



EQUIPPING CHURCH LEADERS
• EAST AFRICA •

MARK—PART 2

by

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Many scholars consider Mark to be the first gospel written. Church father Papias attributed the book to Mark, and said his information came from Peter. This was not disputed in the early church, and various data render this plausible. The book is action-oriented. It is one of the “synoptic” gospels along with Matthew and Luke, because those three gospels contain many of the same stories, in similar sequence, and often with similar wording.

Although it is the shortest of the gospels, it is often the most detailed, with many Jewish customs explained for Gentile readers. Mark shows how Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies of the coming Messiah and is, as Mark states in the very first verse, “the Son of God.”

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I. Introduction

A. Overview

The second half of the book of Mark, **8:27–16:20**, focuses on the road to Jerusalem and beyond. It includes the explicit revelation of Jesus' identity as Messiah; predictions of his death, resurrection, and second coming; the Transfiguration; teaching and healings; ministry in Jerusalem; betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection

B. Outline

The book may be outlined in detail as follows:

I. Prologue (1:1-13)

- A. Ministry of John the Baptist (1:1-8)**
- B. Baptism of Jesus (1:9-11)**
- C. Temptation by Satan (1:12-13)**

II. Jesus' Ministry in Galilee (1:14–8:26)

- A. Announcement of the Kingdom (1:14-15)**
- B. Calling the first disciples (1:16-20)**
- C. Healings and exorcisms (1:21–2:13)**
 - 1. Jesus teaches in the synagogue and heals a man with an unclean spirit (**1:21-28**)
 - 2. Peter's mother-in-law (**1:29-31**)
 - 3. Many demon-possessed and sick people (**1:32-34**)
 - 4. Jesus preaches in Galilee (**1:35-39**)
 - 5. A leper (**1:40-45**)
- D. Opposition to Jesus begins and solidifies (2:1-3:6)**
 - 1. Jesus heals a paralytic (**2:1-12**)
 - 2. The calling of Levi (Matthew) (**2:13-17**)
 - 3. Jesus and fasting: the significance of Christ (**2:18-22**)
 - 4. Jesus' and the Sabbath (**2:23–3:6**)
 - a. Eating grain on the Sabbath (**2:23-28**)
 - b. Jesus heals on the Sabbath (**3:1-6**)
- E. Jesus heals many with afflictions and unclean spirits (3:7-12)**
- F. Choosing the Twelve (3:13-19)**
- G. Disbelief, opposition, and Christ's true family (3:20-35)**
 - 1. Jesus' earthly family think he is mad (**3:20-21**)
 - 2. The scribes accuse Jesus of being possessed by the devil (**3:22-30**)
 - 3. Christ defines his true family (**3:31-35**)
- I. Jesus teaches in parables (4:1-34)**
 - 1. Parable of the sower and the soils (**4:1-20**)
 - 2. What is hidden will be revealed, and by your standard you will be judged (**4:21-25**)
 - 3. Parable of the seed, growth, and harvest (**4:26-29**)
 - 4. Parable of the mustard seed (**4:30-34**)
- J. Jesus calms the sea (4:35-41)**
- K. Exorcisms and healings (5:1-43)**
 - 1. Gerasene demoniac (**5:1-20**)
 - 2. Jairus's daughter and the woman with the discharge of blood (**5:21-43**)
- L. Jesus in Nazareth (6:1-6)**
- M. The Twelve are sent out and return (6:7-13, 30-32)**
- N. The fate of John the Baptist (6:14-29)**
- O. Miracles: feeding 5000; Jesus walks on water; and healings (6:33-56)**
 - 1. Feeding 5000 (**6:33-44**)
 - 2. Jesus walks on water (**6:45-52**)
 - 3. Healings at Gennesaret (**6:53-56**)
- P. Traditions and what really defiles people (7:1-23)**
 - 1. Jesus disputes the Pharisees concerning traditions (**7:1-13**)

2. Jesus says that defilement is from within (7:14-23)

Q. Introducing ministry to Gentiles (7:24–8:10)

1. Exorcising a Syrophenician woman's daughter in Tyre (7:24-30)
2. Healing a deaf man in Decapolis (7:31-37)
3. Feeding 4000 in Decapolis (8:1-10)

R. Testing, lack of understanding, and healing (8:11-26)

1. Pharisees ask for a sign (8:11-13)
2. The disciples do not understand (8:14-21)
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III. Jesus' Identity and Destiny are revealed (8:27–9:13)

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- C. The cost of discipleship (8:34-38)
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- B. Teaching on his death/resurrection, discipleship, and divorce (9:30–10:16)
 1. Jesus foretells his death and resurrection (9:30-32)
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- C. The rich young ruler (10:17-31)
- D. Teaching on his death/resurrection and discipleship (10:32-45)
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 2. James and John seek priority (10:35-40)
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 1. Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus on the way to Jerusalem (10:46-52)
 2. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11)

V. Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem (11:12–13:37)

- A. Signs of Jesus' Messiahship (11:12-26)
 1. Cursing the fig tree (11:12-14, 20-26)
 2. Diving money changers from the temple (11:15-19)
- B. Jesus' authority, parable, and teaching (11:27–12:44)
 1. The source of Jesus' authority is questioned (11:27-33)
 2. The parable of the vine-growers (12:1-12)
 3. "Render to God the things that are God's" (12:13-17)
 4. The resurrection and marriage in the resurrection (12:18-27)
 5. The greatest commandment (12:28-34)
 6. Christ is the Lord (12:35-37)
 7. Warning against the hypocrisy of the scribes (12:38-40)
 8. The widow's mites (12:41-44)
- C. The Olivet Discourse (13:1-37)

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- B. Judas' betrayal of Jesus (14:10-11)
- C. The Last Supper (14:12-31)
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 1. The Sanhedrin (14:53-72)

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- G. The crucifixion and burial (15:20b-47)
- H. The resurrection (16:1-8)
- I. Post-resurrection appearances (16:9-20)

III. Commentary on Mark

8:27-38: ²⁷ *And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”* ²⁸ *And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”* ²⁹ *And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”* ³⁰ *And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.*

³¹ *And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.* ³² *And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.* ³³ *But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*

³⁴ *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* ³⁵ *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.* ³⁶ *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?* ³⁷ *For what can a man give in return for his soul?* ³⁸ *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

vv. 27-38—The identity and mission of Jesus are plainly revealed

This section marks a watershed in the book of Mark and of Jesus’ description of his identity and mission. God explicitly reveals to the disciples that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Even with that revelation, however, the disciples do not understand what the Messiah’s mission is all about. Jesus explains that, contrary to their expectations, it will be marked by suffering, rejection, his death, but then resurrection to new life. That mission, in turn is central to his description in **vv. 34-38** of how our own lives must be characterized if we are to follow him.

1. vv. 27-30—Jesus is the Messiah

While this event marks the beginning of the second half of the gospel of Mark, it has strong parallels with the healing of the blind man which occurred in **vv. 22-26**: they both begin by mentioning the setting (**vv. 22, 27**); the blind man and the people have only partial sight or understanding (**vv. 23-24, 28**; i.e., the people think of Jesus only as a great prophet, but not as the Son of God); the blind man’s full sight is then restored and the disciples then understand clearly that Jesus is the Messiah (**vv. 25, 29**); both the formerly blind man and the disciples are instructed not to tell about what happened and their new knowledge (**vv. 26, 30**).

Caesarea Philippi was far north of the Sea of Galilee, and “the rabbis considered it as the boundary of the Holy Land with Gentile territory” (Cole 1989: 201n.1). “Originally the city was called Paneas . . . in honor of the Roman god Pan, whose shrine was located there” (Wessel 1984: 692). Jesus chose this place to explicitly reveal himself as the Messiah and Son of God, since “symbolically he is announcing to those who have eyes to see . . . that he is claiming his lordship over both pagan and Jewish powers that lay rival claims to the world” (Gruener 1989: 781).

When Jesus asked, “*Who do people say that I am?*” (**v. 27**), the answers were consistent with who Herod and others thought Jesus was (see **6:14-16**), namely, a great prophet. While Jesus was, indeed, a prophet, he was not *only* a prophet, nor was he *only* a man. Herod and the other people erred in thinking of Jesus simply as another forerunner when he was the consummation—the one all the forerunners had been pointing to. Peter’s confession, “*You are the Christ*” (**v. 29**) showed that the disciples finally understood who Jesus was. “Christ” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Messiah.” Matthew’s account of this adds some important details: “*He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’*” (**Matt 16:15-17**) Peter was acknowledging that Jesus the Messiah was more than just a man; he was fully God as well as being fully a man. Jesus was pointing out that Peter’s knowledge of this was not developed on his own, but had been revealed to him by God. Jesus’ charge to the

disciples in **v. 30** that they not tell anyone that he was the Christ probably was because it was evident that they did not yet understand the Messiah's mission on the earth (as we will see in **vv. 31-33**). An incorrect understand of who Jesus is and what he and his kingdom are all about will result in an incorrect way of proclaiming him and of following him, as Jesus will make clear in **vv. 34-38**.

2. **vv. 31-33**—Jesus will be killed but will rise again

Verse 31 is the counterpart to **v. 29**; **v. 31** explains what Jesus' Messiahship entails: "*And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*"⁴⁰ There were several strands of OT evidence concerning who the Messiah would be and what he would do. "The Jews expected the Messiah to come in one of three forms: 1. A king [citing **Jer 23:5-6**; **Ps 110:1-2**]. 2. A priest [citing **Zech 6:12-13**; **Ps 110:3-4**]. 3. A prophet [citing **Deut 18:18-19**]." (Abdul-Mohsin 2006: 95-97) Importantly, the Messiah was not merely to be "a king" but was to be "the king"—the *final* king of the world. "In rabbinic thought, the Messiah is the king who will redeem and rule Israel at the climax of human history and the instrument by which the kingdom of God will be established" (Jacobs 2008: Messiah in Rabbinic Thought). Many OT passages indicate that the Messiah would be a human being (e.g., **Gen 3:15**; **Isa 11: 1-5**; **42:1-6**; **59:20**; **Jer 30:18-22**; **33:14-15**); however, other passages suggest that the Messiah would be divine (e.g., **Ps 2:6-12**; **110:1-7**; **Isa 9:6**; **Jer 23:5-6**; **Mic 5:2**; **Zech 14:9**).⁴¹ Most Jews—including Peter—expected Messiah to be more of a political figure who would drive out the Romans and re-establish Jerusalem and the temple in splendor as the center of the new earth. No one had an idea of a dying and rising Messiah.

What Jesus said his Messiahship involved was the exact opposite of—and went far beyond—all these expectations. The NT clearly shows that Jesus Christ fulfills the Israelite expectations of a king and savior sent by God (see, e.g., **Matt 2:4-11**; **16:16**, **20**; **21:1-11**; **22:42-45**; **26:63-64**; **Mark 8:29**; **11:1-11**; **12:35-37**; **14:61-62**; **Luke 4:41**; **19:28-40**; **20:41-44**; **22:67-70**; **23:2-3**, **39**; **24:26**, **46**; **John 1:49**; **4:25-26**; **11:25-27**; **12:12-16**; **20:30-31**; **Acts 2:30-36**; **9:22**; **17:3**; **18:5**, **28**; **1 John 2:22**; **5:1**). Jesus also is the perfect high priest in the true Temple (**Heb 2:17**; **4:14-5:10**; **7:1-8:6**; **10:11-22**). Finally, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Moses that God would raise up another prophet like him (see **Deut 18:15**, **18-19**; **John 1:45**; **6:14**; **Acts 3:20-23**).

However, in **v. 31**, Jesus was telling his disciples that came to save people not in a political sense but from their enslavement to sin. He came to defeat not Israel's colonial enemy, but the greatest enemies that all people face: sin; Satan; and death itself. How he would accomplish this had not been dreamed of by anyone. Thus, in **v. 31** Jesus joined the concept of the Son of Man (from **Dan 7:13-14**) together with the Suffering Servant of **Isa 52:13-53:12**, the rejected stone of **Ps 118:22** (which would become the chief cornerstone), and the resurrection on the third day of **Hos 6:2**.⁴² Rikk Watts points out, "In conjoining these various texts with his 'Son of Man' self-designation, Mark's Jesus engages in what appears to be an unprecedented interpretive act

⁴⁰ Here Jesus says, "*After three days [he will] rise again*" (**v. 31**). The parallel passage in Matthew says, "*On the third day he will be raised*" (**Matt 16:21**). In another context he said he would be in the heart of the earth for "*three days and three nights*" (**Matt 12:40**). The fact that Jesus was buried on Friday evening (**Matt 57-60**; **Mark 15:42-46**; **Luke 23:50-56**; **John 19:31**, **38-42**) and rose early on the following Sunday morning (**Matt 28:1-6**; **Mark 16:1-6**; **Luke 24:1-6**; **John 20:1**) does not contradict the reference to "*three days and three nights.*" That phrase is an idiom. "The *Babylonian Talmud* (Jewish commentaries) relates that, 'The portion of a day is as the whole of it.' The *Jerusalem Talmud* (so designated because it was written in Jerusalem) says, 'We have a teaching, 'A day and a night are an Onah and the portion of an Onah is as the whole of it.''" (McDowell 1981: 122) Since "Jewish reckoning considered a partial day to be a full day (cf. Gen 42:17-18; 1 Sam 30:12-13; Esth 4:16; 5:1 [see also 1 Kgs 20:29; 2 Chron 10:5, 12]), so Jesus was in the grave Friday, Saturday, and Sunday; and the terminology fits" (Osborne 2010: 486; see also Delling 1964: 949-50). **Matt 27:63-64** shows the idiomatic usage of "three days" terminology specifically in connection with Jesus' burial: In **27:63** the Pharisees went to Pilate and recalled that Jesus had said, "*After three days I am to rise again.*" Therefore, in **27:64** they requested that Pilate "*give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day.*" "If the phrase, 'after three days,' had not been interchangeable with the 'third day,' the Pharisees would have asked for a guard for the fourth day" (McDowell 1981: 122). That is confirmed in **John 2:18-19** where the Jews also asked Jesus for a sign. Jesus replied, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*" (referring to the temple of His body, **John 2:21-22**).

⁴¹ Note that, when we put **vv. 29, 31** and **Matt 16:15-17** together, Jesus was equating the "Messiah (Christ)" with the "Son of God" and the "Son of Man."

⁴² In **Luke 24:46** Jesus mentions that His resurrection on "*the third day*" had been "written" about in the OT. "Yet to what verses is he referring? Whilst it is possible that there is an allusion to the story of Jonah, the far more likely reference is Hosea 6:2 ('after two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us'). If so, Jesus has taken a verse which originally referred to the restoration or revival of Israel and applied it instead to himself as Israel's Messiah. . . . As Dodd rightly concluded: 'the resurrection of Christ is the resurrection of Israel of which the prophets spoke.'" (Walker 1996: 285)

and the disciples are as astonished as the witnesses in Isaiah. . . . Although the suffering element of Isa. 53 was widely ascribed, sometimes vicariously, to Moses . . . and possibly to an eschatological figure . . . this did not extend to either Daniel’s son of man or the Messiah, who evoked instead glory and vindication. Jesus’ predicating his messianic Son of Man identity with Isa. 53’s suffering was apparently utterly unexpected, as was the consequent notion that Israel’s peace would come through his bearing, even to death, the Deuteronomic wounds and sicknesses of idolatrous Israel’s exilic judgment [i.e., his taking upon himself the law’s curse.]” (Watts 2007: 181-82)

Indeed, when Jesus was crucified, even those who believed he was the promised deliverer lost their hope because a crucified Messiah seemed to be a contradiction in terms (see **Luke 24:19-21**). The people did not understand that the crucifixion was the *means* by which salvation from sin had to be accomplished.⁴³ Then the unexpected occurred: Jesus rose from the dead. After his resurrection, Jesus explained to his disciples, “*Was it not necessary for the Christ [i.e., Messiah] to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?*” (**Luke 24:26**), and “*Thus it is written, that the Christ [i.e., Messiah] would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day*” (**Luke 24:46**). Jesus therefore fulfilled all the OT expectations of the Messiah, but he did so in an unexpected way. He thereby gave the term a greater and deeper meaning than people had anticipated. Hence, the NT proclaims him as the savior who alone can save people from their sins (**Matt 1:21; Luke 2:11; John 1:29; 3:17; 4:42; Acts 3:26; 4:12; 5:31; 13:23, 38-39; 15:11; 16:31; Rom 3:24-26; 4:25; 5:1, 6-11, 15-21; 8:2; 10:9; 1 Cor 1:30; 6:11; 15:17; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Gal 1:3-4; Eph 2:13-16; 4:32; 5:2, 25-26; Phil 3:20; Col 1:12-14; 3:13; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9-10; 1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 2:10; 3:15; Titus 1:4; 2:13-14; Heb 2:17; 5:9; 7:25; 13:20; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 3:18; 2 Pet 1:11; 1 John 3:5; 4:9-10, 14; Rev 5:9; 14:4**).

It is that which Peter and the other disciples did not understand. After Jesus plainly explained that he would suffer, be rejected, be killed, and then rise again (**v. 31**), **Matt 16:22** gives the substance of Peter’s rebuke of the Lord, “*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.*” It was Satan in the wilderness who originally had tempted Jesus to deny or abandon the way of the cross (**Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-12**). Thus, in **v. 33** Christ rebuked Peter (and the other disciples by turning to them all), saying, “*Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.*”⁴⁴ As R. Alan Cole observes, “Satan’s suggestion is not blasphemous or obviously evil: it is smooth, attractive and ‘natural’, appealing to all ‘natural’ human instincts. That is why it is so dangerous.” (Cole 1989: 206)

3. **vv. 34-38**—The cost of discipleship

Jesus has clearly identified who he is (**vv. 27-30**) and has plainly stated that the way of the Messiah and Son of Man involves suffering, rejection, and death (**vv. 31-33**). Now in **vv. 34-38** he makes clear that anyone who wishes to follow him must walk the same path that he will walk, namely, the path of suffering, rejection, and death to self. Peter had rebuked Jesus and had wanted to spare Jesus from the cross. Now Jesus “not only corrects Peter’s denial of suffering messiahship, but also makes suffering, self-denial, and cross-bearing a necessary way for Peter and the disciples as well, if they want to please their Lord and save their souls” (Gruenler 1989: 783). Jesus’ statement, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (**v. 34**) is prophetic, since he himself will go before the disciples (and us) literally bearing his cross. He is not requiring of us anything that he did not do himself. What Messiah was like is what we must be like if we are to be Christians. The identification between Jesus and the believer is complete.

“Denying self means that we repudiate our natural feelings about ourselves, i.e., our right to ourselves, our right to run our own lives. We are to deny that we own ourselves. We do not have the final right to decide what we are going to do, or where we are going to go. When it is stated in those terms, people sense immediately that Jesus is saying something very fundamental. It strikes right at the heart of our very existence, because the one thing that we, as human beings, value and covet and protect above anything else is the right to make ultimate decisions for ourselves. We refuse to be under anything or anybody, but reserve the right to make the final decisions of our lives. This is what Jesus is talking about. He is not talking about giving up this or that, but about giving up our selves.” (Stedman 2021b: n.p.) The radical nature of what Christ is saying, and how contrary it is to the way most of us think and act, was observed by C. S. Lewis who said, “There are three kinds of people in the world. The first class is of those who live simply for their own sake and pleasure. . . . In the second class are those who acknowledge some other claim upon them – the will of God, the categorical imperative, or the good of society – and honestly try to pursue their own interests no further than this claim will

⁴³ They did not understand even though the OT had prophesied that the Messiah’s royal crown and throne would be thrown down (**Ps 89:39, 44**), his enemies would rejoice (**Ps 89:42**), and he would be killed as a sacrificial offering (**Isa 53:1-12**).

⁴⁴ Interestingly, the word “rebuke” (Greek = *epitimaō*) is the same word used for silencing or rebuking demons (see **Matt 16:22; Mark 1:25; 3:1; 8:32-33**).

allow. They try to surrender to the higher claim as much as it demands, like men paying a tax, but hope, like other taxpayers, that what is left over will be enough for them to live on. . . . But the third class is of those who can say like St Paul that for them ‘to live is Christ [Phil 1:21]’. These people have got rid of the tiresome business of adjusting the rival claims of Self and God by the simple expedient of rejecting the claims of Self altogether. . . . The will of Christ no longer limits theirs; it is theirs. All their time, in belonging to Him, belongs also to them, for they are His.” (Lewis 1986: 21) In short, Christ is saying that, in order to follow him, we must recognize the truth that “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price*” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Jesus’ reference to the “cross” underscores the denial of self, since the cross was an instrument of death. But the cross was more than that. “It was a place of degradation, where he was demeaned and debased. And so the cross stands forever as a symbol of those circumstances and events in our experience which humble us, expose us, offend our pride, shame us, and reveal our basic evil. . . . Any circumstance, any incident which does this to us, Jesus says, if we are a disciple, we are to welcome. That is his meaning. ‘Take up your cross, accept it, glory in it, cling to it, because it is something good for you. It will reduce you to the place where you will be ready to receive the gift of the grace of God.’ That is why the cross is so valuable to us.” (Stedman 2021b: n.p.) To “follow” Jesus means to “obey” him. “Is it not remarkable that it takes us so long to understand that if disobedience is the name of the game before we are Christians, then certainly obedience is the name of the game after we become Christians.” (Ibid.)

A few other aspects of what Jesus is saying in these verses should be mentioned. First, what he is saying applies to “anyone” (v. 34) who would come after Jesus. In other words, he is not talking to a special class of Christians (i.e., “disciples” versus “regular Christians”) but to *everyone* who wants to or claims to be a Christian. Second, what he is saying is not a part-time matter but applies all the time. Luke’s account of this makes this clear: “*And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’*” (Luke 9:23) Third, what he is saying is the most important thing in the world because it concerns the most valuable thing we have—our soul—which is more valuable than the entire world: “*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?*” (vv. 36-37) Fourth, whether we follow Jesus as he describes or not will have everlasting consequences: “*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*” (v. 38).

Finally, what Jesus is telling us in these verses is not a minor or optional issue. It is at the very center of Christianity and, essentially, defines what a Christian is. In fact, the principle expressed in v. 35—“*whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it*”—is found more times than any of principle in the Gospels. It is found six times in all four Gospels, representing four separate discourses of Jesus: **Matt 10:39; 16:35; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25**. We therefore need to take what Jesus says here incredibly serious, evaluate our own lives in light of what he says, and make the changes we need to make in our lives to bring ourselves in conformity with him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Jesus redefine what the Messiah and Son of Man were?
2. Why do you think Peter began to rebuke Jesus (v. 32)? Why do you think Jesus was so harsh in his rebuke of Peter (v. 33)?
 - Does the interchange between Peter and Jesus tell us anything or provide any lessons for us?
3. The principle stated in v. 35 is found more times than any single principle in the Gospels—6 times in the 4 Gospels, representing 4 separate messages of Jesus at the beginning, middle and end of his earthly ministry: here (plus the parallel passages of **Matt 16:25** and **Luke 9:24**); **Matt 10:39** (sending out the 12 apostles); **Luke 17:33** (after the Transfiguration but before entering Jerusalem); and **John 12:25** (after entering Jerusalem for the last time). Jesus states quite graphically what he requires if a person wants to be a Christian. Put what Jesus said in your own words.
 - Is this how becoming a Christian or being a Christian is usually described today? If not, why not?
 - If what it takes to be a Christian is “defined down” by pastors, evangelists, and other Christians today, what (if any) harm does that cause?

4. Go through the Gospels and find other places where Jesus states what he requires if someone wants to be a Christian.

- How can we square what Jesus said with the common desire to have the “best of both worlds” (i.e., all that this world has to offer and heaven, too)?
- If there is a disconnect between what Jesus says being a Christian is and what we have understood being a Christian requires what can (and should) we do about it?

9:1-13: ¹ *And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”*

² *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” ⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.*

⁹ *And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. ¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” ¹² And he said to them, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.*

vv. 1-13—The Transfiguration

Peter, James, and John were allowed to witness Jesus transformed into his glorious state, to see a vision of Moses and Elijah with Jesus, and to hear God’s words from heaven, “*This is my beloved Son; listen to him.*”

1. v. 1—Some will see the Kingdom of God

Jesus has interchangeably used himself, Son of Man, the gospel, and the kingdom in **8:34-38** (see also **Matt 16:28**). Different scholars have suggested that “*the kingdom of God after it has come with power*” (**Matt 16:28** phrases it, “*the Son of Man’s coming in his kingdom*”; **Luke 9:27** simply says, “*until they see the kingdom of God*”) refers to the Transfiguration, the crucifixion, the resurrection, Pentecost and the spread of the early church, the teachings of Jesus, and/or the fall of Jerusalem (see Bird 2003: 23-25; Cole 1989: 209). “In any or all of these ways, and no doubt in others too, those with eyes to see could have perceived before they died that God had powerfully taken control of events and was working out his purpose in history. Even if some were to die before this was clearly visible, the process had begun, and the mustard seed was growing. That is all the wording of 9:1 requires.” (France 2002: 345)

The apostle Peter relates this to the Transfiguration. In **2 Pet 1:16-18** he refers to the “power” and “coming” of the Lord, speaks of the “holy mountain” where the Transfiguration took place, and quotes the voice they heard from heaven: “¹⁶ *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*” **Verse 1** links what Jesus just said in **Mark 8:38** (“*when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*”) and with what immediately follows (the Transfiguration). It is therefore probable that Mark understood the Transfiguration as a prefigure of Christ’s resurrection, ascension, Pentecost, and second coming which manifested (and will manifest) his glory, power, and kingdom to all.

2. vv. 2-8—The Transfiguration

The radiant whiteness of Christ’s clothes denotes his absolute purity, righteousness, and heavenly nature (see **Dan 7:9**; **Rev 19:8**). The cloud undoubtedly is the shekinah glory cloud (see **Exod 24:16**; **40:38**). There are commonalities between the Transfiguration and Jesus’ baptism. At Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration the Father quotes from **Ps 2:7** and declares, “*You are my beloved son*” (**Matt 3:17**; **17:5**; **Mark 1:11**; **9:7**; **Luke 3:22**; **9:35**). At both the baptism and the transfiguration there was a configuration of Jesus and Elijah (John the Baptist

at the baptism; see below for his identification with Elijah). While Mark says that Moses and Elijah were present and “*were talking with Jesus*” (v. 4), he does not give us the substance of what they said. **Luke 9:31** tells us that they “*spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*” Interestingly, the Greek word translated as “departure” is “exodus.” Peter’s reaction shows that he still did not fully grasp who Jesus was and that he would have to suffer and die. By saying, “*Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah*” (v. 5), Peter was, in effect, placing Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah and simply wanting to extend their meeting and communication with people. The abrupt departure of Moses and Elijah and God’s statement, “*This is my beloved Son; listen to him*” (v. 7) make clear that Jesus is the true and only tabernacle of God and that the mission of the Messiah is considerably different than what Peter believed.

3. **vv. 9-13**—Descent from the mountain

Verses 9-10 show that the disciples still did not comprehend that Jesus would be killed and rise from the dead, even though he had “plainly” told them so in **8:31-32**. As Jews, the disciples would have been familiar with the concept of resurrection, but only a general resurrection at the end of time (see **John 11:24**); the idea that a single person could rise to eternal life in the middle of history was unprecedented and beyond their comprehension.

The presence of Elijah in visionary form on the mountain prompted the disciples’ question to the effect, “Isn’t Elijah supposed to come in bodily form to usher in the messianic age?” Jesus agrees with that premise, and in his answer to the question, Jesus identifies Elijah with John the Baptist. **Isa 40:3-11** and **Mal 3:1** say that the Lord would send his messenger before the Lord came to his people and to his temple. Zacharias (John the Baptist’s father) confirmed that by stating that God “*has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant*” (**Luke 1:69**, referring to Jesus). Then in **Luke 1:76** he quoted from **Mal 3:1** in referring to John the Baptist (“*and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare his ways*”). John the Baptist himself quoted from **Isa 40:3-5** and **Mal 3:1** prior to Jesus’ baptism (**Matt 3:3**; **Mark 1:2-3**; **Luke 3:4-6**; **John 1:23**). Jesus confirms that John the Baptist was the “messenger” referred to in the prophecy of **Mal 3:1** (see **Matt 11:7-10**; **Luke 7:24-27**).⁴⁵ Thus, John the Baptist and Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of **Isa 40:3-11** and **Mal 3:1**. The messenger who will go before the Lord is specified in **Mal 4:5**, which says that God would send “*Elijah the prophet.*” John the Baptist is portrayed as having the spirit of Elijah to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord (**Matt 11:14**; **17:10-13**; **Mark 9:11-13**; **Luke 1:13-17, 76**). **Matt 17:13** says that “*the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.*”

Jesus’ statement in v. 12, “*Elijah does come first to restore all things*” meant that “the longed-for age of ‘restoration’ was now in the process of being effected—but paradoxically through the ‘suffering’ of the Son of Man” (Walker 1996: 43). Because the disciples still did not grasp the suffering nature of his messiahship, Jesus again had to emphasize his suffering, “*And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?*” (v. 12). Although the disciples understood that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come, they did not yet understand that “as John’s coming was a heralding of the Messiah’s coming, so John’s rejection was a heralding of the rejection of the Messiah: and both alike were in fulfillment of Scripture” (Cole 1989: 213).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The word “transfigured” (Greek = *metamorphoō*) in v. 2 (and in the parallel passage of **Matt 17:2**) is the *same word* which is translated as “transformed” (or “changed”) in **Rom 12:2** and **2 Cor 3:18**. These are the *only* places in the NT where this word is used. What does this tell us about our life in Christ?

- What is the significance of the fact that many of us cannot see any significant changes in ourselves (our thoughts, attitudes, words, and deeds)?

2. What do you think the significance is of Moses’ and Elijah’s presence with Jesus on the mountain? Of the voice from heaven?

3. Note that Jesus discusses the role of suffering and death (**vv. 12-13**) immediately following and as a counterpoint to the glory of his transfiguration, just as he did immediately following and as a counterpoint to Peter’s confession of him as the Christ (**8:29-35**). What is the significance of this?

⁴⁵ Jesus himself is “*the messenger of the covenant*” referred to in the latter part of **Mal 3:1**.

- How (if at all) does the picture of a suffering Messiah shape your view of what the Christian life is all about?

4. In the story of Martha and Mary (**Luke 10:38-42**) Mary's "sitting at the feet of Jesus" is usually held up for praise, while Martha's service is not. In this passage, on the other hand, Peter expresses the desire to remain with Jesus on the mountain; however, not only does this not happen, but Peter's wish is not even commended, either by the voice from heaven or by Jesus. Put these two passages together and come up with an explanation that takes both situations into account and describes the relative roles of both teaching and service.

9:14-29: ¹⁴ *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.* ¹⁵ *And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him.* ¹⁶ *And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"* ¹⁷ *And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.* ¹⁸ *And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."* ¹⁹ *And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."* ²⁰ *And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.* ²¹ *And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?"* *And he said, "From childhood.* ²² *And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."* ²³ *And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes."* ²⁴ *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"* ²⁵ *And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."* ²⁶ *And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead."* ²⁷ *But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.* ²⁸ *And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"* ²⁹ *And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."*

vv. 14-29—Jesus heals a boy possessed by a demon

As with many of his actions, the casting out of this demon and healing of the boy is an acted-out parable of the human (our own) situation: the boy "from childhood" is controlled by a force (in our case, sin) he is powerless to change; religious people who are unhelpful and who argue among themselves; curious onlookers; and the distress of the one who loved the boy. Behind Jesus' question and the responses in **vv. 16-19** are an important spiritual principle: "First, those in need must confess their own inadequacy, and then they must be brought to see the power of Jesus to meet that need" (Cole 1989: 214).

Verse 19 shows both Jesus' great forbearance ("*O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?*") and his great compassion ("*Bring him to me*"). The father's statement in **v. 22**, "*But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*" is an interesting contrast with the leper's statement in **1:40**, "*If you will, you can make me clean.*" The leper did not doubt Jesus' ability to cure him but was questioning his compassion; the father here did not doubt Jesus' compassion but was questioning his ability. Jesus' challenge to the man to have faith in him prompted one of the most encouraging statements that most of us, from time to time, have expressed: "*I believe; help my unbelief!*"

In **vv. 28-29**, when the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon, Matthew has Jesus focusing on their faith: "*He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."* (**Matt 17:20**) In Mark, Jesus focuses on their lack of prayer: "*And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer"*" (**v. 29**).⁴⁶ The two concepts supplement each other.

Jesus' statement in Matthew and his statement in **Mark 9:23** ("*All things are possible for one who believes*") can easily lead to a false "name it and claim it" or "prosperity gospel" view of faith in which faith essentially becomes a form of magic or a "power" in and of itself. That is not the biblical concept at all. Contrary to that, "The Bible teaches that faith is a confident reliance on and trust in another. Instead of being something that is exerted, biblical faith constitutes a resting or repose. The value of faith is extrinsic, not intrinsic. The significance of faith is found in its object, namely, God." (Sarles 1986: 348) In the NT, the

⁴⁶ A number of manuscripts add the words "*and fasting.*"

language of faith is used “both for the practical recognition of Jesus’ supernatural authority and also for the appropriate response to the gospel which he came to proclaim. . . . It is a life-changing commitment, the beginning of a new relationship with God. . . . The object of believing can only be the person of Jesus himself.” (France 1992: 223-25) Similarly, our prayers are to arise out of a holy life of forgiveness (**Mark 11:25-26**). Our motives in prayer must not be selfish (**Jas 4:3**) and must in accordance with God’s will, not our own (**Mark 14:36; 1 John 5:14-15**).

It may be that, since the disciples had previously been given authority to cast out demons (**6:7**), their faith “had changed from faith in God to faith in the process they were following. They thought that if you said the right words, and followed the right ritual, that the demon would have to leave. Without their even realizing it, they had transferred their faith from confidence in a God who can act, to a formula that can bring it about. This is what we often do. We get to thinking that it is the words we say, or the way we say them, or what is happening in our lives, which is the real reason things happen, rather than the God who acts. Jesus reproved them for this, said their faith must be in God himself, if it is to be a fresh and vital faith.” (Stedman 2021a: n.p.) Walter Wessel puts it similarly, “Apparently they had taken for granted the power given them or had come to believe that it was inherent in themselves. So they no longer depended prayerfully on God for it, and their failure showed their lack of prayer.” (Wessel 1984: 704)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Look at this passage as an “acted out parable.” What is it a parable of? Describe the main characters in this “parable” and what they signify.
2. Note that Jesus did not heal the boy immediately, but conversed with the father even as the demon was causing the boy to undergo a rolling, foaming convulsion. Why do you think Jesus did this? Does this have any potential lessons for us?
3. In **v. 29** Jesus said “*This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer [some manuscripts add ‘and fasting’].*” Jesus neither prayed nor fasted to cast out the demon. What does this tell us about the real nature and purpose of prayer and fasting?

9:30-50: ³⁰ *They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

³³ *And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵ And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶ And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”*

³⁸ *John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” ³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ For the one who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*

⁴² *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’ ⁴⁹ For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”*

vv. 30-50—Jesus’ teaching on his death, resurrection, and discipleship

As he had done in **8:31-38**, Jesus links the lives of those who would be his disciples with his own life of

suffering and death. This section is also filled with irony and again reveals the disciples' incomprehension.

1. vv. 30-32—Jesus foretells his death and resurrection

Verse 30 begins Jesus' final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. This is the third time (**8:31; 9:9** [to Peter, James, and John]; and **9:31**) when Jesus tells his disciples of his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Jesus' being "*delivered into the hands of men*" refers to God the Father's delivering him over, not Judas's betrayal (see **Isa 53:10; Rom 4:25; 8:32**). Once again, they do not understand his reference to his resurrection.

2. vv. 33-37—Who is the greatest in the kingdom

Verses 33-34 show the first irony: Jesus has just told them (again) that he will suffer, be rejected, and be killed (**v. 31**), and they "*had argued with one another about who was the greatest*" (**v. 34**). Not only is their argument a complete contradiction to Jesus (who alone is "the greatest") and to the mission of the Messiah (to suffer, die, and "*give his life as a ransom for many*," **Mark 10:45**), it also contradicts what Jesus had told them in **8:34**, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" It is also ironic in that the disciples had just demonstrated their incompetence and inability to cast the demon out of the boy in **9:18, 28**, and now demonstrate both incomprehension and fear (**v. 32**), yet they are arguing over which one is the greatest!

Jesus' statement to the Twelve in **v. 35**, "*If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all*," was telling them (and us) how to find true greatness in God's eyes. The reason is that, by doing so, the disciples (and we) will be emulating Jesus himself, who "*came not to be served but to serve*" (**Mark 10:45**). A life of service to others requires a life-long attitude of humility, as opposed to the disciples' attitude of pride and seeking high status. "This humility, which is the basic law of the kingdom, demands a complete reversal of our previous scale of values, a reversal which God will one day vindicate (10:31)" (Cole 1989: 221).

Calling a child to himself (**v. 36**) was another acted-out parable. His statement in **v. 37**, "*Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me*," makes the connection of humility and the child implicit, since it suggests that true greatness means lowering oneself and caring about "insignificant" people like children. The parallel passage of **Matt 18:2-4** makes the connection of the child with humility explicit: "*And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them³ and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" There may be a number of reasons why Jesus placed the child in their midst; two such reasons suggest themselves:

- It is not that children are "innocent" (they are not). Rather, they are the most dependent people with the least ability to repay. Their security comes from their relationship with and trust in their parents, on whom they must depend for everything. Christ called his disciples "children" (**Mark 10:24**). The disciples (and we) need to recognize our complete dependence of God in Christ for, as Jesus said in **John 15:5**, "*apart from me you can do nothing.*" However, in Christ—by his grace and power—"I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (**Phil 4:13**). The reason is that "*it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (**Phil 2:13**; see also **Gal 2:20**).
- A second reason is, "Christ is teaching His disciples a concept of intrinsic value and worth. This child is to be greatly valued because of who he is in God's eyes, precious because of His workmanship and His image. This child's value had nothing to do with what he could produce or how he could contribute, and everything to do with who he is in God's sight. Only when we understand our basic value, worth, acceptance, and approval before our Father in heaven can we be free from the fluctuating value system in this world which depends on our production and performance. Only then are we free to serve one another from that full position of strength with God." (Mills 1986: 182-83)

3. vv. 38-50—The nature of discipleship

This section begins with another irony: the disciples had just been told to be a "*servant of all*" and to "receive a child in my name," yet they want to stop someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name (where they themselves had just failed to do so)! In **vv. 39-40**, Jesus is speaking practically. The issue in **v. 40** ("*the one who is not against us is for us*") is different from the issue in **Matt 12:30** ("*whoever is not with me is against me*"). In Matthew, the issue was the person of Jesus and whether or not he was demon-possessed; here, the issue is our relations with others who are followers of Christ. Jesus' statements and warnings in **vv. 40-42** need to be heard and heeded by individual Christians and by entire churches and denominations, many of whom will not fellowship or work with believers or churches who are of different denomination than our own. As Royce Gruenler says, "The implication of Jesus' warning in verse 42 is that the disciples, by their denial of the

man's Christ-centered hospitality, are playing the devil's role (like Peter in 8:33 who denies Jesus' suffering servanthood) and are in danger of preventing him from serving in Jesus' name (and thereby sinning). This is ironic, for the disciples are in danger of perishing, like a person thrown into the sea with a weight . . . if they persist in their selfish preoccupation with greatness and privilege rather than servanthood in Jesus' name (the unified theme of 9:33-42)." (Gruenler 1989: 785)

Jesus' statements in **vv. 43-48**⁴⁷ about cutting off one's hand or foot or plucking out one's eye if it causes you to sin are obviously not to be taken literally, but are a form of hyperbole to emphasize the importance of living a truly Christ-centered life and not leading others astray by our own conduct. In **8:34-38** Jesus had talked about denying oneself, taking up the cross to follow him, and losing one's life for Christ's and the gospel's sake. In **vv. 43-48** he is reinforcing what he said there, only now he is not talking about one's life as a whole, but the individual parts! He is using such graphic language here because of the tremendous stakes involved: there are only two, mutually-exclusive, everlasting destinies in store for all human beings: either "life" or "hell," i.e., "unquenchable fire."⁴⁸ The language of **v. 48** comes from **Isa 66:24** which says, "*And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.*" Christ is telling us that our lives, how we conduct them, and our relationship with him are of supreme value and importance. Therefore, we must constantly be mindful of this and assess our attitudes, speech, and conduct so that we remain on the narrow path that leads to life.

Verse 49 connects to both **v. 48** and **v. 50**, since it contains the thoughts of both "fire" and "salt." Throughout **vv. 33-50** Jesus has been discussing how we are to live as his disciples, and he has emphasized the everlasting consequences for us of our choices. Thus, **v. 49** appears to have both a future and a present application. Just as there will be a future judgment at which all of our actions will be tested and purified by the fire of God's holy judgment (see **1 Cor 3:13**), we can expect the fire of persecution, trials, and suffering in this life, as God's way of conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ (see **Rom 8:29**). **Verse 50** is picking up the salt image and applying it to our lives now. Just as salt was added to the OT sacrifices (see **Lev 2:13**), we are to "*have salt in yourselves*" since the Christian life is to be a "*living sacrifice*" (**Rom 12:1**). Salt acts as a preservative; hence, the individual Christian and the church should preserve that which is good and true in society to prevent society from decaying. And just as salt gives taste, so the individual Christian and the church should people a foretaste of heaven. But Christ warns his disciples, "*If the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?*" He is again warning us, as he did in **vv. 42-48**, to be mindful and assess how we are living our lives, since they are of such great and everlasting value.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Jesus chose a child as an object lesson of true greatness in the kingdom of God?
 - What responsibility does **v. 42** place on us in our relationships with people who are weaker than us?
 - What would it mean for you to live out **vv. 35-37, 41-42** in your family, your work, your neighborhood?
2. Does what Jesus said in **v. 40** have any application to any individuals or Christian groups you speak against or do not work with? If so, what changes (if any) will you make in your relationship with such individuals or groups?
3. What are examples of your hand, your foot, your eye causing you to stumble? How do you deal with this? How should you?
4. In various places in Mark, Jesus has told us what discipleship requires in our treatment of others and ourselves (e.g., **7:6-23, 8:34-35, 9:35-50**). Summarize what discipleship means and requires in our treatment: (A) of others, and (B) of ourselves. (In formulating your answer you may also refer to any other verses in any of the Gospels where Jesus discusses the nature of discipleship.)

⁴⁷ **Verses 44** and **46**, which are identical to **v. 48**, are not in the earliest manuscripts.

⁴⁸ This is discussed in greater detail at Menn 2017: 20-24.

10:1-12: ¹ And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. ² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³ He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴ They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” ⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

vv. 1-12—Jesus teaches about divorce

By coming down from Galilee into Judea and then beyond the Jordan, Jesus had entered the territory of Herod Antipas and Herodias. It is therefore most interesting that the Pharisees tested him with a question concerning divorce, since it was John the Baptist’s preaching against Herod Antipas’s divorcing his wife and marrying his brother’s wife that got John arrested and ultimately executed.

Ironically, the Pharisees seem more interested in the exceptions to the rule of fidelity between a husband and wife than in fidelity itself. This is doubly ironic since they are talking to the Bridegroom himself (**Matt 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29; Rev 22:17**) who is calling Israel to a remarriage with himself (**2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-27; Rev 19:7**). The Pharisees, however, are leading the people into spiritual adultery by rejecting Jesus, just as the leaders of Israel were unfaithful to God in the days of Hosea (see **Hosea 2**). Royce Gruenler puts it like this, “as Herod and Herodias commit adultery on the physical and spiritual levels and kill the only prophet who could save them, so the Pharisees commit adultery by deserting the only bridegroom who can save them, Jesus the Messiah” (Gruenler 1989: 786).

Verses 3-4 are referring to **Deut 24:1-4**, which permitted a husband to divorce his wife if he “*found some indecency in her*” (**Deut 24:1**). The issue of what constituted an “indecency” led to different schools of thought. Wives in Israel were not permitted to divorce their husbands, although she could go before the court and force him to divorce her for various reasons (see Lane 1974: 358n.19; Wessel 1984: 711).

Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees and his private explanation to the disciples do two things. First, he goes back to the beginning, long before Moses, by alluding to **Gen 1:27** and **2:24**. He points out that any divorce stems from people’s “*hardness of heart*” (v. 5) and is contrary to God’s will, since God created humanity as male and female, ordained marriage, desired that the married couple be in unity (“*one flesh*”), and desired that the marriage union be permanent (vv. 6-9). Jesus was going back to God’s will for marriage, because marriage ultimately is spiritual. Marriage—as God designed and desires it to be—is a reflection of the intimate love and oneness of the Trinity itself. The oneness and holiness of marriage also is a reflection of Christ’s relationship with his bride, the church (**Eph 5:25-32**; see also **John 17:21**). Consequently, Christians must realize the tremendous importance and significance of their marriage and do all they can to make it the joyful, fruitful union that God intends it to be. Second, in his comments concerning divorce, Jesus elevated the status and dignity of women.⁴⁹ Under Jewish law, a wife’s infidelity was adultery against her husband; if the husband committed adultery with another man’s wife, he thereby committed adultery against the other man, but “a man could never commit adultery against his wife, no matter what he did” (Wessel 1984: 712). By saying “*whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her*” (v. 11), Jesus was putting the husband under the same moral obligation as the wife, thereby raising the status and dignity of women. And by saying “*if she divorces her husband*” (v. 12), he was placing the right of wives and husbands to obtain a divorce on the same level, thus again elevating the status of women.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In **Mark 2:19-20**, Jesus describes himself as the bridegroom; we are, of course, his bride. What spiritual lessons or significance does Jesus’ discussion of marriage and divorce have for us as Christians? How does (or

⁴⁹ Rikk Watts adds these two helpful comments: “First, if Jesus’ final declaration (10:9) is taken to mean ‘no divorce’ under any circumstances, then he is at odds not just with Moses, but with God, who himself was obliged to divorce Israel (i.e., the northern kingdom) at one point (Jer. 3:8). The fact that Jesus says nothing about non-‘no fault’ divorces is probably best understood as an acceptance of those grounds as outlined in Exod. 21:10-11 (hence Matt. 19:9’s exception and Paul’s instruction in 1 Cor. 7:10-16). But, second, following Yahweh’s example, divorce even in these situations is not mandatory, and reconciliation and forgiveness are much to be preferred.” (Watts 2007: 199)

should) this affect the way we live our lives?

2. How do you think Jesus would have responded if he had been asked the question regarding divorce by someone who was asking the question sincerely and was trapped in a troubled or abusive relationship?

10:13-16: ¹³ *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.* ¹⁴ *But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.* ¹⁵ *Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”* ¹⁶ *And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.*

vv. 13-16—Jesus blesses little children

In **9:37** Jesus had told his disciples, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” Now, amazingly, the disciples still have not learned but are rebuking the people who are bringing their children to be blessed by Jesus! Then, ironically, Jesus tells his disciples that *they* must become like a child if they wish to enter the kingdom of God. **Verse 14** is the only time in the Bible where Jesus is said to be “indignant,” which is a strong feeling of displeasure at something or someone who is unjust or offensive. Here he is indignant against his own disciples because, by their words and deeds, they have a wrong view of the worth of children (see discussion at **9:36-37**, above), and thereby are misrepresenting the nature of the kingdom, misrepresenting what it takes to enter the kingdom, and thereby misrepresenting Jesus himself and the gospel.

This, again, is an acted-out parable of the gospel and the kingdom. Jesus’ taking the children in his arms and blessing them (**v. 16**) shows that the kingdom is something that is received, not something worked for or earned. When **v. 16** says that he “*blessed them*,” the Greek verb used (*kateulogeti*) is used nowhere else in the NT and has an intensive force signifying “He blessed them fervently, again and again” (Swift 1970: 872). This likewise shows the nature of Jesus, the gospel, the kingdom, and Christ’s love for his people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does “*receive the kingdom of God like a child*” (**v. 15**) mean? What childlike qualities was Jesus commending?

2. How are you like the children in this passage?

- How are you like the disciples?
- What in your life is preventing you from receiving the fulness of the kingdom of God now?

10:17-31: ¹⁷ *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* ¹⁸ *And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.* ¹⁹ *You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”* ²⁰ *And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”* ²¹ *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* ²² *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

²³ *And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”* ²⁴ *And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”* ²⁶ *And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”* ²⁷ *Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”* ²⁸ *Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”* ²⁹ *Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”*

vv. 17-31—Jesus and the rich young man

In vv. 17-18 when the man knelt before Jesus and called him “*Good Teacher,*” and Jesus replied, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone,*” he was not denying that he was God. Rather, he was affirming his divinity by asking a rhetorical question. In effect, he was saying to the man, “Do you really know to whom you are speaking?” As Victor Babajide Cole puts it, “Jesus was not denying that he was ‘good’. Rather, he was pressing the man to see the logical implication of addressing him as ‘good’, namely that he is God!” (Cole 2006: 1189)

As with so many of Jesus’ other encounters, there is irony here. First, there is the man’s question, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” you do not “inherit” something by “doing” something; inheritance is a gift that is not earned. Jesus’ answer to the man’s question is drawn from the second tablet of the Decalogue, i.e., how we relate to other people. Jesus had summarized the entire teaching of the law in two commandments: “*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*” (Matt 22:36-40; see also Mark 12:28-31) “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*” is called the “Royal law” (Jas 2:8) and fulfills the entire law (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14). The reason why Jesus cited the second tablet of the Decalogue is that all people are created in God’s image; how we treat God’s image shows what we really think of God. In other words, how we treat people is the test and the proof of the reality and sincerity of our faith in God. The apostle John puts it like this, “*If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen*” (1 John 4:20).

Jesus was pointing the man to the law to show him (and us) that the law cannot save you or grant you eternal life. The man said that he had kept everything in the law that Jesus had said, yet he still knew he lacked something. The fact that the law cannot save us, or make us righteous, or change our hearts, is made clear throughout the NT (see, e.g., Rom 3:20; 4:14-15; 7:14-24; 8:1-4; Gal 2:16; 3:1-25; 4:4-5; Heb 7:19; 10:1-4). That is why Jesus told the man, “*You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*” Essentially, Jesus’ entire answer was about himself as the “good,” i.e., “You say you have obeyed the law—but the law cannot save you and give you eternal life, and you realize that—so now, will you put me first and follow me, because only I can give you eternal life.” The the gospel—and people’s salvation—is based on what Christ has done; salvation cannot be “earned” by doing “good deeds.” Rather, salvation is given by God to people as a gift of his grace; it is received by people solely by faith in Christ.⁵⁰ As Eph 2:8-9 says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” To be saved means to repent of our sins, accept by faith what Christ has done for us, and turn to Christ as the Lord of our life (Matt 11:28; Mark 1:14-15; John 1:12; 3:16; 17:3; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:8-9). The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) summarizes: “The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life” (Westminster 1646: XIV:2).

Jesus not only was confronting the man with the fact that the law cannot save us but was also confronting him to evaluate what truly was most important to him. In his case, it was his money and possessions. The man had run to Jesus, knelt before him, recognized him as good, desired eternal life, and recognized his own inner lack or inadequacy. The one thing—the essential thing—that he was not willing to do was to obey Jesus. Without obeying him, he was revealing that he really did not worship him (despite the outward signs of worship [kneeling before him]). What we do with our money and possessions is the outward and visible sign of what is truly most important to us, i.e., who or what is our real Lord. It is true, of course, that selling all one’s possessions and giving to the poor is a great sacrifice, and would also affect his extended family community who probably relied on him. However, Elisha made that sacrifice to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19-21) as have countless others throughout history. The rich man epitomizes all people who try to find their worth and security in the things of the world. As Jesus said of the church of Laodicea, “*You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*” (Rev 3:17). Jesus was telling the man, as he told the church of Laodicea, “You are really putting your worth and security in your money and possessions, rather than in me. Trust me. I am trustworthy and will prove it by going to the cross for you. Your possessions, however nice they may be, will be gone in an instant and cannot save you, whereas if you obey and follow me, you will have *treasure in heaven* (v. 21) which will last forever.” That man (and we) needs to recognize what Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are

⁵⁰ Notice that throughout this section, “eternal life,” “having treasure in heaven,” “entering the kingdom of God,” and “salvation” are all used synonymously.

restless till they find rest in Thee” (Augustine 1942: 1.1.1) Blaise Pascal put it similarly, “There was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.” (Pascal 1958: VII.425)

In vv. 23-27, Jesus’ statements about how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God provoked amazement in the disciples because they considered riches to be a sign of God’s favor and blessing. While it is true that God “*richly provides us with everything to enjoy*” (1 Tim 6:17), Jesus recognizes that there is great spiritual danger in wealth (see Prov 30:8-9). Those who have much tend to rely on themselves, rely on their money and possessions, fear losing their money and possessions, and deny their dependence on the Lord. The rich man who came to Jesus exhibited those very traits. In v. 27 Jesus makes clear that salvation is 100% the work of God, not man.

Jesus’ answer to Peter’s statement in v. 28 that “*we have left everything and followed you*” is of great importance: “*Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,*³⁰ *who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*³¹ *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*” (vv. 29-31) Many so-called “prosperity gospel” preachers take the “hundredfold” return out of context and tell people to “sow a seed of faith,” claiming, “For every dollar (franc, shilling, etc.) you give to this ministry, God will give you back 100.” Jesus is saying nothing of the kind. The context has nothing to do with people “sowing a seed of faith” by giving to someone’s ministry. In fact, money is not even mentioned in the passage. Rather, it concerns those who already “*have left everything and followed [Christ]*” (10:28). Jesus had just told the rich man to “*go and sell all that you have and give to the poor*” (10:21). Jesus did not promise the man that if he sold his possessions and gave to the poor he would get even more money on this earth. Instead, Jesus said that “*you will have treasure in heaven*” (10:21). Indeed, far from promising that giving would increase someone’s money and wealth, Jesus warns, “*How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! . . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*” (10:23, 25).

The context has to do with Jesus’ preparing his disciples for their apostolic ministries in the face of persecution. Thus, part of what Jesus promises as a “return” for being devoted to him is “persecutions” (10:30). The theme of persecution and humility is continued in 10:32-45. Jesus speaks of a person leaving one’s “*house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel*” and receiving “*a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life*” (vv. 29-30). What is Jesus talking about? The answer is that he is referring to believers now being a *new family* in Christ. When we are saved, God adopts us into his family (see Rom 8:15-17; Eph 1:5). The church is specifically called the “*household [or, family] of God*” (1 Tim 3:15; see also 1 Tim 5:1-2). Dharti Lewis points out, “The church is not *like* family; it is family. . . . This can be seen by the fact that the word *disciple*, so prevalent in the early part of the New Testament, disappears after the book of Acts. It is replaced by the term *brother* in the rest of the Bible.” (Lewis 2015: n.p.) As Sarles puts it, “When the disciples lost their houses for the sake of the gospel, they would be given access to homes owned by fellow believers who would share with them as they moved from place to place preaching the gospel. Likewise when the disciples forsook their families for Jesus’ sake, they entered new associations in the family of God that were a hundred times greater.” (Sarles 1986: 338) Interestingly, however, Jesus does *not* speak of a person leaving his or her wife or husband. In light of what he said in 10:7-9, Jesus is saying that only death—not Jesus and the gospel—should sever the marriage union. In fact, Peter and the other disciples traveled with their wives (1 Cor 9:5).

Finally, v. 31 (“*many who are first will be last, and the last first*”) refers to the judgment “when God will evaluate the lives of men and when human values will be reversed. At that time those who have rank and position will not have them, and those who do not have them now will have them. This may be a kind of summary of Jesus’ teaching in vv. 17-31.” (Wessel 1984: 717) It also may be a warning to the disciples in light of their having “*left everything and followed you*” (v. 28) that “they must not conceive of their discipleship in terms of rewards. Discipleship entails suffering and service; it must be entered on in terms of love and commitment to Jesus, not because of what one hopes to get out of it either in this life or in the life to come.” (Ibid.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus pick up on the man’s use of the word “good” (vv. 17-18)?

2. Why did Jesus initially take the man to the Ten Commandments in response to the question of what he had to do to inherit eternal life? Note specifically that all of the commandments that Jesus referred to were from the *second* tablet of the Decalogue (your relationships with others), not from the first tablet (your relationship with God). Why was this?
3. How does this passage apply to what we are to do with *our* money and possessions? In this regard, go through the Gospels and find where else Jesus talked about money and possessions.
4. Do we borrow the techniques of Satan in evangelism because we are so intent on getting a potential convert to say the “magic words” of the “sinner’s prayer” that we don’t spell out in advance the implications and costs of what conversion to Christ and discipleship really mean for one’s life? What are the effects of such an approach to evangelism?
5. In **vv. 29-30** Jesus is using the language of *family* to discuss the Christian community (i.e., the church). What are (or should be) the implications of what he is saying for us as Christians individually and as churches in our relations with other believers?

10:32-45: ³² *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him,* ³³ *saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.* ³⁴ *And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”*

³⁵ *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* ³⁶ *And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”* ³⁷ *And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”* ³⁸ *Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* ³⁹ *And they said to him, “We are able.”* *And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,* ⁴⁰ *but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”* ⁴¹ *And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.* ⁴² *And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.* ⁴³ *But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,* ⁴⁴ *and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.* ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

vv. 32-45—Jesus again foretells his death and resurrection and the nature of true discipleship

These events bear a striking parallel to **9:30-37**. The disciples still do not understand the mission of Jesus, and they still have the worldly mindset of status and preferment instead of humbleness and service.

1. vv. 32-34—Jesus again foretells his death and resurrection

As he frequently does in the book of Mark, Jesus separates the Twelve from the rest of the crowd in order to teach them. This fourth (three to the Twelve and one to Peter, James, and John) and final prediction of his suffering and death is the most explicit and detailed. He identifies Jerusalem as the place where he will be betrayed (v. 33). He points out not only that the chief priests and scribes will reject their Messiah, but that he also will be delivered over “to the Gentiles” (v. 33). Just as both Jews and Gentiles would be involved in his passion and death, so his kingdom is open equally to Jews and Gentiles. He then gives gory details of what will then happen to him: “they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him” (v. 34). The parallel passage in Matthew refers to the fact that he would be killed by crucifixion (**Matt 20:19**). In this teaching, he was alluding to **Ps 22:6-7** and **Isa 50:6; 52:14; 53:5**. The climax of it is that “after three days he will rise” (v. 34).⁵¹ Mark does not record the disciples’ reaction to this, but in the parallel passage Luke says, “But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.” (**Luke 18:34**) That was clearly the case, since even after Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced to death,

⁵¹ **Matt 20:19** says “and he will be raised on the third day.” For a discussion of the fact that these different wordings of the “three days” idiomatic and mean the same thing, see n.40, above.

mocked, spit on, flogged, and crucified, none of the disciples seems to have recalled that Jesus had also said that he would rise again after three days.

2. **vv. 35-45**—The nature of true discipleship

Amazingly, James and John understood that Jesus was Messiah but still did not understand what his mission was. They had not learned anything from what Jesus had just said about the suffering he would soon have to endure or from what Jesus had told them in **9:30-37**, when they and the other disciples had discussed who was the greatest. **Verse 41** shows us that the other disciples likewise had learned nothing, since they were indignant and by no means content to be “second best,” let alone the “least” or the “last.”

Jesus’ statement to them in **vv. 43-45**, “*whoever would be great among you must be your servant,*⁴⁴ *and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.*⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” again describes the nature of true discipleship. It is in accord to how he described true discipleship in **8:34-38** when he first announced that he would suffer and die. **Verses 40-44** suggest that, while *entry* into the kingdom is a gift, there will be different *positions* or *rewards* in the kingdom which are earned by faithfulness in service (see **Matt 6:20-21; 10:42; 19:21; 25:14-29; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33-34; 19:12-26; 1 Tim 6:17-19**). **Verses 38-39** and **45** (as he did in **v. 38**) link his own life to the lives of his disciples. It is akin to his saying “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master*” (**Matt 10:24**; see also **John 13:16; 15:20**). Disciples are to live with the same “servant”-oriented values as Jesus had and can expect the same treatment as Jesus received. Both the “cup” and “baptism” were symbols of enduring trouble, including the wrath of God (see **Ps 69:1-2, 15; 75:8; Isa 51:17**; see also **Mark 14:36; Rom 6:3**).

The last part of **v. 45** (“*to give his life as a ransom for many*”) goes to the heart of the gospel. To “ransom” people is the price of redemption or release and indicates that we were enslaved (to our sin, the devil, and death) but now have been set free. The reference to “many” alludes to **Isa 53:11-12** (see also **Rom 5:15; Heb 9:28**). Jesus recognized that “forgiveness is always a form of costly suffering” (Keller 2008: 193). When someone has been wronged and damaged, the first option “is to demand that [the wrongdoer] pay for the damages. The second is to refuse to let him pay anything. . . . Notice that in every option the cost of the damage must be borne by *someone*. Either you or he absorbs the cost for the deed, but the debt does not somehow vanish into thin air. . . . [To forgive someone means that] *you* are absorbing the debt, *taking the cost of it completely on yourself* instead of taking it out on the other person” and also means that you not only suffer the original loss but that you refuse to make the wrongdoer pay for what he has done. (Ibid.: 187, 189, *emph. added*) Thus, all forgiveness involves suffering—and the greater the wrong and the injury, the greater the cost and the suffering of the one who forgives.

The costliness of our sin and what it cost God to forgive us (i.e., “*His only begotten Son,*” **John 3:16**) is revealed by Jesus on the cross. What Jesus was doing on the cross was receiving the judgment, paying the cost, and taking onto himself the punishment due to sinful humanity: “In Matthew 10:28 Jesus says that no physical destruction can be compared with the spiritual destruction of hell, of losing the presence of God. But this is exactly what happened to Jesus on the cross—he was forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46). . . . When he cried out that his God had forsaken him he was experiencing hell itself. But consider—if our debt for sin is so great that it is never paid off there, but our hell stretches on for eternity, then what are we to conclude from the fact that Jesus said the payment was ‘finished’ (John 19:30) after only three hours? We learn that what he felt on the cross was far worse and deeper than all of our deserved hells put together. . . . When Jesus was cut off from God he went into the deepest pit and most powerful furnace, beyond all imagining. He experienced the full wrath of the Father. And he did it voluntarily, for us.” (Keller 2009: sec.4)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is Jesus’ understanding of greatness? How does this compare with the disciples’ understanding of greatness?

2. How do you think James’ and John’s question to Jesus (**v. 37**) and the disciples’ reaction to James and John (**v. 41**) made Jesus feel?

- How does it make Jesus feel, and what spiritual good are we, when *we* strive for honor, position, riches and power?

- How about when we strive to be “like Jesus” or do things “for Jesus” *for the purpose of* gaining some supposed “rewards” or “crowns” or honors in heaven and eternity?

3. If we are truly born again, and have the Holy Spirit in us and leading us and guiding us, why is this whole concept of becoming a “slave to all” so disagreeable to us?

- What can we do to bring our attitudes and actions into the true “Jesus style” of humility and servanthood?

10:46-52: ⁴⁶ *And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.* ⁴⁷ *And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* ⁴⁸ *And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”* ⁴⁹ *And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.”* ⁵⁰ *And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.* ⁵¹ *And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.”* ⁵² *And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.*

vv. 46-52—Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus

Jesus is now approaching Jerusalem for the final time where he will consummate the gospel. Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, calling him “*Son of David*” (vv. 47-48). God had made a covenant with David in which he promised to raise up David’s seed, establish his kingdom forever, be a father to him, and he would be a son to God (2 Sam 7:12-14a). Further, Isa 9:1-7 promises that salvation will be brought by the promised Son of David, who will establish the eternal kingdom (Isa 9:7). Consequently, “Son of David” is a messianic title (see also Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:23-24; Mark 12:35). Even before Jesus was born the angel Gabriel alluded to 2 Sam 7:12-13 and Isa 9:6-7, and said that Jesus would fulfill the Davidic Covenant, when he told Mary that Jesus “*will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end*” (Luke 1:31-33). Matthew begins his gospel by describing Jesus as “*the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matt 1:1). Others who recognized Jesus’ power and uniqueness applied the term “*Son of David*” to Him (Matt 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 18:38-39). Jesus applied the term to Himself (Mark 12:35-37). “By healing the blind man from Jericho who addressed him as the Son of David, Jesus publicly acknowledged this role” (Goppelt 1982: 87).

Mark says that, as a result of Bartimaeus’ crying out to Jesus, “*many rebuked him, telling him to be silent*” (v. 48). Luke’s account of this says, “*Those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent*” (Luke 18:39). That indicates that it was the disciples who were rebuking Bartimaeus and telling him to be silent. They still have not learned. Irony abounds in this. Those who could see physically were blind spiritually, and the one who was blind physically could see spiritually. Nevertheless, even though Jesus is approaching the culmination of his mission, he stopped and took the time to heal a man in need. Ironically, in v. 51 Jesus asked Bartimaeus the same question he had asked James and John in v. 36, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” Bartimaeus received a considerably different answer than James and John had received. Now, since his mission is reaching its climax, Jesus does not command Bartimaeus to be silent or go home; instead, Bartimaeus “*followed him on the way*” (v. 52).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Jesus did not order Bartimaeus to keep silent as he had done in several other cases of healing?

2. Jesus is recorded as twice asking the question, “*What do you want me to do for you?*” (v. 36 to James and John and v. 51 to Bartimaeus). How would you respond if he asked you that question?

11:1-11: ¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

vv. 1-11—The triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, like so many of his acts, was designed to reveal who he was. In his triumphal entry into Jerusalem Jesus was fulfilling the OT expectations that “YHWH is returning to Zion. He will do again what he did at the exodus, coming to dwell in the midst of his people [Isa 4:2-6; 24:23; 25:9-10; 35:3-6, 10; 40:3-5, 9-11; 52:7-10; 50:15-17, 19-21; 60:1-3; 62:10-11; 63:1-9; 64:1; 66:12-19; Ezek 43:1-7; Hag 2:7-10; Zech 2:4-5, 10-12; 8:2-3; Mal 3:1-4].” (Wright 1996: 616) “Within his own time and culture, his riding on a donkey over the Mount of Olives, across Kidron, and up to the Temple mount spoke more powerfully than words could have done of a royal claim. The allusion to Zechariah (and, with that, several other passages) is obvious [Zech 9:9-10; see also Gen 49:8-12; Ps 72:8; Isa 63:2-6]. The so-called ‘triumphal entry’ was thus clearly messianic.” (Ibid.: 490-91) Jesus may have made a prior arrangement with the owner of the colt in order to fulfill the prophecy of Zech 9:9. The crowd’s shouting the words of Ps 118:25-26 (“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”) and “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” (vv. 9-10) were an acknowledgement of Jesus as the Messiah; “hosanna” is a transliteration of the Hebrew of Ps 118:25 (“save us”) literally means “save now” (Swift 1970: 875). At that time, the disciples, and probably many in the crowd, did not understand the full implications of what was going on and what was being said (see John 12:16).⁵² However, the Pharisees recognized the implications of what the crowd was shouting and, therefore, told Jesus to rebuke his disciples (Luke 19:39). But Jesus replied, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Jews looked for a political deliverer; they misunderstood the nature of their own Messiah and the nature of his kingdom. How do we misinterpret Jesus or try to use him (or his Word) for our own ends? Try to be specific (and honest).
2. The shouts of “hosanna” (“save now”) changed to “crucify him” in less than a week. Have your thoughts and feelings about God ever abruptly changed when your circumstances changed? When and how?
 - What does this tell you?
3. In v. 11 Jesus entered the temple *incognito* to perform an inspection of that which was rightfully his. (When he came back the next time [v. 15] he came to judge that which he had found at the time of his inspection.) When does he come *incognito* to us?

⁵² After the Maccabean Revolt (167-160 BC) had restored the temple, “the great Hosannah chant—‘Save us!’—had taken on additional meaning. Before it had been sung in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt and as a prayer for forgiveness and rain for next year’s harvest. Now it had also become a prayer, a fervent plea, for political freedom, something the Jewish people had not known for more than 500 years.” (Vander Laan and Markham 1996: 117)

11:12-26: ¹² *On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.* ¹³ *And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.* ¹⁴ *And he said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.*

¹⁵ *And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.* ¹⁶ *And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.* ¹⁷ *And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”* ¹⁸ *And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.* ¹⁹ *And when evening came they went out of the city.*

²⁰ *As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots.* ²¹ *And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.”* ²² *And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God.* ²³ *Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.* ²⁴ *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* ²⁵ *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”*

vv. 12-26—Signs of Jesus’ Messiahship: Jesus curses a fig tree and cleanses the temple

As was true with some of his other actions, Jesus’ cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple were “acted-out parables” to demonstrate who he was; they were also prophetic.

1. vv. 12-14, 20-26—Jesus curses the fig tree

In **Luke 13:6-9** Jesus told a parable concerning a barren fig tree. That parable really concerned Jesus’ own coming to Israel, looking for fruit, but finding none. Now, in **Mark 11:12-14**, Jesus acts out the parable and signals his rejection of the nation of Israel by cursing the fig tree (**Matt 21:18-22; Mark 11: 12-14, 20-24**).⁵³ The fig tree was a symbol for the nation of Israel (**Hos 9:10; Nah 3:12; Zech 3:10**). In cursing the fig tree, Jesus was condemning outward religious “show” that lacks true, spiritual fruit. However, he was doing more than that. **Jer 5:17, 8:13, Hos 2:12; Amos 4:9**, and **Mic 7:1-6** all speak of judgments on fig trees as part of God’s judgment on Israel. “The passage most likely to come to mind from this story is Mic 7:1-6, where the prophet’s dismay over the corruption of Judah is described as his failure to find ‘the first-ripe fig for which I hunger.’ Following the explicit statement that Jesus was hungry in v. 18, his inability to find early figs to eat speaks powerfully of how the prophetic vision is fulfilled in the failure of contemporary Jerusalem and its temple.” (France 2007: 793) Jesus combined his cursing of the fig tree with the statement, “*May no one ever eat fruit from you again*” (**Mark 11:14**; see also **Matt 21:19**). By that statement Jesus was not merely attacking religious hypocrisy (since hypocrites might possibly repent and change). Instead, he was demonstrating that the *nation* as the vehicle for spreading God’s kingdom had been permanently rejected and cast off. Similarly, after having attacked the Pharisees, Jesus had said, “*Every tree which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted*” (**Matt 15:13**).

In **vv. 20-26** the disciples saw that the fig tree which Jesus had cursed had withered. When they commented on this, Jesus’ reply dealt with faith, and he said, “*Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him*” (v. 23). Central to rejection of Israel is rejection of the Temple. That is corroborated by Jesus’ remark about casting “*this mountain*” into the sea. The “mountain” probably referred to the temple mount, since that was the most important mountain in Jerusalem and the Temple was often synonymous with the mountain on which it was located. “The saying is not simply a miscellaneous comment on how prayer and faith can do such things as curse fig trees. It is a very specific word of judgment: the Temple mountain is, figuratively speaking, to be taken up and cast into the sea.” (Wright 1996: 422)

Jesus goes on, in **vv. 23b-26**, to speak more broadly about the connection between faith and prayer. “Prosperity” teachers often indicate that if one prays for material wealth God is required to grant it. They base this on what Jesus said in v. 23. That verse does not support or have anything to do with prosperity teaching.

⁵³ When Jesus came to the tree, v. 13 says, “*He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.*” This does not mean that Jesus’ cursing the tree was unreasonable, because “the fig tree in Palestine bears an early crop of immature fruit, like green knobs, which appear before the leaves. These are known as *taksh* and are the common food of the *fellahin*, or peasants. Their absence was a clear indication of the barrenness of the tree.” (Smith 1970: 875)

The context, of course, concerns Jesus' judgment of the nation of Israel and the temple (**vv. 15-19**). The passage is concerned with making sure that we have the proper object and focus and the right character and lifestyle. Even his broader application concerning faith and prayer related to his rejection of Israel since, by rejecting Jesus, the nation demonstrated that it did not have either faith in God or the right character and lifestyle to be God's vehicle for spreading God's kingdom. Hence, Jesus emphasized to the disciples (and to us) that the object of our faith is to be God, not material riches (**v. 22**; see also **Jas 4:3**). Indeed, the only effective requests are those that are made "*according to his will*" (**1 John 5:14**; see also **1 John 3:22**). Further, our prayers are to arise out of a holy life of forgiveness, not greed (**vv. 25-26**). In **vv. 25-26**, Jesus was repeating the condition he had said in connection with the "Lord's Prayer" (**Matt 6:14-15**).

2. **vv. 15-19**—Jesus cleanses the temple

In these verses, Jesus "cleansed the temple" by driving out the buyers and sellers and the money-changers (see also **Matt 21:12-13**; **Luke 19:45-46**; **John 2:13-16**). In doing that, Jesus quoted from **Isa 56:7** ("*my house will be called a house of prayer*"), which is part of a prophecy (**Isa 56:3-8**) that God would call the Gentiles to Himself in his "temple" ("*holy mountain*"). He also quoted from **Jer 7:11** ("*den of robbers*"), which is part of a word from the Lord (**Jer 7:1-11**) that God has seen how Israel has not practiced justice, has oppressed foreigners and the helpless, has shed innocent blood, and has gone after other gods. The offense that led to this action primarily was against the Gentiles, because "the Sadducees had put the sheep market where the Gentiles came to worship [i.e., the court of the Gentiles]. Since Gentiles couldn't enter any of the other courts, by doing this, the priests had usurped their place of prayer. God had commanded that faithful Gentiles needed a place to pray, but the Sadducees had decided that on religious days they needed a market more." (Vander Laan and Markham 1996: 158)

Jesus' greater point in cleansing the temple is that just as God rejected the first temple in 586 BC because it had become corrupt, so the physical temple in Jerusalem had to be replaced with a greater "Temple" because it was corrupt and not fulfilling its role. "In addition to Isaiah and Jeremiah, the whole incident cries out to be seen, as various writers have recently argued, within the context of a deliberate reapplication of Zechariah. The quasi-royal entry into the city, and Jesus' messianic authority over the Temple . . . evokes Zechariah 9.9 and 6.12; the warning of a great cataclysm echoes 14.1-5. Further, the whole context speaks of the mighty acts whereby YHWH will set up his kingdom once and for all (14.9), whereupon the Gentiles will come in to worship (14.16-19). In this context, it may be that the action reported by Mark 11.16, where Jesus refused to allow anyone to carry vessels through the Temple (something also forbidden in rabbinic literature), was both part of the 'cleansing' side of the story and, more importantly, another symbol, indicating, by veiled allusion to Zechariah 14.20f., that 'the day' had at last arrived." (Wright 1996: 422)

Casting out the moneychangers may have briefly stopped the offering of sacrifices by shutting down the procedure by which animals were bought and sacrificed. If that is the case, it also would have indicated that the temple's purpose of offering sacrifices for forgiveness was passing away. "Without the right money, individual worshippers could not purchase their sacrificial animals. Without animals, sacrifice could not be offered. Without sacrifice, the Temple had lost its whole *raison d'être* [reason for existence]. The fact that Jesus effected only a brief cessation of sacrifice fits perfectly with the idea of symbolic action. He was not attempting a reform; he was symbolizing judgment. . . . Jesus' action symbolized his belief that, in returning to Zion, YHWH would not after all take up residence in the Temple, legitimating its present administration and its place and function within the first-century Jewish symbolic world. . . . The brief disruption which Jesus effected in the Temple's normal business symbolized the destruction which would overtake the whole institution within a generation." (Wright 1996: 423-24)

Additionally, in the OT law, anyone who had a physical defect had not been permitted to serve in the Temple (**Lev 21:16-24**). **Isa 56:3-8** prophesied that there would be a new people of God "*in My house,*" including Gentiles and people with physical defects. "Isaiah announces that in the last days, when God will reveal his righteousness, biological descent or bodily mutilation [e.g., Gentiles, eunuchs] will no longer determine membership in his people. Foreigners will 'join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants' (56:7). . . . The criterion for being a part of YHWH's future restoration and establishment of his kingdom is not ethnic descent but a contrite spirit and a contrite heart [57:15] and a righteous response to God's will on the part of those individuals who belong to the remnant for whom God has compassion (58:7-14)—those who 'take refuge' in YHWH 'shall possess the land and inherit my holy mountain' [57:13], both 'the far and the near' [57:19]. This means that in the Isaianic prophecies the criteria for membership in the eschatological people of God have changed in a fundamental way: when YHWH restores the earth, both repentant Jews and repentant Gentiles will constitute the covenant people." (Schnabel 2002: 41)

When Jesus cast out the moneychangers, Matthew reports that “*the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them*” (**Matt 21:14**). Jesus’ quoting from **Isaiah 56** signified that he was creating the new people of God and fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy. This new people of God consists equally of Jews and Gentiles, males and females, and people from every station of life; all are now “priests” in the new, true, house of God (see **Acts 8:26-38; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-22; Col 3:10-11; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:9-10; 7:9**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? Was he merely angry with the tree because he was hungry and it had no figs, or was he making some other point?

- How is the cursing of the fig tree related to the cleansing of the temple?

2. What do the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple tell you about what angers Jesus?

- How does this relate to any of your religious practices or other acts?

3. At first blush, the conversation beginning in **v. 21** is somewhat odd: Peter’s statement isn’t really an explicit question, but Jesus “answers” it; even then, Jesus’s answer does not seem to pertain directly to what Peter said. Why do you think Jesus answered Peter the way he did?

4. What are the primary conditions for effective prayer laid down by Jesus in **vv. 22-26**?

- Which of these conditions stretch you the most?
- How does what Jesus says about prayer relate to the way you actually pray?

5. What does it mean to forgive someone? If we have been forgiven of rebellion, sin, and a debt owed to God that we could never pay which would have resulted in our spending eternity in hell, but instead have been graciously granted a new life here and eternal life which will be one of complete happiness, why do we find it so hard to forgive others of whatever they may have done to offend, hurt, or otherwise harm us?

11:27-33: ²⁷ *And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him,* ²⁸ *and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”* ²⁹ *Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.* ³⁰ *Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.”* ³¹ *And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’* ³² *But shall we say, ‘From man?’—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.* ³³ *So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”*

vv. 27-33—The source of Jesus’ authority is questioned

Jesus’ question to the religious leaders, “*Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?*” (**v. 30**) exposed the religious leaders to a dilemma and also revealed their hypocrisy. To answer “from heaven” would have been fatal to their opposition to Jesus, because John the Baptist had testified that Jesus was greater than he was (**Mark 1:7-8**) and was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (**John 1:29-34**). Thus, if John’s authority was from heaven, then all the more so was Jesus’ authority from heaven, which could only mean that Jesus was the Messiah. As R. Alan Cole points out, “The question of Jesus to them was not a trap; it was yet another opportunity for them to realize and confess their blindness, and to ask for sight. Theirs was the unforgivable sin, that constant wilful opposition and blindness that is the sin against the Holy Spirit (3:29).” (Cole 1989: 258)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why would the answer “from heaven” to Jesus’s question in **v. 30** have been fatal to the Jewish leaders’ opposition to Jesus?

2. To what extent, or in what circumstances, do you refrain from speaking the truth or doing what you know you should because of the fear of people (including the fear of what you think people might think about you)?

12:1-12: ¹*And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.* ²*When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.* ³*And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.* ⁴*Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.* ⁵*And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.* ⁶*He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’* ⁷*But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’* ⁸*And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.* ⁹*What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.* ¹⁰*Have you not read this Scripture: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;’* ¹¹*this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”*
¹²*And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.*

vv. 1-12—The parable of the vine-growers

Upon his entering Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus did two “acted out parables” signifying his rejection of and judgment of Israel—cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple. Now, he tells a parable to the same effect, which recounts Israel’s history of its relationship with God and ends with its judgment by God. The imagery of this parable is drawn from **Isa 5:1-7**, which prophesied the destruction of Israel for its injustice, unrighteousness, and failure to bear good fruit. Jesus, in effect, takes what Isaiah said about Israel, brings it up to date, and says what will be done about it. In the parable of the vine-growers, the vineyard owner is God, the vineyard is Israel, the tenants are its leaders, the servants are the prophets, and the son is Jesus. In **Matt 23:29-35** and **Luke 11:47-51** Jesus also recounted Israel’s mistreatment of the prophets. In **v. 8**, Jesus says, “*And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.*” That is foreshadowing his own crucifixion outside the city gate (**Heb 13:12**). **Verses 9-11** foreshadow both the destruction of Israel and the creation of the new, true Israel consisting of all those—Jews and Gentiles alike—who are “in Christ” (see **Rom 11:11-26**; **Gal 3:28**; **Eph 2:11-22**; **Col 3:10-11**; **Rev 5:9-10**; **7:9**). In **vv. 10-11** Jesus quotes from **Ps 118:22-23**, the very psalm from which the people quoted when they shouted “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*” during Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem only a few days before. This parable actually gives the answer to the question asked by the chief priests, scribes, and elders in **11:28**, “*By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?*” In this parable Jesus is saying, “I am doing these things by the authority of God, for I am his Son as prophesied in the Psalms.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who do each of the central figures in this parable represent (i.e., the owner of the vineyard, vineyard, the tenants, the servants, and the son)? How is this parable both historical and prophetic?
2. How does **Ps 118:22-23**, which Jesus quoted in **vv. 10-11**, relate to the parable?
3. How does this parable answer the scribes’ question in **Mark 11:28**?

12:13-17: ¹³*And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.* ¹⁴*And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?”* ¹⁵*But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.”* ¹⁶*And they brought one. And he said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”* They said to him, “Caesar’s.” ¹⁷*Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marveled at him.*

vv. 13-17—“Render to God the things that are God’s”

Since AD 6 the Romans had required the Jews to pay a poll tax; the Zealots refused to pay it, the Pharisees paid it grudgingly, and the Herodians paid it willingly (Wessel 1984: 734). This question sought to

impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. A simple “yes” or “no” answer would result in Jesus appearing to side with either the Herodians or the Zealots. A “yes” answer would mean that many of the people might disavow him as Messiah, because they thought that messiah would free them from the authority of Rome. A “no” answer might subject him to charges of treason by Rome. The hypocrisy behind the question is amazing. Their statement that “*we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion*” shows their own hypocrisy, since they “*feared the people*” (12:12). Further, the Pharisees and the Herodians were enemies but conspired together anyway.

The fact that Jesus had to ask then for a denarius reveals his own poverty. But it also forced them to reveal their own hypocrisy in that they had Caesar’s coin and used it. Hence, they were, in effect, answering their own question. Jesus’ two-part answer, “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's,*” is profound and caused them to “marvel” at him. His answer showed that he was not playing the role of a “political” Messiah that many people were expecting. The first part of the answer acknowledges that the state has certain legitimate claims on us as citizens, because it provides certain benefits to us. In this, it does not contradict God’s claim on us (see **Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:1-6; Titus 3:1-2; 1 Pet 2:13-17**). However, the second part of his answer shows us that our obligation to the state is not absolute. God is our ultimate authority and is sovereign over the state. While the denarius was stamped with Caesar’s image, we—every human being—are stamped with and made in God’s likeness and image (**Gen 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; Jas 3:9-10**). Consequently, the first and greatest command is to “*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” (**Mark 12:30**; see also **Matt 22:37; Luke 10:27**). The absolute priority of God in our lives means that there will be differences in applying our relative obedience to government versus our absolute obedience to God. When the government usurps the place of God and renders our obedience to him illegal, our duty must be to disobey the government, even though that can result in imprisonment or even death. The apostles learned this lesson early on (see **Acts 5:17-42**). As Peter said, “*We must obey God rather than men*” (**Acts 5:29**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was the question “Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?” such a dangerous question for Jesus?
2. Whose likeness is stamped on *us*? What does this imply for how we are to live our lives?
3. Our politics and economics (and, indeed, our life in general) should be the outworking of our theology. Have you ever encountered a situation where your theology contradicted your political or other beliefs, or where society requested or demanded of you something that you believed to be contrary to your theology?
 - How did you handle the situation?
 - How should you have handled it?

12:18-27: ¹⁸ *And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying,* ¹⁹ *“Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.* ²⁰ *There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring.* ²¹ *And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise.* ²² *And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died.* ²³ *In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”*

²⁴ *Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵ For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ ²⁷ He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.”*

vv. 18-27—Life in the resurrection

The question by the Sadducees is a mocking question. They begin by quoting **Deut 25:5**.⁵⁴ Their

⁵⁴ This was called “levirate marriage” (from the Latin *levir*, “brother-in-law”) and was designed “to protect the widow and guarantee the continuance of the family line” (Wessel 1984: 735).

question is mocking because it is essentially saying, “Since all seven brothers obviously can’t have the woman in the resurrection, therefore there cannot be a resurrection.”

Jesus’ answer says that there are two things that are key to our understanding the true nature of reality: (1) understanding the Scriptures, and (2) understanding the power of God (v. 24). Verse 25 indicates that marriage (particularly, sexual relations) is only necessary here and now on this earth, where death prevails, since procreation is necessary for the continuation of the human race. It is no longer necessary in heaven or on the new earth since all those who are “*who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection . . . cannot die anymore*”; hence, marriage is no longer necessary (Luke 20:35-36). Further, the Sadducees were unaware of the fact that resurrection is not merely re-animation and repetition of present conditions but is transformation to a new type of life and conditions, as Paul makes clear in 1 Cor 15:35-50.

In v. 26 Jesus quotes Exod 3:6 and emphasizes the present tense (“*I am the God of. . .*” not “*I was the God of. . .*”). Jesus argues that that means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are now living. This is made even more explicit in Luke’s account. This also is in accord with what Jesus said in Luke 20:37-38 (see also Matt 22:31-32; Mark 12:26-27), “*But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.*” The word used by Jesus for “raised” in v. 37 is *egeirō*, one of the primary words used in the NT for “resurrection.” The important point here is that Jesus was using clear “resurrection” language to describe Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *in the intermediate state*, not their final bodily resurrected state. The use of “resurrection” language to speak of our current life in Christ (now on earth and in heaven before the inauguration of the new heaven and new earth at the second coming of Christ) as well as to refer to the bodily resurrection that will take place in connection with the second coming of Christ is amplified throughout the NT. For example, Eph 2:5-6 uses the phrases “*made us alive,*” “*raised us up,*” and “*seated us with him in the heavenly places*” to refer to spiritual resurrection with Christ in this age, the present (see also John 5:24-29; Rom 6:4-5; Col 2:12-13; Rev 20:4-6).⁵⁵

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the Sadducees’ hypothetical example and question an argument against the resurrection?
2. How does Exod 3:6, which Jesus quoted in v. 26, act as an argument for eternal life and the resurrection?
3. In his answer to the Sadducees, Jesus listed two things that are essential to our understanding of the true nature of things. What are they?
 - Of the two, which do you know more about or have personal experience with, and how do you think you can grow in the one you do *not* know as much about or have personal experience with?

12:28-34:²⁸ *And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”*²⁹ *Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’*³⁰ *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’*³¹ *The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*³² *And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.”*³³ *And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*³⁴ *And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.*

vv. 28-34—The greatest commandment

In answer to the scribe’s question, Jesus begins by quoting Deut 6:4-5. He began here because these verses are foundational. They remind us of who God is and that God is sovereign over all. They also remind us of the necessity to personally be in right relationship with him, to stay focused on him, and to hear and respond to his word in ways that demonstrate our love and trust of him. Our love for God is to consume our entire being. For the second commandment, Jesus quotes Lev 19:18. “*Loving your neighbor as yourself*” flows naturally

⁵⁵ This issue is discussed in detail at Menn 2017: 203-10.

from “*loving the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” In fact, the apostle John points out that doing the second commandment (loving your neighbor) is the proof and the test of whether or not you are really doing the first commandment (loving God): “*If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*” (1 John 4:20) The reason why the second commandment is the proof and test of the first is that all people are made in the image of God, so how we treat God’s image shows what we really think of God himself. Further, the word for “love” in both cases is *agapaō*, which is not just “an emotional sentiment but [is] an active principle embracing the entire personality” (Swift 1970: 877).

Because many of us are familiar with these two commandments, we do not reflect on how radical they really are. We may say we love God, but do we really love him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength all the time? And to truly “love our neighbor as we love ourselves” means that we would have to spend the same amount of time, effort, and money seeking the welfare of others as we spend seeking our own welfare. As Jesus made clear in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and Matt 5:43-48 (“*love your enemies*”) the command to “*love your neighbor as yourself*” extends to everyone, including the unlovable, those we dislike, our enemies, those who do not like us, those of different races, classes, tribes, and backgrounds than our own. One can only imagine what the world would be like if Christians made an attempt to apply these two commandments in a serious and consistent way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Meditate on this passage, as it is one of those that goes to the heart of what Jesus and the kingdom of God are all about. What lessons do we learn from Jesus’ answer to the scribe?
2. How does Jesus’ statement to love your neighbor “as yourself” affect or qualify the commandment to “love your neighbor?”
3. What is this thing called “love” (Gr., *agapaō*, and its noun form, *agapē*)? To answer this you might go through the Bible to see where the term is used, and see how it is defined, described, or qualified elsewhere.

12:35-37: ³⁵ *And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, “How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?”* ³⁶ *David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”* ³⁷ *David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?”* *And the great throng heard him gladly.*

vv. 35-37—Christ is the Lord

Following Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, the religious leaders had been asking him questions, often to try to trap him, beginning with “*By what authority are you doing these things?*” (11:28). With his answer to the scribe’s question about which is the greatest commandment, however, “*no one dared to ask him any more questions*” (v. 34). Therefore, Jesus now assumes the authoritative place in the temple and asks a question which goes to the heart of who he is and the nature of his authority. Mark’s account makes implicit that Jesus’ question was directed to the religious leaders and teachers of the law. Matt 22:41 and Luke 20:39-41 make explicit that his question was directed to the Pharisees and the scribes.

Jesus had previously been identified by Bartimaeus (10:47-48) as the messianic Son of David. Jesus now takes that title and reveals that the Son of David is more than just a man, but is the Lord himself. He does this by quoting Ps 110:1. Matthew’s account of this event gives us more of the background than does Mark. As Matthew recounts, Jesus asked the Pharisees what they thought about the Christ: “*Whose son is he?*” (Matt 22:42); they responded that he is “*the son of David*” (Matt 22:42). Christ then quoted Ps 110:1 which says, “*The Lord said to my Lord.*” He then asked, “*If David [who wrote the psalm] then calls him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?*” (Matt 22:45; see Mark 12:37). Jesus was pointing to Himself as the Messiah, David’s “greater son,” and that He was divine (see Goppelt 1982: 83 [“The term ‘Lord’ (*kurios*) makes him equal with God”]). The writers of the NT understood what Jesus was saying. Ps 110:1 became a key text in the NT (there are 21 quotations or allusions to it in most of the NT writings). The importance of this to the early Christian writers, especially given their own context of Jewish monotheism, was profound. “[Ps 110:1] could, for example, be read to mean simply that the Messiah is given a position of honour as a favoured subject beside the divine throne, where he sits inactively awaiting the inauguration of his rule on earth. This is how some of the rabbis later read it. It is quite clear, however, that early Christians read it differently: as placing Jesus on the divine

throne itself, exercising God’s own rule over all things.” (Bauckham 1998: 29) Note the presence of the Trinity in **v. 36**: David, who wrote **Psalms 110**, was “in the Holy Spirit” and said, “The Lord” (i.e., the Father) said to “my Lord” (i.e., the Son).”

Finally, Jesus’ use of **Ps 110:1** is a veiled or indirect prophecy of his coming resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, in addition to a declaration that he is the divine Son of God. The reason is found in Paul’s discussion of the resurrection and the second coming of Christ (i.e., the *parousia*) in **1 Cor 15:20-57**. In that passage, **v. 26** tells us that “*the last enemy that will be abolished is death.*” Death itself will be abolished at the *parousia* (**vv. 50-57**). Consequently, Christ must have begun his reign before, not after, the *parousia*.⁵⁶ In fact, Christ’s “reign” began with his resurrection and ascension; he is now at the right hand of God reigning in power (see **Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:22-36; 7:55-56; Rom 1:4; 8:34; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 2:9-10; 3:20-21; Col 1:13; 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 1:5**; see also Fee 1987: 747). This is seen by Paul’s quoting or alluding to **Ps 110:1** (“*The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’*”) in **v. 25** and **Ps 8:6** (“*You made him ruler over the works of your hands and placed all things under his feet*”) in **v. 27**.

Keener discusses the significance of **Ps 110:1** in this context: “Paul’s eschatological scheme here depends on his interpretation of Ps 110:1, which becomes clear in 15:25. Because “the Lord” will reign at God’s right hand until all enemies are subdued beneath his feet (Ps 110:1), Christ must reign at God’s right hand in the present until his enemies are subdued (15:25).” (Keener 2005: 127; see also Bauckham 1998: 29-30; Hill 1988: 312-14; Smith 1999a: n.p.) Christ has been exalted and is ruling from heaven now in the “already” phase of his kingdom. That is clear from other passages which discuss Christ’s present reign: “In Col. ii. 15 [Paul] speaks of the conquest of the *archai* [“rulers”] and *exousiai* [“authorities”] [both of which are referred to in **1 Cor 15:24**] as having in principle been accomplished in the cross of Christ. In Rom. viii. 38, 39 he assumes that even now Christ so reigns over and controls death and life and principalities and powers as to preclude every separation of the Christian from the love of God in Him.” (Vos 1979: 245) According to **Ps 110:1**, Christ will continue to rule from heaven *until* all foes are subdued. It is the *parousia* itself which manifests the completion of Christ’s final victory (i.e., ushers in the consummation—the “not yet,” eternal phase of the kingdom). Gruenler concludes that, in this brief passage, Jesus “not only enigmatically discloses his divine and human origins but also prophesies through the words of the psalm his coming resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Father. Jesus’ messianic kingdom therefore supersedes David’s political domain and the nationalistic expectations of his opponents. His warfare probes deeper into the domain of the dark demonic powers that occupy the space of human beings and of nations; hence his goal as Messiah is to put his enemies underfoot (v. 36). With this veiled affirmation of his messiahship Jesus reaches the high point of authority in his debate with the interpreters of Scripture, placing them under his feet as he assumes in his own person the authority and space of Old Testament religion symbolized by the temple.” (Gruenler 1989: 790)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the answer to Jesus’s question in **v. 37** (i.e., if David called Christ “Lord,” how can Christ also be David’s son)?
2. How is **Ps 110:1**, quoted by Jesus in **v. 36**, prophetic and what things were being prophesied?
 - How does that scripture show that Jesus is reigning *now*?

12:38-40: ³⁸ *And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces”* ³⁹ *and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,* ⁴⁰ *who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*

vv. 38-40—Warning against the hypocrisy of the scribes

This warning marks the end of Jesus’ public ministry in Jerusalem. After this, his teaching will be exclusively to his disciples (and to the Jewish and Roman officials following his arrest). It is significant that Jesus’ last public teaching is not about the substance of the doctrine of the scribes but about their character and

⁵⁶ The Greek wording in **v. 26** indicates this. The word translated “abolished” (*katargeitai*) is in the present passive tense. Grosheide comments, “The present tense in vs. 26 implies that death *is being abolished*. The action has begun already because Christ has been raised up as firstfruits.” (Grosheide 1953: 368; see also Fee 1987: 757; Thistleton 2000: 1234-35).

lifestyle. Cole points out that the scribes were “devoted to the biblical text as few others have been; they were conservative and reverent in their approach to the Bible as they knew it. . . . For those who accept the Bible as the rule of faith and conduct, there is no excuse for disobedience.” (Cole 1989: 270). Jesus’ saying that people like the scribes “*will receive the greater condemnation*” (v. 40) is an application of what he said in **Luke 12:48b**, “*Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.*” His comments also reflect what he said in **Matt 6:2, 5, 16** that those who act in religious ways in order to be seen and acknowledged by people “*have received their reward.*” In other words, acting in the name of the Lord to be seen and acknowledged by people have received their reward now and will receive condemnation and punishment later.

The self-aggrandizement and desire for money of the scribes is a problem of many in church leadership today. The Bible reveals what the character, values, priorities, motives, and lifestyle of true Christians are to be. The early church manual, the *Didache* (c. 70-110), stresses the importance of evaluating a person’s motives and lifestyle in order to discern whether or not he is a false prophet or apostle. It says: “Now concerning the apostles and prophets, deal with them as follows in accordance with the rule of the gospel. Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night’s lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

Also, do not test or evaluate any prophet who speaks in the spirit, for every sin will be forgiven, but this sin will not be forgiven. However, not everyone who speaks in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he exhibits the Lord’s ways. By his conduct, therefore, will the false prophet and the prophet be recognized. Furthermore, any prophet who orders a meal in the spirit shall not partake of it; if he does, he is a false prophet. If any prophet teaches the truth, yet does not practice what he teaches, he is a false prophet. But any prophet proven to be genuine who does something with a view to portraying in a worldly manner the symbolic meaning of the church (provided that he does not teach you to do all that he himself does) is not to be judged by you, for his judgment is with God. Besides, the ancient prophets also acted in a similar manner. But if anyone should say in the spirit, ‘Give me money,’ or anything else, do not listen to him. But if he tells you to give on behalf of others who are in need, let no one judge him.” (*Didache* 1989: 11.3-12)

Greater knowledge and greater position bring greater responsibility and, hence, greater accountability. The desire of the scribes and many church leaders today for public acclaim and wealth demonstrates that they do not really love and worship God at all. As Jesus said in **Matt 6:1**, “*Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*” Our motives and desires reveal our true spiritual state. We need to take Jesus’ warning to heart and not try to mask our covetousness and self-centeredness with “*long prayers*” (v. 40). We cannot fool God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the inner attitudes of the heart and mind that led to the actions which Jesus condemned in vv. 38-40?
2. In what ways do Christian leaders today fall into behaviors and attitudes similar or analogous to those condemned by Jesus in this passage?
 - In what ways do you?
3. How *should* Christian leaders’ lives be characterized?

12:41-44: ⁴¹ *And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums.* ⁴² *And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.* ⁴³ *And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.* ⁴⁴ *For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

vv. 41-44—The widow’s mites

This observation by Jesus is given in contrast to his comments regarding the scribes in vv. 38-40. In contrast to the scribes who were seeking the best things for themselves, often at the expense of widows, the widow here was giving sacrificially at her own expense and, out of love and devotion to God, was seeking the

welfare of God's temple and others. Jesus observed that even a gift of two small copper coins can have greater spiritual significance than a gift of thousands of shekels or talents. The reason is that, according to the principle of sacrifice, the most important thing is not how much one gives, but the motive for giving and how much one has left over after one has given. At the same time, on a secondary level the text "may reflect an ironic lament about a system that *allowed* the woman potentially to divest herself of any further resources" (Blomberg 1999: 144-45).

In our churches we must be careful not to exploit or manipulate people's giving so as to drive already poor people into deeper poverty. There are churches that publicly acclaim donors who give large amounts of money but do not publicly acclaim poor people who are only able to give small amounts. Such churches have a worldly mindset and do not realize, as Jesus did, that in God's eyes those who can only give small amounts may be far more generous than those who give much. In the churches we certainly should teach the people about the biblical principles of giving, but we also should be teaching people about how to manage their money well and become economically self-sufficient.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the *principle* regarding giving that Jesus is stating in vv. 43-44?
2. What is the point or points that we should learn in the contrast between the teachers of the law (vv. 38-40) and the poor widow (vv. 41-44)?
3. Why is it that we can approve the widow's action and agree with Jesus's commendation of her, but then not follow her example? How can we correct this problem?

13:1-37: ¹ *And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"* ² *And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* ³ *And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"*

⁵ *And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

¹⁴ *"But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, ¹⁶ and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. ¹⁷ And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!*

¹⁸ *Pray that it may not happen in winter. ¹⁹ For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. ²⁰ And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. ²¹ And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.*

²⁴ *"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

²⁸ *"From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the*

very gates. ³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— ³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

vv. 1-37—The Olivet Discourse

The Olivet Discourse (see also **Matt 24:1-25:46; Luke 21:5-36**) is Jesus’ longest, most important, and detailed discussion of eschatology. It is called the Olivet Discourse because **Matt 24:3** says that Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives when he gave it. In it he deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple which occurred in AD 70, discusses his Second Coming, exhorts his followers in light of these eschatological events, and concludes by discussing the final judgment that will occur when he returns.⁵⁷

1. vv. 1-4—The context of the Olivet Discourse

“Most agree that the Olivet Discourse relates to (a) Israel’s rejection of Christ, (b) Christ’s rejection of Israel, and (c) the disciples’ questions in Matthew 24:3 [**Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7**]” (Toussaint 2004: 474). The immediate context was the temple. When Jesus left the temple for the Mount of Olives, His disciples mentioned how beautiful and wonderful the temple buildings were. Jesus responded by telling them, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” (**Mark 13:2**) That statement regarding the temple prompted the disciples’ questions, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” (**Mark 13:4**). Matthew adds that the disciples added the question, “and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (**Matt 24:3**). The Olivet Discourse is Jesus’ answer to those questions.

2. vv. 5-13—Signs of the times

In this part of the discourse “Jesus deals with certain outstanding features of the interadventual period. We are reminded at [v. 7] that the end is not immediately, that the activity of deceivers, and reports of wars and rumours of wars, are not to be regarded as portents of an imminent consummation (cf. Luke 19:11); and at [v. 8] that wars, famines, and earthquakes are but the beginning of sorrows.” (Murray 1977: 388) Christ’s reference to the disciples’ being “hated by all” (v. 13) and the preaching of the gospel “to all nations” (v. 10) are reminders “of the extended period that the events of interadventual history require for their fulfillment. However, this section of the discourse brings us to what is surely of the same purport as ‘the consummation of the age’ in the question of the disciples [**Matt 24:3**], namely, ‘the end’—‘then shall the end come’. So we are compelled to construe [**Matt 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21:8-19**] as, in brief outline, a forecast of interadventual history.” (Ibid.) That is how *Didache* 16 (c. 70-110) applied this portion of the Discourse.

3. vv. 14-23—The fall of Jerusalem and recapitulation

This section begins with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and then recapitulates the entire inter-advent period. It “cannot be a continuation, because [vv. 10, 13] brought us up to the end. It must be, to some extent, recapitulation. Our Lord forecasts to the disciples certain additional features of the period that had been delineated in [vv. 5-13], and gives the warnings and exhortations appropriate to the events involved.” (Murray 1977: 388)

The “abomination of desolation” (v. 14) was referred to in **Dan 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11**. In 167 BC Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king, had sacrificed a swine on the altar and had made the practice of Judaism illegal. That prompted the Maccabean revolt of 167–164 BC. (Bartlett 1993: 476; Metzger 1957: 132) In 1 Macc 1:54, the “abomination of desolation” was applied to the desecration of the altar of the temple by Antiochus. Nevertheless, in the first century many in Israel believed that Antiochus had not completely fulfilled Daniel’s visions of the “abomination of desolation.” Desmond Ford relates that Daniel “had promised the advent of the kingdom of God after the profanation of the sanctuary by the willful king. But certainly the kingdom had not come with the rededicated sanctuary in 165 B.C. Therefore, they reasoned, the woes under Antiochus must have been pre-figurative of worse woes to come.” (Ford 1979: 157)

⁵⁷ The Olivet Discourse is analyzed and discussed in detail in Menn 2017, chapter VIII.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus likewise views the times of Antiochus as prefigurative of what lay ahead. He takes the same prophetic language and reapplies it—or, rather, is saying that the true fulfillment related to the nation’s rejection of him (compare **Dan 7:13** and **Mark 13:26**; **Dan 8:13** and **Luke 21:24**; **Dan 9:27** and **Mark 13:14**; **Dan 11:31** and **Mark 13:14**; **Dan 12:1** and **Mark 13:19**). The temple would again be desecrated and, indeed, destroyed. That happened in AD 70 when the Romans again desecrated the building by virtually razing it to the ground. After the fact, that is how first century Jewish historian Josephus took it: “And indeed it so came to pass, that our nation suffered these things under Antiochus Epiphanes, according to Daniel’s vision, and that he wrote many years before they came to pass. In the very same manner Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, and that our country should be made desolate by them.” (Josephus 1987a: 285 [Antiquities: 10.11.7]) Clement of Alexandria [c. 150-215] (1885: 1.21), Tertullian [c. 160-220] (1885: 8), and early church historian Eusebius [c. 263-339] (1988: 86 [Ecclesiastical History 3.5.4]) also took Daniel’s vision that way.

The specific identification of the “*abomination of desolation*” is unclear but is related to the events of AD 66-70 in Jerusalem and the temple. **Luke 21:20** (“*When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near*”) picks up on Jesus’ statement in **Matt 23:38** that “*your house is being left to you desolate.*” The surrounding armies are not the “desolation” itself but signal that it “is near.” That suggests that the desolation is the destruction of the temple and the city (see Pao and Schnabel 2007: 376). In light of all of the above, Rikk Watts wisely cautions, “Perhaps the attempt at an overly precise identification is misguided. Mark 13, although clearly referring to a historical event, does so using prophetic topoi [rhetorical conventions or motifs]. As with all such prophetic language, the concern is the significance of the event, not an exact description” (Watts 2007: 224).

Although some people take the “*abomination of desolation*” as indicating an “end-time” Antichrist, that is not the case. Christ’s admonition to his disciples, “*when you see*” the abomination of desolation or Jerusalem surrounded by armies (v. 14) suggests the events of AD 70, since Jesus was talking to his disciples: “you” is in the second person plural, and the events of AD 70 were in the lifetime of the disciples. “Surely Jesus does not denounce the first-century temple in which He is standing ([Matt] 24:1) by declaring it ‘desolate’ ([Matt] 23:38), prophesying its total destruction ([Matt] 24:2), then answering the question ‘when shall these things be?’ (v.3), and warning about the temple’s ‘abomination of desolation’ (v.15) only to speak about the destruction of a totally different temple some two thousand years (or more) later!” (Gentry 1999a: 24)

Further, both the references in **Dan 9:27** and **11:31** which suggest a human instigator of the abomination, and the Maccabean historical background, “indicate a historical, not a supra-historical individual” as the abomination (Such 1999: 95). “In fact, a supra-historical Antichrist figure in [v. 14a] would leave no room for the subsequent ‘false christs’ in [v. 22]” (Ibid.: 96). Finally, because Israel as a nation and its temple were “types,” “symbols,” “shadows,” “copies,” or “examples” of NT realities (**Matt 5:17**; **1 Cor 10:1-6**; **2 Cor 3:12-16**; **Gal 3:23-4:7**, **21-31**; **Col 2:16-17**; **Heb 1:1-2**; **8:1-10:22**), the temple and its sacrifices have been fulfilled and superseded in Christ (**Matt 5:17**; **Mark 14:58**; **John 2:18-22**; **2 Cor 3:12-16**; **Gal 3:23-4:7**; **Heb 4:14-5:10**; **7:1-10:22**). Therefore, even if a temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem it would be an idol temple, with no more theological significance than a Hindu temple or an Islamic mosque. Nothing that might occur in a rebuilt temple could be an “*abomination of desolation.*”

The case is overwhelming for interpreting the exhortation to flee from Judea (vv. 14-18) as local and historical: “V. G. Simkhovitch long ago lunged at the heart of the matter when he asked ‘If it refers to the end of the world, what difference does it make whether that end is to come in the winter or in the summer?’ And C. H. Dodd in similar vein affirmed that the description in these verses fits precisely a condition of besiegement. Unless these verses have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Christ has not truly replied to the enquiry from His disciples which provoked the discourse.” (Ford 1979: 65-66) In **Luke 21:20** the exhortation to flee is triggered “*when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.*” In **Mark 13:14** the triggering event is seeing the “*abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be.*” Jerusalem was, in fact, encircled by the Romans several times (in AD 66, 68, and 70) before it was finally destroyed (Gentry 1999a: 48-50). Eusebius reports that the church at Jerusalem had been commanded by a divine revelation given before the war [evidently the Olivet Discourse] and therefore left the city and dwelt in the town of Pella beyond the Jordan (Eusebius 1988: 86 [Ecclesiastical History 3.5.3]). That may have occurred in AD 68 (Carson 1984: 501).

Verse 19 refers to “*such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.*” There have been greater numbers of deaths, including Jewish deaths, in wars since that time (e.g., World Wars I and II, and the holocaust of approximately 6 million Jews in WWII). Therefore, many people do not see how the “*great tribulation*” can refer to the events of AD 70. There are at least four reasons why the “*great tribulation*” refers to the events of AD 70, not to some “end-time” event

shortly before the Second Coming.

- The context of the Olivet Discourse. The context of the Olivet Discourse establishes the AD 70 context for the “*great tribulation*” to which Christ refers. Both Christ’s statement in **Matt 23:38** that “*your house is being left to you desolate,*” and the occasion of the Olivet Discourse itself (**Matt 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7**) primarily concern the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. Likewise, the *immediate* context of Christ’s reference to the “*great tribulation*” concerned the events of AD 70. Grammatically, both **Matt 24:21** and **Mark 13:19** tie the reference to the “*great tribulation*” to the immediately preceding AD 70 context (i.e., fleeing from Judea) since both verses begin with the word “for” (Greek = *gar*). In other words, the reason to flee is “for [or ‘because’] there will be a great tribulation” (**Matt 24:21**) or, as Mark puts it, “for [or ‘because’] those days will be a time of tribulation” (**Mark 13:19**). The parallel passage in Luke is phrased somewhat differently but is to the same effect. **Luke 21:20-21** sets forth the context of those in Judea fleeing to the mountains “*when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies.*” The very fact that this “*great tribulation*” was a local event, as opposed to a world-wide, end-time event, is what enabled Jesus’ followers to flee.
- Jesus’ statement is correct. In the context of Israel and Jerusalem, Jesus’ statement about the events of AD 70 being an unparalleled tribulation is factually correct. First century Jewish historian Josephus details the savagery, slaughter, disease, famine, cannibalism, and death of 1.1 million of the city’s inhabitants and enslavement of 97,000 more (Josephus 1987b: 719-20, 737, 749 [*Wars*: 5.10.2-5; 6.3.3-4; 6.9.3]). He concludes, “Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness that this was, from the beginning of the world” (Ibid.: 720 [5.10.5]). Carson adds, “There have been greater numbers of deaths—six million in the Nazi death camps, and an estimated twenty million under Stalin—but never so high a percentage of a great city’s population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem” (Carson 2010: 563). Further, in a *theological* sense this was indeed the “*great tribulation*” for Israel because, as a result, “they no longer have a temple as required by their law” (Gentry 1999b: 198). Consequently, since AD 70 Judaism has not been able to be practiced as required by the OT.
- The necessity of events following the “tribulation.” Jesus’ statement in **v. 19** requires a lengthy historical period *after* the “tribulation” in order for his statement to make any sense. “That Jesus in [**v. 19**] promises that such ‘great distress’ is never to be equaled implies that it cannot refer to the Tribulation at the end of the age; for if what happens next is the Millennium or the new heaven and the new earth, it seems inane to say that such ‘great distress’ will not take place again” (Carson 2010: 563; see also Lane 1974: 472; Schnabel 2011: 40n.30). Further, “The Lord is not referring to His Second Advent, or else we should wonder why His disciples should pray about fleeing from Judea ([**Matt 24:**]16): what good would running to the hills be at the return of Christ? Why should ‘winter’ be a concern at that time?” (Gentry 1999a: 53) Consequently, the addition “*never will be*” at the end of Jesus’ statement regarding the severity of the “tribulation” implies that there will be subsequent tribulations after Jerusalem falls, “and in that respect the addition corresponds to ‘the end is not yet’ of [**v. 7**]” (Beasley-Murray 1993: 419).
- Jesus’ use of prophetic language. Jesus’ language is typical of the prophetic language often found in biblical oracles of judgment, and therefore is not necessarily to be taken literally. Similar language is found elsewhere concerning catastrophic events. In speaking about the Babylonian captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, **Dan 9:12** says: “*Under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem.*” In a prophecy regarding that same event of 587 BC, **Ezek 5:9** uses language almost identical to Christ’s in **Matt 24:21**: “*Because of all your abominations, I will do among you what I have not done, and the like of which I will never do again.*” **Ezek 7:5-6** goes on to call the Babylonian taking of Jerusalem a “*unique disaster*” and says “*the end has come!*” Those passages talked about a “*unique disaster*” that would befall Jerusalem and never happen again. Nevertheless, Jesus used the *same* type of language about *another* judgment that would (and did) again fall on Jerusalem. Thus, although some might think that the “*great tribulation*” Jesus mentions is an end-time event, in reality it is not.

Although the references to the “*abomination of desolation*” and the “*tribulation*” relate to the events of AD 70, similar principles or foreshadowing may apply to events that will occur shortly before Christ returns, just as the prophesied actions of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC foreshadowed the events of Titus and the Romans in AD 70.

Verses 20-23 appear to refer to the entire period before Christ comes again. The themes of persecution and false Christs are characteristic of the entire period before Christ comes again, not merely the time before AD 70. The persecution or tribulation mentioned in **v. 20** was also mentioned in **vv. 7-9, 12**. The warnings against false Christs and being misled (**vv. 21-22**) were also given in **vv. 5-6**. All of those things are characteristic of the

entire period between Christ's two advents. Further, in **v. 20** Jesus uses the phrase "*if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved.*" That indicates something worldwide in scope is occurring, not a local phenomenon, because the basis on which the lives of God's people are saved is different in the two situations: in AD 70 people in Judea are urged to "*flee to the mountains*" in order to save their lives (**v. 14**); before Christ comes again people are saved not by fleeing but by God's "cutting short" the days. In other words, tribulation will characterize the entire period before Christ's return, and it will even worsen shortly before his second advent, but God will not allow the age to run its course, humanity to destroy itself, or his people to be eliminated from the earth. The "cutting short those days *for the sake of the elect,*" was not required in AD 70 because, as mentioned above, the Christians had fled to safety. The nonbelieving Jews who remained in the city were no longer God's "elect" after their rejection of Christ (**Matt 13:10-17; 21:18-22, 33-46; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24; 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18**). Finally, **v. 24**, which begins Christ's description of his second coming (*parousia*) begins, "*But in those days, after that tribulation.*" This again indicates that tribulation will characterize the entire period before Christ's return. The apostle John recognized this when, in **Rev 1:9**, he called himself "*your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom.*"

4. **vv. 24-27**—The second coming of Christ

When Jesus says that, at his coming, there will be cosmic events involving the sun, the moon, and stars, and the powers of heaven (**vv. 24-25**), that may be figurative language. The OT prophets frequently described political crises and regime changes metaphorically as cosmic upheavals or the overthrowing of creation itself. Jesus' language is quoting from or alluding to several OT passages which use similar language for political events: e.g., **Isa 13:10, 13** (the Medes' defeat of Babylon); **Isa 34:4** (judgment against Edom); **Jer 4:23-28** (judgment against Judah by Babylon); **Ezek 32:7-8** (Babylon's defeat of Egypt); **Amos 5:20; 8:9** (Israel's defeat by Assyria). On the other hand, the cosmic signs may be literal. "It is difficult to be sure how literally to take this, but there seems to be an escalation from [**Luke 21:11-25**]" (Nolland 1993: 1007). In light of that apparent escalation in the description of the cosmic signs, Carson concludes that the signs Jesus lists in **Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26**, "are probably meant to be taken literally, because of the climactic nature of the Son of Man's final self-disclosure" (Carson 1984: 505).

Jesus' reference to "*the Son of Man coming in clouds*" (**v. 26**) echoes OT language in which clouds often symbolize the presence and glory of God (**Exod 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15-16; 34:5; Lev 16:2; Num 10:34; 11:25; Ps 18:10-13; 97:2; 104:3; Isa 19:1**). They also have eschatological associations (**Isa 4:5; Ezek 30:3; Dan 7:13; Zeph 1:15**). His reference to "sending out the angels and gathering his elect" (**v. 27**) also reflects both OT language and what he earlier had said concerning what the second coming entails. In his parable of the wheat and the tares (**Matt 13:24-30, 36-43**) Jesus had said that, at the end of the age, "*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire*" (**Matt 13:41-42**). A similar image of "*one like a son of man . . . who sat on the cloud*" and reaped the earth in connection with angels is found in **Rev 14:14-20**, which also refers to the *parousia* and final judgment. The reference to "gathering the elect" may allude to such OT "re-gathering of Israel after exile" passages as **Deut 30:3-4; Isa 27:12-13**, and the "gathering of His people for judgment" passage of **Ps 50:5**. "*The four winds*" (**v. 27**) probably is an allusion to **Zech 2:6**, and refers to the entire world (see also **Jer 49:36**). Jesus has, in effect, taken OT passages that in their original OT context dealt with Israel's return from exile (**Deut 30:3-4; Isa 27:12-13; Zech 2:6**), and used them as "types" that pointed to himself and the *parousia*. The parable of the wheat and the tares and Jesus' statements in **Matt 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26** concerning judgment are reflected in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, that when Christ comes he will bring both judgment on His enemies (**Luke 21:26**) and redemption for those who are His (**Luke 21:28**).

5. **vv. 28-31**—The parable of the fig tree

The parable of the fig tree is related to the signs which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and has nothing to do with the founding of the modern nation of Israel in 1948, as some dispensationalists allege (e.g., Lindsey 1970: 53). In context, the fig tree is clearly linked with the things that are "near," which his disciples who were then alive (i.e., "you," "this generation") would be able to see.⁵⁸ The parallel passage in Luke shows positively that Jesus was not using the fig tree as a secret reference to modern Israel since in **Luke 21:29** he says, "Behold the fig tree *and all the trees.*" The fig tree was simply a metaphor or easily

⁵⁸ Gary DeMar points out that, not only the fig tree in this parable, but "every instance of a leaves-only tree in the gospels is a sign of Israel's judgment, a judgment that came in A.D. 70" (DeMar 1999: 402). In **Matt 21:19; Mark 11:13-14** Jesus underlined the fact that the nation was facing imminent judgment by cursing a leaves-only fig tree (Ibid.: 397-405).

understandable object lesson of the point Jesus was making about what was soon going to occur (Schnabel 2011: 132).

If the phrase “*all these things*” (v. 30) includes “the celestial signs *and the Parousia itself* [vv. 24-27], then [vv.28-30] are illogical, because any distinction between ‘all these things’ and ‘it is near’ would be destroyed. . . . The more natural way to take ‘all these things’ is to see them as referring to the distress of [vv. 5-23], the tribulation that comes on believers throughout the period between Jesus’ ascension and the Parousia.” (Carson 1984: 507)

Ehen Jesus says that “*this generation*” will not pass away (v. 30), he is clearly referring to the generation of the disciples who were then alive. Given Jesus’ announcement that the kingdom was at hand (Mark 1:15) coupled with His prophecy of the destruction of the temple, *theologically* “*this generation*” could *only* refer to the generation alive when Jesus was speaking. The theological significance of “*this generation*” in connection with Jesus’ prophecy and mission is rarely commented on, but N. T. Wright clearly sees this and explains: “As a prophet, Jesus staked his reputation on his prediction of the Temple’s fall within a generation [Matt 21:33-45; 23:29-39; 24:1-2, 15-19, 32-34; Mark 12:1-12; 13:1-2, 14-19, 28-30; Luke 11:45-51; 13:34-35; 19:41-44; 20:9-19; 21:5-6, 20-24, 29-32]; if and when it fell, he would thereby be vindicated. . . . The generation that rejects Jesus must be the last before the great cataclysm. There can be no other, because if there were they would need another warning prophet; once the father has sent the son to the vineyard [Matt 22:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19], he can send nobody else. To reject the son is to reject the last chance.” (Wright 1996: 362, 365) Even though “*this generation*” refers to the generation of disciples who were then alive when Jesus was speaking, “it does not follow that Jesus mistakenly thought the Parousia would occur within his hearers’ lifetime. . . . All that [v. 30] demands is that the distress of [vv. 5-23], including Jerusalem’s fall, happen within the lifetime of the generation then living. This does *not* mean that the distress must end within that time but only that ‘all these things’ must happen within it.” (Carson 1984: 507)

6. vv. 32-37—The second coming of Christ is totally unpredictable

In v. 32 Christ contrasts “*that day or that hour*” (i.e., His Second Coming in glory at the end of the age) which “*no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*” with “*these things*” (v. 29, i.e., the events leading up to and including the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70), which are “near” (v. 28), which “*you see*” (v. 29), and which “*this generation*” will witness (v. 30). In the NT “*that day*” is “a well-defined eschatological denotation to designate the day of the Lord, the last day (cf. Matt. 7:22; Luke 10:12; 21:34; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8). So much is this the case, that the expression ‘the day’ has taken on a distinctly technical meaning (cf. Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:4; Heb. 10:23; 2 Pet. 1:19).” (Murray 1977: 394-95; see also Moore 1966: 100 [“‘*That day*’ carries Old Testament overtones (of the last judgment and *parousia*) which ‘*the day*’ in modern usage does not”]) Just as “that day” is “a well-defined eschatological denotation to designate the day of the Lord, the last day,” so does “hour” stand for the Second Coming in Matt 24:44; Luke 12:39-40; John 5:25, 28; and Rev 3:3; 14:7, 15.⁵⁹ The linkage of the “day” and the “hour” as a technical term for the Second Coming is also seen in Matt 24:50; 25:13; and Luke 12:46. He adds that “*you do not know when the time will come*” (v. 33) and “*you do not know when the master of the house will come*” (v. 35). That is also reflected in his constant use of “*you see*” for the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 14, 29) compared to “*they will see*” with respect to the second coming (v. 26). In short, Jesus is saying that his disciples in the first century would be able to tell when the temple was about to be destroyed, but no one will be able to predict when he will come again.

7. Conclusion

Many people throughout history have tried to calculate when Christ will return, based on events happening in the Middle East or elsewhere in the world. Such attempts are incredibly wrong-headed and always fail. Prophetic “signs” are not designed to enable one to calculate when or how the prophesied event will occur. He said explicitly that “*no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*” (v. 32). How much clearer could he get? Additionally, the “signs of the times” are deliberately general and open-ended. “Earthquakes, famine, political upheaval, false messiahs, persecution and gospel-preaching, and the fall of Jerusalem—these things are not the kind of events which will pinpoint a particular moment of history when the Son of Man will come. They are the kind of things which characterize the whole period between Jesus’ first and

⁵⁹ Allen Kerkeslager argues that “every occurrence of ‘hour’ in Revelation refers to the parousia” (Kerkeslager 1991: 5). In addition to the passages cited above, that is seen most clearly in those passages that talk about the resurrection of the righteous (Rev 11:11-13) and judgment of the unrighteous (Rev 11:13; 18:10, 17, 19) that accompany the *parousia*.

second comings (though the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was of course a particular, ‘one-off’ event). Jesus warned his followers of them not so that they would know the date of the end, but so that they could understand the nature of the conflict which would surround them and thus be forearmed to endure it.” (Travis 1982: 92) The idea that we may not be able to know “*that day or that hour*” (v. 32) but can predict the week or month or year or decade or century is nonsense. The “day” and the “hour” are not in contrast to the day, week, month, year, decade, or century, but are what is known as “terms of art,” which signify *the second coming itself*.

Finally, the Olivet Discourse as a whole stresses faithful living because of the *impossibility* of knowing when Christ will return. Although the Olivet Discourse deals with the second coming, Jesus includes multiple practical imperatives. “Unlike Jewish apocalyptic writings, much of Mark 13 is cast in the form of commands. For example: ‘Watch out’ (verses 5, 9, 33). ‘Don’t be troubled’ (verse 7). ‘Do not worry’ (verse 11). ‘Be on your guard! I have told you everything ahead of time’ (verse 23). ‘Keep awake!’ (verses 35, 37). This highlights the fact that Jesus’s purpose is to encourage not speculation but watchfulness—to strengthen faith and forewarn his disciples what will be their lot as his followers.” (Travis 1982: 92-93)⁶⁰ The whole subject of predicting when the end might come is not the reason why Jesus gave the discourse. Consequently, trying to predict the end from what Jesus said is using the discourse for a purpose Jesus did not intend. That amounts to taking it out of context. Whenever one takes Scripture out of context, one is bound to reach an erroneous conclusion. James Edwards concludes, “No one is either encouraged or commended for attempting to be an eschatological code-cracker. That is folly, for even the Son of Man is ignorant of the End [Mark 13:32]. The premium of discipleship is placed not on predicting the future but on *faithfulness in the present*, especially in trials, adversity, and suffering.” (Edwards 2002: 386)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was the temple so significant for the disciples? What would its destruction symbolize for them?
 - Why do you think Jesus used the destruction of the temple to begin his discourse about the end of the age?
2. **Verses 9-13** describe persecutions of the church that have never really occurred in some places. How has this lack of persecution in such places affected Christianity?
 - If this lack of persecution has had some negative effect, what, if anything, can we do about it?
3. Why do you think the Father kept the time of the end secret?
 - Given the fact that no one except the Father knows when the end of this age will occur, what does it mean for us to “*stay awake*” (vv. 33-37)?

14:1-11: ¹*It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, ²for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.”*

³*And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴There were some who said to themselves indignantly, “Why was the ointment wasted like that?*

⁵*For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.*

⁹*And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”*

⁶⁰ Ford adds to this by noting how Christ framed his discourse verbally: “But what is present from beginning to end is the note of warning, the admonition to be right rather than merely to know or profess the right. The first and last words of Christ are *blepete* [“watch out”; “take heed”; “see”]: **Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33**, and His imperatives throughout amount to nineteen. It is evident that His prophecy has primarily a moral purpose, as was the case also with most Old Testament predictions.” (Ford 1979: 82)

¹⁰ *Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.* ¹¹ *And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.*

vv. 1-11—Jesus is anointed with costly perfume

The three episodes in this section again show a “sandwich” pattern: the anointing of Jesus for his burial by the woman is sandwiched by the chief priests and scribes plotting to have Jesus arrested and by Judas’s agreeing with the chief priests to betray Jesus, all of which will lead to his death and burial.

1. vv. 1-2—The chief priests and scribes plot against Jesus

As in so many places, the first two verses reveal considerable irony. In **13:32-36** Jesus had called for faithful vigilance by his followers. Here, the chief priests and scribes are lying in wait with stealth to try to kill Jesus. Further, they said, “*Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people*” (v. 2). Yet it is precisely during the feast when they did kill him, even using custom at the feast (Pilate would release one prisoner for whom the people asked, **15:8, 15**) to have Jesus condemned.

2. vv. 3-9—The anointing of Jesus

The anointing of Jesus is also recorded in **Matt 26:6-13** and **John 12:1-8**. John, in particular, provides four background details omitted by Matthew and Mark. First, the anointing is actually a flashback which took place “*six days before the Passover*” (**John 12:1**), whereas the scheming of the chief priests and scribes Mark recounts in v. 1 took place “*two days before the Passover.*” Mark undoubtedly used this order to “sandwich” the anointing of Jesus “*for burial*” (v. 8) between the plot of the chief priests and scribes to arrest and kill Jesus (**vv. 1-2**) and Judas Iscariot’s agreement with the chief priests to betray Jesus (**vv. 10-11**). Second, Simon the leper was in some way related or connected to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, since John recounts that they were there and Mary was serving the supper (**John 12:1-2**). Third, John also identifies the woman who anointed Jesus as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (**John 12:3**). Fourth, while Mark only says that “*there were some*” who were indignant at the cost of the perfume that was used to anoint Jesus (**vv. 4-5**), and Matthew says that “*the disciples*” were indignant (**Matt 26:8-9**), John specifies that Judas Iscariot voiced his indignation because he was a thief who used to help himself from the moneybag (**John 12:4-6**).

This appears to be the only anointing that Jesus’ body received before his burial. Mark reports that Joseph of Arimathea was granted the body, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in his tomb (**Mark 15:43-46**; see also **Luke 23:50-54**). However, presumably because of the lateness of the day, there is no indication that he anointed the body, although John says that “*Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.*” (**John 19:39-40**). That Jesus’ body was not “anointed” for burial appears confirmed by the fact that “⁵⁵*The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid.* ⁵⁶*Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.* ¹*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.* ²*And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,* ³*but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.*” (**Luke 23:55–24:3**)

Jesus said two things about what Mary had done: “*She has done a beautiful thing to me*” (v. 6) and “*She has done what she could*” (v. 8). Both statements have important implications for us. Jesus is our Lord. Everything we do should be for his glory. As Paul says in **1 Cor 6:19-20**, “*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*” (see also **1 Cor 10:31**). Further, even though Jesus has ascended back to the Father, the church is his body here on earth (**Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:12-27; Eph 1:22-23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 15-16; 5:23, 30; Col 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15**). Consequently, by helping our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are doing a beautiful thing to Jesus. Paul summarizes, “*So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*” (**Gal 6:10**). Similarly, Mary did “*what she could.*” Neither she nor we can do everything, but we can all do something. The widow in **Luke 21:1-4** could not give much, but she gave “*what she could.*” In this case, the perfume was very expensive (300 denarii would be equivalent to one year’s worth of wages) yet, like the widow, Mary gave it all, because she loved Jesus, and honoring him was more important than holding onto the perfume for her own benefit. We are called to do what we can do—not what we cannot do—to show love for others, to build the kingdom, and to honor Jesus in our lives. We need to ask ourselves, “*Are we doing what we can?*”

In **vv. 5-8** the complaint was made that “*this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.*” *And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you*

trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me.” Jesus’ reference to the poor always being with us is a quotation from **Deut 15:11**. By quoting Deuteronomy, Jesus was not saying that we should accept poverty as inevitable and therefore do nothing about it. He was saying that, in a fallen world, there will always be some in need; indeed, poverty (for various reasons) is one of the signs of the Fall. Thus, as believers we can and should do “what we can” to try to alleviate poverty among individuals and eliminate the reasons for poverty. But his commending Mary for her great gift and his statement that “you will not always have me,” while at the same time saying, “whenever you want, you can do good for them [the poor],” amounts to an application of what he earlier had said were the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength [and] You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (**12:30-31**). Our love for the Lord will lead us to love our neighbor, since our neighbor has been made in God’s image. Mary was focusing on demonstrating love for the Lord in a direct personal way, because she had the opportunity to do so which we do not. We have the opportunity—all the time—to demonstrate our love for the Lord by loving our neighbor, helping the poor, and building the kingdom in other ways.

3. **vv. 10-11**—Judas agrees to betray Jesus

Judas took the initiative to betray Jesus for money. As has been seen on other occasions, Mark shows us great irony and contrast: Mary’s extravagant gift of love and devotion, which cost her a year’s worth of wages versus Judas—one of the Twelve—who betrays his own Lord for 30 pieces of silver (**Matt 26:15**). This shows the hypocrisy of Judas for complaining that “*this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor*” (**v. 5**). There were different silver coins in circulation at the time, so it is difficult to determine the value of how much Judas was paid. “Leading candidates for Judas’ finder’s fee are the stater issued by Antioch, the shekel of Tyre or the tetradrachem of Ptolemaic Egypt. Depending on which of the coins was used, in modern values of silver, these known coins would bring the sum to be between \$250 and \$300.” (“Professing Faith” 2016: n.p.)

There is more to this betrayal than its contrast with Mary’s devotion; it is the fulfillment of prophecy. “What’s more revealing is the gospel writer Matthew’s intent. The phrase he used, ‘30 pieces of silver,’ is a throwback to a reference in the book of Zechariah. In Zechariah 11 this phrase is used to mean the value of a slave and is based on Jewish Law. Exodus 21:32 states: ‘*If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull is to be stoned to death.*’ The prophet Zechariah asked the Israelites to pay him for the work he had done working among them, that’s what they gave him. It was meant to be an insult; they didn’t value his prophecy. Jehovah told Zechariah to throw this slave’s wage into the treasury (back in their faces). So when Matthew says 30 pieces of silver and has Judas throw it back into the treasury [**Matt 27:5**], it’s an allusion to this story in Zechariah in which unfaithful Jews undervalued a prophet of the Lord with an insulting amount of money - what a slave is worth. Matthew is saying the priests were willing to pay almost nothing for Jesus. They were angry at Jesus for the scene he’d made at the temple overturning the moneylenders’ tables and railing against the corrupt priests profiting off the sacrifices people brought to the Jerusalem to make to God out of devotion and duty. Thirty pieces of silver to the priests, to Matthew, to Zechariah, then, was the price of contempt.” (Soldaat 2020: n.p.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider how Jesus faced the betrayal and death he knew were imminent. How and with whom did he spend his last few nights on earth?
 - What does this tell you about his character, nature and values?
 - What can we learn from this?
2. Describe the nature, characteristics and/or principles of giving that the woman demonstrated in **v. 3**.
 - Of all the things that Jesus said about her in **vv. 6-9**, which phrase would you like him to say about you (and why)?
3. Judas, in **vv. 10-11**, appears to have been seduced by, and succumbed to, his greatest *weakness* (his greed –

see **John 12:6**). On the other hand, Peter, in **vv. 66-72**, appears to have been tested, and failed, at his point of greatest *strength* (his boldness – compare **Mark 14:29-31** and **John 18:10**). Is there anything we can learn from this?

- Have you faced temptations in both your areas of strength and weakness?
- What did you do to successfully meet the challenge on those occasions when you did not succumb to the temptation (and was your method of standing firm the same for both your areas of strength and weakness)?

14:12-31: ¹² *And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, “Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?”* ¹³ *And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him,* ¹⁴ *and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’* ¹⁵ *And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.”* ¹⁶ *And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.*

¹⁷ *And when it was evening, he came with the twelve.* ¹⁸ *And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”* ¹⁹ *They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, “Is it I?”* ²⁰ *He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.* ²¹ *For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”*

²² *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.”* ²³ *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.* ²⁴ *And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”* ²⁵ *Truly, I say to 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.”*

²⁶ *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* ²⁷ *And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’* ²⁸ *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”* ²⁹ *Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.”* ³⁰ *And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”* ³¹ *But he said emphatically, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same.*

vv. 12-31—The Last Supper

The Last Supper involves a number of events: the preparation; the Passover; the meal itself; Jesus’ prediction of his betrayal and the disciples’ questioning of themselves; the announcement of the new covenant; the prophecy of the striking of the shepherd and the sheep scattering; and Jesus’ telling Peter that Peter would deny him three times that very night.

1. vv. 12-16—Preparation for the Last Supper

These verses indicate that Jesus had a pre-arrangement with the person who owned the upper room in which the Last Supper was celebrated. This is indicated by the fact that a man would be carrying a water jar as a means of identification (**v. 13**, women typically carried water jars), the question Jesus told the disciples to ask (**v. 14**), and the fact that “*he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready*” (**v. 15**). The situation is similar to obtaining the donkey on which Jesus rode during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (**11:1-6**).

2. vv. 16-18, 22-23, 26—Passover and the Passover meal

It is significant that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. Both the Jewish Passover feast and the meal itself were prophetic and were fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Passover commemorated deliverance from Egyptian bondage (i.e., God’s angel of death “passed over” the Israelites). A lamb was slain, its blood was sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts of the house, and then it was roasted and eaten by the family (**Exod 12:1-13, 21-27; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16; Deut 16:1-8**). The exodus was the basis for the feast of Passover (**Exod 12:1-27**). As we saw with respect to the Transfiguration (**9:2-8**), Jesus was recapitulating Israel’s exodus in his own life; even on the Mount of Transfiguration he spoke of his own “*exodus*” [the Greek term translated as “departure”] (**Luke 9:30-31**). The NT identifies Jesus with the Passover lamb. At the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry John the Baptist

recognized who Jesus was and identified Him as “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (**John 1:29, 36**). By this identification, John was joining Passover (which required the sacrifice of a lamb) and the Day of Atonement (in which Israel’s sins were covered). The identification of Jesus with the sacrificial Lamb is reaffirmed in **1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6, 8**. Christ was crucified at the time of Passover when the Passover lamb was killed (**Luke 22:1; John 19:14, 31**).⁶¹ The NT says that Passover was prophetic of the sacrifice of Christ. **John 19:36** quotes **Exod 12:46** and **Num 9:12** (which specify that the bones of the Passover lambs are not to be broken) and says, “*These things [i.e., the soldiers not breaking Christ’s legs as they did to the men crucified with Jesus] came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken.’*” **1 Cor 5:7** also says, “*Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*”

The meal itself was a Passover Seder (the word seder means “order,” as in order of service) (Litvin and Litvin n.d.: 4). Different gospels provide different details concerning the meal. For example, the Passover Seder involves drinking four cups of wine. **Luke 22:17-18** refers to the first cup: “*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’*” The first cup is followed by the washing of hands by the host. However, instead of washing his hands, Jesus “washed the feet of all His disciples. He did this to teach them the lesson that ‘He who is greatest among you must be the servant of all.’” (Litvin and Litvin n.d.: 10; see **John 13:4-17**) After the washing, each participant has a vegetable and dips it into a dish of salt water. This is referred to in **Matt 26:21-23**: “²¹ *And as they were eating, he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’*” ²² *And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’*” ²³ *He answered, ‘He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.’*” Litvin and Litvin state, “At this point in the meal, Yeshua [Jesus] handed the bowl of salt water to Judas to dip his vegetable. Then the bowl would have gone round the table to each person at the table as a matter of course. One reason the other disciples did not recognize that the person being indicated was Judas was because they would all dip their vegetable into that dish. There was an element of ambiguity here. But . . . Judas was the only one who actually dipped his hand into the bowl at the same time as Yeshua as he was the second one served.” (Ibid.: 12) After the second cup of wine (known as the cup of the plagues) a mixture of matzah (unleavened bread) and horseradish [called the “morsel” or “sop”] is eaten. **John 13:23-26** refers to this: “*One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side,*” ²⁴ *so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.*” ²⁵ *So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, ‘Lord, who is it?’*” ²⁶ *Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.’*” *So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.*” Again, however, since all the others received a similar morsel from Jesus, they still did not understand that he was talking of Judas.

There is also a ceremony in which there is a cloth with three pockets in it. In each pocket is a piece of matzah. The middle one is taken, broken, wrapped in linen, and then hidden (Ibid.: 13). After the morsel is consumed, the main meal itself is eaten. Then following that, the middle matzah is found (by children if they are in the house) and brought to the table. This is the bread about which Jesus said, “*Take, this is my body*” (v. 22). Following that, the third cup of wine (called the cup of redemption) is drunk. This is the cup of which Jesus said, “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*” (v. 24). After that, “Psalms 113-118 (known collectively as the Hallel) are sung by those gathered to celebrate the Passover” (Ibid.: 33). **Verse 26** refers to this: “*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*”

The story does not end here. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted a *new Passover*—the Lord’s Supper (**Matt 26:20-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:1-22; John 13:1-2; 1 Cor 11:23-32**). The new Passover, as exemplified by the Lord’s Supper, is our redemption, not from slavery in Egypt, but our slavery to sin, based upon what Christ has done for us in his body and his blood. Bretscher (1954: 199-209) lists 11 comparisons between the original Passover/Unleavened Bread and the Lord’s Supper:

- *Each feast was instituted at the command of God (Exod 12:1; 1 Cor 11:23).*
- *Each feast involved the sacrifice of a lamb (Exod 12:3; 1 Cor 5:7).*
- *In each feast the lamb was without blemish (Exod 12:5; 1 Pet 1:19).*
- *In each feast no bone of the sacrificial lamb was broken (Exod 12:46; John 19:31-36).*

⁶¹ Orthodox Christianity holds that Jesus was crucified on Friday and resurrected on Sunday morning. However, there is controversy about which *Hebrew day* the last supper occurred (the traditional Passover meal “would begin just before sundown on Nisan 14 but would *continue* into the new day of Nisan 15” [Parsons 2016b: “Passover at the Temple”]) and whether Jesus was crucified on 14 or 15 Nisan (remember that Hebrew days include part of two Roman days because Hebrew days began at sundown, not midnight, and continue until the next sundown). Michael Scheifler sets forth the basis for a 13-14 Nisan last supper and a 14 Nisan crucifixion (Scheifler n.d.: n.p.); Alfred Edersheim sets forth the basis for a 14-15 Nisan last supper and a 15 Nisan crucifixion (Edersheim 1988: 244-59, 389-401).

- *In each feast it is by eating of the flesh of the sacrificial lamb that the individual participates in the sacrifice and personally receives its benefits* (**Exod 12:47; John 6:52-57; 1 Cor 10:18; Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:17-19; 1 Cor 11:24**).
- *In each feast the blood that is shed plays a central part of the ceremony.* In Passover the blood of the lamb was to be placed on the doorposts and lintel of the house (**Exod 12:7, 22**); in the Lord's Supper the blood becomes a part of the feast itself (**Matt 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor 11:25-26**).
- *To each feast God attaches his promise.* In Passover, God promised to spare his people the plague of the death of the first-born child (**Exod 12:13, 23**). In the Lord's Supper, Christ promises the forgiveness of sins (**Matt 26:28**; see **Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20**). The Lord's Supper is thus a far more powerful and effective feast, because it is not limited to sparing the participant's earthly body but to saving the participant's body and soul for eternity (see **Matt 10:28**).
- *Both feasts are given as a memorial to be celebrated from generation to generation.* Passover memorializes the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians (**Exod 12:14, 24-27**). The Lord's Supper memorializes Christ who, in his death, "takes away the sin of the world" (**1 Cor 11:25-26**).
- *Both feasts imply the necessity of faith.* The Israelites' obedience to God at the time of the Passover demonstrated their faith and trust in what he said (**Exod 12:27-28**) and thereby spared them from death. In the Lord's Supper, the participants likewise must examine themselves and take the Supper in a worthy manner; failure to do so results in judgment, even to death (**1 Cor 11:27-32**).
- *Real blood underlies both feasts, but the blood that underlies the Lord's Supper has infinite, intrinsic worth and power, whereas the blood that underlies Passover does not.* The blood of the lamb in Passover was merely a "sign" that God would see as his death angel moved through Egypt but had no intrinsic power to spare men's lives in itself (**Exod 12:13**). On the other hand, the blood of Christ which underlies the Lord's Supper is the very blood of the Son of God, which alone is intrinsically able and sufficient to "take away the sin of the world" (**Matt 26:28**). Thus, Jesus could say, "This . . . is the new covenant in my blood" (**Luke 22:20**), not merely that his blood was a "sign" of the new covenant.
- *Both feasts are exclusive.* Passover was only for Hebrews; non-Israelites had to go through the rite of circumcision in order to partake (**Exod 12:43-45**). The Lord's Supper is for the body of Christ (**1 Cor 10:16-17, 20-21**). It is only through Jesus' sacrificial death that Israel, and anyone else who "eats his flesh and drinks his blood," is freed from slavery—which is what Jesus and the rest of the NT teach (see **John 8:31-36; Rom 6:1-23; Heb 2:14-15**).

Finally, just as Passover was symbolic and prophetic, so is the Lord's Supper. "The institution of the Lord's Supper proclaims that the situation in which the church passes through history is not yet the consummation. The Last Supper is itself another prophecy in type, a type that points to the joyous banquet in the future that Christ will celebrate with his disciples in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:15-18; Mark 14:25; Matt 26:29; 1 Cor 11:26). Therefore, each Lord's Supper celebrated by the church points to the consummation (Rev 21:2ff.)." (Goppelt 1982: 116)

3. **vv. 17-21**—Jesus' prediction of his betrayal and the disciples' questioning of themselves

Jesus' prediction of his betrayal by one of the Twelve in **v. 18** is an allusion to **Ps 41:9**. If Litvin's account of the order of the Passover meal is what was followed by Jesus and the disciples, **v. 20** ("It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me") appears to refer to the morsel of **John 13:26** eaten after the second cup of wine (see above). The disciples' self-questioning ("Is it I?," **v. 19**) is a healthy distrust of self and a recognition of the power of indwelling sin that is in us all (see **Rom 7:14-24**). Such self-questioning is better than the self-assertion they all exhibited shortly afterward (see **vv. 29, 31**). **Verse 21** ("the Son of Man goes as it is written of him") probably is alluding to **Isaiah 53**. Although Jesus' betrayal and death had been foreordained (**Isa 53:10-12; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28**), Judas was responsible and accountable for his betrayal.⁶²

4. **vv. 22-25**—The announcement of the new covenant

Jer 31:31-34 had promised a New Covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." The New Covenant would be an everlasting covenant in which God would write his law in His people's hearts, His people would truly know the Lord, and He would forgive their sins and remember them no more (see also **Jer 32:38-40; 50:4-5; Ezek 11:14-20; 36:24-32; 37:15-28**). Jesus previously had said that he was the "bread of

⁶² The issue of God's sovereignty, human responsibility, and the existence of sin and evil is discussed in depth at Menn 2021: 108-32.

life” (**John 6:35, 48**). Now at the Last Supper he symbolizes that by taking the bread, saying “*this is my body*” (v. 22). Further, he explicitly stated that He was inaugurating the New Covenant in His blood (**Luke 22:20**; see **1 Cor 11:25**). Jesus said, “*This is my blood of the covenant*” (v. 24; **Matt 26:28**). That echoes Moses’ words in **Exod 24:8**. The Mosaic covenant did not forgive sins or give eternal life; the New Covenant, which Jesus inaugurated in his blood, does forgive sins and give eternal life. The covenant was confirmed and finalized on the cross (**Heb 9:12-17**). It was ratified when Jesus rose from the dead, then ascended to heaven and sat down on the throne with the Father (**Heb 10:11-18**). The “newness” of the New Covenant is seen in that “this covenant included a new sacrifice that would take away sins [**Heb 9:12-14**], a new temple not made with the hands of men [**Heb 9:11**], a new priesthood called from every tribe and nation [**1 Pet 2:5**; **Rev 1:6**; **5:9**; **7:9**], and a new people of God born from above by the Spirit [**John 3:3**; **2 Cor 5:17**]. Christ, therefore, is the true antitype of Adam, the head of an entirely new race and a new world order, established upon the basis of His saving work (cf. Rom. 5:12-25).” (Smith 1999b: ch. 13) “He is not simply the mediator of God’s New Covenant; he is the incarnation of it” (Goppelt 1982: 116).

Jesus’ reference to his blood being “*poured out for many*” (v. 24) alludes to **Isa 53:12** and echoes what he said in **Matt 20:28** (“*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*”). Verse 25 indicates that the Lord’s Supper will not be taken when the kingdom of God is consummated, because it will be fulfilled in the marriage supper of the Lamb (**Rev 19:7-9**). Consequently, the Lord’s Supper must be celebrated today “as a reminder of two important truths: the joy of our salvation that has already been procured and the hope of Jesus’ second coming and our eternal fellowship with him forever” (Cole 2006: 1196).

5. **vv. 26-31**—The prophecy of the striking of the shepherd, the sheep scattering, and Peter’s denials

In v. 27, Jesus predicts that all of his disciples will fall away. In this, he quotes **Zech 13:7** and applies it to himself. Jesus’ quotation from Zechariah was intentional, since the context of **Zechariah 13** shows that God is behind the striking of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep (see also **Isa 53:10**).⁶³ The scattering is to winnow, test, and refine the sheep (**Zech 13:8-9**)—and that is what happened to the disciples. Jesus prophecy was fulfilled when he was arrested (v. 50, “*And they all left him and fled*”). Jesus’ prophecy of Peter’s denials was fulfilled at **vv. 66-72**.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Look at the contrast between the disciples’ attitude of self-doubt or questioning in v. 19 and their self-assertion in v. 31. Which was the healthier or more accurate attitude to have, and why?

- What can we learn from this?

2. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the elements of the Passover meal and invested them with new meaning (or, perhaps more accurately, showed what they really had been pointing to all along). In **vv. 22-25** he inaugurated the New Covenant that had first been prophesied by Jeremiah (**Jer 31:31-34**; see also **Ezek 36:25-27**; **Luke 22:20**; **2 Cor. 3:2-6**; **Hebrews 8-9**), thus rendering the Old Covenant obsolete (**Heb 8:13**). What is this “New Covenant,” and what are its most important aspects or characteristics?

3. Why is (or should be) Communion an important part of the life of the church and of the individual Christian?

- Has it been to you? If not, how can it have its rightful place in your heart and life?

⁶³ “The servant in Isaiah 53 and the shepherd in Zech 13 share much in common. Both suffer because it was the Lord’s will for them to do so. Both experience death wrongfully and evoke sorrow and consternation among the people for the wrong done to them. Most importantly, both figures suffer in order to effect purification for sins.” (Klein 2008: 389)

14:32-42: ³² *And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”* ³³ *And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.* ³⁴ *And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.”* ³⁵ *And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.* ³⁶ *And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”* ³⁷ *And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?”* ³⁸ *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* ³⁹ *And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.* ⁴⁰ *And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.* ⁴¹ *And he came the third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”* ⁴² *Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”*

vv. 32-42—In the Garden of Gethsemane

In the garden, Christ was “*greatly distressed and troubled*” (v. 33), and his soul was “*very sorrowful, even to death*” (v. 34). **Luke 22:44** adds, “*And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*” His distress and agony were so great that he prayed, “*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will*” (v. 36). The cup obviously was what he was going to experience the next day on the cross. Although on a physical level crucifixion was a very slow, painful, and humiliating way to die, that does not account for his level of distress. Rather, the “cup” he was going to drink was the cup of God’s wrath (see **Ps 75:8**). He who “*knew no sin*” was made “*to be sin*” for us (**2 Cor 5:21**). It is impossible for us, who always have the power of indwelling sin within us, to comprehend the nature of what Christ took onto himself. His becoming sin for us necessitated his drinking the cup of God’s wrath which meant that the Father—with whom Jesus had, for all eternity, been in a perfect relationship of oneness and love—forsook him.⁶⁴ Again, it is impossible for us to comprehend the depth of what that meant. What Jesus was doing on the cross was receiving the judgment, paying the cost, and taking onto himself the punishment due to sinful humanity: “In Matthew 10:28 Jesus says that no physical destruction can be compared with the spiritual destruction of hell, of losing the presence of God. But this is exactly what happened to Jesus on the cross—he was forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46). . . . When he cried out that his God had forsaken him he was experiencing hell itself. But consider—if our debt for sin is so great that it is never paid off there, but our hell stretches on for eternity, then what are we to conclude from the fact that Jesus said the payment was ‘finished’ (John 19:30) after only three hours? We learn that what he felt on the cross was far worse and deeper than all of our deserved hells put together. . . . When Jesus was cut off from God he went into the deepest pit and most powerful furnace, beyond all imagining. He experienced the full wrath of the Father. And he did it voluntarily, for us.” (Keller 2009: sec.4)

In the garden, “God the Father did as it were set the cup down before him, for him to take it and drink it. . . . He had then a near view of that furnace of wrath, into which he was to be cast; he was brought to the mouth of the furnace that he might look into it, and stand and view its raging flames, and see the glowings of its heat, that he might know where he was going and what he was about to suffer. This was the thing that filled his soul with sorrow and darkness, this terrible sight as it were overwhelmed him.” (Edwards 1739: n.p.) Jonathan Edwards explains why this foretaste of the cup was necessary: “Unless the human nature of Christ had had an extraordinary view given him beforehand of what he was to suffer, he could not, as man, fully know beforehand what he was going to suffer, and therefore could not, as man, know what he did when he took the cup to drink it, because he would not fully have known what the cup was--it being a cup that he never drank before. If Christ had plunged himself into those dreadful sufferings, without being fully sensible beforehand of their bitterness and dreadfulness, he must have done he knew not what. As man, he would have plunged himself into sufferings of the amount of which he was ignorant, and so have acted blindfold; and of course his taking upon him these sufferings could not have been so fully his own act. Christ, as God, perfectly knew what these sufferings were; but it was more needful also that he should know as man; for he was to suffer as man, and the act of Christ in taking that cup was the act of Christ as God man. . . . Christ was going to be cast into a dreadful furnace of

⁶⁴ The depth of his intimacy with the Father is reflected in the fact that Jesus addressed the Father directly, using the Aramaic word “Abba,” a term of close, personal affection (v. 36). Although there are very rare instances of other Jews describing God as Abba, “We have no evidence that others before Jesus addressed God as Abba” (Bauckham 1978: 249, emph. added). “At the very least his use of Abba placed him in a class of holy men enjoying an exceptional degree of intimacy with God, and we can scarcely explain this usage except as a reflection of his awareness of such exceptional intimacy” (Ibid.: 248).

wrath, and it was not proper that he should plunge himself into it blindfold, as not knowing how dreadful the furnace was. Therefore that he might not do so, God first brought him and set him at the mouth of the furnace, that he might look in, and stand and view its fierce and raging flames, and might see where he was going, and might voluntarily enter into it and bear it for sinners, as knowing what it was. This view Christ had in his agony.” (Edwards 1739: n.p.; see also Cole 2006: 1197).

“Gethsemane” means “oil press” (Vander Lann and Markham 1996: 160). In the garden, “as Jesus bore the weight of what it meant to be the Lamb of God and the sacrifice for the sins of the world, drops of his anointing blood began to seep from Him, like precious oil being squeezed from olives. Jesus willingly placed Himself under such agony to show us the intensity of His love. Our need drove Him there and placed Him under the incredible gethsemane of His sacrificial death.” (Ibid.) In light of all this, his prayer, “*Yet not what I will, but what you will*” (v. 36) is all the more remarkable. That should be the mindset and prayer of every Christian, especially since “because He was pressed out for us, we will never have to bear the weight of the penalty for our own sins” (Ibid.).

Given Christ’s extreme distress, and even his repeated admonitions to Peter, James, and John to “*watch and pray*” (vv. 34, 38), it is amazing that all three fell asleep at the time of their master’s greatest need. The admonition to “*watch and pray*” applies to all believers, particularly when faced with temptation or persecution. We cannot depend upon the fact that our spirit is willing, since our flesh is so weak and easily led astray. Our flesh is only “strong” when it is yielded to the Holy Spirit. That can occur regardless of bodily strength or infirmities. Our flesh is the testing ground of our intentions and of our faith. Only a life characterized by watchfulness and prayer will keep us faithful and prevent us from falling into sin.

Christ’s last comment about being “*betrayed into the hands of sinners*” (v. 41) is more poignant than it may appear. The fact is, there really are only two kinds of people: sinners and saints. Many people, like Judas, can spend years with Jesus and yet still be sinners. We must “*watch and pray*” that that is not us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is of huge significance. Why is it important to Christianity’s claim to be the *exclusive* way to God and salvation?

- How did God ratify that Jesus is the exclusive way to God and salvation?

2. How can the same phrase, “*not what I will, but what you will,*” indicate either great *faithfulness* or great *unbelief*?

3. In v. 38, when Jesus said that “*the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,*” he meant “weak toward the things of God and the Spirit.” He may just as well have said that “*the spirit is willing, but the flesh is strong [i.e., strong toward the world and the things of the flesh].*” How can one get his or her flesh to be strong toward the things of God and the Spirit, and weak toward the world and the things of the flesh?

14:43–15:20a: ⁴³ *And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” And he kissed him. ⁴⁶ And they laid hands on him and seized him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ And Jesus said to them, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ And they all left him and fled. ⁵¹ And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, ⁵² but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.*

⁵³ *And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. ⁵⁴ And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. ⁵⁷ And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, ⁵⁸ “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” ⁵⁹ Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify*

against you?”⁶¹ *But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”*⁶² *And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”*⁶³ *And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need?”*⁶⁴ *You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?”* *And they all condemned him as deserving death.*⁶⁵ *And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!”* *And the guards received him with blows.*

⁶⁶ *And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came,*⁶⁷ *and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.”*⁶⁸ *But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you mean.”* *And he went out into the gateway^[L] and the rooster crowed.^[U]*⁶⁹ *And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.”*⁷⁰ *But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”*⁷¹ *But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know this man of whom you speak.”*⁷² *And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”* *And he broke down and wept.*

¹⁵ *And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.*² *And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”* *And he answered him, “You have said so.”*³ *And the chief priests accused him of many things.*⁴ *And Pilate again asked him, “Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you.”*⁵ *But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.*

⁶ *Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked.*⁷ *And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas.*⁸ *And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them.*⁹ *And he answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?”*¹⁰ *For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.*¹¹ *But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead.*¹² *And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?”*¹³ *And they cried out again, “Crucify him.”*¹⁴ *And Pilate said to them, “Why? What evil has he done?”* *But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.”*¹⁵ *So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

¹⁶ *And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion.*¹⁷ *And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.*¹⁸ *And they began to salute him, “Hail, King of the Jews!”*¹⁹ *And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.*^{20a} *And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him.*

vv. 43–15:20a—Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, trial before the Council, Peter’s denials, and trial before Pilate

This part of Mark’s gospel describes Jesus’ betrayal and arrest, his trial before and condemnation by the Jewish Council, Peter’s denials of Jesus, and his trial and condemnation before Pontius Pilate. The irony is that, Jesus’ fellow Jews violated their own legal procedures to treacherously condemn Jesus as they had determined in advance to do, but when Jesus is then handed over to the Gentiles, the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, could find no fault in him but nevertheless bowed to pressure from the Jewish leaders and condemned Jesus to be crucified.

A comparison of the four gospels gives the complete chronology of the events from the time of Jesus’ arrest in the garden of Gethsemane until his death and burial (the following table is drawn from Powell 1954: 42-43):

About midnight	The arrest
Midnight to daybreak	Jesus appeared before Annas (John 18:13, 19-24) Trial before Caiaphas and Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53-65 ; see Matt 26:57-68 ; Luke 22:54, 63-71)
Daybreak: 6:00AM (“as soon as it was morning”)	“A consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council” (Mark 15:1a ; see Matt 27:1)
Sunrise: 6:00AM-9:00AM (12 th -3 rd hour)	Trial before Pilate (Mark 15:1b-5 ; see Matt 27:2, 11-14 ; Luke 23:1-5 ; John 18:28-38a) Trial before Herod (Luke 23:6-12) Jesus again before Pilate, is scourged and condemned (Mark 15:6-20a ; see Matt 27:15-30 ; Luke 23:13-25 ; John 18:38b-19:16)
9:00AM-Noon (3 rd -6 th hour)	Procession to Calvary and Crucifixion (Mark 15:20b-32 ; see Matt

	27:31-44; Luke 23:26-33; John 19:17-25)
Noon-3:00PM (6 th -9 th hour)	Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:33-36 ; see Matt 27:45-49; Luke 23:34-44; John 19:26-29)
3:00PM (9 th hour)	Jesus' death and burial (Mark 15:37-46 ; see Matt 27:50-60; Luke 23:45-54; John 19:30-42)

1. **vv. 43-52**—The betrayal and arrest of Jesus

Mark's mention of Judas as "*one of the Twelve*" (**v. 43**) highlights the baseness of his treachery. Judas clearly had planned the betrayal in some detail: it was at night and in a deserted place where the crowds (whom the chief priests feared) would not be present; he came with a delegation of the religious leaders who were armed with weapons in the event the disciples or others protested (Peter's striking the servant of the high priest with his sword [**v. 48**; see **John 18:10**] showed the prudence of Judas's planning; and, since it was night, he gave the religious leaders a sign—he would kiss the one he was betraying—so there would be no doubt about which one was Jesus. In fact, the word for "kiss" here is *kattaphileō*, which means "to kiss eagerly, affectionately, or repeatedly" (Zodhiates 1992: *kattaphileō*, 847). Jesus' statement about the Scriptures being fulfilled (**v. 49**) probably refers to **Isa 53:12**, as indicated in **Luke 22:37**, and may also allude to **Zech 13:7**, which Jesus had quoted earlier at the Last Supper.

Verse 50 emphasizes that "*all left him and fled.*" Jesus was now totally alone and in the power of his enemies who had long plotted to kill him. Most think that the "young man" who "*ran away naked*" (**vv. 51-52**) is Mark himself. Mark did have a house in Jerusalem (**Acts 12:12**). Later tradition maintains that that was the house where the Last Supper took place (Cole 1989: 301). Swift points out, "No good reason can be shown for the recording of the incident unless it is based on personal reminiscence" (Swift 1970: 883).

2. **vv. 53-65**—Jesus' trial before the Council

Verse 55 refers to Jesus' hearing or trial before the "*whole council.*" This clearly was the Greater Sanhedrin. "According to the *Mishnah*, there were three Courts of Law in Jerusalem: the Greater Sanhedrin, the lesser Sanhedrin and an inferior Court" (Powell 1954: 36). The Greater Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members and was the only tribunal authorized to judge a "false prophet" (Neusner 1988: 584, Sanhedrin §§1:5.A; 1:6.A). The *Mishnah* was written beginning approximately AD 200 and records the extensive oral traditions that had been in place. If the traditions and procedures regarding the Sanhedrin were in place as of the time of Jesus, then the religious leaders violated their own legal procedures in order to obtain their pre-determined result: the condemnation and death of Jesus. For example, the *Mishnah* states that, in capital cases, the judges must "try the case by day and complete it [by] day" (Neusner 1988: 590, Sanhedrin §4.1.J) In capital cases, the judges "come to a final decision on the same day, *but on the following day for conviction*" (Ibid.: Sanhedrin §4.1.K); therefore, "They do not judge [capital cases] either on the eve of the Sabbath or on the eve of a festival" (Ibid.: Sanhedrin §4.1.L) Further, "in capital cases they begin only with the case for acquittal, and not with the case for conviction" (Ibid.: 589, Sanhedrin §4.1.E). None of those important procedural safeguards were followed. Indeed, **Matt 26:59** even says, "*Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death.*"

Interestingly, although the Sanhedrin itself was seeking false testimony in order to condemn Jesus, it still followed the requirement of the *Mishnah* that "when [the witnesses] contradict one another, their testimony is null" (Ibid.: 592, Sanhedrin §5.2.F). Consequently, Mark twice reports that the testimony of the false witnesses "*did not agree*" (**vv. 56, 59**). The witnesses' testimony that Jesus said he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (**v. 58**) could be construed as sacrilege and sorcery, the punishment for both of which was death. However, as Frank Powell states, "Yet this evidence was not what the Sanhedrin wanted. They wanted to hear evidence about a much more serious matter than that of a fantastic threat to destroy the Temple or a claim to be able to rebuild it in three days. So on the highly technical ground that 'the witnesses agreed not together' they rejected this evidence." (Powell 1954: 68)

At this stage, there had been no case for Jesus to answer. "In those circumstances it was the duty of the High Priest to announce that no charge had been made out and that the Accused would be discharged" (Ibid.: 69). The high priest did not do that. Instead, the high priest himself said to Jesus, "*Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*" (**v. 61**) Jesus replied, "*I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven*" (**v. 62**). As a result of Jesus' answer, "*the high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?'*" And they all condemned him as deserving death." (**vv. 63-64**)

The high priest's question was entirely illegal. First, a person was liable for blasphemy "only when he

will have fully pronounced the divine Name” (Neusner 1988: 597, Sanhedrin §7.5); also, because blasphemy was a capital offense (**Lev 24:10-16**), the charge of blasphemy required that at least two or three witnesses all testifying that they heard the same blasphemy from the accused (see **Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15**; Neusner 1988: 597-98, Sanhedrin §§7.4.A, D; 7.5). Because no witnesses had testified that Jesus had committed blasphemy, the high priest had no right to even raise the issue of blasphemy or ask the question. The high priest “was not entitled to make up for the shortcomings of the prosecution by questioning the Accused” (Powell 1954: 70). Second, the high priest’s question was also illegal because “the Court was trying the Accused on the basis that he had committed an offense *before* He came into Court (of which there was no evidence) and not for *something said by the accused in Court*” (Powell 1954: 71).

Third, the high priest’s question was actually a statement. James Edwards states, “In the original Greek the wording is put in the form of a statement with a question implied (‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One’). The ‘you’ is emphatic, and ‘the Blessed One,’ a Jewish circumlocution for God’s name, means none other than ‘God’s Son.’ The effect is to put a full Christological confession into the mouth of the high priest!” (Edwards 2002: 446)

Jesus’ answer to the high priest is a straightforward affirmation: “I am” (**v. 62**). He then “immediately interprets his affirmation with reference to the Son of man in Dan 7:13 and Ps 110:1. The Son of Man here is a fully divine and exalted figure, ‘sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One’ . . . Thus Jesus both affirms his divine Sonship before the high priest and portrays himself as the fulfiller of the eschatological mission of the Son of Man, an affirmation that sets him unambiguously in God’s place.” (Ibid.: 447) Craig Blomberg discusses why Jesus’ claim to be the “Son of Man” in this context is so significant: “This ‘Son of Man’ saying, rather than the claim that he was some kind of messiah, is what would have led the high priest to tear his garments and proclaim that Jesus had blasphemed [**vv. 63-64**]. Alleging messiahship was no capital offense; otherwise, the Jews could never have received a messiah! But claiming to be the exalted, heavenly Son of Man, one who was Lord and next to the Father himself in heaven, transgressed the boundaries of what most of the Jewish leaders deemed permissible for mere mortals.” (Blomberg 2007: 93) N. T. Wright discusses another important aspect and implication of Jesus’ answer to Caiaphas: “There is nothing particularly modest or understated about the vindication of the ‘son of man’ in Daniel 7.14, 18 and 27. . . . He is claiming to be the representative of the true people of God. . . . He therefore declares that Israel’s god will vindicate him; and that vindication will include the destruction of the Temple which has come to symbolize and embody the rebellion of Israel against God.⁶⁵ . . . Among the other implications which echo out from this explosive statement, there is one which Caiaphas surely did not miss. If Jesus is to be vindicated as the true representative of YHWH’s people; and if he, Caiaphas, is presently sitting in judgment on him; then Caiaphas himself, and the regime he represents, are cast in a singularly unflattering light. His court has become part of the evil force which is oppressing the true Israel, and which will be overthrown when YHWH vindicates his people. Caiaphas, the High Priest, has become the new Antiochus Epiphanes, the great tyrant oppressing YHWH’s people.⁶⁶ The Sanhedrin was playing the Fourth Beast [see **Dan 7:7**] to Jesus’ Son of Man. . . . The courtroom is turned inside out: the prisoner becomes the judge, the judge the condemned criminal (Wright 1996: 524, 525-26).

Here, again, the high priest and the rest of the Sanhedrin did not follow the legal procedures spelled out in the *Mishnah*. “In these circumstances it was their bounden duty to investigate the truth or falsity of the claim. This they signally failed to do. There was no investigation into the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah and ‘the Son of God.’ . . . The behaviour of the Judges when they received the news of the resurrection of Jesus, apart from their conduct before and at the trial, justifies the belief that *in no circumstances whatever* would they be prepared to admit the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel. When the news of the resurrection reached them, instead of trying to make contact with Jesus to confirm the facts, or holding a full enquiry to ascertain the facts—possibly with a view to holding a new trial—they gave large money to the soldiers who supplied the evidence, as a bribe to induce them to start the false story that while they slept the disciples stole the body of

⁶⁵ Jesus symbolically enacted the temple’s demise when he cleansed the temple (**Mark 11:15-17**) and prophesied the destruction of the temple in **Mark 13:2, 14-18**. At his trial, false witnesses testified, “*We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands’*” (**Mark 14:58**). That was a misquotation and misinterpretation of what Jesus had said. In **Mark 13:2** he prophesied that the temple would be destroyed, but the Romans, not he, would destroy it. In **John 2:19** he had said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” He was not saying that he would destroy the temple but was challenging the Jews and “*was speaking about the temple of his body*” (**John 2:21**).

⁶⁶ Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes rules Syria He reigned over Judah from about 175–164 BC. In 167 BC he sacrificed a swine on the altar of the temple and had made the practice of Judaism illegal. That prompted the Maccabean revolt of 167–164 BC. (Bartlett 1993: 476; Metzger 1957: 132)

Jesus.” (Powell 1954: 74, 89)

Further, since they found Jesus guilty, they were required to “postpone judging him until the next day. They would go off in pairs and would not eat very much or drink wine that entire day, and they would discuss the matter all that night. And the next day they would get up and come to court.” (Neusner 1988: 593, Sanhedrin §§5.5.A, B, C) They did not do that but, instead, spit at Jesus and struck him (v. 65); those were traditional ways of showing rejection and repudiation (see **Num 12:14; Deut 25:9; Job 30:10; Isa 50:6**). The high priest’s tearing his garments was required of the Sanhedrin when someone was convicted of blasphemy (Ibid.: 598, Sanhedrin §7.5.E). The entire proceeding is filled with irony: The Sanhedrin stands on the law and Jesus sits in the dock, but in reality the Sanhedrin breaks the law and Jesus upholds it. The testimony that the Sanhedrin seeks against Jesus is in the end not provided by the false witnesses but by Jesus himself in the claim to be God’s Son. Jesus stands on trial before the Sanhedrin, but the Sanhedrin will stand trial before the Son of Man when he returns in glory. The Sanhedrin makes a charade of Jesus’ ability to prophesy, but his prophecies all come true. Above all, it is the high priest, not Jesus, who blasphemes, because Jesus *is* God’s Son. (Edwards 2002: 449) One final irony is that the high priest tore his own clothes which may, like Samuel tearing Saul’s clothes, signify that his priesthood would be torn from him, whereas even when he was crucified, Jesus’ clothes were kept whole (**John 19:23-24**), signifying his own never-ending high priesthood (**Heb 2:17; 4:14-15; 10:19-22**) and kingdom.

3. **vv. 66-72—Peter’s denials**

Peter’s presence in the courtyard shows his continued concern about Jesus and his wanting to know what would happen to him. However, his concern about Jesus’ wellbeing yielded to his concern for his own wellbeing. When the servant girl said to Peter that he had been with Jesus, Peter’s denial, “*I neither know nor understand what you mean,*” is significant in that it took “the form common in rabbinical law for a formal, legal denial” (Lane 1974: 542; see Neusner 1988: 637, Shabuot §8:3.B). He could have told the truth or given an evasive answer (e.g., “I think you are mistaken”), but instead he gave a strong denial such as one would give in court. The first two denials were that he had been with Jesus, but Peter’s third denial denied Jesus himself (“*I do not know this man of whom you speak,*” v. 70). Additionally, Peter’s third denial was more than just a strong denial such as a person might give in court; v. 71 says that “*he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear.*” Swift points out invoking a curse and swearing “does not . . . mean that he used profanity; but rather that he affirmed on oath. He called down the ‘anathema’ of God upon his head if what he said was not true.” (Swift 1970: 883) *Anathema* means that one is “given up or devoted to destruction for God’s sake (Sept.: Num. 21:1-3; Deut. 13:16-18); therefore, given up to the curse and destruction, accursed (1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22; Gal. 1:8, 9). In Rom. 9:3, estrangement from Christ and His salvation. The word does not denote punishment intended as discipline but being given over or devoted to divine condemnation. It denotes an indissoluble vow.” (Zodhiates 1992: *anathema*, 148-49). Peter could not have denied and rejected Jesus Christ more forcefully than he did in v. 71.

Look at the incredible deceitfulness of the human heart (**Jer 17:9**) and the incredible self-centeredness shown by Peter: from “*You are the Christ*” (**Mark 8:29**) to “*I do not know this man of whom you speak*” (v. 70). At the third denial the rooster crowed the second time (v. 72); **Luke 22:61** tells us that at that moment Jesus turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered that Jesus had predicted this very thing, “*and he broke down and wept*” (v. 72). We need to know that every person has the same seeds of deceitfulness and self-centeredness that Peter demonstrated. These can be manifested in different ways, particularly in times of temptation and persecution. That is why we need to prepare for temptation and persecution before they occur, instead of waiting for them to occur. However, Peter’s great fall should also remind us that there is always a way open for repentance, forgiveness, and restoration (see **Mark 16:7; John 21:15-17**).

4. **v. 15:1a—The consultation among the elders, scribes, and the whole Sanhedrin**

It may be that the second cock-crow “is a definite point in time [that] denotes true dawn, as against the midnight of first cock-crow; 15:1, ‘as soon as it was morning’, supports this” (Cole 1989: 309). It is apparent that the Greater Sanhedrin tried Jesus at night. Then “*as soon as it was morning*” (v. 1) there was another meeting of the Greater Sanhedrin, together with chief priests, elders, and scribes. There could have been well more than 100 of these religious leaders present. Powell states, “It would seem that this second meeting was for consultative purposes only, held for the single purpose of deciding the most expedient way of giving effect to the illegal pre-trial decision of the Sanhedrin to put Jesus to death. . . . Certainly it was necessary that the High Priest, as Head of the Jewish State, should have the assurance that the whole of official Jewry agreed with what had been done.” (Powell 1954: 81-82) Matthew states succinctly, “*When morning came, all the chief priests and*

the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.” (Matt 27:1).

They decided to deliver Jesus to the procurator, Pontius Pilate, since only Pilate could legally order Jesus’ execution (see **John 18:31**). There were other reasons for handing Jesus over to Pilate: “The authority of the governor would be important in quelling any popular outcry that might arise on Jesus’ behalf. Moreover, a verdict of Rome against Jesus—and especially the shame of death by crucifixion—would severely damage attempts on the part of Jesus’ followers to rehabilitate him.” (Edwards 2002: 457-58) However, the Jewish leaders evidently decided not to inform Pilate of their own trial of Jesus by the Sanhedrin. The reasons probably were that “if they disclosed the proceedings before their own Court, the illegality thereof would be manifest to Pilate, for he would know that according to the Pharisaic law the trial could not lawfully take place by night. Pilate would want to know of what offense Jesus was convicted. He would not be interested in a conviction for blasphemy. Awkward questions would be asked and there would be no answer to them. Complications might arise. Pilate might immediately quash the conviction and release Jesus and let him go. Would it not be better to say nothing about their own proceedings and merely mention that Jesus had been arrested overnight and was now, early the next morning, being brought before Pilate for trial?” (Ibid.: 83-84)

Consequently, since Pilate and other Roman officials did not care about and would not hear a case based on the Jewish law of blasphemy (see **John 18:31; Acts 18:12-16**), the Jewish leaders had to bring a new charge “which would interest Pilate, and be one with which he would be *bound* to deal. And, in addition to alleging an offence against Roman law, it had to be one which carried the death penalty. Subsequent events reveal fairly clearly the lines of their plan of action. They would accuse Jesus of high treason—treason against the Emperor. Pilate would be obliged to take cognizance of such a charge and be unable to refer it to the Sanhedrin. . . . If Pilate showed signs of wanting to release Jesus they held a trump card. They would stir up the people to point out that if he let Jesus go he was not Caesar’s friend, and would render himself liable to recall to Rome for suffering a rival to Caesar in Judea.” (Ibid.: 85)⁶⁷

5. **vv. 1b-20a—Jesus before Pilate and the Roman soldiers**

Pontius Pilate was the procurator of Judea from AD 26-36. As such, he “was vested by the Emperor with absolute power of life and death. When trying a non-Roman citizen in his province he was not obliged to follow the procedure of the court in Rome. He had full discretion in the matter. He was judge and jury combined.” (Powell 1954: 101)

In **v. 2**, Pilate’s question to Jesus, “*Are you the King of the Jews?*” is like the high priest’s question to Jesus in **14:61**, namely, a statement with a question implied (i.e., “You are the king of the Jews?”). “As in the case of the high priest, Mark’s wording makes Pilate an unknowing confessor. Again, even the mouths of Jesus’ enemies unwittingly confess him.” (Edwards 2002: 458) The basis for Pilate’s question is found in Luke’s account of the trial, “*Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.’” (Luke 23:1-2)* Jesus’ response, “*You have said so*” (**v. 2**) emphasizes the *You*. “It is not a direct affirmation, or else Pilate would have immediate grounds for execution. But neither is it a denial. The reply is suggestive, as if to say, ‘You would do well to consider the question.’” (Ibid.: 459) The chief priests knew that their allegation that Jesus was “*forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar*” (**Luke 23:2**) was false, since they had attempted to get Jesus to say this only two days before his arrest, but Jesus had refused to take their bait (**12:13-17**; see also **Matt 17:24-27**). They also knew that their allegation that Jesus was “*saying that he himself is Christ, a king*” (**Luke 23:2**) was false. He was condemned by the Sanhedrin precisely because he did *not* claim to be a political Messiah but claimed to be the *not* a political Messiah (Christ) and the divine Son of God. Hence, their accusations were met with Jesus’ silence (**vv. 3-5**), in fulfillment of **Isa 53:7**.

⁶⁷ Craig Evans plausibly observes that Jesus was not, in fact, convicted by Pilate of “high treason.” Drawing on Emperor Justinian’s (AD 530-533) book the *Digesta*, a compendium of Roman law drawing much of its material from the first and second centuries, Evans states, “It seems most unlikely that Jesus was condemned for “high treason,” given the discussion of treason (*maiestas*) in *Digesta* 48.4.1–11. Cited authorities include Ulpian, Marcian, Scaevola, and others. Almost all of the examples discussed in chapter 4 of book 48 involve serious violence against the state, “against the Roman people or against their safety,” including plotting the death of the emperor, plotting or attempting to assassinate a Roman official, raising an army, failing to relinquish command of an army, siding with an enemy of the empire, fomenting armed rebellion, turning an ally against Rome, etc. Jesus did nothing that approximated these kinds of actions.” (Evans 2016: “Roman Law”) Pilate himself knew that Jesus was only being handed over because of envy and wanted to free him (**Mark 15:10; Luke 23:20; John 19:12; Acts 3:13**). He acceded to the demands of the Jewish leaders simply for matters of political expediency.

John 18:33-38 gives a more complete account of the interchange between Pilate and Jesus with respect to Pilate's question: ³³ *So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'* ³⁴ *Jesus answered, 'Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?'* ³⁵ *Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?'* ³⁶ *Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.'* ³⁷ *Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?'* *Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.'* ³⁸ *Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?'* *After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him."* Jesus was saying, in effect, "in answer to the charge, I 'confess and avoid'; that is to say, I admit I made and do make the claim alleged against me; I assert that that claim, *in the sense in which I made it*, is true in substance and in fact. I do not, however, make the claim *in the sense alleged by my accusers*. I admit that I claim to be a king, but not the sort of king alleged by the Chief Priests. I make no claim to be a king, a rival of Caesar. I am not guilty of treason against the Emperor. I admit and assert that I have come to found a kingdom but not an earthly one." (Powell 1954: 115-16)

Since Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent (v. 14) and had only been handed over to him because of the chief priests' envy (v. 10), in vv. 6-15 Pilate attempted to release Jesus based on a custom he had of releasing one prisoner during the festival. His plan backfired, and so, "*wishing to satisfy the crowd*" (v. 15), Pilate released to them the insurrectionist and murderer, Barabbas, and condemned Jesus to be crucified. As with so many other events in Jesus' life, there was great irony in this. Jesus was charged by the Jewish leaders with being a political king, a charge they knew to be false, and Pilate condemned him to death even though he knew Jesus was innocent while, at the same time, releasing a man he knew to be guilty. Additionally, "Pilate, who begins by seeking amnesty for Jesus, ends by seeking it for himself. The Jewish subjects, on the other hand, whose duty is to obey, assert their will and win the day. The governor is thus strangely governed. The free sovereign (note the first person pronouns in vv. 9 and 12) loses his freedom to forces he presumes to control, whereas Jesus, the silent prisoner who has no control, remains true to his divinely ordained purpose, and thus alone remains truly free." (Edwards 2002: 464) John's accounts of the proceedings even show that the Jewish religious leaders and the people abandoned all pretense of loyalty to God but gave their ultimate loyalty to Caesar. **John 19:12** states, "*From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.'*" **John 19:15** adds, "*Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?'*" *The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'*" **Matt 27:24-25** concludes by saying that the people even agreed (similar to Peter's third denial of Jesus) that Jesus' blood be held against them and their children: "*When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.'*" ²⁵ *And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'"*

The ironies do not end there. Barabbas means "son of the father"; Jesus is the true Son of the Father. Thus, "a convicted murderer is set free, and in his place the innocent Son of the Father is condemned to death. It is not difficult to see in this prisoner exchange a reflection of the substitutionary understanding of atonement: 'While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8); 'Christ died for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous' (1 Pet 3:18)." (Ibid.: 461) The same, of course, is true of us: just as Barabbas was imprisoned as an insurrectionist and a murderer, so are we imprisoned in sin as rebels against God and his law and have committed self-murder through sin and, through our sin, brought sin and death into the world; further, just as Barabbas had been condemned to death for his crimes, so we were condemned to death for our sin, and just as Barabbas had nothing to do with his own salvation from death, but was freed entirely by Pilate's grace and Jesus' death, so we have nothing to do with our own salvation but have been saved entirely by God's grace since Jesus bore the penalty for sin that we deserve on the cross to which Pilate condemned him.

The mocking and beating of Jesus by the soldiers (vv. 16-20a) replays the treatment Jesus earlier received by the Sanhedrin (14:65). Purple was the most expensive and prestigious of the ancient dyes and symbolized royalty (Ibid.: 466). Jesus bore the soldiers' scourging, beating, and mocking him in fulfillment of **Isa 50:6** and **53:5**.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In **14:62** Jesus quotes from **Ps 110:1** and **Dan 7:13**, and applies those verses to himself. **Ps 110:1** is quoted from or alluded to on many occasions in the New Testament, including **Matt 22:44**; **Mark 12:36**, **16:19**; **Luke**

20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-22; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12-13; and 12:2. What are the points or issues in support of which this one verse is cited?

2. How was Caiaphas's tearing his clothes (v. 63) symbolic or prophetic?

3. Look at Peter's actions that night: his self-questioning with the other disciples (v. 19); his assertions of great faithfulness (vv. 29-31); his sleeping and inability to answer Jesus (vv. 33-40); his striking the ear off the slave of the high priest (v. 47); his fleeing (v. 50); his following Jesus at a distance into the courtyard of the high priest (v. 54); his sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire (v. 54); his denials that he even knew Jesus (vv. 66-71); his weeping bitterly (v. 72). What does all this tell you about him?

- How is he at all like you?

4. How was the Holy Spirit using the servant girls? The rooster? Has the Holy Spirit ever used non-Christians, animals or even inanimate objects to impress any lessons in your life?

5. If you have ever sinned such that you felt that God could no longer use you, how have you overcome that feeling?

- Has he used you again?

6. In what ways is the account of Barabbas a parable or microcosm of our salvation through Christ?

7. Why do you think that the people, after having seen Jesus's miracles, heard his teachings and hailed his entry into Jerusalem with hosannas, now demand that he be crucified (15:13-14)? To answer that "*the chief priests stirred up the crowd*" (v. 11), although true, is not sufficient; the question is *why* did they let themselves be stirred up?

8. Pilate "*wish[ed] to satisfy the crowd*" (v. 15), and thus delivered Jesus to be crucified, even though he knew Jesus was innocent and had only been accused because of envy (vv. 10, 14). Pilate, of course, was not a Christian. Have you, since becoming a Christian, ever "gone along with the crowd" and done something you knew to be wrong, because of pressure from others?

- Why did you do so? (Again, to simply say, "it was the flesh" or "the devil made me do it," really is not an answer; the question is *why* did you give in to the influence or pressure of others to do what you knew to be wrong?)
- What was the result (on you, your witness to others, your relationship with God, in general)?

9. On the other hand, have you ever *resisted* going along with the crowd?

- Have you ever resisted for *explicitly Christian reasons*?
- How or why were you able to resist the pressure of others?
- What was the result?

10. Have you ever faced mockery for being a Christian?

- How did you handle it?
- If you didn't handle it well, how do you think you should have handled it?
- What effects did it have (on you/on others)?

- On the other hand, how do we mock Jesus, even as we proclaim him our king and kneel and bow before him?

vv. 20b-47: ^{20b} *And they led him out to crucify him.* ²¹ *And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.* ²² *And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).* ²³ *And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.* ²⁴ *And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.* ²⁵ *And it was the third hour when they crucified him.* ²⁶ *And the inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.”* ²⁷ *And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.* ²⁹ *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!”* ³¹ *So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.”* Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

³³ *And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.* ³⁴ *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* ³⁵ *And some of the bystanders hearing it said, “Behold, he is calling Elijah.”* ³⁶ *And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”* ³⁷ *And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.* ³⁸ *And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.* ³⁹ *And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”*

⁴⁰ *There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.* ⁴¹ *When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.*

⁴² *And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,* ⁴³ *Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.* ⁴⁴ *Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died.^[i] And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead.* ⁴⁵ *And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph.* ⁴⁶ *And Joseph^[k] bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.* ⁴⁷ *Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.*

vv. 20b-47—The crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus

The crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ all fulfilled Scripture and prophecy (see, especially, **Gen 3:15; Isa 53:3-12**). Many of the particulars had been prophesied:

- The drugged and sour wine offered to Jesus (**vv. 23, 36**) fulfilled **Ps 69:21b**, “for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”
- Being lifted up on the cross (**v. 24**; see also **John 3:14; 12:32**) fulfilled **Num 21:9**, “So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”
- Dying by crucifixion (**v. 24**) fulfilled **Deut 21:23**, “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (see **Gal 3:13**).
- Being pierced for crucifixion and the soldier piercing Jesus’ side to confirm that he was dead (**John 19:34**) fulfilled **Ps 22:16**, “a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet,” **Isa 53:5**, “he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities,” and **Zech 12:10**, “they look on me, on him whom they have pierced.”
- Jesus’ prayer from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (**Luke 23:34**) fulfilled **Isa 53:12**, “He bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.”
- Dividing Jesus’ garments by casting lots (**v. 24**) fulfilled **Ps 22:18**, “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”
- Being crucified between two robbers (**v. 27**) fulfilled **Isa 53:12**, “[he was] numbered with the transgressors.”
- The people’s standing by, watching him (**Luke 23:35**) fulfilled **Ps 22:17**, “I can count all my bones—I they stare and gloat over me.”

- Wagging the heads and mocking him (v. 29-32) fulfilled **Ps 22:7**, “*All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads*” and **Ps 109:25**, “*I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads.*”
- The statement of the religious leaders, “*He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’*” (**Matt 27:43**) fulfilled **Ps 22:8**, “*He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!*”
- Darkness over the whole land (v. 33) fulfilled **Gen 15:12, 17**, “*dreadful and great darkness fell upon him*” and “*it was dark.*”⁶⁸
- Jesus’ cry, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (v. 34) fulfilled **Ps 22:1**, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”
- Jesus’ saying, “*I thirst*” (**John 19:28**) fulfilled **Ps 22:15**, “*my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.*”
- Jesus’ cry, “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!*” (**Luke 23:46**) fulfilled **Ps 31:5**, “*Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*”
- Jesus’ bones not being broken (**John 19:31-36**) fulfilled **Exod 12:46**, “*you shall not break any of it’s the Passover lamb’s] bones*” (see also **Num 9:12; Ps 34:20**).
- Jesus’ body being pierced by the soldier so that “*blood and water*” came out from him (**John 19:34**) fulfilled **Ps 22:14**, “*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast.*”⁶⁹
- His friends and acquaintances standing at a distance (v. 40; see also **Luke 23:49**) fulfilled **Ps 38:11**, “*My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off.*”
- Being buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb (vv. 43-46) fulfilled **Isa 53:9**, “*And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*”

1. **vv. 20b-32—Jesus’ crucifixion**

The crucifixion of Jesus was not a secret or private event. Instead, it was a public event involving Roman government officials, Jewish leaders (the Sanhedrin), and common people, both friends and foes of Jesus. Ryan Turner summarizes, “Though the disciples forsook Jesus, some of them were still witnesses from a distance (Mark 14:54). Also, there was an anonymous disciple [probably John] whom Jesus, while on the cross, commanded to take care of Mary (John 19:26-27). The Gospel of Luke reports that while Jesus was carrying the cross, ‘. . . there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him’ [**Luke 23:27**]. In addition to these people already mentioned the Gospels are scattered with references to Jewish leaders (Mt. 27:41; Mk. 15:31), Roman centurion (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Lk. 23:47) and soldiers (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:35; and John 19:18, 23) who all witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion.” (Turner 2014: Eyewitness Sources) Jesus’ own mother, his mother’s sister, and other women he knew were eyewitnesses to the crucifixion (**John 19:25-27**). Additionally, as Jesus was being led out to be crucified, “*They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross*” (**Mark 15:21**). Timothy Keller points out, “There is no reason for the author to include such names unless the readers know or could have access to them. Mark is saying, ‘Alexander and Rufus vouch for the truth of what I am telling you, if you want to ask them.’” (Keller 2008: 101) The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is one of the most well-attested events in history.⁷⁰

“Crucifixion was a punishment reserved for non-Roman citizens in which excessive cruelty was unleashed on the lowest and most defenseless classes of society—slaves, violent criminals, and prisoners of war. . . . To enhance both the shame (Heb 12:2) and deterrent effect of crucifixion, victims were executed as public spectacles, and men were normally crucified naked, as the gambling for Jesus’ clothes attests.” (Edwards 2002: 468)⁷¹ We need to remember that Jesus gave all he had for us: his only possession (his clothing); his life; and his

⁶⁸ For a discussion of how Genesis 15 prophesied the crucifixion in detail, see the sermon, Menn, n.d.: “Gen 15:1-18—The Greatest Prophecy In The Bible.”

⁶⁹ The weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death.” (Edwards, et al. 1986: 1463)

⁷⁰ For the biblical and historical evidence demonstrating the historicity of the crucifixion, see Menn 2020: 23-29.

⁷¹ **John 19:23-24** specifies that the soldiers took both Jesus’ outer garment and his tunic (inner garment), which means he was, indeed, crucified naked.

shame (remember that his own mother was present and saw Jesus' nakedness, **John 19:26-27**). We often do not realize that the depth of our sin is so great that it took *everything* Jesus had, even his shame, to atone for us. "The actual cause of Jesus' death, like that of other crucified victims, may have been multifactorial and related primarily to hypovolemic shock, exhaustion asphyxia, and perhaps acute heart failure." (Edwards, et al. 1986: 1463)

Jesus' crucifixion on Golgotha (v. 22) was outside the gate of the city of Jerusalem (**John 19:20**).⁷² This, too, had theological significance and fulfilled Scripture. **Heb 13:10-12** states, "¹⁰ *We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat.* ¹¹ *For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp.* ¹² *So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.*" The writer of Hebrews is referring to **Exod 29:14** and **Lev 4:12** which specified that the bodies of bulls offered as sin offerings were to be burned "outside the camp."

Num 19:1-3, 5, 9 further specified, "Now the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ² *This is the statute of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the people of Israel to bring you a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish, and on which a yoke has never come.* ³ *And you shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered before him.* . . . ⁵ *And the heifer shall be burned in his sight. Its skin, its flesh, and its blood, with its dung, shall be burned.* . . . ⁹ *And a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place. And they shall be kept for the water for impurity for the congregation of the people of Israel; it is a sin offering.*" **Heb 9:12-14** alludes to the sacrifice of the red heifer, "¹² *He [Christ] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.* ¹³ *For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh,* ¹⁴ *how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*" Christians early-on recognized the significance of this. The *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 70-131) states, "But what think ye meaneth the type, where the commandment is given to Israel that those men, whose sins are full grown, offer an heifer and slaughter and burn it, and then that the children take up the ashes, and cast them into vessels, and twist the scarlet wool on a tree (see here again is the type of the cross and the scarlet wool), and the hyssop, and that this done the children should sprinkle the people one by one, that they may be purified from their sins? Understand ye how in all plainness it is spoken unto you; the calf is Jesus, the men that offer it, being sinners, are they that offered Him for the slaughter. After this it is no more men (who offer); the glory is no more for sinners." (*Epistle of Barnabas* 1989: 8:1-2)

Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 34) is pregnant with meaning. The judgment of sin is eternal separation from God, otherwise known as hell. Hell is described in various places in the Bible as "outer darkness" (**Matt 25:30**). The darkness of the sky when Jesus was on the cross (v. 33) was a sign of God's judgment on the sin that Jesus was bearing. That darkness was symbolizing the outer darkness of hell itself.⁷³ Since the essence of hell is separation from God, when Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" he was actually experiencing hell. By definition, hell lasts forever. Jesus did not just bear one eternity in hell, but millions of eternities in hell, all compressed onto him in the time he was on the cross. That is beyond our ability to comprehend, but it reveals that what Jesus experienced on the cross is unimaginable. That is what it took to redeem us from the penalty of our sin.

Another aspect of his cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" warrants our attention. Jesus' cry from the cross reveals his perfect obedience (**Phil 2:8**). Throughout his life on earth Christ himself repeatedly stated that he did nothing on his own initiative but only did what the Father had him do (**John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10**). His cry of "My God" reveals the intimacy of his relationship with the Father. On the cross, Jesus endured an infinity of suffering and the curse of the Father (**Gal 3:13**); yet he continued to obey the Father all the way to the end. His cry was quoting **Ps 22:1**, a psalm of David, who was a prophet (see **Acts 2:30**). In quoting that psalm in those circumstances, Jesus was saying that **Ps 22:1** was pointing to and was being fulfilled in what he was doing on the cross. Jesus knew exactly what was going on. In essence, he was saying, "I trust you Father, I believe in your plan for the salvation of lost souls, and I love you so much that I

⁷² "Golgotha' is a slightly modified transliteration of the Aramaic word for skull, whereas the name 'Calvary' is derived from the Vulgate translation 'Calvariae locus,' calva being the Latin word for skull" (Wessel 1984: 778).

⁷³ Gruenler sees the following additional symbolism of the darkness: "In the Gospel of Mark Jesus death (**15:33-41**) is seen to recapitulate and fulfill the themes of Passover and the exodus. The plague of darkness that fell upon Egypt before the Passover (Exod. 10:21-22) falls over the land of Judah as Jesus becomes the final Passover and substitutionary curse (v. 33; cf. Gal. 3:13)." (Gruenler 1989: 797)

will obey your will completely, even though it means my complete separation from you and having to endure the combined hells of sinful humanity.”

Jesus did it all voluntarily (**John 10:18**) because we were worth it to him. As **Isa 53:11** says, “*Out of the anguish of His soul he shall see and be satisfied.*” What Christ did on the cross shows, in a way that no other religion even hints at, how valuable people are to God. Timothy Keller concludes, “Jesus suffered infinitely more than any human soul in eternal hell, yet he looks at us and says, ‘It was worth it.’ What could make us feel more loved and valued than that? The Savior presented in the gospel waded through hell itself rather than lose us, and no other savior ever depicted has loved us at such a cost.” (Keller 2009: sec.4)

As with other aspects of Jesus’ life, a comparison of the four gospels gives a complete account of the inscription Pilate wrote that was posted over Jesus on the cross. Mark states the substance, “*The King of the Jews*” (**v. 26**); Matthew has, “*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews*” (**Matt 27:37**); Luke says, “*This is the King of the Jews*” (**Luke 23:38**); John states, “*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*” (**John 19:21**). These do not contradict each other. When all are considered, the full statement reads, “*This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*” Interestingly, although he may not have realized it, Pontius Pilate was confessing, in writing (Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, **John 19:20**) for all to see, the truth of who Jesus really was. That is why the chief priests objected to the wording, but Pilate did not change it, saying, “*What I have written I have written*” (**John 19:22**).

2. **vv. 33-41**—The death of Jesus

The death of Jesus (**v. 37**) “is not a terminus but the cause of two exceptional events: the tearing of the temple curtain (**v. 38**) and the confession of the centurion (**v. 39**). These two events signify that the death of the suffering Son of God is not a tragic end but an event of divine fulfillment and revelation.” (Edwards 2002: 477)

There were two curtains (or veils) in the temple: one was before the Holy Place (the main sanctuary of the temple) and the second separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (**Heb 9:1-5**). First century Jewish historian Josephus saw mystical significance in the first veil of the temple. It “was a kind of image of the universe. . . . This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures” (Josephus 1987b: 707 [*Wars*: 5.212-14]; see **Exod 26:31**; **2 Chron 3:14**). The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies were separated by a veil of blue, purple, and scarlet material (**Exod 26:31-37**; **2 Chron 3:14**). It is not clear which of the curtains or veils Mark is referring to. The Greek word for curtain used in **v. 38**, *katapetasma*, is the same word used for the curtain before the Holy of Holies in **Heb 6:19**; **9:3**; and **10:20**, and is the same word used in the Septuagint (LXX) for the curtain before the Holy of Holies in **Exod 26:31-37**, whereas the LXX uses another word for the curtain before the Holy Place. That suggests that the curtain involved was the one before the Holy of Holies. On the other hand, the outer curtain was the only one visible to all people, and **v. 39** and **Matt 27:51-54** suggest that the centurion may have seen the curtain tearing. The only other place besides **v. 38** where Mark uses the word *schizein* (“to tear”) is at Jesus’ baptism (**1:10**) where “the tearing of heaven revealed Jesus to be the Son of God” (Edwards 2002: 478). That the outer curtain signified the universe and the heavens indicates Mark is connecting the tearing at **1:10** with the tearing of the outer curtain in **v. 38**, signifying “at his baptism and death of Jesus the heavenly and earthly dwellings of God are opened to humanity” (Ibid.: 479)

Regardless of which curtain was involved, the meaning is the same. The tearing of the curtain symbolized the destruction of the temple and the free access that people now have through Jesus to God. As a result of Jesus’ sacrifice, we now have “*confidence to enter the holy places . . . by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain*” (**Heb 10:19-20**). In fact, **Heb 10:20** specifically says that “*the curtain*” is “*his flesh.*” In other words, the temple was pointing to Christ all along. “It is not so much that Christ fulfills what the temple means; rather Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed. . . . Christ is the true temple, the true light of glory, the true manna, the true vine. The coming of the true supersedes the figurative. The veil of the temple made with hands is destroyed, for its symbolism is fulfilled.” (Clowney 1972-73: 177, 183) In other words, while the temple building continued to exist until it was destroyed in AD 70, upon his death on the cross, Jesus inaugurated the New Covenant which rendered the Old Covenant and every aspect of Old Covenant worship, including the temple, obsolete (**Heb 8:13**). The entire OT temple-system is no longer valid; Jesus is the final spiritual reality. **Heb 8:1-10:22** establishes that the literal sanctuary is the heavenly one and the figurative sanctuary is the earthly one. “Hebrews 9:8-9 even refers to the old ‘tabernacle’ (precisely, the holy place) as a ‘symbol’ or ‘parable’ of the end-time tabernacle (e.g., in 9:11) in order to underscore that the former tabernacle was not ultimately the real one” (Beale 2004: 295). **Heb 4:14-5:10**; **7:1-10:22** portray Christ as both the high priest and as the Tabernacle/Temple. **Heb 10:12, 14** say, “*When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, . . .*¹⁴ *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those*

who are being sanctified.” And “he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever” (**Heb 7:24**). Jesus Christ is the only means to God. That is what the cross and the tearing of the curtain signify.

In **v. 39** the centurion confessed, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” While Pilate’s confession that Jesus was “the King of the Jews” (**v. 26**) and Caiaphas’s statement in **14:61**, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One” were both true, they were both said mockingly. The centurion’s statement was a true confession. In fact, “the centurion is the first person in the Gospel to confess Jesus as the Son of God, and the confession is evoked by his passion—his suffering and death on the cross. . . . The suffering of Jesus on the cross, which utterly contradicts both Jewish messianic ideals and Hellenistic ‘divine man’ conceptions, becomes, by an act of God, the window into the heart and meaning of Jesus, the significance of which is only captured in the confession ‘the Son of God.’” (Edwards 2002: 479-80).⁷⁴

Verses 40-41 which talks about the women who had followed and ministered to Jesus makes an important point, particularly following immediately after the confession of the centurion. The centurion was a pagan Gentile; as such he was an “outsider” and considered “unclean” by most Jews. Women were generally marginalized and considered, in effect, “second class citizens” by most Jews. What this is telling us is that it is often the marginalized and the outsiders who exhibit the greatest faith and among whom God works prominently.

3. vv. 42-47—Jesus’ burial

The burial of Jesus, and the events surrounding it, are important, because they certify that Jesus was truly dead, not just “almost dead” or unconscious or in a coma. Because Jesus died at approximately 3:00PM, Joseph of Arimathea only had about three hours to see that Jesus was timely buried, since **Deut 21:22-23** specified that even someone “hanged on a tree” should be buried the same day (and Jewish days began at sundown or 6:00PM). Pilate’s surprise that Jesus was already dead is understandable, since sometimes crucified victims struggled for days on the cross before finally succumbing, releasing the body to someone other than a family member or releasing the body at all was highly unusual. Thus, Pilate had the centurion confirm that Jesus was, in fact, dead (**v. 44**). If Jesus was not truly dead, but the centurion reported to Pilate that he was dead, he would have been in violation of his orders and would have been lying to his commander and therefore probably would have paid for that with his own life. Consequently, it is incredible to contend that Jesus did not die on the cross.

The bodies of dead criminals belonged to the Roman government. Most crucified bodies were allowed to remain on their crosses as a warning to others. “The shame of crucifixion ran deeper than the nakedness, the torture, and taunting. In most cases, crucified bodies were not even buried. Instead, in the days that followed the deaths of the crucified, the beaks of vultures and the teeth of wild dogs tore the corpses to shreds and scattered their remains across the countryside.” (Jones 2012: n.p.) However, this was not always the case. First century historian Josephus reports that “the Jews used to take so much care of the burial of men, that they took down those that were condemned and crucified, and buried them before the going down of the sun” (Josephus 1987b: 679 [*Wars*: 4.314]). In addition to **Deut 21:22-23**, the *Mishnah* says that even executed felons were to be buried (Neusner 1988: 595, Sanhedrin §§6:5-6). Josephus further noted that the Romans “do not compel those that are subject to them to transgress the laws of their countries” including the law “not to let anyone lie unburied” (Josephus 1987c: 798 [*Against Apion*: 2.73, 2.211]). Graig Evans states, “The process that led to the execution of Jesus . . . was initiated by the Jewish Council. According to law and custom when the Jewish council (or Sanhedrin) condemned someone to death, by whatever means, it fell to the council to have that person buried. This was the role played by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council (Mark 15:43).” (Evans 2016: “Concluding Remarks”) Evans discusses Roman law and practice. The book *Officio Proconsulis (Duties of Proconsul)* by Roman jurist Ulpian (c. AD 170–223) includes the statement, “The bodies of those who are condemned to death should not be refused their relatives”; Evans observes, “Ulpian supports his opinion by appealing to the precedent of the great emperor Augustus (ruled 31 BC – AD 14), which was expressed in his autobiography written near the end of his life. Ulpian goes on to say that ‘the bodies of those who have been punished are only buried when this has been requested and permission granted.’” (Ibid.: “Roman Law”) Thus, “Burial of the bodies of the executed was permitted in the Roman Empire in the approximate time of Jesus. It was the practice of the Augustan administration and it was the opinion of Ulpian who lived two centuries later.” (Ibid.) It is therefore not surprising that Pilate released the body to Joseph of Arimathea.

⁷⁴ Although in the Greek “Son of God” does not possess the definite article, which leads some to think that the centurion meant *a* son of God rather than *the* Son of God, Edwards demonstrates both for reasons of Greek grammar and other reasons that “the Son of God” is the only plausible reading (Edwards 2002: 480-81).

The tomb is important. It “*had been cut out of rock, and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb*” (v. 46; see also **16:4**, “*it was very large*”). Thus, no one could dig their way out or in. N. T. Wright points out, “The mention of Jesus’ burial [**1 Cor 15:4a**] can only have attained such a significant place in a brief and summary traditional narrative if it was regarded as important in itself. [It served] to certify that Jesus was really and truly dead.” (Wright 2003: 321) The manner of burial also is significant. The body was prepared for burial, which would not have been done had there been any spark of life left in Jesus (**Mark 15:46**; see also **Matt 27:59**; **Luke 23:53-56**; **John 19:39-40**). According to Jewish burial customs, the body would have been wrapped, and between the folds in the linen wrap probably 65-75 pounds of spices mixed with a gummy substance known as myrrh would have been placed (**John 19:39**). This would have resulted in a weighty encasement surrounding the body (see McDowell 1981: 52-53). No one who was alive could have survived when so encased.⁷⁵ Jesus then was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s own tomb; thus, the place where Jesus was buried was a known location (**Mark 15:46**; see also **Matt 27:59-60**; **Luke 23:53**; **John 19:38-42**). A “*large stone*” was rolled to close the entrance, the tomb was sealed, and a guard was placed at the tomb to make sure that no one could steal the body (**Matt 27:60-66**; **Mark 15:46**; **16:3-4**; **Luke 23:53**; **John 19:41-42**). The official government seal and the Roman security guard made it impossible for anyone to break into or out of that tomb (Ibid.: 53-61).⁷⁶ Interestingly, Jesus had been born into and emerged from a virgin womb and was buried in and arose from a virgin tomb (**Matt 27:60**; **Luke 23:53**; **John 19:41**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Look at the details surrounding the burial of Jesus (vv. 42-47, additional details regarding the burial are given in **Matt 28:57-66**; **Luke 23:50-56**; and **John 19:38-42**). What is the significance of the various details for the truth claims of Christianity?

2. Joseph of Arimathea “*took courage*” and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (v. 43). Have you ever acted courageously as a result of your Christianity?

- What was the result?
- On the other hand, did you ever act cowardly when your Christianity was on the line? Why?
- What was the result?

16:1-8: ¹ *When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.* ² *And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.* ³ *And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”* ⁴ *And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.* ⁵ *And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.* ⁶ *And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, 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 that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”* ⁸ *And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*

⁷⁵ The NASB of **John 19:39** says that the mixture brought to anoint the body was “*about a hundred pounds weight.*” Those were Roman pounds (*litrai*); each *litra* weighed approximately 11 ounces (versus 16 ounces to an English pound) (see Carson 1991: 428, 629-30; this is reflected in the ESV which says “*about seventy-five pounds in weight*”). If the Shroud of Turin is the legitimate burial cloth of Jesus, although there are various plant/spice materials found on the shroud, it does not appear that the 65-75 pounds of spices mixed with the gummy substance had yet been placed by the time of the resurrection. This suggests that Nicodemus (who accompanied Joseph of Arimathea) bound Jesus’ hands and feet because of rigor mortis and/or bound the shroud around Jesus, applying only a small amount of the spices he brought (**John 19:39-40**) but did not apply the bulk of the spices and myrrh, probably because it was so close to the beginning of Passover; the women then would have fully anointed the body with spices and myrrh after Passover had ended (**Luke 23:55-56**; see Habermas 1981: 47-54; Lemke 2000: 4-7, 12-14; Lanser 2014: The Wrappings).

⁷⁶ Josh McDowell points out, “This seal on Jesus’ tomb was a public testimony that Jesus’ body was actually there. In addition, because the seal was Roman, it verified the fact that His body was protected from vandals by nothing less than the power and authority of the Roman Empire.” (McDowell 1981: 59)

vv. 1-8—The resurrection

The climax of Mark's gospel is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James had seen where Jesus had been buried (**15:47**). Cole states that "it was strictly a women's task in Israel custom" to prepare and apply the spices for a dead body (Cole 1989: 329). Thus, when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and other women bought the necessary spices; at sun-up on Sunday they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, but found that the stone had been rolled away and that Jesus was not there (**vv. 1-6**); they were informed by an angel that Jesus had risen (**vv. 5-7**).⁷⁷ That is why burial in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb was important. Given the centurion's report and the preparation of the body, we know that Jesus was truly dead; given the nature of the tomb and the guard, no one could break in to steal the body; given the fact that the location of the tomb was known, the women could not have been mistaken because of going to the wrong tomb, and had Jesus not risen, that fact could easily be proved by exhuming Jesus' body.⁷⁸

The women later encountered the risen Christ (**v. 9**; see also **Matt 28:1-7; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1**). They then reported to the disciples that the tomb was empty and that Jesus had risen from the grave and was alive (**Matt 28:8; Mark 16:10-11; Luke 24:9-12; John 20:2-18**). These passages are significant in that the initial appearances of Jesus following his resurrection and the initial reports of the resurrection were made to and were given by women. This fact shows that the biblical accounts were not made up but are reliable. The reason is that in ancient Judaism women were considered to be unreliable witnesses; they either were not competent to act as witnesses in court or there were significant limitations on the testimony they could give ("Witness" 2008: n.p.; Meacham 2009: Other Laws). Consequently, the disciples' disbelief of the women's reports (**Luke 24:11**) stemmed not only from the amazing nature of what they were reporting but probably also from the fact that they were women. That latter fact helps to authenticate that the biblical accounts are truthful because, as Paul Maier explains, since the testimony of women was considered to be unreliable, "if the resurrection accounts had been manufactured . . . women would *never* have been included in the story, at least, not as first witnesses" (Maier 1973: 98). Historian Michael Grant concurs, "The early Church would never have concocted, on its own account, the statement that this most solemn and fateful of all discoveries was made by women, including a woman with an immoral record at that" (Grant 1977: 176).

The angel's statement to the women that Jesus "*is going before you to Galilee. There will you see him, just as he told you*" (**v. 7**) is the fulfillment of what Jesus said at the last Supper (**14:28**). It also highlights the communal or family nature of the church: "The first act of Jesus' ministry was the calling of four fishermen into community with himself (1:16-20); and the first word of the resurrected Jesus is the reconvening of the same community of disciples (14:27-28)." (Edwards 2002: 495) The angel's telling the women to tell the disciples, but then mentioning Peter by name (**v. 7**), shows Christ's great compassion, because Peter "had denied Jesus (14:66-72), and now needed reassurance that he was not excluded from the company of the disciples" (Wessel 1984: 788). The oldest manuscripts of the gospel of Mark end at **v. 8**; **vv. 9-20** were added later. One might think that **v. 8** is an odd place to end this gospel.⁷⁹ Wessel says, "If the Gospel of Mark ends with 16:8, as some believe, Mark intentionally emphasizes the mystery and awesomeness of the Resurrection" (Ibid.). He also ends on a note of irony, which he used repeatedly throughout this gospel. Before his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had frequently told people not to tell of him, but they did; here in **vv. 7-8** the angel told the women to tell of Jesus' resurrection, but they did not. Of course, as we know from the other gospels, when the women got over their fear and astonishment, they did tell what they had seen and heard, but the irony remains in Mark's gospel.

The promise of meeting in Galilee (**v. 7**) and the disobedience of the women (**v. 8**) actually holds out the promise of reconciliation (the reference to Peter in **v. 7**) and the promise of success. In other words, despite the failure of believers—the disciples, the women, and us (**v. 8**), the word of promise ultimately will triumph. Mark has constantly portrayed the disciples as self-seeking and unperceptive. Yet the very fact that the gospel of Mark was written at all shows that God is really running the show. Jesus had said, "*Let us go across to the other side*" (**4:35**) and "*you give them [the 5000] something to eat*" (**6:37**), but on their own the disciples could not do either; in fact, however, Jesus insured that they could. That same assurance applied to the promised rendezvous

⁷⁷ Regarding the issue of Jesus' rising on the "third day," see n.40, above.

⁷⁸ For the biblical and historical evidence demonstrating the historicity of the resurrection, see Menn 2020: 30-40.

⁷⁹ If, as most biblical scholars believe, **vv. 9-20** were added later, then the issues are: Was **v. 8** Mark's intentional ending or not? The majority or recent interpreters of Mark believe that it was (Edwards 2002: 500). However, if it was not Mark's intended ending, then what happened to the original ending? The two leading possibilities would be: (A) the last leaf of the codex was lost (assuming the gospel of Mark was prepared in book [codex] form rather than scroll form); or (B) Mark was interrupted or died before he was able to complete the ending of the book. Much has been written on these issues. For arguments both for and against the originality of **vv. 9-20** and the possible reasons why Mark would have ended his gospel at **v. 8** (see Iverson 2001: "Possible Explanations"; Edwards 2002: 500-504; Miller 2005: n.p.).

between Jesus and the disciples in Galilee the angel referred to in **v. 7**; we know from other gospels that it did occur (see **Matt 28:16-20**; **John 21:1-23**). That same assurance applies to us. Where God guides, he provides. Joel Williams states, “Mark presents true followers who fail, but he also offers hope, because he shows that Jesus does not give up on them. Jesus is able to restore his disciples, or any of his own who stumble, and to make them fishers of men. Mark ends his Gospel with a fitting message to the fallible followers of Jesus who read his story. There is hope for those who fail, but the path is never easy and the dangers are real.” (Williams 1999: 35) As Paul puts it in **Phil 1:6**, “*He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance and importance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus?

- Couldn't a “spiritual resurrection” (i.e., “he may be dead, but he’s risen in my life and lives in my heart”) be just as significant as a bodily resurrection?

2. Why do you think the angel added “*and Peter*” to his charge to the women (**v. 7**)?

- How do you think Peter felt when he first heard the news?

3. The oldest manuscripts end the Gospel of Mark with **Mark 16:8**. If, in fact, that is the way Mark intended to end the book, why do you think he ended it as he did?

16:9-20: ⁹ *Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.* ¹⁰ *She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept.* ¹¹ *But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.* ¹² *After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.* ¹³ *And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.*

¹⁴ *Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.* ¹⁵ *And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole 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 cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;* ¹⁸ *they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”* ¹⁹ *So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.* ²⁰ *And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.*

vv. 9-20—Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances

As mentioned above, the view of most biblical scholars is that “it is virtually certain that 16:9-20 is a later addition and not the original ending of the Gospel of Mark” (Edwards 2002: 497). He then discusses in some detail the manuscript, internal, and external evidence that indicates this (Ibid.: 497-500). Even assuming that **vv. 9-20** are a later addition to the gospel of Mark, “Most, if not all, scholars who have examined the subject concede that the truths presented in the verses are historically authentic—even if they reject the genuineness of the verses as being originally part of Mark’s account” (Miller 2005: “The Authenticity”) Further, “everything in Mark 16:9-20 (except for one insignificant detail) can be found elsewhere in the New Testament. Therefore, no Christian doctrine is in any way affected by the fact that Mark 16:9-20 is probably not original.” (Ballard n.d.: n.p.) This is seen in the following table:

Mark 16	Event	Parallel in NT
v. 9	Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene	John 20:11-17
v. 9	Jesus had cast 7 demons out of Mary Magdalene	Luke 8:2
v. 10	Mary told the disciples	Luke 24:9-10; John 20:18
v. 11	The disciples did not believe Mary	Luke 24:11
v. 12	Jesus appeared to two disciples walking in the country	Luke 24:13-32
v. 13	The two disciples went back and told the others	Luke 24:33-35
v. 14	Jesus appeared to the Eleven	Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23, 26-29; 1 Cor 15:5
v. 14	Jesus rebuked the Eleven for their unbelief	Luke 24:36-43; John 20:26-29

v. 15	Jesus commissioned them to preach the gospel	Matt 28:19-20; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8
v. 16	Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved	Matt 28:19; John 3:18; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 2:38; 4:12; 8:12; 10:43; 16:31
v. 17	Jesus lists signs that will accompany believers	Matt 10:1, 7-8; Mark 6:7, 12-13; Luke 9:1-2, 6; Heb 2:3-4
v. 17	Believers will cast out demons	Matt 10:1, 8; Mark 6:7, 13; Luke 9:1; Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:12
v. 17	Believers will speak in other tongues	Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 12:7, 10
v. 18	Believers will pick up snakes and not be harmed	Luke 10:19; Acts 28:3-6
v. 18	Believers will drink poison and not be harmed	This is the one sign not paralleled in the NT; perhaps that is why it is preceded by “if,” implying that it might not happen. But cf. Ps 69:21; Luke 10:19; Acts 28:3-6. ⁸⁰
v. 18	Believers will heal the sick	Acts 3:1-10; 5:16; 8:7; 19:12; 28:8; 1 Cor 12:7, 9
v. 19	Jesus ascended into heaven	Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; see also John 6:62; Acts 2:33-34; Eph 4:8-10; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 4:14; 9:24; 1 Pet 3:22
v. 20	They went out preaching and the Lord was with them	Matt 28:20; Acts 2:5-28:31

Two comments need to be made about the above signs Jesus refers to in **vv. 17-18**.

- First, these signs will accompany believers *in general*. Jesus was *not* saying that every believer will have all of the signs or even that any particular believe will have any of these particular signs. Paul makes that clear in his discussion of the “gifts of the Spirit” in **1 Cor 12:7-10** where he said, *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”* In **1 Cor 12:12-20** he then compared the body of Christ to a human body, making the point that each believer is a member of the body but, like the different parts of a body we all have different functions, and one person may not have the gift or ability that another person has. He concluded in **vv. 28-30** by saying, *“²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”* Each of those questions is a “rhetorical question,” i.e., he is making a point in question form, the point being that the answer to each question obviously is “No.” **Heb 2:4** likewise confirms that *“God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”*

- Second, the “signs” that Jesus gave in **vv. 17-18** are *examples* of signs or gifts of the Spirit that will accompany believers, but they are not an exhaustive list. As just seen in **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul lists signs or gifts of the Spirit that Jesus did *not* refer to, such as: the utterance of wisdom; the utterance of knowledge; faith; working of miracles; prophecy; the ability to distinguish between spirits; the interpretation of tongues; apostles, helping; and administrating. In **Rom 12:4-8** Paul gives another list of spiritual gifts which contains gifts not listed in **1 Corinthians 12**. He begins by repeating that believers have *“gifts that differ according to the grace given to us”* (**Rom 12:6**). He then lists the following gifts: prophecy; service; teaching; exhortation; contributing (i.e., giving); leading; and acts of mercy (**Rom 12:6-8**).

A few other comments about portions of **vv. 9-20** also can be made. In **v. 12** it says that Jesus appeared *“in another form”* to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This may explain why **Luke 24:16** says, *“their eyes were kept from recognizing him.”* It was not until *“he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them [that] their eyes were opened, and they recognized him”* (**Luke 24:30-31**). This may tell us something of the nature of the new bodies we will receive at the second coming of Christ. In **1 Cor 15:42-44, 49** Paul says, *“⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. . . . ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”* Jesus also said that when we rise from the dead, we will be *“like angels in heaven”* (**Mark**

⁸⁰ Eusebius reports that Papias “tells another wonderful story of Justus, surnamed Barsabbas: that he drank a deadly poison, and yet, by the grace of the Lord, suffered no harm” (Eusebius 1988: 126 [*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.9]).

12:25; Matt 22:30). Heb 13:2 says, “*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*” All of these statements are intriguing and hint that our glorious new resurrection bodies will be far grander than anything we have experienced, or probably can even imagine, in our earthly bodies.

In **v. 16** Jesus says, “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*” Some people believe that being baptized is necessary to be saved in addition to belief. That is not correct. **Rom 10:9** says, “*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*” **1 Pet 3:21** says, “*Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.*” John Piper describes salvation’s relationship to the confession of faith and to baptism in these verses this way: “The movement of the lips in the air [**Rom 10:9**] and the movement of the body in water [**1 Pet 3:21**] save only in the sense that they give expression to the single justifying act, namely, faith (Rom. 3:28). Baptism is the outward appeal of faith to God in the heart.” (Piper 2013: 158)

It should be noted that the traditional Roman Catholic view of baptism is that baptism itself is a *means of imparting* saving grace (“baptismal regeneration”). The Bible is clear, however, that we are saved by God’s grace through faith alone, not by performing a physical act such as baptism (e.g., **Rom 3:28; 4:1-5; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7**). This is corroborated by Jesus’ statement to the thief on the cross, “*Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise*” [**Luke 23:43**]; the thief was saved despite not being baptized). Andreas Kostenberger summarizes, “Theologically, *water baptism presupposes spiritual regeneration* as a prevenient and primary work of God in and through the person of the Holy Spirit. This follows plainly from the Baptist’s announcement that the Messiah would baptize people in the Spirit. Thus repentance from sin and faith in Christ, accompanied by regeneration, are logically and chronologically prior to water baptism. This, in turn, puts water baptism in proper perspective. There is no warrant in the Gospels for the notion of baptismal regeneration.” (Kostenberger 2006-2015: n.p.; see also Hunt 1995; White 2005-2006, and Johnson 2016 for further discussions of baptismal regeneration) Baptism is important because it is the outward and visible sign of what God has already done in regenerating and saving us; it is not a physical or mechanical act we do to in order to become regenerated and saved or that requires or compels God to regenerate and save us. That is why in the second half of **v. 16** Jesus said “*Whoever does not believe will be condemned*”; he did *not* say, “*Whoever does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.*”

Verse 19 says that Jesus “*was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.*” That is confirmed in **Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12, 14** (see also **Ps 110:1; Luke 22:69; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20-21; Col 3:1; 1 Pet 3:21-22**). The finality and perfection of Christ’s Atonement—and thus the complete and permanent elimination of the entire OT sacrificial system and priesthood—is seen in the fact that he “*sat down at the right hand of God*” in the true heavenly holy of holies. “Because sacrificial service entailed the posture of *standing* before God or at the altar ([Heb] 10:11; Deut 10:8; 18:7), the contrasting act of *sitting down* indicates the termination of Christ’s sacrificial act ([Heb] 10:12). Yet, at the same time, his enthronement at God’s right side gives him the access and status appropriate for ongoing, effective intercession [**Heb 7:25**].” (Nelson 2003: 257)

Finally, **v. 20** reminds us that, although Christ has ascended back to the Father in heaven, his ministry continues here on earth through his body, the church. The statement in **v. 20** that “*the Lord worked with them*” confirms what Jesus said in **Heb 13:5**, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” and what Paul says in **Phil 2:12-13**, “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” It also points to and gives us the hope of realizing what Jesus said, that “*whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father*” (**John 14:12**). Unlike the women in **v. 8**, we can go out and proclaim the gospel with confidence. May that be true of us, his church, in our time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What evidence can you point to that indicates that the bodily resurrection is a real, historical fact, not just a myth?
2. If the resurrection is so important, why do you think the disciples did not (initially) believe the accounts of those who had seen Jesus after his resurrection?
3. Is it necessary to be baptized in order to be saved?

- How do you deal with **v. 16**?
 - If it is not necessary to be baptized in order to be saved, then what is the point or role or necessity of baptism at all?
4. What roles do the signs mentioned by Jesus in **vv. 17-18** play?
5. What is the significance of the fact that you may not have manifested *any* of the signs?
- Does that mean that you have not really believed?
6. What does it mean that Jesus “*sat down at the right hand of God*” (**v. 19**)?
- How could Jesus “work with them” (and us) if he is sitting at the right hand of God in heaven?

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