign of love used as a sign of betrayal. Why did Judas have to do this? Perhaps because the crowd didn't know who they were looking for.
3. Jesus challenges their false beliefs about him – “Am I leading a rebellion?” If they had listened to him, they would have known that this was the complete opposite of the truth. But the people were longing for a military Messiah, and could not see the suffering nature of the call of Jesus.
4. Jesus could have called down legions of angels to protect him, but he had established his obedience already, so he said “the scriptures must be fulfilled.” (Read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53.)
5. “They all deserted him.” Finally the disciples are seen for what they were – weak, confused, unable to take the strain. We should not be surprised – chapter after chapter has shown their weakness and lack of understanding.

Spend some time in Gethsemane with Jesus. Make sure you can say “Father, your will be done, not mine.”

14: 51-2 The young man

Tradition has it that this young man was in fact Mark, our author. Even he ran away. No one had the courage and strength to stay with Jesus.

Read and study Philippians 2: 5-11 as a meditation on these 51 verses, and ask the Spirit to give you deeper insight into these verses.

WEEK 21

14: 53-62 Trial

In our times, we have got used to fixed trials and instant judgment, so the scene here is not so strange to us. The evidence is false, but does not agree. Jesus refuses to answer the first question of the high priest (v 60) because he knows it is based on false evidence., But he clearly answers the second question, and with it, this Gospel finally throws off all caution. The truth is out– “Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed one?” “I am.”

As we have been following this Gospel carefully, we are not surprised at this answer. Jesus has clearly shown his power, and by his teaching has clearly shown his mission. Many would have liked to hear him say this sooner, but everything has to be done in its proper time.

Pray for the enemies of the Christian faith, that they may come to know the Son of the blessed one.

14: 63-65 Jesus speaks the truth

As always, truth provokes a violent reaction from those who do not want to see it. “They all condemned him as worthy of death.”

Those who oppose Christ’s followers will stop at nothing to destroy us. Pray for the protection of God, and for courage when faced with powerful opposition. Pray for the ability to follow the example of Jesus – honesty and truth without viciousness or anger.

14: 66-72 Peter’s denial

Here we see the sad result of Peter’s failure to listen to Jesus. (verses 27-31) A spirit of fear entered him, and his faith failed him in the presence of those who did not believe in Jesus. But remember, his biggest failure was not here in the courtyard, but on the Mount of Olives. His biggest failure was not listening to Jesus.

Make sure you do not make the same mistake.

15: 1 The decision

The Romans were in charge in Israel, having conquered the land many years before. They allowed local government, so the Jews made many decisions, but they could not impose the death penalty. So the Jewish leaders had to take their case to Pilate, the Roman Governor. This was always an unpredictable event. The Romans had no love for the Jews, and would not easily grant their requests. But the Jews were determined – “they had reached a decision” and so they took Jesus to Pilate.

Pray for those you know, that they also will reach a decision – the decision to accept Jesus, and not to reject him.

15: 2-5 Before Pilate

In the Gospels, Pilate is shown in a good light, although history shows him to have been a dangerous, bloody and manipulative man. His question “are you the king of the Jews?” is more a political than a religious one. He wanted to know whether Jesus had a political and military objective, and if his plans included kingship. What he didn’t know was that in front of him was a king, not in the physical sense, but in the spiritual.

We do not know, in this Gospel, the exact charges against Jesus, although we can assume they were the same as the trial before the Jews, – blasphemy deserving death. We can be sure that this did not impress Pilate, who had no interest in religious disputes. However, he was amazed that Jesus gave no answer. Used to being faced with prisoners, he knew that this one was different.

Pray that in the face of opposition, you may always be calm and gracious. This is a testimony to those who oppose you.

WEEK 22

15: 6-15 Give us Barabbas

Here is Pilate's problem. He isn't interested in disputes about blasphemy, but he is worried about civil disturbance. The Roman Senate, ruling the Empire from Rome were always afraid of uprisings. They had already witnessed one in Israel, and would not tolerate a second one. If Pilate let things get out of control, he might lose his job, and even his life. So the cry—"Give us Barabbas"—suited him very well. It would keep the Jews happy, and dispose of a troublesome issue – what to do with Jesus. Being a weak and manipulative man, he took his opportunity. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over for crucifixion.

In times of difficulty, we cannot look to the Authorities to protect us. We must look only to Jesus. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

15: 16-20 Mocking

This is a very unpleasant scene, but in the heart of it, the soldiers end up doing the same as Pilate – confessing Jesus as King. (v 18) They were doing it out of ridicule, but even so, they were speaking truth.

Spend some time reading this passage. It is necessary for Prophets to feel the suffering of God. It is part of our calling. Think about the suffering heart of the Father, watching all this. Think about the pain for Jesus, yet his obedience being bigger than the pain.

15: 21-24 Crucifixion

Crucifixion was a very painful method of execution. The writer of our Gospel is very restrained in his writing, giving us few of the details. For him, the word "crucifixion" said everything there was to say. Very interesting is the appearance of Simon of Cyrene—an African. This is the second time Africa has cared for Jesus, (for the first see Matthew 2: 13-18) and the Continent has suffered greatly for this ministry. Simon was probably very ashamed at being forced to carry the cross. Later however, he must have counted himself a very privileged man.

Spend some time at the cross. Let God speak to you.

15: 25-32 Ridiculed

For the third time, testimony to the kingship of Jesus is given by his enemies. The sign over the cross was meant to ridicule, and the enemies of Jesus certainly meant to ridicule him by crying out “Let this Christ, the king of Israel..” Yet in their own mouths, God had placed truth. For in the coming centuries, millions would “see and believe.” Sadly, many also would not, seeing in this suffering man nothing more than another failed and deluded fool. This is the miracle the cross. Some see and laugh, others see and believe. Jesus does nothing to explain what he is doing. God does not intervene to insist that we believe. We either see, or we do not. The depth of God’s love is seen in this – he allows us to pass by if that is what we want.

Mediate on 1 Corinthians 13, and pray for a deeper understanding of the love of God - a love which sacrifices everything, and does not insist on belief.

15: 33-37 Jesus dies

Some things to note here:-

- 1.** The darkness over the land. This could be a reminder of the darkness in which the destroyer passed over Egypt. See Exodus 12:21-30
- 2.** “Eloi, eloi.” This is an original Aramaic expression. We have come across these before, and when we see them, we probably have the original words of Jesus. See also Psalm 22 verse 1, and the rest of that Psalm.
- 3.** “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” Obviously some of those listening were not Aramaic speakers, and hearing these words, mistook “Eloi” for “Elijah.” And yet one sense, Elijah is a witness to this event. He it was who appeared on the mount of Transfiguration, and he was the model of the forerunner of the Messiah.
- 4.** “With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.” John tells us (John 19:30) that this loud cry was “It is finished.!” The task is accomplished. Hell must yield to Jesus, and heaven is open for those who believe in him

Think about the sacrifice of Jesus for you. Spend a time in thanksgiving and praise at the foot of the cross.

WEEK 23

15: 38 The curtain of the Temple

A curtain hung in the Temple, screening off “the most holy place,” a place reserved for God himself. Only the high priest could enter this place, once a year, to sacrifice for the sins of the people. By his death, Jesus paid for all sins, and the way to God is torn open for all of us. No longer does anything stand between us and God. All is dealt with at the cross.

Give thanks for the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Read Hebrews 9: 12-28 for a deep insight into these verses in Mark.

15: 39 The soldier’s confession

The religious rulers were happy. Jesus was dead, and so were they, dead in their sins. The hardened soldiers however, having witnessed all these events at close hand, were deeply moved to confess Jesus as God. As we have already learnt, some see and some do not. (See Isaiah 6:9-10)

Pray for those you know who are “still sinners.” (Rom. 5:8)

15: 40-41 The women

In Jesus’ time, women were considered of little value. But Jesus did not see things this way. Women were precious and valuable in his sight. These women, gathered at or near the cross, had cared for Jesus – and he let them.

God values both men and women in his Kingdom. If you are a man, spend some time thanking God for all that women do for Jesus. If you are a woman, thank God for your uniqueness in the sight of God.

15: 42-47 Burial

Some important details here, which relate to many of the objections the Jews raised about the resurrection of Jesus:-

1. Pilate knew Jesus was dead. (v 44) Some have suggested that Jesus did not die on the cross, but went into a coma, and then revived in the coolness of the tomb. But Pilate knew he was dead.
2. The tomb was known by Joseph and the women. Some have said that on the first Easter day, the women were confused and went to the wrong tomb – one that was not in use. But Joseph knew where the tomb was, and they had all seen Jesus placed in it. If they had gone to the wrong tomb, the right one would soon have been found.
3. A stone was laid over the tomb. Matthew's Gospel tells us that the stone was sealed, and guards were placed by the tomb. Some have suggested that the disciples came and stole the body in the night, and then claimed Jesus had risen. But there were too many obstacles to this plan.

The Gospels all agree that Jesus died, and was buried in a stone sealed tomb.

Even among our enemies there are people like Joseph, who are open to what we are preaching and living. Pray for these "hidden disciples."

Coming to the end of Mark's Gospel, we would expect a list of triumphant resurrection appearances, the confounding of the enemies of Jesus, and a great move forward of the Good News. But we are not going to find that here. Let's study this chapter, and try to understand what Mark is trying to say.

16: 1-4 The stone rolled away

The women return to the tomb when the Sabbath was over, wondering how they would gain access to the tomb to complete the burial customs. But to their astonishment, the stone has been rolled away, and the body is gone. Despite everything that Jesus had taught and demonstrated, there was little hope or understanding in the lives of these women. So astonishment and fear took the place of faith.

Pray that you will be so in tune with the mind of Christ, so that you will always know his will, and the moves of his Spirit in your life.

WEEK 24

16: 5-7 The young man's words

Looking into the tomb, they see the young man, who gives them a complete explanation of what has happened. It was a very clear and powerful statement:-

1. He has risen!
2. See the place where they laid him.
3. Go and tell the disciples "Jesus is going ahead of you into Galilee."
4. There you will see him.

Spend some time reading the words of this young man, and allow the wonder of the resurrection touch your lives afresh.

16: 8 Their reaction

How would you have reacted, if you had been at the tomb, and heard these words? It's easy for us to criticize them, but we have had 2000 years to meditate and grow in understanding, and we also have the additional material in Matthew, Luke and John.

They were afraid, and ran away. They told no one.

So we now look for the next events – but find none! Mark's Gospel ends here. What follows is generally considered to be an additional end, added later, in the light of the other Gospels. Why does Mark end here? If you have been reading the Gospels carefully then you will understand Mark by now. He believes that by Chapter 16, any diligent reader possesses all the information necessary to understand this empty tomb. He has shown the power of Jesus, he has recorded the claims of Jesus, and he has listed the teaching of Jesus on his own death and resurrection.

If a man has been reading carefully, he doesn't need anymore. The tomb was empty because Jesus Christ, the suffering servant Messiah, who has power over life and death, who prophesied clearly his own death and resurrection, has done just that—risen! Mark would say to us “If, after all I have written, you cannot understand the empty tomb, then you don't deserve to understand it!”

Do you understand? Have you grasped the depth of the love of God for you, as revealed in this Gospel? Then commit yourself to a deeper and closer walk with Jesus right now.

©Jim Smith. June 2011

This material may be downloaded for personal, group or church use. It is not to be changed and it is not to be resold.