



# Reflections From The Gospel of Mark

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## REFLECTIONS FROM MARK'S GOSPEL

The flavor of Mark's gospel compared to the other three gospels is very different. Mark's account is the shortest of the three (Mathew, Mark, Luke) and has a rapid pace when telling the story of the life, words, deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And it's this peculiarity that has captivated many through the ages who have either read or heard its contents.

My goal in writing reflections from this gospel account are the following: First, to encourage you the reader that if you will pay attention to the words on the page and listen carefully you will mine a lot of truth for life without the need of a commentary or any secondary source. That is, "take up and read" to enrich your soul Christian.

Second, I write to give you a model of how observations can be done in scripture that do not read into the text something foreign to the author's intent. This will help you experience the joy of discovery and increase your confidence in your ability to comprehend God's word.

Third, by doing the above my hope is that you will be able to hear God's voice all the more clearly because it is the word of God that is forever settled in heaven, and not our subjective impressions however valid they may be. That is, we have a more sure word of prophecy according to Peter—meaning the inscripturated word of God—then a glorious experience we may claim to have (2 Peter 1:16-21). Too often we Christians have bizarre ideas of what "God" is supposedly speaking to us and when it contradicts the Bible, be assured we are not hearing his voice.

### CHAPTER ONE: "THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.1)

This chapter in Mark's Gospel account gets right down to the brass tacks of the message. He starts off immediately with fulfilled prophecy at the ministry of John the Baptist (vv.1-8), reveals the identity of the son through the Father's voice of approval at his baptism (vv.9-11), and shows Jesus going into the wilderness in order to be tempted by Satan for 40 days and nights as he fasted.

Then the gospel of the kingdom is what Jesus preached whose message was for the hearer to repent and believe in the gospel (vv.14-15). The requirements for entrance into the kingdom remain the same today: people must first hear what is said and then they are responsible to submit to the word of the LORD.

Only after Jesus' preparation for ministry had been completed and his first sermon had been preached did he call the disciples to himself (vv.17-20). Jesus' teaching was authoritative not scribe like and the people took note with amazement (vv.21-22). He proceeded then to cast out demons (vv.23-28) which demonstrated the extent of his teaching's authority. It was a display of power that even the spirits had to obey him. Clearly, the overthrow of Satan's dominion was getting a foretaste of future doom. Moreover, Jesus healed a fever and a leper (vv.30-31; 40-45).

There's in this first chapter the fulfillment of Scripture which reminds us of God's faithfulness to bring about in his time what he promised beforehand. Then there's the Father's approval of the son, followed by the son's preparation for ministry all based on Jesus' identity.

This is followed by the calling of the twelve disciples who witnessed acts of power based on authoritative teaching and not like the scribes...that's a rapid clip! (SDG)

## **CHAPTER TWO: "THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.2)**

We read in this section of Jesus' fame such that when he returned home from Capernaum, many gathered around where there was only standing room. What caught my attention is that Jesus was speaking to them—the word (vv.1-2). Today many claim to follow Christ, their many "good deeds" testifying to this fact, all the while neglecting the very foundation of biblical faith: the holy word of God!

It's the word which produces faith in God, liberating the receiver not only from physical bondage but also from actual enmity with God through the forgiveness of sins (vv.3-13). This forgiving of sinners (even those deemed abhorrent to the Jews) is what Jesus, the Son of Man came to accomplish (vv.14-22); and because of his position He is the LORD of the Sabbath (vv.23-28).

What's evident is the authority that Jesus claims for himself in this chapter. This is no ordinary man, he's the second Adam come to restore the effects of the first Adam's disobedience. He's come to bring salvation by the word of God through acts of power and mercy. To resist Him is to heap condemnation on ourselves, but to embrace Him we enter everlasting joy. (SDG)

## **CHAPTER THREE: "THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.3)**

When it comes to the person and subsequent ministry of Jesus, it is an account unlike any other. Jesus had many enemies the majority of which were the religious leaders of his day. Jesus made it a practice of worship to go to the synagogue—the place where the law was taught and explained, the place where the name of the LORD was to be exalted not defamed, the place where the name was not to be taken in vain.

Today, many professing followers of Christ fail to make this connection between their devotion to Christ and the habit of meeting with the church on a weekly basis. Unwittingly, believers are taking the name of the LORD in vain through their misunderstanding of the Gospel message and thus its implications. That is, they hold to a view that contradicts God's word which misrepresents his message and ends up spreading a word that's alien to God's.

Back to Jesus! The issue of healing on the Sabbath and its lawfulness is filled with drama:

"He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. <sup>2</sup>They were watching Him *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him....<sup>4</sup> And He *\*said* to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. <sup>5</sup>After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He *\*said* to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored"

The purpose of the Sabbath and what it was meant to do eluded the Pharisees. How could this occur? This happened because the extra-biblical teachings of the rabbis trumped the plain meaning of the sacred scriptures.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The work Christ displayed was illustrative of the purpose for which the Sabbath was given by God—to bring man rest. This withered hand caused him much pain, not rest. Here, Jesus demonstrates the good, which brings God's reign to bear on a broken body. The hand was designed by God to work, to nurture, to protect, to create, etc. Jesus reverses the effects of the curse here by restoring the hand to its proper function.

The Pharisees were blinded by their teaching and hard hearts. Jesus came to do the will of the Father which consumed him, it was his delight and opposition to the Father's will both grieved and angered the Master. Jesus in his ministry was opposed by those who were God's enemies—the religious establishment as a whole. How could they do this? Because they departed from what is written in Joshua 1:8-9; Psalm 1:1-3, etc., and thus God's word had no place in their minds or hearts.

This opposition was so deep that they accused Jesus of being demonized (21-30). Worthy of note is how the chapter ends with Jesus affirming those who are his kin indeed are not so much blood related but those who do the will of God (31-35). There are several observations that give me great pause.

### **Observations**

First, my ultimate authority has to be Scripture, not secondary theological works. I need to beware of not holding a theology that opposes the written word. That is, theology books, historical, systematic, polemical, etc. have their place, but they must never trump the Scriptures as the ultimate authority. Not heeding this axiom led the Pharisees and many others away from the path of life into doom.

Second, it's with the written word that Jesus saturated his soul. This resulted in a ministry of power and holiness. I need nothing less than word saturation for my soul. We are commanded by Paul to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly so that we may be able to admonish one another with all wisdom, but if that word is not in us we're incapable of obeying that command. That is, without the word being central, my personal holiness and the corporate edification of the church is impossible.

Third, Jesus' anger is based on his zeal for God, his word and the good of this man with the withered hand. In a very real way the enemies of God—the Pharisees—had become Jesus' enemies and the man with the withered hand also. This sobering truth reminds me that I need to pay close attention to my doctrine and life. Not only for my personal salvation but also for those who hear the message.

Fourth, Jesus takes seriously the relationship we can have with him. It's based not only on hearing the word but doing it—the will of the Father. In context the hearing is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one until what is heard is practiced. We are to be not only hearers of the word, James says, but also doers of the word. To hear and not do is a "demonic faith." That is, demonic faith acknowledges Christ's words as true but they have no effect on how life is lived to the glory of God.

Lord, keep me from such error for your names sake. (SDG)

## CHAPTER FOUR: “THE GOSPEL AND THE WORD AT A RAPID CLIP” (MK.4)

It amazes me afresh how central to Jesus’ ministry was his teaching; He’s seen entering the synagogue and began to teach...crowds were amazed at his teaching because it was authoritative (Mark 1:21-22; 39); when Jesus speaks it’s the word (Mark 2:2); when he calls the twelve it’s for the purpose of teaching with authority and casting out demons (Mark 3:13-19); moreover to do the will of God presupposes the word and determines whether or not one belongs to Christ’s family (Mark 4:35); concerning location Jesus taught the word both indoors and out and often in parables (Mark 4:1-2).

Perhaps the reason Mark is emphasizing the centrality of the word of Christ in his ministry is because without it, no acts of power will come because without it faith in God cannot be birthed. God is always the object of faith or trust in the ministry of Jesus and thus his eternal word must be sown in order for life to emerge.

In fact we see that the sown word goes into the soil (metaphor for the human soul) which comes under attack and only the “good” soil produces the life of the kingdom, the other three don’t (4:3-9). The sower sows the word in (v.14) but why? The word is sown because only it has the power to produce faith or trust in God, nothing else. So in order to make disciples, central to the task is the word of God. And I might add: God’s word meaning *the hearing and understanding of the author’s intended message as central, not some aberration to the context of the text.*

More can be said but here ***Jesus reveals three enemies of the word.*** First, Satan is the enemy of the word who steals immediately what is sown (v.15). His usual tactics are deception, lies, etcetera, which contradict God’s word, his goodness and his justice (cf., Gen.3:1-5).

Second, affliction and persecution arises because of the word—which causes one to fall away is also an enemy (16-17). Here is where our dearest relationships and thus our loyalties are pitted against God the savior. In the end, what the creature desires trumps the demands of the Creator.

Third, the other enemy of the word is the worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things (18-19). Here is where financial hardship, health, wealth and other things skew what true treasure is. And thus comfort, fortune and all other temporary delights become all-consuming.

***The good soil however produces fruit*** and that in differing quantities, but the point is that good soil has a place for God’s word to work and flourish in one’s soul. They like all other hear the word, but they also accept it which results in bearing fruit. There’s lasting fruit produced by the word.

When the soul receives the implanted word of God with humility—one comes under its authority—it is then redeemed from death. Nothing less! What’s frightening in our day is that so much of “Christendom” with its supposed “conversions” is not a product of God’s word but of man’s wisdom. This travesty gives people a false assurance of salvation specifically because it’s founded on the sand, not the rock, on which they mistakenly think they’re on (see Mt. 7:24-27).

My prayer is that the Lord will shake things up and move in this land. Remove the counterfeit shepherds who falsely heal your flock by assuring them all is well as they’re falling off the precipice into eternal darkness. Discipline those who are mishandling your word Lord

and grant them repentance. And encourage those who are faithful to you Lord and the Gospel to persevere, looking to you for the reward and no other. (SDG)

## **CHAPTER FIVE: “WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS? THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP” (MK.5)**

In the last chapter the disciples ask the question, “what manner of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? (v.41)” Moments earlier they were being tossed in the boat by the wind and the waves. A terrifying experience and yet fearful still is Jesus’ command over nature such that it obeys him. Too often we can’t appreciate the gravity of situations like this one.

In chapter five we have three accounts of power and dominion that again point to Jesus’ divinity: the healing of the demoniac, the healing of the woman with blood flow, and the raising from the dead Jairus’ daughter. Each account reveals human interaction that’s either receptive to God’s delivering acts on behalf of people, or a difficulty receiving the implications of Jesus’ power demonstrated.

### **Jesus Delivers a Demonized Man**

Jesus casts out Legion from this man from the country of the Gerasenes. The victim tortured by legion is grateful to Jesus, but those who lost great revenue because of the swine asked him to leave their country (vv.1-20) and several observations arise:

*The Setting:* was the country of the Gerasenes where a man tormented by spirits (demons) lived among the tombs. His bondage illustrated by: chains which could not arrest him; ceaseless screams and continuous cutting of himself—a horrific existence (vv.1-5)

*The Encounter:* while no one could subdue him on account of his great strength, when Jesus sees him he runs up to him and bows down. This is significant because the demons in this man knew they are doomed before the Son of God:

<sup>7</sup> and shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” <sup>8</sup> For He had been saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!”

The demons tormenting the man were now being tormented by God’s very presence—Jesus Son of the Most High God! This is an acknowledgement of deity. The conversation ensues and legion wants Jesus not to drive them out of the country—clearly they knew who was in charge (vv.9-10). A term that arises here is “implore” which seems to mean a specific request, a petition where another has the right of power to perform on behalf of the petitioner their request:

<sup>12</sup> *The demons* implored Him, saying, “Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.” <sup>13</sup> Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea.”

*The Results:* the swine were lost (over 2000) but the man was found clothed and in his right mind. Demonic activity always degrades image bearers and eventually drives them mad (vv.14-16). The demons implored Jesus not to drive them out of the country but the irony is that the people who heard what happened “implored” Jesus to leave the country. They did not rejoice at the deliverance of this man, but were rather angered (most likely) that their pocket books had taken a big hit. There’s no mention of a name for the man delivered, but instead of asking Jesus to stay, he desires to go with Jesus. Yet, the Master had another plan for him:

“<sup>18</sup> As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him. <sup>19</sup> And He did not let him, but He \*said to him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you.” <sup>20</sup> And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.”

There is an appointed time for everything under heaven, included was God’s mercy on his life at the proper time (cf., Acts 17:26-28). Vessels of mercy, as this man became, are the instruments God uses to deliver many from bondage.

*The Conclusion:* will I see this man one day? I trust so. What a sobering account of God’s reign over creation—specifically demons—and how even they are subject to him. Too often however we image bearers don’t get it, but rather reject the author of life and want nothing to do with him.

May I submit today to your plans that have yet to unfold and may I be ready to proclaim what great things You Lord have done for me, how You have had mercy on me.  
(SDG)

## **CHAPTER SIX: “TAKING OFFENSE AT JESUS: THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP” (MK.6)**

In this section Jesus’ teaching and power are an offense to his home town people (1-6), Jesus sends the twelve to preach and to heal the sick (7-13); John the Baptist is beheaded (14-32); Five thousand are fed (33-44); Jesus walks on water (45-52); and Jesus’ healing ministry continues.

My focus today will only be on the first six verses. I’ve read this section many times as a believer, heard sermons on this text, and a fresh I want to consider its’ weightiness. This account is followed by the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead (5:40-43) which sets up the next scenario.

Now Jesus comes home with his disciples and the news about his ministry made headlines in the Nazareth Times “GIRL RAISED FROM THE DEAD”. Notice how unlike so many professing believers Jesus always is found in the synagogue—church—on the Sabbath and those present had an unusual response to the Master’s teaching:

“<sup>2</sup> When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, “Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? <sup>3</sup> Is not this the

carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him."

Several observations obtain: First, he was no stranger to these people, this was his hometown where parents saw him grow, play with little Joseph down the street and some could recall when he was 12 years old how he gave his parents a fright by staying behind in Jerusalem during the Feast of Passover learning from the rabbis in the temple, or something like that. Anyway, they knew him. Ironically though, he was very much a foreigner to them because they only thought Jesus was good for carpentry—not teaching or for demonstrating acts of power.

Second, a "virgin birth" assuredly caused the family name much shame; he's the "carpenter, the son of Mary". Most considered him a bastard child. How could such a one have these gifts of wisdom and power?

Third, by naming his brothers and mentioning Jesus' sisters it's as if the people are saying, "Don't you know your place among us, who do you think you are?" That's perhaps their attitudes and why they took offense. Surely jealousy played a role after all, "why does Jesus have these gifts and we don't?" may have also been thought.

Fourth, Jesus explains where honor for a prophet resides: "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his *own* relatives and in his *own* household." (v.4) too close to home often blinds those closest to us from beholding God's work and loving it.

Fifth, the result is God not lavishing his grace on said attitudes. NOTE the text: "And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them" (v.5). Make no mistake, our attitude toward Jesus will often affect whether or not his healing hand touches our lives or simply passes on by.

Sixth, the text says, "And he wondered at their unbelief" (v.6). I can only recall two times where Jesus is amazed at a person's actions: they either demonstrate unbelief or they show belief in him.

Today, like then, many take offense at the message Christ preached and do so to their own damnation. I've impacted more people outside my family for the kingdom than those who are within it. Perhaps people's view of me has kept them from hearing the message. One thing is clear: Jesus' teaching divides all! It divides the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the wicked and the rescued from the damned.

(SDG)

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: "THE MISUSE OF HUMAN TRADITION: THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.7)**

This section in Mark records the proper and improper use of human tradition and weighs it's authority (vv.1-13); the truth of what defiles a person (vv.14-23); and two more acts of healing in Jesus' ministry.

There's always a hierarchy in the affairs of men when it comes to worshipping God. We tend to emulate the Pharisees and scribes when we ignore Moses and Jesus. Let me explain. The Pharisees and scribes took offense at Jesus' disciples when they ate "bread with impure

hands—unwashed”. This was one of many traditions they strictly observed as a means of worship (3-5) but Jesus’ response to their inquisition was an indictment of hypocrisy:

“Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?”<sup>6</sup> And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

NOTE HERE: The inscripturated word of God is the base of authority for how Jesus will argue, “It is written”. This appeal to the written word Jesus uses when being tempted by Satan to question his identity, his loyalty and his mission during the forty day fast. The word of God, not the creatures (Satan) was the authoritative anchor. Jesus calls them hypocrites:

“THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.  
<sup>7</sup> ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’<sup>8</sup> Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”

When God’s commands are trumped by the traditions of men, He is not worshipped but neglected, His word is not final but the creatures is and what results is some form of idolatrous ritual. It’s a form of taking the name of the LORD in vain because his nature and purposes are attributed an alien characteristic, they’re not faithful to who He is. It’s also false worship because it does not originate from the Spirit of truth. How could this be?! Jesus continues:

“He was also saying to them, “You are **experts** at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.<sup>10</sup> **For Moses said**, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’;<sup>11</sup> **but you say**, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’<sup>12</sup> you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother;<sup>13</sup> **thus** invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” (vv.9-13)

Jesus not only calls them hypocrites but also *experts* at neglecting God’s commands as their final source of authority and replacing it with their tradition. I think we all have a tendency with our mouths to give God lip service, but often go astray specifically because we do neglect the word of God, not paying close attention to what has been revealed.

The Pharisees disobeyed when their precepts contradicted Moses’ teaching in how to honor both father and mother with their corban law (vv.10-12). These thought by washing hands ritually made them clean before God, but they could not have been further from the truth.

Jesus sets the record straight by correcting the Pharisees misunderstanding to his own teaching (vv.14-23). Unlike the Old Testament Prophets formula of speech when speaking for God authoritatively, “thus says the LORD”, Jesus uses no such formula. Instead he implies, “Listen to me” as you listen to Moses. Not only does he put his teaching on par to Moses’, his manner demonstrates Jesus’ superiority to Moses by not using the prophetic formula of speech. Jesus is indirectly claiming to be God. He’s already pointed to Moses as a divinely

appointed spokesman (i.e., authority). Now he illustrates his own divine authority by explaining why the Pharisees were wrong:

“<sup>14</sup>After He called the crowd to Him again, He *began* saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup>there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. <sup>16</sup>[If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”]” (vv.14-16)

Why is this true? Because Jesus said it is! He is pointing out that what defiles a man is not physical but immaterial, they are “evil things that proceed from the heart and defile the man” (v.23). What defiles us (i.e., a term used to describe sin, the unholy) goes deeper than anything our souls grasp and thus could ever hope to remedy. That’s why God abhors a works righteousness disposition: because it misdiagnoses the human problem and thus prescribes a false solution. It’s not true!

Here again the primacy of God’s inscripturated word is evident in Jesus’ ministry and why shouldn’t it be, after all he’s the incarnate Word John speaks of in his gospel. We must all tread carefully here that we don’t neglect God’s commands at the expense of playing the expert hypocrite. No, the truth is what we need deliverance from is a bad heart, not dirty hands. And in the new covenant that’s exactly what God promised to give us: a new heart.

This new heart loves to obey God’s commands, it delights to do His will, it’s the heart of God’s people.  
(SDG)

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: “THE FEEDING OF 4,000 PEOPLE: THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP” (MK.8)**

In this chapter of Mark there’s a repeat miracle of feeding the four thousand instead of the five thousand (Mk.6:33-42). Jesus feeds them spiritual food but also understands their need for physical sustenance (vv.1-9). Amazingly, the disciples as in the first account repeat their inquiry and their unbelief.

Unbelief, “Where will anyone be able to *find enough* bread here in *this* desolate place to satisfy these people?” (v.4). “Hey knuckleheads, remember what Jesus did when he fed the five thousand?” is what you might think or say. But really what’s going on here? I think the problem the Pharisees had with Jesus is the same one the disciples are experiencing—they did not understand who he really was. \_\_\_\_\_ **UNDERSTANDING JESUS’ IDENTITY IS ONE KEY TO BELIEF IN HIM!**

The disciples did not understand his identity as of yet because and thus their unbelief persisted. That’s why he asked them after warning them to “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and...Herod” (v.15) “Do you not see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?” (v.17)

Somehow Jesus' sign of feeding these people with loaves and fish is pointing to who he is but his teaching concerning this eluded the disciples.

Consider the following: First, Jesus repeats the miracle which is shouting, "Bring me your lack and I'll satisfy it beyond your wildest imagination!" Second, as the compassionate Bread of Life, Jesus gives it to the multitudes. These were not all saved, just hearers. Third, his kindness like the rain is not just for the righteous but also for the wicked.

All three observations escaped the Pharisees mind because they made it their practice to oppose who Jesus claimed to be and what he taught. Hardened hearts do that and thus Jesus questioned the disciples.

So while the Pharisees proposed to "see", they were blind to who Jesus was, what he said and the meaning of what he did. Meaning could not be grasped. For while in Bethsaida Jesus gave sight to the blind man (vv.22-26) and strategically sets up this question, "Who do people say that I am?" (v.27) Again, the issue of his identity is central in the Gospels and Peter got it right, "You are the Christ" (v.29). Here, the disciple saw.

Now that you see Peter, Jesus in essence says, "I'll let you see more":

"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." (v.31).

Can't be anymore plain than that right? Unfortunately Peter goes to the blind side and rebukes Jesus (v.32). How can it be that in one moment Peter speaks profound truth while in the next moment he speaks satanic words? Jesus responds:

"He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (v.33)

God's ways are utterly different than ours and note specifically here the issue has to do with suffering. The way of redemption is through Calvary's cross...the very thing people abhor. He continues with this issue of suffering as it involves those who would follow him:

"And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.<sup>35</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.<sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?<sup>37</sup> For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?<sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (vv.34-38)

What's the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod? They love this life and its vanishing treasures over against Christ and his teaching. The disciples need to beware lest they too be doomed.

The Person and work of Christ point to his surpassing excellence of attributes which bids the broken creature to come and sup with him. Let him who has ears listen, and he who can see behold the surpassing worth of Jesus over all of creation. To follow Jesus is nothing less than to abandon our dearest treasures to Him...and rightly so for he alone is the King of Glory!

## CHAPTER NINE: "CHRIST'S IDENTITY FURTHER REVEALED: THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.9)

Mark continues his account of Jesus already giving special attention to his identity in chapters 1-7 the core of which is the Father's command, "**This is My beloved Son, listen to him**". It's this experience on the mountain that Peter and the disciples shared with Jesus that he later says:

<sup>16</sup>For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. <sup>17</sup>For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" — <sup>18</sup>and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup>So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup>But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup>for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Pet.1:16-21)

These are not cleverly devised tales, they're real, but there's something more that you believer need to rely on: the written word of God which is even more real than our own radical experience, it's weightier than any personal experience you may have. So trust it as you do a torch in the dark to guide your way.

Nevertheless, this experience on the mount of transfiguration and Christ's command to tell no one until after he rose from the dead caused the disciples to deliberate on what rising from the dead meant (vv.12-13).

The following section shows Jesus' great displeasure toward the disciple's unbelief because they could not cast out a demon from a man's son (vv.14-27) because of their lack of faith. It's as if Jesus expected them to walk as he did. He nevertheless cast the demon out from this young man and once again demonstrated his authority as the Son of God.

In private the disciples asked Jesus why they were not successful in driving out the demon and Jesus' response: "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (vv.28-29). What kind of prayer is this? The Greek term for prayer here is the same one used in (1 Tim.2:1) for *intercession* and if this is the case, there's much we/I need to learn about the power of intercessory prayer. It should therefore not surprise me that my flesh and Hell try to keep me from praying in this manner often.

Jesus again returns to the topic of his crucifixion and glorification (vv.30-32), but the disciples fail to understand him. Like many of us, they had blinders to what Christ's passion meant, evidenced by their discussion of who among them was the greatest and their elitist attitude toward those outside their inner circle (vv.38-50).

Jesus responds to the disciple's attempt to stop those casting out demons who were not of the twelve and says, "For he who is not against us is for us" (v.40) and immediately Jesus addresses their attitude with a command to deal violently with the causes of sin in their paths;

"If your hand causes you to stumble"

"If your foot causes you to stumble"

"If your eye causes you to stumble" Then...

"Cut it off" Why?...

"Better to enter into life lame, then into Hell whole" (vv.42-48)

**The warning of Jesus to beware of self-importance** (a problem the Pharisees had) cannot be overstated. To fall into it assures one's damnation. Jesus ends this section with the command for them to "be at peace with one another" (v.50)

**This temptation to quarrel and self-importance**, to vie for position and exalt ourselves is so dangerous and so easily captivating that if we don't heed Jesus' warning, we assuredly will fall. Pride within frightens me and is so opposed to the humility of the Savior. This humility is truly the road less traveled, but for believers there's no other road to walk.

(SGD)

## **CHAPTER TEN: "CHRIST ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE: THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.10)**

Several accounts unfold in this section of the gospel. Jesus addresses the issue of divorce and remarriage (vv.1-12), children are exalted to an unknown status (vv.13-16), the rich young ruler is shocked into reality (vv.17-31), Jesus predicts the crucifixion (vv.32-34), two disciples ask for what can't be given (vv.35-45), and blind Bartimaeus receives his sight (vv.46-52).

There's so much in this chapter that I'm going to deal with divorce and remarriage for starters. This topic has been a point of contention among Christians in the last forty to fifty years at least in the USA. For the percentage of divorced couples in the country has been matched by divorce in the church. Why is this? Because the church historically has contained, salt, light and mire.

At times we represent Christ well and then there are seasons of rebellion where we don't. We're no different than Israel in that way and the key here is whether or not God's word has a place in our hearts and minds. When the word does not, then the word of the culture commands us and we end up hiding our lamp under the basket—this ought not to be.

This account points to something that must not elude us: "He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them." (v.1) May the primacy of the word in the Master's life and ministry never elude us, but may we emulate it. It's this word and subsequent teaching that was authoritative, that had power to heal, to convert and power to harden recalcitrant hearts.

Jesus gives one example concerning the lawfulness of a man divorcing his wife (v.2) going back to Moses and asks, "...what did he command?" Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. Here there's a command/permitted distinction. Moses did not command it, but allowed it. Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment" (v.5)

This commandment was probably given so that stipulations and provisions would be in lawful order so the woman might not come into financial ruin—I'm guessing much like today. But Jesus continues:

"<sup>6</sup>But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. <sup>7</sup> FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, <sup>8</sup> AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (vv.6-9)

Since the creation, the design for male and female relations is for them—male and female—becoming one flesh. In Genesis God said it's not good for man to be alone...and then came Eve. Hence, what God deems good, don't destroy because of your hard of hearts is what Jesus seems to be saying. Jesus needed to clarify for the disciples what he was teaching that divorce and remarriage equals adultery:

<sup>10</sup> In the house the disciples *began* questioning Him about this again. <sup>11</sup> And He \*said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; <sup>12</sup> and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." (vv.10-12)

Note here that divorce in God's view is sin. It's a departure from His design for flourishing relationships and it's also embracing rebellion (i.e., a hard heart). This sin is not just against one's spouse, but it's also against God himself. Now the Jews just asked if divorce was lawful, but Jesus points to remarriage...why? I think it's because Jesus knew too often that the lot given by God in life to us we tend to despise—especially in marriage. So let's get rid of this wife and get another one, was the sentiment.

What do we do in this culture which treats marriage like a disposable tampon or table cloth and resulting in divorce and remarriage? How do we follow Christ's command to walk in holiness? We do this by grounding our lives in the Scriptures which anchor our tumultuous

relationships in the storms of life. We must submit to God's precepts in Scripture trusting that God is always out for our best interests, never our harm or demise and here's where trusting Him and knowing Him kiss.

We live in a culture that's all about the individuals' convenience and happiness regardless of the cost—but happiness ironically eludes us. The reason for the aforesaid is because our idols promise bliss and inevitably deliver misery. These idols banish us from properly and joyously relating to our Creator and one another.

Lord, move in this land polluted by adultery and bring a revival of your Spirit where among the redeemed marriage actually mirrors the mystery of Christ and his bride the church. (SDG)

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN: "CHRIST'S AUTHORITY REJECTED BY REBELS BUT RECEIVED BY THE HUMBLE"**

Christ's authority while only questioned in the last section of this chapter seems to be what the writer wants to engage.

First, Jesus enters Jerusalem on the back of a colt (vv.1-11) and the people are shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD, Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David, Hosanna in the highest" (vv.9-10) is a Messianic allusion.

Second, the cursing of the fig tree as it pertains to the power of believing prayer is stunning (vv.12-14; 20-26) and also seems to point to Christ's authority over nature.

Third, the zeal of Christ for God's house caused him to get angry at the merchandising of the holy, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the Nations, but you have made it a robbers den". (vv.15-18) Jesus is 'cleaning house' without permission—from the established religious hierarchy, but this also is a demonstration of authority. Yet, the authorities upon hearing this wanted to kill Jesus (v.18).

Fourth, the inquiry by the scribes and elders is telling:

"By what authority are You doing these things [meaning his teaching and actions], or who gave You this authority to do these things?" (v.28)

I think Jesus knew they knew the answer to the question and thus answers with a question concerning the origin of John's baptism—from heaven or man? Is this not the principle question to resolve when hearing religious truth claims? Do they originate in God the Creator or in mankind the creature?

Implied is that the former is greater than the latter and to not submit is madness. Nevertheless, many refuse to submit as the religious rulers demonstrate. The age old question Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I am" remains to be the single most important question to resolve. Why is this? The reason is because the extraordinary claims of Jesus' identity and subsequent works point to us that Emanuel has come—God with us. That is, the word became flesh, the Son of David, the Light of the world, the Savior of souls, the Suffering Servant, the Triumphant King has come.

Jesus is offensive to rebels but he's a delight to the contrite of heart. His authority is what all will eventually come under either willingly—unto joy everlasting, or reluctantly—into eternal doom.

Teach me Lord to submit to your authority in my life, keep my heart from rebelling against you since you are Messiah, and where the "fig tree" is barren of kingdom fruit, use me to awaken said dead souls.  
(SDG)

## CHAPTER TWELVE: "CHRIST'S AUTHORITY REJECTED: THE GOSPEL AT A RAPID CLIP" (MK.12)

In this chapter Jesus harshly addresses the scribes and Pharisees. He uses a parable to expose their wickedness they being the vine growers in God's vineyard (vv.1-12) who desire to destroy him. There's also the account of the Pharisees and Herodian's testing Jesus with the legality of the Poll tax (vv.13-17); then the consideration of marriage and the resurrection among the Sadducees (vv.18-27); followed by clarifying which is the foremost commandment (vv.28-34); leading into clarifying whose Son the Christ is (vv.35-40); and concluding with the widow's mite (vv.41-44)

Jesus' mastery at communicating truth—kingdom truth—was often biting, aggressive and offensive to God's enemies. For the Pharisees and scribes to receive an indictment by Jesus regarding the motives of their heart came on the heels of their questioning his authority (vv.27-33). The fact remains they understood who he declared himself to be, and that was the reason why so much tension obtained between the Scribes, Pharisees and Jesus.

Nevertheless, Jesus did not let them off "the hook" when they challenged him. Jesus pushed back. Note that the parable points to God as **the owner of the vineyard**—He's Creator and thus owns everything—and the Chief priests, scribes and elders are the stewards—they rent the vineyard. They are the lesser and they still refuse to submit to Christ.

The following section on **the poll tax** to Caesar is no different really. Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God (v.17). What belongs to God? Everything! It's as if Jesus is commanding the community to get things right—meaning they're off. The elders and Pharisees are not in touch with who owns it all, but Jesus is.

The account of the Sadducees and their inquiry as to **who is rightfully married** to the widow after the resurrection is telling: (I.e., they did not believe in the resurrection because of their lack of knowledge). They lacked scriptural knowledge and consequently of God's power (vv.24, 27) Jesus said:

"Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?...you are greatly mistaken" (vv.24, 27)

Notice the progression: not understanding God's word leads to not understanding God's power, which means that in order to understand God's power we must first understand His self-disclosure in particular revelation. If God is the creator, then he can easily raise the dead; if God can raise the dead, then he can transform our present state of being into a different one from this fallen condition.

As far as marriage goes, there won't be any between present spouses (Contra Mormon doctrine), but between the Church and Christ yes, there will be! This seems plain from the passage.

So, what do I make of all this? I should heed Christ's authority by recognizing He's the Son of God who owns everything, who will raise me up on the last day and I must beware of blinding pride which, as with the Pharisees and Scribes, causes us to resist the Holy Spirit. May this not depict me Jesus, but may your mercy, truth and grace ever keep me.  
(SDG)

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN: "CHRIST AND THE END TIMES—BELIEVERS WILL SUFFER"**

One of the most sobering sections in all of Scripture is where the eschaton—the end times—is taught. It's sobering because of how the biblical texts describe the horrific events that will transpire. In this chapter, perhaps the critical verse is (v.31):

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away"

Maybe nothing is steadier to our understanding than the heavens above us and the earth below us. We take these for granted. Nevertheless, they are preaching something of eternal weight and glory that we ought to heed. The heavens and the earth were here before we arrived on planet earth and they'll be here long after our existence is forgotten. But the one holding it all together is declaring that his words are more solid, more sure than these phenomenal gifts of the heavens and the earth.

Thus what Jesus is prophesying will certainly come to pass. It's surer than the earth below and the heavens above. In response to an observation one of Jesus' disciples made, he said:

"Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" <sup>2</sup>And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." (vv.1-2)

Later on Jesus' disciples asked him to explain what he meant in (vv.3-4) about the last days. The first words recorded are; "See to it that no one misleads you...." Jesus said that because many false Christs and prophets will arise and mislead many (vv.5-6, 22). Several observations warrant their heeding Christ's warnings:

First, "Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he' and will mislead many." (v.6) Deception always lurks in the shadows and no deception is as lethal as religious is manifold. As in the Garden when Eve was deceived by the serpent, so too Christ's hearers must guard against the deceiver. Thus, deception is assured!

Second, wars, rumors of wars, natural disasters, and famines will occur (vv.7-8) but these are only "birth pangs". Just what is meant by "birth pangs" I'm not sure, but contextually

it seems that predetermined fearful events caused by human and divine agency must precede the end—the eschaton. This also is assured.

Third, religious persecution will manifest, personal suffering will be endured at the hands of Jewish leadership, “you will be flogged in the synagogues...” followed by civic persecution, “you will stand before governors and kings, for My sake as a testimony to them.” (v.9) This gospel message is costly and must be preached to all nations (v.10). Arrests await but God’s presence will be there to shepherd the disciples in their interrogations:

“When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Holy Spirit.” (v.11)

Thus, for Christ’s sake—His testimony will be heard by all who rule. This too is assured. This not only reminds me of Peter, John, and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles under Roman rule, but also of Daniel and his three friends in Babylonian captivity under king Nebuchadnezzar. These men were severely tested but nevertheless remained faithful to the God of the covenant.

Fourth, the pain will not end with strangers but will “come home” when betrayal occurs via family members, thus showing their hatred of Christ and putting to death his messengers (vv.12-13). To be hated by enemies is understandable, by countrymen it’s painful though bearable, but to be hated by family—brother, father, children—it’s heart breaking. This is the cost of discipleship; it’s the cost of loving Jesus, it’s also a mark of a true believer.

Jesus continues, “You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (v.13). Notice how the amplification of fear comes in degrees: it starts with deceivers, goes to natural disasters, then is followed by persecution from outsiders, and culminates in death from those closest to us.

Recall that Christ’s call to follow Him must trump our dearest relationships—this is true discipleship, this according to Him is what will show our worthiness. Worthy not because of our smarts, nor our status in life but because of our choice of treasure—His loving kindness is better than life! No one can compare, he’s Creator, He’s our Redeemer, and He is Judge!

Just as the architect of a house is more glorious than his creation by virtue of essence, so too is God when compared to the creature. But the idolatrous move of treasuring the creature above the Creator is what dooms us all. Therefore, whatever it is we do, may it not be treasuring the creature above the Creator. Thus, death by family members because of the name of Christ is assured.

Fifth, there’s an end toward which history is moving and it can’t be stopped nor avoided. There’s the Tribulation (vv.14-23) and the Post-tribulation period (vv.24-31) where signs are given to describe it: “But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand)...” (v.14) Here, there’s an understanding, a knowledge his hearers can grasp and know the point of which is a tribulation unlike any that preceded it (E.g., Flood, Babel, Exodus?) Consider Jesus:

“For those days will be a *time of* tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will” (v.19)

Scripture has recorded some horrible events but here Jesus is saying to us “you ain’t seen nothing yet!” These future events have no comparison which reminds me of the book of Revelation—God’s last act—where He completes His redemptive plan for those who love Him. Note how Jesus says these things in advance so that when they are occurring, his hearers will trust his word.

This time will see Christ’s return and the final redemption of the elect, but unlike the first tribulation period, where the hearer is to look for signs and thus act accordingly (vv.14-17), in this second tribulation the time of arrival is only known to the Father, nevertheless, the season does not seem to be hidden from the hearer (vv.28-37).

The doctrine of judgment in Scripture is the first one that came under attack (Gen.3) and continues to come under negative scrutiny. Recall that in the OT where signs and wonders occur; two things are evident people experience: Rescue from God’s wrath or the Reception of His wrath (E.g., Flood, Babel, Sodom/Gomorrah, Exodus, Possessing the Land, Elijah and Baal Prophets, etc.) so too in the NT (Book of Revelation). Why judgment? One may ask and Christ would respond,

“because you are bad at the core, your sin has separated you justly from your Creator, but I have come to fix that problem—that’s why I died and rose from the grave. I’m your only hope, no others can help.”

It’s in light of this that the hearer is to be on the alert! They are to be anticipating these moments when what precedes is evident to them. Wow! Many things did take place already but there are things yet to come, obviously since we are here. But in view of this text, what manner of life ought to professing Christians live?

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: “THE PASSION OF CHRIST IS WEIGHTY: BY LOVING THOSE WHO BETRAYED HIM” Part 1**

Jesus’ teaching of the end times now progresses into Jesus’ passion. His enemies were looking for an opportune time to kill him (vv.1-2); a woman anoints Jesus for his burial (vv.3-9); and Judas plots Jesus’ betrayal (vv.10-11). In the last Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus predicts his betrayal (vv.17-21):

“For the Son of Man *is to* go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* good for that man if he had not been born.” (v.21)

That statement must have ruined the disciple’s appetite! Imagine being one of the twelve and hearing these words from the Masters lips. Perhaps someone’s stomach turned (Judas?) or

even fear gripped them that a cold clammy sensation rushed through their bodies? Yes, perhaps. Nevertheless, Jesus knowing this continues to break bread with them (vv.22-26):

“<sup>22</sup>While they were eating, He took *some* bread, and after a blessing He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, and said, “Take *it*; this is My body.” <sup>23</sup>And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it.<sup>24</sup> And He said to them, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. <sup>25</sup>Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (vv.22-25)

Notice that Jesus accentuates this final hour as the end of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new, not through the blood of bulls and goats but with his own blood, which was to be shed not for *all* but for *many*.

This text seems to be pointing to some kind of “limited’ atonement which goes along with (Mk.10:45) and accentuates the personal nature of Jesus’ death; “he laid down his life for his friends”—the disciples—those who will abandon all to follow him shortly (vv.26-31), the thought of which at best must have been unnerving and at worst perhaps horrific.

Jesus tells his trained men that: “you will all fail me tonight; you will all show yourselves to be cowards, just fair weathered friends”. I can’t imagine how difficult that was for the disciples to hear. How often do I deny Jesus by my life that tends to stray from the truth? Don’t I emulate the disciples here when I willfully rebel against my Master? Sounds like a horribly true contradiction.

What an incredible Savior who knows we will deny him and yet chooses to die on our behalf. What an amazing illustration of love’s extent: even in betrayal Jesus would still die to ransom those he came to rescue. Amazing! Now Mark’s account transitions from the table to the Garden of Gethsemane where unlike in Eden, the second Adam demonstrates a resoluteness to do the will of the Father (vv.32-52).

Here, Jesus’ love for the disciples is evidenced by his invitation for them to enter into his pain by toiling in prayer with him:

“<sup>32</sup>They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here until I have prayed.” <sup>33</sup>And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup>And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”<sup>35</sup> And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell to the ground and *began* to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. <sup>36</sup>And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” <sup>37</sup>And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? <sup>38</sup>Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” <sup>39</sup>Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. <sup>40</sup>And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. <sup>41</sup>And He came the third time, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour

has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>42</sup>Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

Jesus' prediction of betrayal and death were about to be fulfilled. The gravity of the moment increasingly intensifies step by step. First, the adjectives of his temptation: "very distressed and troubled", "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death". Physical pain is, and can be unbearable, but the pain of soul who can measure, its magnitude is difficult to fathom, and often seems impossible to cure, much less endure.

Second, its stunning Jesus would ask these weak men to enter into his pain, to struggle with him in prayer, but he does. Here we see the Master telling them to, "keep watch". What vulnerability, what a friend! Solomon writes that it's better to be in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting. Why? Perhaps it's because grief and trouble alarm us out of the stupor that so easily engulfs us. Perhaps it's because on this side sorrow reminds us that things are not the way they *ought* to be. Perhaps it's a reminder of our own mortality and that we too must face death and God who awaits us.

Jesus here invites the three disciples to peer into his darkest hour of mourning, but they could not grasp its gravity—they fell asleep. So, at table the disciples are informed that they will betray him, in the Garden they are invited to suffer with him, but Jesus had another source for comfort in anguish.

Third, Jesus cries out to God as "Abba, Father". He acknowledges his Father in the midst of this horrible experience. The intimacy revealed in this cry is hard for me to swallow. Here, Jesus' relationship to the Father is unveiled for us to see that it's unlike any other relationship recorded in human history. The Son in whom the Father is well pleased is crying out to Him. I'm stunned! Here's an ineffable moment for me.

The request of the Son to the Father, "Remove this cup—of God's wrath—from me" But Jesus remains faithful even to death's door, "...yet not what I will, but what You will." Note that what results in this most intimate painful encounter is utter submission to God's plan and desire. A Godward life of prayer always produces God honoring submission to the /father, not rebellion.

Fourth, the disciples failed to pray three times for Jesus but he did not hold that against them. Instead of retaliating he gave his life for them. What manner of love is this?!

(SDG)

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: "THE PASSION OF CHRIST IS WEIGHTY: JUDAS HAD TO BETRAY JESUS" Part 2**

Everything Jesus predicted is increasingly being fulfilled. Recall at the Passover Meal he told the disciples about their betrayal his death and resurrection. We've seen in the garden of Gethsemane where the disciples failed their first test: they did not watch and pray with Jesus (vv.32-34). The second failure is Judas' betrayal of Jesus with a kiss (vv.43-46). How could one do that? Judas elsewhere is called the son of perdition for a reason. Jesus did say that "the Son of man must be betrayed but woe to the one allotted this dark task." Somehow in God's

sovereignty and Judas' will of choosing, he became hardened toward the Lord of life. He was one of the twelve, no mere stranger or acquaintance, but part of the ministry team. We know elsewhere that Judas committed suicide (Mt. 27:1-10) and was put in a nameless grave in the "Potters Field".

It's as if Judas lost himself, never to be remembered again except for this infamous occasion recorded in the gospels. Never to be remembered is as if one never existed. That's a dark, clammy, chilling thought. To be more dehumanized, I haven't the words.

Why did this happen? Jesus said that his betrayal was in order to fulfill Scripture. That is, God said it would happen, and was faithful to watch over his word to perform it. This necessarily had to happen plain and simple. Sometimes for Scripture to be fulfilled gloriously hope-filled events occur (E.g., Christ's birth), but as in Judas' case, it's a painfully somber reality. The fulfillment of Scripture always points to God's truth and faithfulness to bring about what was previously promised.

We can trust his word but often don't because we have bad hearts, darkened minds, bent toward self rather than towards God. LORD, continuously work on my soul so that you are its song and delight, its reason for reading and writing, the purpose for which I attack each day. (SDG)

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: "THE PASSION OF CHRIST IS WEIGHTY: PETER HAD TO DENY JESUS" Part 3**

As previously mentioned, God assures his word of promise will be fulfilled—come to pass. Many of us doubt God's word can be trusted. If that is you, consider how often Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This means for those that are yet to be fulfilled, we can trust because they'll eventually come to fruition.

Perhaps you doubt the second coming of Christ. In the apostle Peter's day, this doubt circulated among many, but he reassured his hearers that God's patience had a purpose for delaying and thus they should not lose heart.

While Jesus is before his accusers, none of their testimonies corroborated but contradicted each other (vv.53-59). Jesus is on trial not for his good deeds—which would be absurd—but because of "who" he claimed to be (which could seem even more absurd); the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One! Interestingly Jesus affirms his identity before his enemies and points to another future fulfillment of this age:

"...and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (vv.61-62)

Here again is the double edged sword of prophecy being fulfilled: rejoicing for God's friends, but doom for his enemies. Always, and I mean always, God's enemies oppose his word, but those who love God and trust him, bank on what he has promised.

God promised Messiah would come, but he did not come in the way the Jews anticipated. Why? The reason is because their Jewish theological system prevented them from grasping who Christ was. This is instructive for us who are settled within a particular

theological camp, sometimes our theology is wrong and needs to be discarded otherwise we won't be able to see what God has spoken. Christ's accusers were blind to the promised Messiah and texts that support this. Thus many of them missed the hour of their visitation. It's bad enough his accusers are lying about him, but now the text shows Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends denying him (vv.66-72). This is both embarrassing and heart-breaking.

To tell Jesus: "You're wrong", by saying that, "I (Peter) will never deny you but even go to death with you", is a foolish stance that proved to be Peter's downfall. For God's word of promise can be trusted—even if it means that you will deny him. Another sobering thought is when the final denial leaves Peter's lips, according to Luke's account (22:61-62) Jesus:

"...turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times'". "And he went out and wept bitterly."

Peter's denial has been replicated time and again over the past two millennia in the experiences of God's frail and yet real children. Pride is ever prowling to pounce on us like a lion overpowers its prey when we don't trust God's faithful word, when we don't watch and pray that we enter not into temptation.

The silver lining here however is that unlike Judas whose grief drove him to suicide, Peter's heartache produced repentance to life. He turned back to Christ in his lowest moment, not away from him. We'd do well to follow his example friends.  
(SDG)

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN: "THE IRONY OF BARABBAS AND THE SINNERS PLIGHT"**

Nearing the end of Mark's gospel, there's the exchange of Barabbas a murderer for Jesus the preacher to be crucified as demanded by the Jewish people before Pilate (vv.1-15); Jesus is then mocked and beaten by the Roman soldiers (vv.16-21); he is crucified (vv.22-41) and finally Jesus is buried (vv.42-47).

This section is deeply moving to me, and yet I sense a hard heart within as I wrestle to engage the text intellectually and with passion, with my mind and heart. There's much to reflect on but the following observations are what caught my eye.

What first intrigues me is Pilate's amazement at Jesus' silence before his accusers (vv.2-5). The tense situation had even Pilate rattled, not wanting any more unrest in the region. And now this ruler has to deal with THE KING OF THE JEWS who has been harshly abused. Lord, you kept silent because you entrusted yourself to the Father who judges all men justly, and though you kept silent it was heard loud and clear in the soul of this ruler.

Second, I'm amazed that your accusers preferred to release Barabbas—a murderer—and chose to brutally murder you—the giver of life. Their hatred was deep, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (vv.6-15), but the irony is that in order for murderers to be truly set free, you had to die in their place. As the hymn reflects, "Why should I gain from His reward, I cannot give an answer, But this I know with all my heart, His wounds have paid my ransom". What a savior!

Third, the way you were mocked by the soldiers through; spitting, punching, robing you with royal attire, and giving you a crown of thorns before being sent off to be crucified is difficult to consider. As their mocking continued, “Hail King of the Jews”, it’s as if the Roman soldiers were saying, “Yeah, you’re a king all right, of a defeated people who know they’re conquered evidenced by us killing you today!” (vv.16-21). The irony here is that you actually were the king of glory, and only through your death would death finally put away. You are the King of glory who pursues us with your love.

Fourth, the inscription for why you Jesus were put to death, “The King of the Jews” is true. This inscription is loudly proclaiming, “Do you see, do you hear, do you understand?!” This is no ordinary monarch you are killing, but the One who rules not just the Jews and the Romans, but all the nations the reality of which will be completed in the eschaton. What is he accomplishing through his death? Jesus is gathering many sons and daughters in order to have table fellowship with them. Who knew?!

Moreover, the manner in which he was crucified fulfilled the scriptures—he was numbered with the transgressors (Ps.22:7) and his last cry (Ps.22:1) demonstrated God’s promise revealed to be faithful. How is his faithfulness shown? It’s demonstrated by the Father forsaking His own Son for our good, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?!” (v.34). The answer is so that many sons and daughters may be gathered by grace alone into the kingdom of Gods mercy and grace. God will never leave nor forsake his redeemed children.

Fifth, this last cry convinced the centurion standing by that Jesus was the Son of God indeed (v.39). What manner of emotion did he hear, what sound from the gut did he hear? It was the sound of Jesus, the Lord of Life, breathing his last. This culminated the day’s events where both his enemies and friends witnessed Jesus die (vv.34-39).

Sixth, Jesus was definitely dead and they lay him in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (vv.42-47). As the stone was rolled over the opening, one can imagine that life stood still for those who hoped in Jesus. Their dreams and aspirations were now dashed to the ground.

Jesus was born to die as God promised long ago in the prophets. He fulfilled everything the Father intended Jesus to do and while the plot line is both painful and glorious, it is nevertheless true. Many years later I sit writing at my table, reflecting on these incidents which came about at the fullness of time penned in Mark’s gospel. It’s as if time stands still and I’m able to peer into the wonders of God’s amazing grace.  
(SDG)

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN: “DON’T BE AMAZED THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE GRAVE!”**

As in every Gospel account, the grave could not keep Jesus bound, but he’s risen from the dead as the angel testified:

*“<sup>6</sup> And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going*

ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.”<sup>8</sup> They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

The command “*Do not be amazed*” from the angel is odd in light of the death of Christ. No one has ever risen from the dead. But perhaps the reason for the imperative is because the LORD of life can be trusted to do what he promises (i.e., Jesus told them these events would occur).

The unbelief of the disciples recorded in this account and in the rest of the Gospels shows a bent all humans possess when it comes to trusting God’s word—we don’t! Their unbelief actually shows us all that we’re more prone to trust the creature over against the Creator.

This unbelief is first seen in the Garden of Eden, exemplified in the history of Israel up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Don’t be amazed” was the command to the woman—that Jesus was alive—because Christ’s word can be trusted! Even death is ruled by the author of life.

Thus, as we go about our day, the challenge to trust God remains. When we are anxious about life we ought not fret but trust he who is faithful to keep his promises. And yet unbelief is ubiquitous ready to beat us down. We will only vanquish it as Jesus did, “It is written...” We must remember God’s promises are true and they will be fulfilled because he can’t lie. As one writer has said, “Let God be true, and every man a liar”.

(SDG)