

Bethany to Betrayal: From the Leper's Supper to the Last Supper

Lesson Text: Mark 14:1-25 (NKJV)

¹ After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. ² But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people." ³ And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head. ⁴ But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? ⁵ For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. ⁷ For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. ⁸ She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. ⁹ Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. ¹¹ And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him. ¹² Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

¹³ And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him.

¹⁴ Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' ¹⁵ Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us."

¹⁶ So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ In the evening He came with the twelve. ¹⁸ Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."

¹⁹ And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, “*Is it I?*” And another *said*, “*Is it I?*”

²⁰ He answered and said to them, “*It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish.*” ²¹ The Son of Man indeed goes 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 never been born.”

²² And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

²³ Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.” ²⁵ Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Introduction

The traditional name “the Last Supper” suggests an elevation of that meal above others. Mark found significance in two suppers our text discusses. One was in Bethany two days before the Feast of Unleavened Bread “at the house of Simon the leper” (v. 1, 3). The second was in Jerusalem in a large upper room (v. 12, 15). Jesus had enjoyed many meals with his close friends in Bethany. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus served him supper four days earlier (John 12:1-2). There was nothing unusual in Jesus eating a meal, the importance of Mark’s account is what happened at these meals. Please read and study Mark’s account in several translations, and compare the other Gospels which complete the picture of the week which led up to and included Passover. May we gain a greater realization of the man, the teacher, and the servant Jesus while we increase our devotion to his Father for giving us His son.

Bible Learning

Verse 1a After two days it was the Passover and the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. (Compare Luke 22:1, 7.) This Jewish festival was commanded by God when He brought Israel out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai. There Jehovah, God of Israel, gave His laws to Moses for Israel’s posterity. Passover was the “first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover [lamb]” (14:12). Following the day of Passover, God commanded, “seven days you must eat unleavened bread” (Lev. 23:4-8). By the time of Christ the two had become so linked that context determines what is meant. During eight days the people were to eat bread which had been baked without yeast (leavening agent). Yeast became a symbol of sin (Matt. 16:6, 11-12; Mark 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:7-8).

Verse 1b-2 The chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him [Jesus] . . . not during the feast. For over three years Jesus was aware of the threat against his life, sadly it came from other teachers of God’s word. He cautioned his disciples to be wary of the “traditions of men” these teachers mixed into their teaching (Matt. 15:1-9). The opposition escalated to secretly planning his death, while deceptively giving the appearance of approval in public. Jesus, however, knew this was as the Prophets had predicted, and made public references to “the builders,” “hypocrites,” and to “foolish” and “idle shepherds” (Psalm 118:22 / Mark 12:10-11; Isaiah 29:13 / Mark 7:6-8; cp. Zechariah 11:15-17 / John 10:1-39). Jesus also spoke privately to his disciples about their future treatment of him, “the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again” (Mark 10:33-34; cp. 9:31). They finally got the opportunity when “**Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad**” (14:10-11a).

Verses 3-9 In Bethany at the house of Simon . . . a woman came having . . . oil of spikenard. We don’t know the name of this woman. Some have treated this as being Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. But John places the anointing done by Mary before the Triumphal Entry (John 12:1-8). Jesus accepted both anointings, “**she has come beforehand to anoint my body for burial**” and “**she [Mary] has kept this for the day of my burial**” (v. 8 and Matthew 26:12; John 12:7). Mark reported the woman poured the oil of spikenard on Jesus’ head, a sign she intended to “anoint” Jesus. We don’t know her reasons, but Jesus commended her for her deed of devotion, “**She has done what she could**” (v. 8). It would be speculation to suggest she was among the women who came after Jesus’ burial to prepare him in the tomb. Jesus said she had done this “**beforehand.**” Her oil was very expensive. It came from a plant found at high elevations in the Himalayas (Nepal / India). The nard (or spikenard, referring to the spikes of its purple flowers), was transported for months by trade caravan. Oil of nard was extremely expensive (in 2011 it is much more easily accessible, at \$25 an ounce, \$175 a pint). Add the “alabaster flask” and the woman was sacrificing for Jesus something of great value. Yes, she could have sold it, like some there critically voiced, and even at today’s prices she would have done well. Her unselfish act has been preserved for us to ponder and apply to our willingness to serve Jesus. We benefit from Jesus’ words, “**Assuredly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole**

world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”

Verses 12-16 Where do you want us to go and prepare, that you may eat the Passover? . . . his disciples . . . found it just as he had said to them. Both Matthew and John recount that Jesus knew “his hour had come” (John 13:1; Matt. 26:18). Jesus knew this Passover he would become “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). By the Spirit Jesus knew an upper room had already been “furnished and prepared.” The Passover was a remembrance service, “for bringing them out of Egypt” and eaten with unleavened bread because Israel “came out of Egypt in haste.” It was also for the circumcised in Israel, Jews and Gentiles alike who were circumcised. “It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD . . . for all the children of Israel throughout their generations” (Exod. 12:42; see all of 12:41-51 and Deut. 16:1-8). Jesus was “born of a woman [a Jewess named Miriam], born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Verses 17-21 They sat . . . ate . . . and were sorrowful . . . ‘Is it I?’ Jesus announced during the Passover meal that one of the twelve would betray him. Mark’s account of this is quite brief but John, who was there, reported more details of what Jesus said. He rose during supper, already aware that Judas Iscariot intended to betray him, and yet he washed all their feet. He said “you are not all clean.” And then, reclining again, he commanded them,

“If then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. . . . If you know these things [supremely] blessed are you if you do them. . . . I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, *He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me.*” . . . Then his disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom he spoke. (John 13:14, 17-18, 22).

Judas Iscariot left soon after this, and he betrayed Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane later that night (Mark 14:43-50).

Verses 22-25 Take, eat; this is my body . . . This is my blood of the new covenant. The Passover was a time of remembrance for Israel. Jesus took two elements from this meal, unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, and introduced a new remembrance, “do this in remembrance of me”. Thus Jesus introduced the “new covenant” for Israel (read Hebrews 8:6-12 with 9:15). Through His prophet Jeremiah God spoke of a “new covenant” (read Jer. 31:31-34). Hebrews 8-10 explains that those of Israel who now believe in Jesus enter into the new covenant of Jeremiah. Jeremiah also

described the return of Israel to the land God promised Abraham, “from the river of Egypt [Nile] to the great river, the River Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18). So those of Israel who enter into the new covenant with their God now through the blood of His son will “inherit the earth” and “see God” (Matt. 5:1-9). Also those of Israel who are alive when Jesus returns will inherit the land restored from centuries of desolation (Jer. 31:8-14, 28-37).

“Therefore, behold the days are coming,” says Jehovah, “that they will no longer say, ‘As Jehovah lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As Jehovah lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country, and from all the countries where I have driven them.’ And they shall dwell in their own land” (Jer. 23:7-8).

Jesus understood this and prepared his disciples to explain to Israel, “In that He [Jehovah] said, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13). Jesus’ disciples do not keep the old covenant which God gave Moses to give to Israel (Rom. 7:4-6). Rather the faithful of Israel and all disciples who believe in Jesus have a new covenant, which God commanded by Jesus, and do not keep the Law (read Gal. 5:1-14).

Remembering Jesus’ sacrifice with unleavened bread and the juice of the grape has often been called “the Lord’s Supper” and “Communion”. Jesus himself gave it no title. In the Church of God (Abrahamic Faith) congregation where the author grew up it was referred to as “the members meeting.” When Jesus had this meal he was not instituting a sacrament for the church, rather the apostle Paul wrote years later that Jesus said twice “do this in remembrance of me.” Paul added the statement “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). How often? As often as you do it. Unlike the Passover, it was not commanded for any set time of month or year. Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth (10:16-18),

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [fellowship] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [fellowship] of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we are partakers of that one bread. Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers [fellowshippers] of the altar?

Israel keeps the Passover; Jesus’ church remembers, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7).

Verse 25 I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God The kingdom of God was

never far from Jesus' mind. Even in his most trying time, he focused beyond his present distress to his resurrection and the joys which his God and his Father had promised in His kingdom. Hebrews 12:2 described Jesus similarly, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus looked forward to sharing God's kingdom with his disciples after he returned, "Assuredly I say unto you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me, will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in His throne" (Rev. 3:21; cp. 5:9-10; 20:4-6). Mark began his account of Jesus, "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel [good news].'" To Jesus the kingdom of God was good news indeed.

Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the New Covenant for Israel, its restoration to Jehovah, their God, and the importance of this for the gospel message (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36-37; Zech. 12-13).
2. Consider Jesus' life under the Law of Moses, including the laws he observed which we are not commanded to observe; compare the Passover and communion.
3. Discuss the New Covenant described in Hebrews 8-10.
4. Has the communion service become only a tradition? Has it been treated as a sacrament? Has it been restricted to being part of Sunday services? Has it been a time of remembering and fellowship of believers in the Son of God?
5. How much do we think about God's kingdom in our daily trials? How much does our hope help us overcome the evils of this world and keep us focused on being in God's kingdom?

“What is Written”

Golden Text: Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Key Thought: Jesus took what is written very seriously. Peter tried to deny what Jesus said, yet it became true for both of them.

Lesson Text: Mark 14:26-42 (NKJV)

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

²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

‘I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ “But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

²⁹ Peter said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will* not *be*.”

³⁰ Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that today, *even* this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.”

³¹ But he spoke more vehemently, “If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!”

And they all said likewise.

³² Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. ³⁴ Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, *even* to death. Stay here and watch.”

³⁵ He went a little farther, and 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. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*.”

³⁷ Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

³⁹ Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. ⁴⁰ And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.

⁴¹ Then 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. ⁴² Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

Introduction

We may not want to accept some of the things we find in Scripture. As a minister once stated in a funeral, regarding Hebrews 9:27, death is an appointment we all will keep – but he went on to say that though we know this we each think death will make an *exception* in our case. For another example, John says that the Beast was granted “to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Rev. 13:7), but some seek a more acceptable future than they see in prophecy. Similarly in today’s text Peter chose his own interpretation for what was written. There may be danger in accepting “what is written” but applying it to everyone else, not ourselves.

One further verse is “Yes and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12 NKJV). This adds some substance to

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:10-12 NKJV).

What is written should give us fair warning of what is coming. When it comes it should not surprise us. And we should not boast of planning that what is written won’t happen to us. It would be best, in this writer’s opinion, to follow Jesus’ example (not Peter’s) and commit ourselves to Yahweh.

Bible Learning

Verses 26-28 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Jesus and his disciples had just finished the Passover meal. As Jesus instituted the “Lord’s Supper” it shouldn’t be too difficult to understand that Jesus knew what was coming that night. The short phrase, “I will strike the

Shepherd” references all the agony and suffering that we know followed. It certainly appears that Jesus was aware of what was written. In fact Jesus stated this to his disciples on more than this occasion. As we face hard times, even the end times, how can we use the example Jesus left for us? Actually Peter himself gave us insight into this in his letter.

“For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Jesus left us the example of committing ourselves to the One that judges righteously. This may be one of the lessons Peter had to learn the hard way.

Verses 29-31 Peter said to him, “Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.” Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he spoke more vehemently, “If I have to die with you, I will not deny you!” And they all said likewise.

Isn’t it grand to boast of our abilities? “Others may fall away, but I’m smarter, stronger, more capable.” And Peter’s words aroused the pride of the other disciples; they were not to be outdone, the text tells us “they all said likewise.” However as we progress through the text we will see that this boasting was short lived.

Verses 32-34 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” And he took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.”

I understand that Gethsemane comes from two words that mean “olive press”. This calls to mind Revelation 14:19 and the “wine press of the wrath of God Almighty”. Here Jesus came to take the punishment that we all deserve. How Jesus must have been flooded with the symbolism of that night.

What agony and heaviness must have been on Jesus' heart as he spoke these words. He allowed Peter, James, and John into a very personal place. He made what appears to be a simple request, "stay and watch". He wanted them to remain vigilant in this time that he was troubled and deeply distressed. As we proceed we will learn that their boasting was empty.

Verses 35-37 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." Then he came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

This is the prayer of committal. "It isn't what I want, but I will put myself in Your hands." In the face of death are we as willing to trust Yahweh? Or do we want to take matters into our own hands and try to figure a way of escape? Jesus is the example we are to follow. Oh, the boasting men. "Simon, you who said you'd die with me, are you sleeping?" This was the hour of great spiritual warfare. The best course of action, as Jesus directed, is to pray so that we might avoid temptation. Jesus gave a similar instruction in another place, when teaching about the great tribulation, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy [or have the strength] to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). His "preparation" for this time was to pray.

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." We may all find ourselves here. I understand this as telling us that while we may have plans to be obedient [the spirit is willing], our flesh is weak [like a spoiled child] and can't be controlled. That's why we often need to take measures to keep our bodies under subjection, allowing the spirit of God, not our flesh, to be in control of our decisions.

Verses 39-40 Again he went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer him.

Jesus needed to enter into prayer again, and he prayed the same prayer. He didn't change his mind, but perhaps reinforced his decision to be committed to his Father's plan. Don't think that if you need to repeat a prayer this means something is wrong. Our master did so. When Jesus found his companions sleeping this second time they had nothing they could say for an excuse. They knew he was right, and couldn't say anything to him.

Verses 41-42 Then 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. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

Jesus came the third time to find his disciples sleeping. Jesus may not have been too surprised because of what is written. He knew they would all abandon him. Wisdom tells us that even against human boasting, God’s truth will be fulfilled. We can see that Jesus was resigned to what was about to befall him.

Bible Application

I have had occasion to talk with husbands, questioning whether or not they would give their lives for their wives. The response is always in the positive. “Yes I will”, they say. My response is “How about giving up a football game?” How easy it is to boast when the reality seems so distant that we won’t ever be brought into account. The same sort of boasting has been heard in response to a blatant sin committed. People respond, “Oh I’d never think of doing that sort of thing.” Such boasting will cause us to not keep our guard up. Many people caught in sin will say, “I don’t know how I came to do that.”

Life Response

No one looks forward to suffering and ordeals. However those things may come. It behooves us to know what to do when they do. We may face tribulation because of our faith. People may single us out for harsh treatment. Those things are not beyond what we can expect. We should be prepared for those things, not with boasting, but prayer. Our connection and commitment to Yahweh and His will is what will see us through.

Questions for Discussion

1. How can we use Jesus’ example as our own response to what awaits in the great tribulation?
2. What do you think caused Peter to respond to Jesus the way he did? Could that same thing be found in you?
3. Discuss how prayer can be the antidote to temptations.
4. Why is it, or is it not, important to realize that anyone is capable of any sin? Remember, the *Titanic* wasn’t supposed to be able to sink.

Jesus Arrested

Golden Text: Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. (Mark 14:61-62)

Key Thought: At a time when Judas betrayed Jesus, others brought false charges against him and Peter disowned him, Jesus professed the truth.

Lesson Text: Mark 14:43-72 (NIV)

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

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

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

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

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

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

⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

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

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

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

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

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

They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophesy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

A fond memory when we lived in the heart of the Niagara Peninsula (Ontario) was picking blueberries at a local Pick-Your-Own farm. Our girls, who were quite young, especially enjoyed trying to fill their small buckets with choice berries. When it came time to pay the farm manager looked at Paige (whose lips were stained with berry juice) and asked with a twinkle in his eye, “You didn’t eat any of my berries did you?” Paige shyly replied, “Yes,” to which the man added, “Good, and since you told me the truth, I’m going to give you some extra berries!”

Telling the truth, remaining truthful, acting Christ-like, is not always easy. That is especially so if we are falsely accused or in a time of crisis. Yet the world is always watching to see how we respond. Who in today’s Bible passage did, or didn’t, remain true, during a critical time in Jesus’ life? How does our text tell us about the importance of walking in truth, speaking the truth and adhering to the truth? What changes do I personally need to make in order to align my attitude more closely with that of Jesus?

Bible Learning

After praying in the garden, Jesus told his sleeping disciples, “Here comes my betrayer!” Judas, the leader of the group, had been waiting for an opportunity to hand over Jesus and knew where to find him. Judas had “sold” Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders for 30 silver coins and arranged the signal for his arrest. A kiss was a customary greeting and a sign of honor/respect, but sadly the verb form suggests that Judas embraced/kissed Jesus with the strongest appearance of love/affection. Jesus was then arrested – without any resistance, with him in complete control of the situation (John 18:5-8) and in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7. Jesus reminded the armed crowd that they previously had opportunity to arrest him (he had taught in the temple courts for several days since his entry into Jerusalem). Jesus continued, “The Scriptures must be fulfilled”. Perhaps he was referring to his betrayal, arrest, suffering and death and the desertion shown in verse 50 (“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”). Judas had walked with Jesus for years, and was trusted as “keeper of the money bag” for the poor, however John reveals Judas to be a thief who helped himself to the money. Judas had experienced the grace and truth of Jesus; how sad that his life is characterized by hypocrisy. Matthew tells us when Judas saw the condemned Jesus he was remorseful and even returned the silver coins. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

The actions of the Jewish high court also stand in contrast to the truth of our sinless Lord and Savior. The Sanhedrin wasn’t looking for truth, but “for evidence against Jesus so that they could put Him to death” (Mark 14:55). Everything about this mockery of a trial was illegal, and Jesus was considered condemned before it began. Many testified falsely against Jesus, including those who testified he said, “I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man” – an untruth that contained some truth (see John 2:19). Caiaphas asked Jesus, “Aren’t you going to answer?”, but Jesus remained silent. Alexander MacLaren (*Expositions of Holy Scripture*) states, “Our Lord’s silence is not only that of meekness . . . it is the silence of innocence.” When asked, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus responded truthfully, “I am.” (On “Blessed One” consider 1 Timothy 6:15 which describes God as “the blessed and only ruler . . . who alone is immortal.”) Jesus continued, “You will see the Son of Man [Jesus’ favorite designation of himself] sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and *coming on the clouds of heaven*” (reminding his hearers of Daniel 7:13). When saying this Jesus knew he would soon die on Calvary’s cross; he also anticipates his ascension to the right hand of the Father in heaven and his future Second Coming as Righteous Judge and King of the coming Kingdom on the earth. The Sanhedrin accused Jesus of blasphemy and condemned him to death.

The truthfulness/faithfulness Jesus showed is in contrast to Peter's three denials of Christ. The servant girl told Peter, "You were with Jesus . . . you are one of them . . . surely you are." Peter countered, "I don't know what you're talking about . . . no . . . I don't know the man," and *immediately the rooster crowed the second time*. In 14:29 Peter had declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." Jesus replied, "Tonight, before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." When Peter remembered Jesus' words he broke down and wept.

Bible Application

Judas with his pretense of love/loyalty, the other disciples who deserted Jesus, those who falsely accused and abused him, and Peter who followed at a distance and later denied his Lord, all stand in sharp contrast to Jesus. At this crucial time, Jesus was in complete control. He didn't retaliate; he remained silent and professed truth to Caiaphas.

Recently my younger daughter was shaken by the reaction of a friend/classmate to her belief that Jesus is the Son of God, not God the Son. I was quite proud of Jennie's stance, yet sorry that she had to deal with public ridicule. (Though being accused of blasphemy for believing that Jesus is the 'Son of the Blessed One' did put her in pretty good company!)

None of us know when and how we will be called to stand for the truths of God's Word. Knowing the truth is important; so is walking in the truth (which includes the truth concerning who Jesus is) all the days of our lives.

Life Response

Peter says, "Jesus suffered for us, leaving us an example we should follow" (1 Pet. 2:21). He's our example in life and in death. The writer of Hebrews says of Jesus, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Though others may fall away or follow Christ *at a distance*, though some deny the truth and falsely accuse, may we remain true, standing firm until the end. Just as Paige was rewarded for her truthfulness with extra blueberries, the faithful believer in Christ will be awarded the crown of righteousness on the Day of His appearing. Come what may, let's keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, the *true* and faithful witness.

Questions for Discussion

1. Matthew tells us that before Judas died, he was remorseful and returned the silver. Is this evidence that Judas was truly repentant?
2. Why is it so hard to follow in Jesus' steps when we are falsely accused or put on the defense? How can we possess the wisdom to know whether it is *a time to be silent* or *a time to speak* (Eccl. 3:7b)?
3. Certainly, like Peter, we all have expressed our loyalty to God and to Jesus, only to later shed tears of disappointment/failure. What does it mean to you personally that Peter's three-fold denial was countered by a loving restoration and reinstatement from his risen Lord (John 21)?
4. Jesus responded, "I am," when asked if he was the Christ, the Son of God. Just how important is this profession? How necessary is it to know, walk in and profess this truth, as well as to work together to promote it?

Jesus Before Pilate

Golden Text: For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving for you an example for you to follow in his steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; and while being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to Him who judges righteously; (1 Peter 2:21-23)

Key Thought: Jesus laid an example for each of us to follow. The truth is, this example is daunting. How well would we endure the events that Jesus dealt with? How would we respond to being taunted, spit on, and beaten? The behavior of the Jewish leadership exhibits deadly motive, and identifies the true nature of who they are.

Lesson Text: Mark 15:1-20; NASB

¹ Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. ² Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "*It is as you say.*" ³ The chief priests *began* to accuse Him harshly. ⁴ Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" ⁵ But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at *the* feast he used to release for them *any* one prisoner whom they requested. ⁷ The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. ⁸ The crowd went up and began asking him *to do* as he had been accustomed to do for them. ⁹ Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd *to ask* him to release Barabbas for them instead. ¹² Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" ¹⁴ But Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" ¹⁵ Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole *Roman* cohort. ¹⁷ They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; ¹⁸ and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ They kept beating His

head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him.
²⁰ After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His *own* garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.

Introduction

There is an interesting contrast in this scene between two factors: Jesus performed exactly as a Son of God should, and the priests, scribes, and council members performed exactly as they shouldn't have – you know, like humans often do. Filled with envy, these men wanted Jesus crucified. They went to great lengths to contrive a believable tale against Jesus. Justice just wasn't served.

Mark and Matthew's accounts describe the motives of the chief priests as "envy", while Luke and John both point out that Jesus is being "accused" without sufficient cause. Characteristics like envy and accusation can creep into our lives and take over our thoughts, and pull us away from the loving service Jesus showed us.

Jesus taught us valuable lessons, even during his most severe trial. Learning to be faithful throughout our lives involves testing our own endurance. We can read of this event and see its tragedy, but will we take away from that reading *all* Jesus wanted us to?

Bible Learning

In Mark 15 we see the absolute determination of the Jewish leadership to bring Jesus to trial. In verse 1 they bring him before Pilate, already bound as a prisoner.

Look at the questions Pilate brings in front of these leaders, trying to get them to see that they are in danger of making an error.

Vs. 2 Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Vs. 4 Pilate asks Jesus, "Do you not answer?"

"See how many charges they bring against you?"

Vs. 9 Pilate asks the multitude, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

Vs. 12 Pilate asks the chief priests and multitude, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

Vs. 14 Pilate asks the chief priests and the multitudes, "Why, what evil has He done?"

Pilate is careful to present opportunities for the Jewish leadership to turn the angry mob around, but they choose rather to "stir up" the multitude. And the motive? Look at verse 10. How powerful is envy in this incident? Matthew's account states that Pilate washed his hands of the problem when he realized that a riot was imminent.

The amazing power of a phrase. Look at the changes in behavior that the words “King of the Jews” brought on. Pilate asks Jesus if he is King of the Jews and Jesus responds “It is as you say” (v. 2; also Matt. 27:11; Luke 23:3). John’s account has more detail (18:33, 34), showing that Jesus replied with his own question. John’s account also shows that the Jews claimed Jesus was not only *not* their king, but that their *only* king was Caesar (19:15). The Roman soldiers mockingly took up the phrase “King of the Jews” as they began their torment of Jesus.

Looking at the context as a whole, we see the shocking truth that human beings can be so driven with envy and hatred that they are willing to kill each other. We don’t like to call out envy as the culprit in our behaviors, but often it is a player in our treatment of others. Mark 15:10 is *so* clear about the true identity of the problem. As attorneys say, “It all goes to motive”.

What are our motives in life? Consider Proverbs 16:2 – *All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives.*

Life Response

The Bible has some great texts that deal with our motives. Below are verses that deal expressly with the motivators of envy, jealousy, and hatred. We probably would rather not admit that these are factors that God felt needed to be mentioned in regard to the human condition, but here they are, brought out for us to work with.

¹⁶ There are six things which the LORD hates,
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:

¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood,

¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that run rapidly to evil,

¹⁹ A false witness *who* utters lies,
And one who spreads strife among brothers.

²⁰ My son, observe the commandment of your father
And do not forsake the teaching of your mother;

²¹ Bind them continually on your heart;
Tie them around your neck.

²² When you walk about, they will guide you;
When you sleep, they will watch over you;

And when you awake, they will talk to you. (Proverbs 6:16-22)

Hatred stirs up strife,

But love covers all transgressions. (Proverbs 10:12)

¹⁷ Better is a dish of vegetables where love is
Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred.

¹⁸ A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,
But the slow to anger calms a dispute.

(Proverbs 15:17-18)

Every man's way is right in his own eyes,
But the LORD weighs the hearts.

(Proverbs 21:2)

¹ Do not be envious of evil men,
Nor desire to be with them;

² For their minds devise violence,
And their lips talk of trouble.

(Proverbs 24:1-2)

⁴ Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood,
But who can stand before jealousy?

⁵ Better is open rebuke
Than love that is concealed.

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend,
But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

(Proverbs 27:4-6)

As well, look up James 4; Mark 7:21-23; and Galatians 5:13-26.

Yes, it really does all go back to motive. It is not so much what we are doing, but why we are doing it. This is what God sees and measures, and this is what Jesus held up as the high standard. He not only died for us, but he died perfectly, without sin. His motives were clear. He wants each of us to see the glorious possibilities of life without sin.

Questions for Discussion

1. The leadership of the Jews had decided to bring Jesus to trial. What were their true motives, and what other points did they bring up to keep their true motives hidden?
2. What emotions did the phrase "King of the Jews" bring out in the Jewish multitude and leadership?
3. What did the Romans do with the phrase "King of the Jews"?
4. Jesus answered some things, but not others. Why did he not answer in regards to the long list of accusations brought against him?
5. Are there times when it is better not to answer an accusation?

Many Faces at the Cross of Jesus

Golden Text: He was numbered with transgressors (Mark 15:28)

Key Thought: Every face at the cross of Jesus had a story, some bitterly opposed to him, some devotedly in love with him, but all desperately in need of him.

Lesson Text: Mark 15:21-47 (NASB)

²¹ They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.

²² Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. ²³ They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man should take.

²⁵ It was the third hour when they crucified Him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS." ²⁷ They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. ²⁸ [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."]

²⁹ Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. ³² Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

³³ When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "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 veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

³⁹ When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰ There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. ⁴¹ When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

⁴² When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. ⁴⁵ And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.

Introduction

All who understand the meaning of Jesus’ death for our salvation have both sorrow and joy from knowing the event actually took place. We feel great sorrow that our sins caused him to endure such great suffering but exuberant joy knowing his suffering and death paid the penalty for our sins.

But among those who actually witnessed Jesus’ suffering and death the emotions were polarized. Quite opposite passions stirred in the two groups of people involved: those who wanted him dead and those who loved him. It is worth examining the emotional drive which motivated each group.

Bible Learning

Our text shows the impact of six individuals or groups, some wanted Jesus dead, one was simply an opportunist, and we can see three as showing him their love. Let’s examine each as they are revealed in the story.

First are the Roman guard. Would Jesus seem different to them from any troublemaker they had encountered? They were tasked with taking Jesus to Golgotha to nail him to the cross (v. 22-25) and making sure he died. They carried out their duty as ordered, but they did so with a maliciousness characteristic of the evil found deep in men’s hearts. Note the cruel acts which Mark records in verses 16-20: twisting a crown of thorns on his head, spitefully mocking him, repeatedly beating his head with a reed, and spitting

on him. These behaviors, of the highest disrespect and cruelty, exemplify the undue wrath exerted by those in authority on one they consider to be a threat to their Empire. These soldiers did not know it, but their own venom represented the extreme need for Jesus to endure the suffering they inflicted and to die on the cross.

Pontius Pilate is the second villain of this story, though he is not mentioned in our lesson text. It was he who had a placard placed on Jesus' cross, supposedly to explain why Jesus needed to die: "THE KING OF THE JEWS" (v. 26). This was not offered by Pilate to be true, but as sarcasm. Pilate wished to infuriate the Jewish leaders who had annoyed him with their incessant plea for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate showed his insensitivity to Jesus even by his means of getting a last poke at his Jewish provokers. Pilate was like humorists who poke fun at Jesus and Christians because they have nothing better to do with their lives.

Third we have those who hurled mocking insults at Jesus while he hung on the cross. These include those passing by the crucifixion scene, along with the high priests and the scribes, and two thieves who were crucified with Jesus (v. 27, 29-32). Among these the high priests and the scribes were the worst, the real troublemakers. They hated Jesus. They were insanely jealous of him and had sought long and hard for the opportunity to get him put to death so they would not have to contend with his popularity any longer. These all used abusive slander to attain their desired ends. It is the cheap way to dirty another's name, to defame the good which people otherwise do. It is used by politicians as a chief weapon for putting down opponents. It is Satan's main tool to ridicule the followers of Jesus. "Slanderer" is the meaning of "devil". Those who use slander intend to do great harm without having to answer for that crime. It is the coward's way to disgrace another.

Besides the ones who sought to harm Jesus, a few were simply curious about one statement he made at the end of his life. Mark observed that **34 at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" 35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." 36 . . . "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down."** They were going to stick around just long enough to see whether Elijah would hear his plea and return to free Jesus from the cross. These were thrill seekers, who would not want to miss such a sight; they were like the crowds who looked for a free lunch after Jesus fed the five thousand. In rebuking them Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26). Such ones

quickly leave Jesus when there is no more free lunch and the way leads into a tough wilderness, a desert of trials and troubles. They are like “many of His disciples [who] withdrew, and were not walking with Him any more” (John 6:66).

Jesus has no regard for the heartless ones, the slanderers or the shallow followers. But he has great respect for those who would risk all to be counted as his servants. We can see the image of such disciples among those who stood by him in his greatest hour of trial.

The first I will mention was an unassuming, innocent bystander who got called into duty to help a fallen Jesus. We don't know what Simon of Cyrene believed about Jesus before that day; but likely he was just engaged on a task of his own, on his way into or out of Jerusalem during the busy preparations for Passover. The strong grasp of a soldier urged Simon to put his shoulders to work to bear the cross of Jesus (v. 21). After being scourged and abused by the soldiers Jesus was greatly weakened and unable to carry his cross to the crucifixion site. We can envision that at first Simon felt greatly imposed upon by the Roman soldier, but observing the situation he quickly changed his attitude, willingly slipped under Jesus' weakened shoulder, and took the load of the cross on himself. He is a rare case on that day of anyone providing help to relieve Jesus' struggles. Simon represents those who can size up the real value of the Christian life and willingly take on the burdens borne by others, helping them acquire the full benefits of salvation. Such people are willing to surrender what has been important in their own lives to take up a cause with greater meaning for them and those they help. When they help the needy it is as if they are helping Jesus.

Another unlikely hero in the crucifixion scene is the centurion who stood at the foot of Jesus' cross the moment he died. Something about the way Jesus died, perhaps the dignity of his dying moments, affected him. He declared, **39 Truly this man was the Son of God!** He was not obliged to say anything, but he spoke. This rough soldier proclaimed a witness of truth no other voice at the cross had the boldness to say. It is like the truth which unexpectedly comes from babes and penetrates a sullen air. Perhaps no one who hears the statement knows quite what to do, but instinctively they know the word has hit its mark and all are in awe of its meaning. Babes in Christ often hit such a mark, causing more mature disciples to stand up and take notice.

Before examining the women who followed Jesus we turn to a man of wealth, **43 Joseph of Arimathea . . . a prominent member of the Council.** The Council was the Sanhedrin, the main ruling body of the Jewish people. Earlier in the day almost the whole Council had cast their vote to send Jesus to his death. Joseph was one of the two dissenters (Luke 23:50, 51), with

Nicodemus (John 19:39). Joseph demonstrated his love for Jesus by gathering up the courage to go before Pilate, and ask for the body of Jesus (v. 43-45). Pilate had the right to simply have Jesus' body tossed into a garbage pile. Jesus meant nothing more than that to Pilate. But Joseph yearned to make a last respectful display of caring for his friend Jesus by providing a worthy place of burial (v. 46). Joseph had gone to great expense to have a tomb hewn out of stone in preparation for his own burial. He was a man of wealth and this would be a statement to the world concerning Joseph's own importance in the Jewish community. Now this monument would become the tomb of his beloved friend, a fitting tribute to the man he most admired. It would be his parting gift of gratitude for the joy he found in life from Jesus' teachings. Joseph represents the goodness in the gifts we can offer Jesus as our tribute to his worth to us.

Finally, we come to the many faithful women who followed Jesus. Mark tells us the names of several of them. Of all Jesus' followers only a few stayed to witness and endure the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross, and of those we know only the names of these women and the apostle John (John 19:26, 27). **40 There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. 41 When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.** These women showed great compassion for the suffering Jesus. It was as if they would have offered up their own bodies on the cross to die in his place that Jesus might live and continue his works of compassion and mercy. They did not know it then but their hearts were completely in tune with the heart of Jesus when giving of themselves as he was giving of himself for them. This lesson of self giving they learned well from their Master (John 10:11, 15; 15:13). This is the heart of a faithful servant. Jesus was called the servant of God (Zech. 3:8; Acts 4:27, 30), and these women were demonstrating what it looks like to be a servant of God.

As a final act of love and caring **47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid.** They had joined Joseph of Arimathea to witness Jesus' burial place so they could return to complete the burial process. They wanted all procedures to be followed properly in honor of their fallen Master. This is reminiscent of the church's desires after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Faithful followers want to keep his teachings alive for themselves and for all generations of believers who follow them. His teachings are words of eternal worth and result in never ending rewards.

Bible Application

There are numerous and varied lessons to be learned from the personalities identified in this text on the crucifixion of Jesus. In summary they teach us as followers of Jesus both what not to be and do and what to be and do. Even in Jesus' suffering and death we learn much about what it means to be a Christian.

Life Response

Consider these lessons for Christian living based on the crucifixion story.

Poor Behavior to Avoid:

The Roman guard – represents the extreme senseless wickedness that caused the need for Jesus' death on the cross.

Pilate – represents those who belittle others just for fun. Pilate is like the humorists who poke fun at Jesus and Christians because they have nothing better to do.

Worldly know-it-alls – These are mockers who slander Jesus and his followers, and are jealous of them. They seek endlessly to find any way to drag the names of good people through the mud to discredit them mercilessly.

Bystanders – the thrill seekers, people who are looking for a free lunch. They only want what they can get for themselves at very little cost to themselves.

Good behavior to emulate:

Simon - one who can truly size up the value of Christian living, who willingly takes on the burdens borne by others and helps them to acquire full salvation.

Centurion – one who speaks words of wisdom from observation, like truth from babes that unexpectedly penetrates sullen air. No one knows quite what to do, but instinctively they know the word has hit its mark and all are in awe of its meaning.

Joseph – he acted with love and respect for a fallen comrade. Joseph represents the goodness in the gifts we can offer Jesus as our tribute to his worth to us.

The women – their hearts were completely in tune with the heart of Jesus when giving of themselves in imitation as he gave of himself for them.

The Long Night, the Joyful Morning

Golden Text: 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. (Mark 16:6)

Key Thought: For the Christian every dark night of sorrow has a bright new morning filled with joy. These moments of our lives follow the pattern established by Jesus in his suffering, death, burial, and resurrection.

Lesson Text: Mark 16:1–8 (NASB)

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. ² Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. ³ They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴ Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. ⁵ Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. ⁶ 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. ⁷ “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.’” ⁸ 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.

Introduction

Have you ever had a night when you tossed and turned from dread of some inevitable thing you would face in the morning, and then after you arose suddenly the tables turned 180 degrees and you found yourself instead bathed in the most joyful outcome you could imagine? Strange events like that do happen on occasion. And this is precisely the case on the resurrection morning as the women who so faithfully followed their beloved Master tearfully went to his cold stone tomb to bid his body a mournful goodbye. To their great shock they found that the huge stone which was set over the opening of the tomb had been rolled back. Fearfully, they entered the tomb – and Jesus’ body was gone! What occurred next was the beautiful outcome of the story.

Bible Learning

I want you to imagine the events of our text with me. It begins following the long days and nights the disciples waited for the sacred celebration of the Passover to end. They wanted to return to Jesus' grave site and finish readying his precious body for a state of final rest in Joseph's tomb. The scriptures hold no record from the disciples of their thoughts in what must have seemed a wearily protracted period, a dark time of anguished reflection and complete despair. How gruesome their recollections must have been, of Jesus' struggles to inhale each remaining breath. The one who cared so very much for everyone he ever met was brutally treated. His cruel opponents, in their spiteful hatred, aimed not just for his death but for a slow execution by excruciating torture. The disciples must have found the image of his suffering hard to expel from their minds, robbing them of sleep until pure exhaustion mercifully brought rest.

Then the long night of hurt and mourning ended. **1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, arose from their dark night and bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.** They might have expected a dark, gloomy day to greet them. We can imagine a typical bright morning, quite in contrast to the darkness still pervading their thoughts. Each step they took toward the tomb seemed heavier until at last they saw their teacher's home in death.

They paused briefly at the sight. Then **3 they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"** Up to that moment it had not occurred to them that the massive stone would be a troubling obstacle to completing their task. **4 Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large.** They thought that was peculiar. But they did not think long about it, for **5 entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right.** Now this was more peculiar still. Who was this young man, and why would he be sitting in Jesus' tomb? They were struck with amazement.

They really didn't have time to look around in the tomb to see where Jesus' body had been laid. In fact they did not know what to think or what to do. They did notice this strange young man **wearing a white robe.** Matthew says his "appearance was like lightning" and "his garment as white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). Their stunned silence was broken by his confident voice. **6 Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified.** It was then that they looked around and saw that the stone slab where Joseph laid Jesus was devoid of his body. They gasped in horror, afraid to imagine what had become of him.

The young man spoke again and the women's attention was drawn back to his voice. In a gentle but certain tone he told them, **He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him.** The women brushed their hands over the surface of the stone slab where they last saw Jesus laid, and questions raced through their confused minds. *What does this mean, that Jesus is risen? Where could he be? Why is this man in his tomb?* Their minds cried out for answers. Up to now these women had not allowed themselves to believe Jesus' own words, from four separate occasions, that he would rise from the dead (Matt. 16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19). The evidence was mounting. Breaking into their thoughts he spoke again, giving them instructions to **7 go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'**

There is no indication here that the women actually understood, much less believed, what the young man in the tomb said to them. All Mark tells us is that **8 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.**

Mark ends his gospel in this abrupt fashion. Many Bible scholars believe the remaining twelve verses of his gospel are texts added later by an overactive manuscript copyist, eager to end the account of events surrounding Jesus' resurrection more smoothly. But for Mark apparently this was enough information. It mattered not to him what the women did next. The young man at the tomb, whom we know from the other gospel writers was an angel, was the first to bear witness that Jesus had risen from the dead. Later that day Jesus revealed himself alive to his disciples and their world would be forever changed from that moment on.

Bible Application

The loyal, but despairing, women who came to Jesus' tomb represent well how a state of mind can paralyze otherwise physically healthy people. Jesus had told them what they needed to know to face this day jubilantly, but all his teachings evaporated from their thoughts. Instead they allowed what they had seen – their master's death, and the horrors which led up to it – to overwhelm what they should have known and been able to recall.

Every day of our lives we face the ups and downs of trials and testing. Sometimes we face severe suffering, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual in nature. We should expect these as common occurrences and learn how to deal with them. It is not possible to live a life free of such struggles; rather our spiritual maturity is measured by how well we deal with them.

Jesus gave us his teachings to help us fill our minds and hearts with the things we need to face any difficulty in life. We must be able to maintain our peace of mind despite events in this world, and we do so through knowing God's word intimately. That is the secret to living a successful and fulfilled life in this age. Without it we fall into the same crippling despair that weighed down the women who came to Jesus' tomb.

Life Response

God wants us to live the victorious life. Do not be paralyzed by trials; do not allow troubles to disturb your peace of mind. If when events come we do not rely on what God has revealed in His word then we can expect to be overwhelmed. But when we rely confidently on God's presence and His word to help and guide us through even the darkest hours of life we can handle things with a poise and confidence we would not possess otherwise. Trials will come, but we need not fall back in fear. We can rise boldly to face all challenges, knowing that He is near, and that triumph is His. He will help us. His word tells us so.

Expectations

Life Need

Many Bible versions treat last week's text, Mark 16:1-8, as the ending of Mark's Gospel. In it some of the company of women who were present at Christ's crucifixion had gone to his tomb and received strong indications that Jesus was again alive. They do not see Jesus risen, and "they said nothing to anyone" because they were afraid (v. 8). That statement doesn't seem to work if you have heard about the disciples learning of Jesus' resurrection. But it works if the story is left at that moment, frozen in time to be examined. Despite the fact that these women found these things happening "just as he [Jesus] told you" they were totally unprepared for them.

We may want more from Mark's Gospel, though it is not necessary for us to assume that Mark ever wrote more to end it. Various reasons have been suggested for Mark to end his text like this.

One theory is that he was demonstrating the force of what Psalm 146 says, calling on his readers not to trust in humanity because none of us are sufficient on our own (thus the disciples who don't deliver the message). Rather than trusting in "the son of man" (Ps. 146:3 – but meant in a broad sense, as "people", not like Matthew's use of that term for the Messiah), Mark calls us to trust in the Son of God. Jesus so allied himself to God's cause as to carry out God's plans (v. 7-9) and so God rewarded him; his thoughts were not left in a perished state (v. 4, KJV) but were brought back into glorious life.

It has also been suggested that Mark was making a point with this conclusion about the presence of both "hope" and "disappointment", perhaps setting up an internal conflict for his readers. Under this theory the women represent *us*, at least how we are some of the time. They know the truth, and they stand caught between two opinions. They have heard, but do they truly believe? They have been told to speak, and Mark shows them trapped in the time between *hearing* about Jesus' resurrection and having an encounter with the risen Lord. They do speak, later, but first they fear.

And it is very easy for us to see ourselves counted among those, unlike Thomas, who must believe *without* seeing. We lack firsthand or even secondhand witnesses, except in what they have written which has survived for us. But we are to believe. In a sense we are caught in the dilemma of the people in Joshua's day and after, who were to continue to rejoice in freedom from Egypt though they did not remember receiving it. We are to continue in the freedom Christ has brought, though we neither have heard him preach

or seen him risen. And we are to go into the land and tell of the glories of the Lord.

Given how often we try to see *ourselves* in biblical figures, pondering how biblical stories relate to our hearts, it may be understandable if some have gotten rather sensitive about this passage. Does it say something *good* about us? It is not a comfortable ending. More than one person has put their hand to writing a “better” ending – some are, at least, more upbeat.

The Lesson Text on this occasion is more than one text – manuscripts have four. We have a “shorter ending” and a “longer ending”, and then there is the “freer” addition to the “longer” ending, and there is a version which strings together the “shorter” and then the “longer” endings. Perhaps none of these is by Mark, but they show us how he has been read.

Lesson Text: all that follows Mark 16:8

Mark 16:9 (the “shorter ending”)

⁹ And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

Mark 16:9-20 (the “longer ending”)

⁹ Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

¹⁰ She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. ¹¹ When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.

¹² After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. ¹³ They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either.

¹⁴ Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining *at the table*; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. ¹⁵ And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

¹⁹ So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received 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 word by the signs that followed.

the “freer ending” (inserted after verse 14 – known in the fourth century)
And they excused themselves, saying, “This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits. Therefore reveal your righteousness now” – thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, “The term of years of Satan’s power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, that they may inherit the spiritual and imperishable glory of righteousness that is in heaven.”
(the text of the “freer ending” is from *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*, edited by Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., p. 209.)

Bible Learning

Let’s be Practical

Mark has filled his Gospel with references to immediacy, and his audience is set up to expect simply that in Mark 16: for the women to “immediately” follow through on what they have been told. They do not. They are presented as leaving the world hanging – they know the most important fact in the world and tell no one. Who is going to accept that? So the “shorter” ending simply has the women “promptly” follow through, despite that linking very poorly with verse 8.

On a basic level, we expect the Bible to convince people of the truth, and we think the truth sounds better when it is its most upbeat. We don’t *want* a Gospel to end on a “down” note.

“Commentary Track”

Many times we might wish for a “commentary track” to play alongside our reading of the Bible, like we can get with movies. I don’t mean simply a “commentary” (many of those are available). We want behind-the-scenes explanations. That desire for more insight applies not only with our questions about the events of the story (“Where was Jesus at that time of the morning? Why didn’t Jesus meet the women at the tomb?”) but about how the story is relayed (“Why use an ending that would never make it past a focus group?” “Should I imagine this as the screen ‘fading to black’?”).

We may also wish Mark had provided us more at the end of his Gospel – particularly something more positive. But, as one author commented, Mark is willing to leave a story with “unanswered questions, with an abrupt, open ending” (as at Mark 6:52, for another example). Mark is not the only example in the Bible. It has been compared to the book of Jonah, which

ends with God having acted but leaves the reader to wonder what the response will be. Similarly the parable of the prodigal son doesn't comment on the response of the son to the words of the father. (Joel F. Williams, "Literary Approaches to the End of Mark's Gospel", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1999, p. 25, 26).

Fan Fiction

But people reading the Gospel continued to ask themselves "Why would Mark stop here?" We know from elsewhere that the women *do* tell what they have learned of. So extra endings were written by some who preferred other versions of the story. Maybe we *want* a "commentary track", but we *got* something more like efforts at "fan fiction" – attempts to extend the story beyond what the author actually provided. Sometimes such efforts take the route of trying to "fix" a work when its fan base thinks the author got it wrong, and it looks like that is what happened here.

But we need to accept the story for what it is, facing our own discomfort with it and trusting that serving God is more important than our comfort. Maybe the ending we need to provide is not in a few tacked on written words, perhaps it is not even in the words we *speak* in response, but in the complexities and steadfastness of our lives as we choose to reject for ourselves the possible ending Mark holds out in 16:8 (fearful silence).

Sources

Of the four endings, the "longer ending", used in the King James Version, probably is the most satisfactory to us. *Gospel Parallels: A Comparison of the Synoptic Gospels*, edited by Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., describes what may be its sources, or at least its parallels:

- Mark 16:9-11 ties to John 20:11-18;
- Mark 16:12-13 ties to Luke 24:13-35;
- Mark 16:14 ties to John 20:19-23;
- Mark 16:14-16 ties to Matthew 28:16-20;
- Mark 16:19 ties to Luke 24:50-51.

Also verse 9 describes Mary Magdalene with a detail in Luke 8:2 (and treats her like she wasn't already in the story); and verses 17-18 call to mind Acts (the line about lifting serpents might draw on Acts 28:3-6). The comment about drinking poison is the one that seems the most odd.

One other difference with the "longer ending" really stands out. It changes Jesus' "last words" in the book from his cry at 15:34 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?") to the encouraging talk in 16:15-18.

Bible Application

We don't like having a resurrection story without an appearance by the resurrected one, and without any clear impact of that event. But that may all too often be where we are now. It is for us to act on who Jesus is. If we won't deal with the challenge, however ambiguous, which Mark provides, how will we deal with the outright doubt and even mockery which the world may offer? Take up the challenge and serve the Lord. And, while you are at it, be prepared for the seeming oddities which scripture sometimes puts in our path. We will not understand it all until we meet the one who understood us from the beginning. And that is o.k.

The tacked on endings assume that the focus of the gospel's ending must be a meeting with the resurrected one, and that Mark simply hasn't provided enough information about it yet. But everything has been happening, just as Jesus said it would.

“There is every reason to believe that the rest of his promises will be fulfilled: James and John will drink from the cup; the disciples will give testimony; the gospel will be preached to all the Gentiles. Jesus will be enthroned at God's right hand and will one day come with the clouds of heaven so that ‘all will see’ and will send his angels to gather the elect from the four winds.”

(Donald H. Juel, *Mark*, in the Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament series.) The trust that these promises will be fulfilled is not based on human effort, and neither is the end of the story. “The story is not over and will not be until Jesus returns.” (Juel).

Life Response

We are in the story too. We are among those who must believe without seeing, but we have the aid of the Spirit with which to do so. We are told that now *we* are Christ's body in the world. How will we demonstrate to others, who have yet to believe, that Christ is risen? It will not happen because of human cleverness or inventiveness, or simply by human effort, but by faith in the Son of God and the power that *can* and *will* raise the dead – the power that enables faith in words that, for others, do not make sense.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you imagine about the people who wrote the added endings (their situations, their motives)?
2. What parts of the Bible do you most wish had commentary tracks?
3. What parts of the Bible would most tempt you to “fix” them, and how?

Entry of Judgment

Golden Text: They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, (Mark 10:32; NRSV)

Key Thought:

Jesus comes in judgment of Israel and mourns over the city of Jerusalem because of the people's unbelief and rejection of God's Son and Messiah.

Lesson Text: Mark 11:1-14 (NRSV)

¹ When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.

⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" ¹¹ Then 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.

¹² On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

Introduction

Contrary to popular church teaching, the so-called "Triumphal Entry" of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is actually a record of two entries. The first is recorded here in Mark, and refers to judgment of Israel (it is also recorded in Luke and John). The second entry on our "Palm Sunday" is one

of blessing, it has differences of sequences and events; it is recorded in Matthew. Why are two entries recorded, and what is God showing us in them? These are important questions and we should use our best biblical research skills to find the answers.

Bible Learning

Jesus and his apostles and disciples are in Jericho when Jesus says they will go to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. The apostles are afraid because of what they think will happen there, and the other followers are astonished that he would choose to go there. The Pharisees and Sadducees have decided that Jesus is “Public Enemy Number One” and are conspiring to kill him, as well as Lazarus, to eliminate the threat Jesus presents to their rulership. They have made it plain that if Jesus comes to Jerusalem for the Passover feast they will kill him.

John 11:55-57 (NRSV) ⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?” ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Jesus surprises all his followers by deciding to go to Jerusalem for Passover, and he confounds the Pharisees and rulers by daring to come into their realm of influence. The Law called for the men of Israel to come to the Temple in Jerusalem three times during the year. The first was the Celebration of Passover, in the spring. It commemorated the passing over of death in Egypt and was a reminder to the nation that God chose them by parting the Red Sea and saving the Hebrew people from certain death. The second time of gathering in Jerusalem was Pentecost, 50 days after Passover. Pentecost celebrates the harvest of the land in its bounty of grain and other things God had given to the people. The third convocation of the men of Israel was the feast of Booths or Tabernacles, held in the Fall, it included celebrations of the vineyard harvest and also the Day of Atonement.

The Jewish gatherings, with their timing and activities, are all related to Jesus Christ. They also point to future events that will compass the same themes of God’s dealings with men. Jesus Christ is God’s chosen Lamb and will fulfill the Passover once and forever. Jesus Christ is the first fruits of the harvest which is gathered to God of the peoples of the earth. He is

represented by the sacrificial goat of the Day of Atonement who has the sins of the people laid upon him. The Feast of Booths remembers the feeding of the nation of Israel in the wilderness and the care of the God who loves them. All of these themes are central to the understanding of the Christ who died for us and for the future of those that God has chosen for Himself.

Jesus comes up the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, which goes right past the home of his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany less than two miles from Jerusalem. He stays at their house during that week and goes the short distance to Jerusalem each day until the night of his arrest. The gospel records of Mark, Luke and John all record the event of his visit with varied but supporting details.

The gospel of Luke gives us some additional information about what happens when Jesus gets to the city. In Mark it says that he looks around and then leaves. In Luke we find that he weeps over the city and passes judgment on Jerusalem for not receiving him as the Son of God and Messiah.

Luke 19:37-44 (NRSV) ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” ⁴¹ As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

John adds additional information about the people and how they react to Jesus coming to Jerusalem. Some praise him, many want to make him king, others despise him and look to eliminate him as a political move. The Pharisees see his coming to Jerusalem as a great threat to their relationship with the Roman rulers and their accommodation with that rule. They are afraid that Jesus will call for an uprising and cause all the Jews to be attacked by the Romans and their soldiers.

John 12:9-19 (NRSV) ⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus. ¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!” ¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” ¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸ It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

The passage is filled with wonderful clues about the meaning in what is going on. Jesus sent disciples to get a donkey’s colt. It has been taught many times that the men found a colt and somehow convinced its owners to let them take it to Jesus by simply saying “the Lord has need of it”. At that time people maintained animals which were dedicated to God’s use, typically kept in a stable some distance from the city. These animals could be used by anyone who needed them for God’s service. The phrasing “had never been any man’s” or “had never been ridden,” means the animal had never been owned by someone who put it to work for personal purposes. It may also be that no one before Christ had rode on this colt. I think that it showed Christ’s purpose for riding into Jerusalem, like an Old Testament judge of Israel riding into a city, having been sent there to judge (Judges 5:10; 10:3-4 and 12:13-14).

The significance of the coming in judgment of Christ is further seen in the book of Revelation where he comes to the earth riding on a white horse in judgment of all that is against God and His purpose. His judgment of Israel, that the nation is found lacking, can further be seen in Mark 11:14 when he curses a fig tree (representing Israel) for having no fruit. You might ask why Jesus would give this judgment when the disciples did not expect fruit. In springtime we wouldn’t expect to find fruit on peach trees or cherry trees. But we would expect to find buds, which ripen into the fruit. If one of my apple trees has no buds in the late spring, perhaps due to frost or disease,

I can know I will harvest no apples from it later in the growing season. Christ knew that the fig tree he condemned, which had no buds, would have no fruit. In the end a “fruit” tree with no fruit would be cut down and used for firewood. We see a less drastic figure in Romans 11:17-21, where Paul says that some natural branches from the tree of Israel had been replaced with the grafting in of Gentile limbs.

The gospel of John also gives us the timing of this trip into Jerusalem. In John 12 the Word shows that the day was the fifth day before the start of Passover.

John 12:1-2, 12 (KJV) ¹ Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. ² There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. . . . ¹² On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

Passover begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month Nissan; the lamb is chosen on the tenth of Nissan and killed on the afternoon of the 14th of the month. If we count backwards from the record this day is five days before the Passover and Jesus is at the home of his friends Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Remember that the Hebrew day begins at sunset, not midnight like we reckon time. Mary poured ointment on the feet of Jesus at suppertime, after sunset, at the start of the tenth day of the month. That is when the Lamb of God is chosen from among the flock, perfect, without blemish, to sacrifice for the sins of the people. On the day the lambs were chosen, the very Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world was set apart by God. He is anointed, chosen for the things that will come.

Bible Application

On the surface this record of Christ’s coming to Jerusalem seems straightforward and direct, but study shows us its great depths and that at first we scarcely saw the picture. God has a purpose for everything He does and says; nothing will go without fulfillment in its proper time and place. And there is significance in everything that God has Jesus do. We need to have confidence as His children to go to Him and become close as we gain understanding of His great love for us. Literally God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, the Lamb of God sacrificed for you and for me.

Future events include the coming of Christ in judgment of the world, and for the blessing of the nations. The relationships of the comings of Messiah to Jerusalem and the future events are beyond the scope of today's lesson but the records are there for the biblical student to study out.

Life Response

The response of people to his entrance is to put their garments down for him to walk or ride on, the traditional homage paid to a mighty conqueror or a great leader. *Hosanna* is literally "God Save Us", and the palm leaves are symbolic of the nation of Israel. They are praising him and calling on him to become the political leader of the nation. The Pharisees and Sadducees only want to kill him and remove a threat to their position and wealth. The nation wants the works of Christ and the removal of Roman rule, but the nation praising him today will turn against him and crucify him only a few days in the future. God's judgment is against their unbelief and their non-acceptance of him as their lord and Messiah. The judgment of God then, which continues to our time, is that we must personally accept Jesus Christ as our lord and savior and give our hearts to the God who saves us. This is a judgment of the heart of each man or woman, not of our actions or outward appearances.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the basis of our relationships with God and His Son and how do we walk in accord with the purposes of God for our lives?
2. What does God base His judgment of the world on?
3. How do we change our thinking to see that God wants our hearts to be right with Him?

The Authority of Jesus

The times are tough.

How tough? Take a look at the weather. Start with the damage from spring storms. Some people have lost everything.

How tough? The economy has spiraled downward. Many are out of work, and our federal and state governments cannot keep up with the need for help. The housing market still struggles to leave behind short sales. Too many homes remain under water in value.

But things won't feel so tough if you are independently wealthy, don't need to work, have a house which is paid off, and can still trade in your car, go anywhere you wish, and feed yourself well.

Consider the "tough" times Israel had during Jesus' earthly ministry. Controlled by an outside power, the tiny nation of Jews found no one among its leaders to throw off the Roman yoke. Its religion was ruled by wealthy but infighting sects, the common people got no help in their life of faith. A large minority of the population suffered from strange physical and mental ailments. The working class was no better than the slave class, poverty was rampant, and hope waned. But the upper crust didn't feel all that.

How did Jesus handle "tough" times?

Lesson Text: Mark 11:15-33 (GNT)

¹⁵ When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple and began to drive out all those who were buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the stools of those who sold pigeons, ¹⁶ and he would not let anyone carry anything through the Temple courtyards. ¹⁷ He then taught the people: "It is written in the Scriptures that God said, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations.' But you have turned it into a hideout for thieves!" ¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the Law heard of this, so they began looking for some way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. ¹⁹ When evening came, Jesus and his disciples left the city.

²⁰ Early next morning, as they walked along the road, they saw the fig tree. It was dead all the way down to its roots. ²¹ Peter remembered what had happened and said to Jesus, "Look, Teacher, the fig tree you cursed has died!" ²² Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ I assure you that whoever tells this hill to get up and throw itself in the sea and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴ For this reason I tell you: When you pray and ask for something,

believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for. ²⁵ And when you stand and pray, forgive anything you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done.” ²⁷ They arrived once again in Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders came to him ²⁸ and asked him, “What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you such right?” ²⁹ Jesus answered them, “I will ask you just one question, and if you give me an answer, I will tell you what right I have to do these things. ³⁰ Tell me, where did John’s right to baptize come from: was it from God or from human beings?” ³¹ They started to argue among themselves: “What shall we say? If we answer, ‘From God,’ he will say, ‘Why, then, did you not believe John?’” ³² But if we say, “From human beings . . .” (They were afraid of the people, because everyone was convinced that John had been a prophet.) ³³ So their answer to Jesus was, “We don’t know.” Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you, then, by what right I do these things.”

Bible Learning

Challenge corruption head-on

The Temple was a beautiful complex. Some 20 years before Jesus’ birth King Herod the Great set out to build a magnificent Temple, in place of the building put up in the time of Zerubbabel (about 500 years earlier). He had to negotiate this demolition / building project with Israel’s religious leaders. Herod brought in a massive amount of materials, and enlarged Mount Moriah to accommodate the complex. The main building was done before his death in 4 B.C., but parts of the project were ongoing for years after Jesus’ crucifixion. In spite of how you felt about this political despot, you had to appreciate the Temple’s grandeur.

People were glad to come to the Temple, and they didn’t even have to bring sacrifices with them. You could buy anything you needed; folks had pigeons and turtle doves right there to purchase. Maybe the prices were exorbitant, and of course you heard whispers about graft and corruption, but everything was conveniently located.

That is, except when the Rabbi Jesus cleaned it up. He slammed over their display cases, chased the birds away, and drove those spiritual bandits right out of the Temple. All the while he quoted one of the prophets, accusing them of converting God’s prayer house into a big box store!

Charge right into hypocrisy

Now the seventy elders in charge of religion in Judea didn’t like how Jesus blatantly confronted their hypocritical scam. They couldn’t agree on

much of any interpretation of the Jewish laws (there were Pharisees bending the Scriptures to satisfy greed, and Sadducees rejecting all spirituality), but they agreed about getting rid of this Jesus. He was too disruptive to their status quo. And for good reason: all the Jewish world was attracted to him. Jesus healed people, met folks where they hurt, demonstrated God's compassion, and changed lives. For these elders, all that was too much. Their religion wasn't about such things. It was about establishing control, taking from the people of faith, not giving to their needs, and managing self-serving programs.

Create a new order of authority

What had been the purpose of Jesus cursing the fig tree? We could make a case that he was venting his anger at the establishment, demanding something contrary to nature (it was not the time for the fig harvest), or demonstrating what it means to live by faith. But it's more likely he was establishing his authority in the minds of his closest followers, the 12 disciples. God was granting him control over nature itself. The natural laws that govern the times and seasons were bent to the Master's authority. That being true, the disciples now learned his authority over them, the religious leaders, or any earthly power.

With that authority now a "given," Jesus taught the 12 the power of prayer. The days to come would bring huge challenges. Those who spoke for Jesus spreading the gospel throughout the Roman world would have civil and religious powers stand in their way – but a word of prayer would remove such barriers. The name of Jesus on the Apostles' lips guaranteed a way through, allowing the gospel to change lives. Guilt and sin would be forgiven, faith and love and hope would take over.

Confound questions and doubts

When the powers that be had their day in court, their true nature was revealed. Their questions about the Lord's authority showed their true motive, to preserve their hypocritical control of everyday Jewish life. When Jesus turned the question on themselves they failed to face the truth. Their refusal to answer his question showed that they had no standing either before God or the people. In the eyes of all who were present, Jesus had already established his authority with both God and the people.

Close to home

Think again about Jesus establishing his authority over all other authority, including nature. He demonstrated this to his followers, the Apostles, and to the religious authorities. Those who accepted his authority

changed the world. Those who rejected him and his authority lost everything.

While we are not apostles, we are his followers. What does his authority mean to us today?

Suppose your junior high relative (daughter or granddaughter) returns home from school to report that the home room teacher publicly scolded a student for bowing his head, praying before the opening bell of the day. Should she:

- Privately support the student the next day
- Bow her head the next day before opening bell
- Publicly gather support for others to join her in bowing their heads the next day
- Do nothing
- Do something else to show support

Your neighbors make a lot of fuss about people of faith, indicating their disapproval with snide remarks and crude jokes. You should:

- Ask questions to determine why this is happening
- Make clear your personal faith with strong statements, explaining your answers with Scripture
- Use nonverbal and dismissive gestures when this happens
- Hear them out, then explain how you feel without making judgments
- Respond in some other way

There's a special event happening at your church (benefit dinner/concert, evangelistic services, ice cream social, etc.) – how will you “advertise” it?

- Put up flyers in local businesses
- Hand out flyers personally
- Discuss the event everywhere you go
- Draw specific persons aside to personally tell them about the event
- Some other way

Jesus has changed your life dramatically recently and you want to tell others about his power and authority. You will:

- Call specific attention to the change with everyone you talk to
- Urge others to have the same life change you have had
- Select persons with which you can share your life change
- Write your story for a local media outlet
- Another activity

Recently one of your friends talked about how tough the times are today.
You should:

Concur

Say, “Yes, but . . .”, then recall tougher times in the past and those we expect ahead

Talk about who will make changes in our life in spite of tough times

Talk about the points made in this lesson

Something else . . .

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Jesus cleanse the Temple?
2. Why did he curse the fig tree?
3. What mountain would you like Jesus to remove into the sea?
4. What Scripture passages help you understand what is going on in today’s lesson?
5. What is the deeper reason why Jesus refused to answer the question of his authority?
6. What are some answers to our tough times?
7. What is one thing you learned from today’s lesson?
8. How will you use your life to make a difference because of this lesson?

Jesus Teaches His Adversaries

Golden Text: Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Mark 12:17)

Key Thought: God’s people must learn to control wealth, not vice versa.

Lesson Text: Mark 12:1-17 (NASB)

¹ And He began to speak to them in parables: “A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. ² “At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. ³ “They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ “Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. ⁵ “And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. ⁶ “He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ “But those vine-growers said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ ⁸ “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 vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ “Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER STONE; ¹¹ THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES ‘?’

¹² And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

¹³ Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. ¹⁴ They came and said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? ¹⁵ “Shall we pay or shall we not pay?”

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.” ¹⁶ They brought one. And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” And they said to Him, “Caesar’s.” ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him.

Introduction

Wealth and the control it brings are big motivators for mankind; Paul warned Timothy that “the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). This may be why the Bible contains so much about money. Greg Laurie, in his article “Money and Motives” (oneplace.com), says,

It is worth noting that money is such an important topic in the Bible that it is the main subject of nearly half of the parables Jesus told. In addition, one in every seven verses in the New Testament deals with this topic The Bible offers . . . more than 2,000 verses on money In fact, 15 percent of everything Jesus ever taught was on the topic of money and possessions.

Too often money controls us rather than the other way around. Our parable today is a good example of what not to do, especially as it relates to our attitude toward God and our eternal destiny.

Bible Learning

Jesus is nearing the end of his earthly ministry. He just entered Jerusalem triumphantly and in chapter 13 will give his greatest message of warning to his disciples about what to expect before he returns to rule planet earth. He is within a few days of his crucifixion. He knows his time is near (John 12:27). The things Jesus tells his disciples in this week he wants them to truly understand.

1 He began to speak to them in parables. The parable we read here ties to the distant past, the present and the future. It highlights how Israel as a nation treated God’s prophets, including Jesus. God’s judgment on wicked behavior, with its eternal effect, ends the parable.

Jesus begins by describing an agricultural scene. **A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.** The plantation owner represents Yahweh God. God is in control of the affairs of His world, like the owner determines what to do with the land and how to run his affairs. The landowner has wealth to hire workers. These vine-growers represent the nation of Israel, in particular those who rejected God’s sovereignty. Their attitude toward God is at the heart of why Jesus told this parable.

As one would expect, **2 at the harvest time, he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers.** The parable uses the slave to represent God sending a prophet to His people. The words of God’s prophets fill a major part of the Bible. Often their messages condemned Israel for rebellious behavior, and

most of them were not received well. Matching this fact the parable continues, **3 They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.** The attitude of the land tenants, the Israelites, toward the landowner, Yahweh God, was becoming quite clear. Even Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, was verbally challenged and abused throughout his service. This scene was repeated often. **4 Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others.** We can accept that rebellious Israel is representative of the people of the world in general as regards their treatment of God and His word. Obstinate people are not happy being told by an “absent” God how they should live their lives. Since God is not visibly present or displaying His powerful hand the rebellious tend to ignore what His prophets warn. Words of warning from preachers just don’t hold the attention of people who know how they want to live out their lives.

As portrayed in the parable the landowner believed he held the trump card, his son. The others he had sent were only servants. They were not respected because they were viewed as not carrying the same weight as the landowner. But that could not be true of the landowner’s own flesh and blood, his son, who they would have to contend with as heir of the property. But the servants tending the vines were much more belligerent than the landowner surmised. So the landowner **6 had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 7 But those vine-growers said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ 8 They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.** The servants simply saw the landowner’s heir as the end of the line of ownership of the land. They thought that without a visibly present owner they could forcibly take control of the land for themselves. Again, the land represents the value of the Israelites’ inheritance, but by extension the Israelites represent the world as a whole, the whole world order of things. So as Israel rejected its God in order to follow their own ways, so too do the people of this world.

The question then becomes, **9 what will the owner of the vineyard do?** What real power does this absent landowner have to restore control and order to his domain? Was his power drained by the loss of his servants and his son? Jesus makes it clear that the landowner is not powerless, in spite of what the land tenants believed, he still has more than sufficient power to inflict justice and **He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others.** This reaction the land tenants did not expect or they would not have thought to treat the servants and the son as they did. This is God inflicting His justice in the last judgment.

It was to “the chief priests, and scribes, and elders” of the Jews that Jesus addressed this parable, because immediately before they had challenged his authority (Mark 11:27-33). They knew what he meant. And to make his message quite clear Jesus spoke to them more directly saying, **10 “Have you not even read this Scripture : ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER STONE; 11 THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?’”** They could hardly stand to listen to his words. They knew he was telling them that the one saying these words was revealing that they would reject him, but Yahweh God would exalt Jesus above them all. This they could not bear, **12 and they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.** Soon after this event these same chief priests and scribes plotted to capture Jesus and put him to death (Mark 14:1), going along with their role in the parable.

More Contesting With His Adversaries

Their first attempt at entrapment came soon after Jesus told the parable of the marriage feast, another parable about end time judgment (Matt. 22:1-14). **13 They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement.** This is the very kind of reaction to his teachings that Jesus warned about in the parable reviewed earlier. Jesus is being hounded, either to discourage him and chase him from town or seeking to get him into trouble so they can lock him away or accuse him of a mortal crime and put him to death.

Here is the nature of their attempt to entrap Jesus. **14 They came and said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth.”** First they try to make him believe they are on his side, then they sock it to him. **Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? 15 “Shall we pay or shall we not pay?”** These geezers believed they had crafted the ultimate trap. They wanted Jesus to say “yes” or “no”. The first answer would have the general Jewish population turn against him as a Roman sympathizer. But saying “no” will cause the Roman authorities to treat him as a traitor.

Jesus is quick to see their trap. **But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.”** So they did as he asked. And he pointed to the image on the coin **16 and He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”** And they said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Now Jesus forced his antagonists into his own entrapment. They stated clearly that it was Caesar’s image on Caesar’s coin. To which Jesus then wisely replied, **17 “Render to Caesar the things that are**

Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” They could not use this response to accuse Jesus of siding against the Jews, who revered Yahweh God, nor to charge him with treason against the Roman government. **They were amazed at Him** as they watched Jesus stroll away.

Bible Application

The men who were Jesus’ chief adversaries believed they greatly honored Abraham, Moses, and all the prophets – but they stubbornly resisted the things of God. They acted like the Jewish rebels before them and opposed Jesus, God’s prophet like unto Moses. They believed that their traditions held much greater weight and importance than the words of this poorly dressed and ignorant itinerant preacher.

Too often Christian preachers focus on how to get what people want out of life. Following the advice of these “me”-focused messages may indeed help us get what we want out of life, but we need God-focused messages. In our lives are limited; once we have done all and gained all, what remains?

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders sought mainly what this life could give them, at the expense of their fellow Jews. They enjoyed this world’s goods only until their last breath. What then?

Life Response

Our lives show how we respond to the God of creation. Too many resist what God offers as His treasures because they value other things. Some can only see wealth and what it offers them: lush meadows beside tree-lined lakes, sunny Caribbean cruises, and quiet time-share resorts. These are sought as bringing fulfillment to life. But these are not the things that interest God in this life. They may be treats to enjoy occasionally, but when they become the main pursuit of life they interfere with God’s real plans. When we would rather pursue wealth and all that it can give us we overlook the gifts of love and compassion for others. God desires that we learn and practice these godly traits. They are important benefits from God for our daily lives and our salvation. Martin Luther said, “There are three conversions a person needs to experience: The conversion of the head, the conversion of the heart, and the conversion of the pocketbook.” Even some who concentrate on the first two have the third as their downfall. “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you” (Matt. 5:31).

Self-deceived Sadducees

Golden Text: Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? (Mark 12:24)

Key Thought: The true understanding of our salvation and godly way of life must rest on a true understanding of the teachings of God's word.

Lesson Text: Mark 12:18–27 (NASB)

¹⁸ Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, ¹⁹ “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN’S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. ²⁰ “There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. ²¹ “The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; ²² and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. ²³ “In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had married her.”

²⁴ Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or 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 “But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning 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 the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.”

Introduction

What person, when confronted with an idea, is able to take an honest second look at personal beliefs, analyzing old and new thoughts clearly to uncover the truth? It can happen, but frequently our vision is blurred by the benefits we already reap from our current beliefs regardless how solid the arguments are for a new idea.

The Sadducees strongly resisted believing in bodily resurrection. They knew of reports that Jesus had raised the dead, but they could not bring themselves to accept them. Even when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, not far from Jerusalem, they would not believe. Even when Jesus rose from

the dead the Sadducees, the party of the chief priests, tried to cover up the truth of the climactic event (Matt. 28:11-15). Such blindness leads not only to cherishing false beliefs but to ridiculing and defaming what is true. Such blindness exists widely, both inside and outside the Christian community. It is our duty to search out truth honestly and live by it.

Bible Learning

Last week’s lesson showed the antagonistic behavior of the chief priests, scribes and elders. Some of these were of the group known as Sadducees, and loved wealth and power. They controlled the office of high priest, but didn’t have much interest in spiritual things. They didn’t believe in spirits or angels or bodily resurrection (Acts 23:8). They lived only for this life.

In this scene they send some of their number to attempt to trap Jesus into looking like a fool for teaching future bodily resurrection. **18 Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him.** Their scheme depended on a teaching in the law that expected a blood brother to help raise an heir through his dead brother’s wife (Deut. 25:5). That is now commonly called the levirate (Latin – husband’s brother) rule.

Admittedly their scheme is well contrived; the plot unfolds in verses 19-23. It depends on a possibility which is clearly not the usual situation of one man providing an heir for one brother.

The devious purpose for painting such an odd scene is revealed by their question to Jesus. **23 “In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had married her.”** Which brother is to live with the woman as her husband? If Jesus answers that she remains married to the first brother, what of the other six? And what if Jesus says they are all husbands to her? The Old Testament involved men married to multiple women, even if the Jews of his day still accepted that the text presents no groundwork for the opposite system. Will Jesus support tradition, and what tradition would he be able to support?

24 Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?” He has the attention of these opponents of resurrection now. They consider that it could create just such a situation as they proposed, so how are they mistaken? They do not understand the nature of the resurrection and what God is able to do, by His power.

In reply Jesus says, **25 “When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”** Obviously, Jesus believes in angels, even though the Sadducees do not. And he says that following the resurrection, which Jesus also believes in, those

so raised neither marry nor are given in marriage – as is the state of the angels. They live forever, and create no new angels to replace themselves. And that is the very promise God makes to believers, for those who accept that Jesus was raised from the dead, and his body was changed to an immortal nature to demonstrate the power of God. He offers believers the same at our resurrection from the dead. Since the Sadducees did not believe this they couldn't anticipate Jesus' response to their contrived dilemma. They were greatly mistaken about the condition of the human immortal body in the kingdom of God.

But Jesus does not leave off his teaching at this point. He is prepared to go further. **26 “But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning 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 the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.”** The Sadducees respected the Pentateuch and the great prophet Moses and so Jesus offers them a quote they will not reject (tied to the great covenant with God that the people valued so much). Jesus makes the point that Yahweh God does not make promises that cannot be fulfilled after those to whom the promises were made are dead. God intends to fulfill His promises to the letter. Thus Abraham could believe Isaac, his one and only son, would be the fulfillment of God's promise of a living son who would begin the population of a great nation, even though Abraham was ordered to put him to death as a sacrifice. Abraham “considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received [Isaac] back as a type” (Heb. 11:19). Simply to accept God's promise to Abraham is, by extension, to accept the resurrection of the dead. In their lack of belief in the resurrection of the dead the Sadducees were greatly mistaken.

Luke's account of this visit by the Sadducees has the phrase “for all live to Him” (Luke 20:38) following the words, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” This enhances the sense of God's ability to raise the dead. No life has entirely ended yet. Perhaps this caused some Sadducees great consternation, considering that it opened the door for a meeting with God later regarding their choice to live life to the hilt and seek every means to gain power and wealth. Most, however, went on with their lives as before, as evidenced by their part in arranging Jesus' arrest and condemnation at trial.

Luke also has Jesus say “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die any more, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:34-36). Immortality is the sole

innate nature of God and is to become the nature of those God deems “worthy to attain to that age,” of God’s eternal kingdom.

Bible Application

Two lessons arise from this event. The first concerns the reality of the resurrection of the body. Jesus proves from scripture that Yahweh is the God of the living. Even the dead patriarchs live to God. His plan to raise them from the dead is certain, and the nature of their resurrection body will be such that they will never die again. They will be immortal as Yahweh God is immortal.

Secondly, we learn that knowing truth is important for those who will share in God’s plan for man. Resisting the truth can be hazardous to one’s spiritual health. The Sadducees resisted belief in bodily resurrection and were willing to kill God’s Son in order to hold on to their beliefs and defy God’s truth. We need to accept God’s truth in His Word and be willing to accept what He has revealed, not fight Him and His plan.

Life Response

Be diligent to search out the truth contained in God’s Word. Do not merely accept what a preacher or Bible student says is truth if it cannot be shown to be clearly presented in the Bible. If it is only a tradition among men, run from those who claim that you must believe it on pain of losing your eternal life. Such claims are a clear warning that their teaching is not from God. Read the scriptures to determine for yourself what they teach. God has made them very clear. You can do it.

In addition, one Bible truth is clearly presented in our lesson text. Jesus taught that bodily resurrection is truth and in fact it is the means by which Yahweh God is going to save believers from mortality and death. God raised Jesus from the dead to prove this very truth (Luke 24:1-7). Should we die before Jesus returns to this earth, God has promised that at the coming of Jesus we who do believe this truth will be raised from the dead (1 Thess. 4:16, 17) and changed from a mortal physical body to an immortal nature (1 Cor. 15:51-54). In that state we will never die again. We can rest our hope solidly on this truth.

Truths to Emphasize

1. Holding on to traditions in contradiction to truth from God’s Word leads to resisting the ways of God, fighting God and denying His way of salvation.
2. Jesus came to bear witness to God’s truth.
3. Bodily resurrection is the only Bible teaching for salvation from death.

Steps Toward the Kingdom of God

Lesson Text: Mark 12:28-44 (NKJV)

²⁸ Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?”

²⁹ Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments *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, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This *is* the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like *it*, *is* this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

³² So the scribe said to Him, “Well *said*, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. ³³ And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

But after that no one dared question Him.

³⁵ Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, “How *is it* that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? ³⁶ For David himself said by the Holy Spirit:

‘The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’

³⁷ Therefore David himself calls Him ‘Lord’; how is He *then* his Son?”

And the common people heard Him gladly.

³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.” ⁴¹ Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

Introduction

Many of the Jews of Jesus' day, like many of their ancestors, believed in the God of Jacob but had not put their hearts with God. Jesus compared his fellow Jews to the leaders of Isaiah's time. He chided the scribes and Pharisees, "Why do you also transgress the commandments of God with your traditions? . . . Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" [Matthew 15:1-10; Isaiah 29:13; read Isaiah 28 with 29]. In the last week of his ministry Jesus presented this message even more forcefully. He was also aware of those in Israel who kept faith in their God. Mark reported Jesus' interaction with his brethren, leader and ordinary, rich and poor, faithful and unfaithful. When Jesus spoke privately to his disciples, he continued to show his concern for Israel's relationship with their God.

Bible Learning

Verse 28 "Which is the first commandment of all?" The man who was pressing Jesus was a scribe, a copier of the Law. He was well aware of the 'first commandment' in Exodus 20:2, "I am the LORD your God". But Jesus quoted the first commandment Moses gave the people after he recounted the commandments which Jehovah spoke directly to Israel (Deuteronomy 6:1-9, "Hear, O Israel: YHVH our God, YHVH is one."). **"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."** The "first commandment" honored the God of Israel (Jacob) who was also the God of Jesus. The text is from the Shema, which literally said to Israel, "Hear."

Verse 29 "Hear, O Israel" Jesus taught that knowing Jehovah (YeHoVaH) was not enough for Israel. Complete devotion to God must not include any other god. Though called gods ("elohiym" or "mighty ones"), the leaders of Israel, including the kings, were never regarded as God, or worshiped. Rather, they were "the sons of the living God" (Hosea 1:10). They were, literally, "mighty ones" in the service of their God (read Psalm 45 with 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 29). Misunderstanding the role of God's Messiah ("Christ" in the New Testament) led to rabbinic confusion and upset when they misunderstood Jesus' claim that God was his Father. The Jews, however, let their teachers (rabbis) lead them away from the first commandment to "hear" their God and to "love" YHVH their God with their complete being.

Verse 29 “love the LORD your God with . . .” Jesus described love with the entire person: heart, soul, mind, and strength all represent YOU. That figure of speech is called synecdoche – parts represent the whole. Love is an action word which involves the complete person. By failing to give God what they should, the Jews had broken “the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:38). Within 40 years, God punished the Jews for not loving their God with all their being.

Jesus answered the scribe according to the Law of Moses. But Jesus spoke of something more that his hearers did not understand, but would be able to understand after his resurrection and ascension, the New Covenant. Jesus shortly afterward explained what “love the LORD your God” was all about, the night before his death (see John 15:9-17). Jesus showed loving God with his complete being, he expressed it in unselfish obedience to his God and in service to others even unto death. He fulfilled the Law of Moses and he went beyond the Law of Moses. And he asked no less of his brothers and sisters than what he gave of himself.

Verse 34 you are not far from the kingdom of God. The scribe affirmed Jesus’ understanding of the commandment. He, too, understood “there is one God, and there is no other but He” (v. 32). He also affirmed what Jesus stated, that the second commandment was “love one’s neighbor as oneself.” It is important to note that this scribe agreed with Jesus that to love God and man “is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Matthew 22:40 says Jesus added to his first response, “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” An accurate understanding of Moses, that is, of the Law of God given at Sinai, is that it was good, a law of love; both Jesus and the scribe agreed. Paul, himself an expert in the Law, agreed: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments [five are cited] . . . , and if there are any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom. 13:8-10). The scribe was close to understanding Jesus’ message. But he, with most of Israel, did not yet understand that Jesus was the Christ, and that Christ was the son of God.

Verse 35 How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? Jesus was not in disagreement with the scribes about this, rather he wanted to point out that they had missed what David said about God’s “son” in his psalms. Jesus based his question on Psalm 110:1, “Jehovah said unto my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand’” The scribes should have understood this Psalm of David, along with Psalms 2 and 89, which describe David’s

son as Jehovah's son. Therefore, David said the Christ would be the son of God as well as the son of David. Even in God's covenant with David, Jehovah said, "I will be his father, and he will be my son." Yes, "Christ" means God's anointed one, but the Christ would be the son of God and the son of David. This was also God's word to Mary (Luke 1:30-35) and to Joseph (Matt. 1:18-21). John the baptizer confirmed that Jesus was the son of God (John 1:29-34). Jesus taught he was the son of God (John 10:24-38). Peter confessed "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." And Jesus himself confirmed this as the foundation teaching of his church (Matt. 16:15-17). The Jews even reported he made this claim when they accused him before Pilate (John 19:7). John wrote his gospel to explain, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). To be God's church, the church must confess that Jesus is the son of God and the son of David; and that he is the Christ, anointed by God to be king of the Jews.

Verse 44 they all put in out of their abundance, but she . . . put in all that she had, her whole livelihood. Sacrifice is not giving part of yourself or a portion of your money. Sacrifice is giving all that you have, especially when you have nothing to give; that is giving when it is inconvenient. You can love Jehovah with your *all*, or you can be like the scribes and Pharisees who gave "out of their abundance" (which is in reality no sacrifice). The unassuming act of this "poor widow" showed her humble heart. Romans 12:1-2 describes complete sacrifice, "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Paul added in Galatians 6:6-10, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (read also 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Verse 38 Beware of the scribes. One scribe was not far from the kingdom of God; but many were far from God. They were among those **"who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive the greater condemnation."** Matthew 22:1-14 and 23:1-39 record more of Jesus' cautions about the leaders of Israel (the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and elders). The greater condemnation included,

"that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berichiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, all these things will come upon this generation . . . See, your house is left unto you desolate" (23:35-36, 38).

Their destruction occurred within 40 years after Jesus prophesied against the

scribes and other leaders of the Jews.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is different between the Law of Moses for Israel and the Law of Christ for the Church? What is similar?
2. What does your church teach about sacrifice? Is the giving of 10% a commandment for the church? When is one blessed?
3. What is the church when it does not teach that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God? Is it fallen away?
4. How does the history of the Jews fit with Jesus' condemnation of their leaders?

Jews, Jerusalem, and Jesus' Disciples

Lesson Text: Mark 13:1-36 (NKJV)

¹ Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*”

² And Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”

⁵ And Jesus, answering them, began to say: “Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁶ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am *He*,’ and will deceive many. ⁷ But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end *is* not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

⁹ “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. ¹¹ But when they arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

¹⁴ “So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. ¹⁶ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁷ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ¹⁸ And pray that your flight may not be in winter. ¹⁹ For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

²¹ “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, *He is* there!’ do not believe it. ²² For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ But take heed; see, 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 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. ²⁸ “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! ³⁰ Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. ³² “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. ³⁴ *It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. ³⁵ Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— ³⁶ lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

Introduction

Jesus had just been teaching his fellow Jews in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and elders were seeking a way to discredit Jesus, even to kill him. The public, however, continued to accept Jesus and his teaching. His disciples also listened intently to Jesus, believing he was the Christ and the son of God. Jesus reprimanded the leaders of the Jews with the strength of the prophets of Jehovah before him. Jesus finished his admonitions to his people, “Your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:38). Then Jesus left the Temple in Jerusalem for the last time. He went out to the Mount of Olives and His disciples followed, still in wonderment of his teaching in the Temple and his response to their admiration of the Temple.

Bible Learning

Verse 2 Do you see these great buildings? What Jesus and his disciples witnessed was a whole complex of buildings, which had been embellished and expanded by King Herod. Jesus’ disciples were enamored with its

beauty. Jesus responded to his disciples' comment about this Temple, "**Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**" This "great building" was torn down, every stone, within 40 years, just as Jesus prophesied (compare Luke 19:41-44, Jesus wept over the city).

Verse 3 Now as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple . . . Often, pictures of Jerusalem view it from the Mount of Olives. Jerusalem and its Temple were easily seen from where Jesus sat. In this picturesque place Peter, his brother Andrew, James, and his brother John approached Jesus and asked him, "**Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?**" Mark (a second generation disciple) was not as detailed as Matthew who was there as one of Jesus' disciples. Peter (Mark's mentor) and the others referred to more of Jesus' teaching than just the destruction of the Temple. Matthew recalled Jesus had just spoken to the Jews before he left the temple, "O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! . . . See, your house is left unto you desolate, for I say to you, you shall see me no more till you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Matt. 23:37-39). So, the disciples' questions related to the Jews, to Jerusalem and its temple, and to events leading up to Jesus' return. Jesus first cautioned, "**Take heed that no one deceives you.**"

Verse 8 These are the beginning of sorrows. Jesus began with a list of 'signs' which his disciples would soon experience, in the years following his ascension. These are just the "beginning." Many impostors came in the following 40 years and declared themselves the Messiah; they deceived many Jews to follow them rather than believe that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ). During the first century, turmoil in the Roman empire resulted in "wars, and rumors of wars": Roman and Persian forces clashed multiple times, Rome conquered Britain (43) and fought a major war in Israel (66-73), which overlapped with a series of battles related to succession after the death of Nero (68-69). An earthquake in 62 A.D., related to Mt. Vesuvius, damaged Pompeii and Herculaneum and other cities in the region including Naples. Another major earthquake in 66 A.D. shook the Mediterranean world and destroyed the cities of Hierapolis, Colosse, and Laodicea (see Revelation 3:14-22). Great famines occurred throughout the Roman empire during the time of Claudius Caesar, who reigned 41-54 A.D.: famines in his first and second year affected Rome; one in his fourth year was prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:27-30) and is reported by Josephus to have affected Judea and Syria (*Antiquities* 1:3-2:5) in 46-47 A.D.; a third famine noted by Eusebius (*An. Abrahami*) was in Greece in late 48 A.D.; Tacitus mentions a fourth in the 11th year of Claudius, 53 A.D., which caused great stress in Rome (*Annals* 11:4). These were just the beginning;

much more has transpired in the ensuing centuries. These occurred before the end of the Jews' Temple and the end of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In Jesus' words, "But the end is not yet."

Verse 9 But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up. Jesus warned his disciples about the Jews' reaction to them preaching that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) and the son of God. The book of Acts recorded that the Jews did precisely what Jesus said, "**for they shall deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for my name's sake, for a testimony to them.**" The Jews immediately began to persecute Jesus' disciples. The leaders of the Jews jailed, scourged, and threatened them. Paul decried that he was responsible for more, even the death of many of Jesus' disciples (1 Tim. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:9; Acts 8-9; 22:2-5; 26:9-12). Jesus spoke of the Jews when he said, "they will deliver you up." The Jews ("they") continued to persecute Jesus' disciples until God removed them from their land a second time and destroyed their beloved city and Temple.

Verse 13 And you shall be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. Stephen was the first recorded to "endure to the end" (in Acts 7) – notably one of the men who played a role in that event became the apostle Paul, and would encourage the believers, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-22). Jesus prophesied against the Jews, "Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city" (Matt. 23:34).

Verses 14-23 So, when you see the abomination of desolations Take heed; see, I have told you beforehand. There are many interpretations of these words. Some think Jesus spoke of events yet future to our time. Others suggest Jesus had two events in mind, one past which foreshadowed a future event. It is up to the student of prophecy to determine about whom and of what event the prophet Daniel spoke. The author suggests the following understanding.

Daniel spoke of two abominations and two desolations: Daniel 11:29-32 and Daniel 9:24-27. Daniel 11 was fulfilled nearly 200 years before Jesus referred to Daniel; the "king of the north" (Antiochus Epiphanes) was rebuffed by "Chittim" (Rome) and returned from the land of the "king of the south" (Egypt) to Jerusalem. He vented his anger on the Jews, defiled "the sanctuary" (the Temple) by offering swine's blood on the altar, and took away the daily sacrifices. In that time many Jews were corrupted by including Greek practices in their worship; but "the people who know their God" the Maccabees, were strong, and carried out great exploits

(Dan. 11:32). The Maccabees defeated Antiochus (with Rome’s secret approval) and cleansed the temple (an event remembered still at Hanukkah). Jesus knew the history of the Jews, and knew that this “abomination of desolation” was fulfilled in the second century B.C.

Jesus referred, then, to the “abomination of desolation” in Daniel 9. This concerned Daniel’s “people” (the Jews to be returned by Cyrus the Persian), Daniel’s “holy city” (Jerusalem, to be rebuilt in the “troubled times” of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel, 9:24-25; its walls were completed in 444 B.C.), and Daniel’s “sanctuary” (the Temple, also to be rebuilt, about 520 B.C.). This was the same Temple in which Jesus worshiped, and taught the Jews. [*Editor’s note:* Herod extensively remodeled the second Temple built in the time of Ezra, but even the remodel did not equal the original splendor of Solomon’s Temple.] It was this city and people about whom Jesus said, “The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41-44). Shortly thereafter, Jesus declared one last time, “See, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38). Leaving the Temple, he told his disciples, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down” and in the garden Jesus answered his disciples’ question, “Tell us, when will these things be?” (Mark 13:2-4). Jesus directly answered, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20). The “desolation” of Daniel’s “people” (the Jews), Daniel’s “holy city” and Daniel’s “sanctuary” happened when Rome’s forces surrounded and then destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Editor’s note: the following is the interpretation of those in the Church of God who hold an historical understanding of prophecy. Most in the Church of God see the abomination as being the presence of someone who ought not be in the sanctuary. This editor believes that Jesus is both answering the question of what would happen to the Temple that they were looking at in Jerusalem as well as preparing later disciples for a tribulation at the end of this age.

Jesus also addressed the “abomination” of Daniel’s prophecy: “And the people [Daniel’s people] . . . shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war, desolations are determined” (9:26). The Jews had killed the prophets, and then killed the son of God (read Jesus’ parable in Matthew 21:28-46). Having rejected

Jesus as their Messiah and persecuted Jesus' disciples, they then revolted against Rome. Rome destroyed their city and their Temple, and dispersed the Jews all over the world. Their "abomination" was prophesied by Moses (Deut. 28). Their "abomination" was described by Jesus,

"For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to the pregnant and those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:22-24).

The Jews' "abomination" caused their "desolation" just as prophesied in Daniel.

Verses 24-27 After that tribulation . . . then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. The Jews entered a time of tribulation when they began to be sold into all the world by Rome. Their second dispersion continues to this day, an unparalleled time of persecution from 70 A.D. to 2012 A.D. and beyond to the time Jesus comes. Jesus said, "You will see me no more till you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!'" (Matt. 23:39). The Jews have yet to cry for God to send them a deliverer, their Messiah (read Isaiah 51:17-52:10). They will not seek God until Jerusalem is again taken by the nations (Zech. 14:1-4). When the nations again trouble Israel and take Jerusalem, God will "go forth and fight against those nations . . . And in that day his [God's servant's] feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which faces Jerusalem on the east". Jeremiah prophesied "And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck them up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD" (31:28). Israel, that is the Jews, will continue to be a scattered people, a persecuted people, in tribulation until God sends Jesus to restore them to their land (read Isaiah 11 with Jeremiah 31). The Jews will be delivered from their long tribulation when Jesus returns, as prophesied in Daniel 12:1, "at that time your [Daniel's] people shall be delivered." Jesus adds, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming". The Jews will see their Deliverer, "every eye will see him, even they who pierced him" (Rev. 1:7).

Verses 28-31 Learn this parable from the fig tree Jesus had the Jews' tribulation in mind throughout his answer to his disciples' question. He also had in mind their return, compared to a fig tree budding. In our time Israel "budded" when it became a nation in 1948. We are living the return of Judah and Jerusalem, the fulfillment of Joel 3:1. We are seeing the "weak" nations saying, "I am strong" and the nations preparing for war as

Joel 3:10-11 described. We are seeing the nations burdened with Jerusalem as Zechariah 12:2-3 states. We see “all the trees” as Luke reported Jesus’ words, the nations preparing for war in the Middle East. Jesus’ coming is near, because we “see these things happening” (Mark 13:29). We “know that the kingdom of God is near” (Luke 21:31). (The restoration of all Israel will only occur after Jesus comes; Isaiah 11:11; Zechariah 12-13; Jeremiah 31.)

Verses 32-36 But of that day and hour no one knows Take heed, watch and pray I say unto you all: Watch! Jesus added, “not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but my Father only.” Jesus himself did not know when he would return. Even after his resurrection he said, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” No one will be able to determine the exact time when Jesus will come. We must watch the signs which Jesus gave. We must study the signs given by the prophets of old (and relayed to us in the Old Testament). We must observe closely the insights given us through Jesus’ disciples in the New Testament. We can discuss these prophecies in more detail. Let God speak and God’s word explain itself. Listen and apply God’s word to our lives. Pray, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth.” Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Continue to WATCH!! “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the history of the Jews relate to the prophecies of Moses in Deuteronomy 28-30?
2. What abominations did the Jews perpetrate against God which caused their first dispersion?
3. What is the relationship between the Jews and Jesus’ disciples in the book of Acts?
4. What holocausts have the Jews experienced over the centuries of their dispersion?
5. How has the persecution of the Jews paralleled the persecution of believers in one God and Jesus as the son of God (Rev. 12)?
6. What tribulations will God’s people (Israel) and God’s people (Jesus’ disciples) yet go through before Jesus comes (Zech. 14:1; Rev. 13:11-18)?