

## Mark 9:1-13

Mark connects the events on the mountain with the dialogue described at the end of chapter 8. *After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him .... (2)* At this point the disciples are in a state of confusion. They have correctly identified Jesus as the Messiah (8:29) and he has gone on to describe his mission in terms of rejection and death. (8:31). At least one of the disciples has overruled Jesus. (8:32)

This was not in the script as they read their Bibles. It spoke of God installing his king despite the opposition of the nations and of the Messiah ushering in an age typified with the wolf living with the lamb.

It is reassuring that disciples who had front row seats suffered from doubt and confusion. And even more so that Jesus addressed those concerns. Up the mountain his kingly glory becomes visible and Moses and Elijah (they represent the law and the prophets ie the OT) talk with Jesus. They don't appear to correct Christ's view of his mission. He is in complete harmony with the expectation of the first part of the Bible.

As the disciples find themselves at odds with Jesus ministry they either have to change their minds or look for another leader. V7 tells us they are enveloped by a cloud and addressed by a voice: *This is my Son whom I love listen to him.* It is what they have not been doing.

It is as they start to listen to Jesus that they are able to put the pieces of the jigsaw together. (11-13)

- The passage is a challenge to read the OT and to allow it to shape our expectations of what kind of King Jesus has come to be.
- It also urges us to listen to Jesus. In his second letter Peter applies the lessons of this event in the following way: *We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19)*

## Mark 9: 14-29

Jesus descends from the harmony of talking with Moses and Elijah and the affirming voice of his Father to the disorder and unbelief of the world. Little wonder it provoked the frustration of v19. Jesus lived and served among a generation that only accessed him to get what they wanted. When we find ourselves in that place comfort is found in the fact that he knows what it is like.

The request of the father. (24)

Mark describes the conversation that takes place between Jesus and the boy's father (21-24) It culminates with this request: *I do believe help me overcome my unbelief!* Faith grows as we discover how faithful Jesus is. We are privileged to have access to the encounter on the mountain (9:1-9) Moses and Elijah affirm that he is fulfilling all the OT predications perfectly. *For no matter how many promises*

*God has made, they are Yes in Christ. (2 Cor 1:20)* Similarly he is loved by the Father because of his obedient submission to his will.

The question of the disciples (28)

The disciples ask the tough question: *Why couldn't we drive it out?* Jesus references 'prayer' in his answer. Dependent prayer, that majors on God's grace not my ability, is the way to progress in Christian ministry. It's the way we do ministry when the Lord Jesus is not physically present.

- A good prayer to pray: I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief. Expect God to answer it by emphasising the faithfulness of his Son.
- How honest are we prepared to be about our failures? Is prayer moving from the fringes of our lives to the very centre? Are we making prayer a priority in our homes? Are we meeting with others in the church family to pray?

### **Mark 9:30-50**

Mark's Gospel breaks neatly into two halves. In the first eight chapters we are introduced to Jesus powerful identity. He is God's long awaited Messiah who has authority over demons and death, nature and sickness and even sin itself. The second half of the gospel describes his mission. What has this powerful king come to do? He has come to serve us by dying for us. (see 10:45)

In this section Jesus teaches his disciples what it means to follow him. Unsurprisingly it means we need to learn to serve. *Sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of all' (35)*

Here is what service looks like. Its not about promoting ourselves (34) but welcoming those who are insignificant and seem to have little to offer. (37)

Its not about stopping those who don't belong to our tribe (38) but encouraging everyone to see the value in serving God. (41)

Its about being alive to our impact on the lives of others, especially new believers and restricting our freedom for their sake. To cause one of those little ones who believes in me to sin means leading them into unbelief or to break God's moral law.

The final section emphasises the seriousness of sin. And whilst amputation is not Jesus intention he speaks as he does to urge us to be ruthless with those places where temptation arises from.

- Look out for any who could be described as 'little children' and welcome them
- Encourage those who love Christ and promote the Gospel even if they don't belong to our tribe.

- Are there areas I need to restrict my freedom in for the sake of someone else. (see Romans 14:19-21)

### Mark 10: 1-12.

Mark's gospel contains teaching at two levels. Jesus teaches the crowds but he also instructs his disciples in what it means to follow him. This chapter has much that is directed specifically at the disciples. See 10:10, 14, 26, 41-45.

The first section (1-12) addresses the question of divorce and re-marriage. The Pharisees came to Jesus to 'test' him. In Deut 24:1-4 Moses spoke of a husband divorcing his wife because he found 'something indecent about her'. This was a much debated term. Did it mean unfaithfulness or did it cover much more trivial matters? What was Jesus view?

Jesus regarded this permission as a temporary measure, granted to save hard hearted people from destroying one another. This though was never Gods intention for marriage. He directs the questioner back to Genesis. There we find God defining creation by means of opposites: light and dark, earth and sky, sea and land, male and female. (6) And he goes on to define marriage as God uniting these two contrasting individuals as one flesh.

The disciples were unlikely to have been surprised to hear the Genesis ideal re-stated. However Jesus final comment clearly challenged them: (9) *Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.* And if they were expecting him to privately tone down his teaching they were to be disappointed. (11,12) For Jesus, marriage is the commitment of a man and a women to live the rest of their lives together, in a union effected by God.

- Do you know of marriages where people are struggling to live out this ideal. Pray for them and look for ways you could offer practical support.
- Christian marriage is intended to reflect the relationship Christ has with his church. Pray for couples to reflect the gospel in their relationship with one another
- Pray for those who are single and would like to be married.
- Pray for those who have been divorced.

## Mark 10:13-30

Mark's gospel is highly selective. It is not a disciple's diary, simply a record of events as they happened. The material has been very carefully ordered to make the evangelist's point. The incident with the little children (13-16) sheds light on the encounter with the rich man (17-31)

*"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* is the rich man's question. But the conversation begins with an important qualification. The man addresses Jesus as 'Good teacher' and Jesus replies that no one is good except God alone. How good is good is right at the heart of this matter.

Jesus takes the man to the commandments because they are a reflection of God's good character. He is happy to affirm his obedience to the list Jesus relates (18-20)

Jesus has the ability to put his finger on the issue in people's lives. In John 4 he highlights a woman's disordered relationships here it's a man's money. In effect he is applying the first commandment 'You shall have no other gods before me'.

This man is described by Jesus as 'lacking one thing'. He is not good as God defines good. And so strong is the grip his money has on his life he cannot 'do' what needs to be done to inherit eternal life. He may only lack one thing but he has as much chance of working his way into the kingdom as a camel has of squeezing through the eye of a needle.

The little children are the opposite of the rich man. They are unable to 'do' anything and rely entirely on their parent's provision. *Truly I tell you anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (15)* God does the impossible opening the kingdom to people like us through the obedience of his son. We receive it as a gift and all the blessing that comes to us subsequently is a gracious gift and out of all proportion to what we deserve. (28-31)

- Are we remembering how we inherited eternal life?
- Is God's goodness having the kind of effect on our lives that it had on those original disciples? See v29-31.
- We are apt to welcome the 'rich' and disregard the 'weak and insignificant'. Are we being careful not to hinder any who might qualify as children and want to come to Christ? (14)

## Mark 10:32-52

Jesus is the king heading for the capital. (see chapter 11) He is heading for glory (34) *Three days later he will rise.* But his route to glory will go by way of suffering. *The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death.... (33)*

This clear statement is followed by the request of James and John who seek a share in Jesus glory. (37) When their attempt to steal a march on the other

disciples becomes known it leads to resentment. In the normal course of things this is how the system works. Humankind craves power and influence. The more successful you are the less you have to serve the needs of other people. Kings aren't at the beck and call of their subjects.

But this king institutes a new system. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...The way up is the way down. "...*whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.*" (44)

Jesus emphasises this point as he responds to the cry of the blind beggar. Bartimaeus is told to be quiet by the crowd but the King ask him what he can do for him. (51). He grants him his sight and he sets out to follow. (52) This King is always ready to show mercy.

- Take a moment to reflect on the way Jesus has served us. (10:45)
- Are there situations where relationships are being put at risk through being too competitive?
- Are we on the look out for those we could serve?

### **Mark 11:1-11**

These verses describe Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is a significant moment and all four gospels include this event. Mark makes a lot of the donkey. (2-7) The mode of travel is not a sign of Jesus poverty. Zechariah predicted that when the Messiah arrived in his city he would come riding on a donkey. (Zech 9:9) Up to this point Jesus has dampened all popular messianic expectation. Now he goes public. Jesus announces to the crowds that the long awaited king has arrived in his city.

And the greetings of the crowds respond to this claim. They reply with the words of Psalm 118:25,26. The next verse in the psalm states: *The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.* (Ps 118:27)

As Jesus led them to the temple courts they must have thought this was what was happening. But it will transpire that the horns of the altar are the arms of the cross. This king has not come like Pilate or Herod or Caiaphas to lord it over people but to serve by giving his life as a ransom.

- Are we clear on the kind of King Jesus has come to be and what it means to follow him?
- He is though a real king and his requirements take precedence over our plans. (3)
- Is our enthusiasm for Jesus informed by what he has come to do or simply shaped by the behaviour of the crowds?

### **Mark 11:12-33**

When Jesus the King comes to the house of God in Jerusalem he comes in judgment. He forcibly evicts the traders and their goods. (15-17). He condemns the occupants of the temple as a 'den of robbers' (17) This incident is sandwiched between 'an encounter' with a fig tree. As Jesus makes his way into Jerusalem he is described as being hungry, seeing a fig tree in the distance but finding no fruit on it, only leaves. He pronounces judgment on it. (14) The incident is picked up again in v20,21 when Peter's amazement at the withered tree is recorded.

The fig tree serves the Kings purpose. It illustrates the consequence of unproductive religion. The activity of the temple where worshippers are exploited and reverence is absent is summed up as barren and fruitless. (The fact that it was not the season for figs should not be overstated as though Mark is wanting to emphasis Jesus unreasonableness. Parables are not allegories with everything lining up neatly - there is a main point. Israel's faith has become leaves without fruit)

Jesus follows this up with a lesson on prayer (22-25) Note the reference to 'this mountain' (23) Jerusalem regarded itself as elevated. You went up to it (see the Psalms of Ascent 120-134) Isaiah spoke of the Mountain of the Lord referring to this city. (Isaiah 2) But Jerusalem and all it stood for has become a major obstacle to Gods salvation plan. The response of Jerusalem's leaders to Jesus activity in the temple is to look for a way to kill him. (18).

Jesus invites his disciples to have faith that God can move this mountain and to express this faith in prayer. It is what we will see in the book of Acts. The powerful and violent opposition of the Jewish leadership to Jesus and his mission will be removed and the gospel will progress on its way to the ends of the earth.

- Is our faith productive? Are we in danger of those who only honour God with our lips (7:6,7) What kind of 'fruit' is Christ looking for?
- Are we conscious of 'mountains' that stand in the way of the progress of the Gospel? Are we praying about their removal?
- Are we checking that there are no obstacles of un-forgiveness in our own hearts? (25)

### **Mark 12:1-12**

Fruitfulness continues to be the theme in the next chapter as Jesus delivers the 'Parable of the Tenants'

Chapter 11 ends with Jesus being questioned over his authority to drive the traders from the temple. He does not respond. The first part of Mark's gospel provides abundant evidence of Jesus divine identity. Instead he challenges them over their fruitless religion.

The parable serves to remind them they are never more than tenants. There is a landlord to whom they are accountable. This point was emphasised by the economic system that ought to have shaped their lives. (see Leviticus 25)

The ministry of the prophets is described in terms of repeated attempts to have the tenants give the landlord his share of the harvest. In short they are to love God by loving one another. (Leviticus 19 contains the statement about *loving our neighbour as ourselves*, but the whole chapter unpacks that principle)

The main point of the parable is to impress upon them the heinous nature of the sin they are about to commit. To reject John (11:29,30) or Jesus (12:7) is to reject God. The inevitable consequence of this rejection was catastrophic judgment. (9).

We are though reminded that all this opposition and rejection would accomplish was the long established plan of God. *The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes.* (10,11)

- Observe the mercy of God. They will kill the Son but there will be delay in judgment falling (AD 70) Judgment is Gods 'strange work' He delights to show mercy.
- Observe the submission of Christ. He knows what is coming. He prepared to become the rejected stone in order that his Father can make him the cornerstone of the Church.
- Observe the deceitfulness of sin. Somehow faced with the truth about themselves from the lips of Jesus they are able to tell themselves a different story.

#### **Mark 12:13-34.**

The interrogators carefully devised questions are intended to damage Jesus reputation among the people. Instead though they become occasions when Jesus demonstrates his unique wisdom. He is the sure interpreter of Gods ways.

12-17.

The Pharisees combine with the Herodians to trap Jesus. Their question appears to place Jesus in an impossible position. Agree to pay the hated Roman poll tax and he loses popular support. Rebel against the charge and find himself on the wrong side of the Roman law.

Jesus does not avoid the question. He does not begin a tortuous discussion on its finer points. With a question and statement he leaves his opponents amazed. And he leaves us a hugely helpful principle in working out our relationship to the State. 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's'.

18-27

The Sadducees come at Jesus with their marriage scenario that seeks to mock the idea of resurrection life and the world to come.

Their problem is their lack of Bible understanding (24). These are people who are familiar with the Scriptures (especially the first 5 books) without understanding its message. The resurrection is unintelligible without reference to God's power. There is though plenty of evidence of the supernatural activity of God, not least his power to create out of nothing. (Gen 1). The Sadducees would have been familiar with God's word to Moses at the burning bush when he introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Sadly they failed to understand its significance. This was no polite title but an expression of an ongoing relationship that endured despite the changed situation of these men. God's care and provision for his people continues beyond this world.

28-34

Not all Jesus questioners are equally insincere. Jesus describes this man as 'not far from the Kingdom'. (34)

The Pharisee asks which is the most important commandment; Jesus answers in terms of love for God. In other words the issue is one of relationship rather than religious correctness. (burnt offering and sacrifices) We are to love the Lord because he alone is the one true God. (30) This love finds expression less in emotion and more in our obedience to what he has spoken. Our love for God is also to be expressed as we love our neighbour as ourselves. We express our love for ourselves when we care for ourselves when we are disappointed with ourselves. We are to adopt a similar attitude to those around us.

- Give thanks for the words of Jesus that confirm his identity.
- Pray that we would not only be familiar with the Bible but clearly understand its message.
- Look for ways to express your love for Christ through obeying what he says.

### **Mark 12:35 -44**

In Mark 1 (21-28) we witness the Son of God in the house of God with the word of God on his lips and the effect is dramatic. The demons tremble and the people are amazed. In Mark 12 we witness the same effect. He concludes the parable (12:1-12) by challenging the 'builders' to see themselves in Psalm 118 he confounds the Sadducees by quoting their own scriptures to them. (Exodus 3:6) He combines Deut 6 with Leviticus 19 in answer to the Pharisees question about the most important commandment. And now with his own question (35) he advances his claims not only to be the Messiah but the divine Son. Jesus shows us that it is the word of God wisely applied that convicts men and women.

In v38 - 40 he provides further evidence of their barren religion. (see 11:13,14) Yet the temple is not devoid of fruit. A poor widow places all her funds in the treasury. Here was rich faith that expressed great trust in God and in so doing nourished the 'hungry' Jesus.

- Are we confident that Gods word really is powerful? Are we learning how to use it?
- Would our giving qualify for Christ's approval?



### **Mark 13:1-23**

When it comes to predicting the future we are wary. We couch our predications in the language of approximation and possibility. There is none of that here. Jesus does not use 'perhaps' or 'maybe'. He makes pronouncements. He speaks categorically first about what would take place 40 years hence and then how everything would finish up. And he places these things alongside one another because there are similar themes and features that run through both.

Jesus authority has been the issue in the preceding chapter. He rides into Jerusalem on the donkey claiming to be the long awaited Messiah. He drives the traders out the temple. And when in chapter 12 they bombard him with their questions he so effectively answers them that (12:34) they didn't dare ask him anymore questions. Jesus is able to predict the future because he is in control of the future.

One of the things that makes us question how much control Christ has over events is the level of opposition his followers face. (9-13) Its worth reminding ourselves that Jesus priority for his disciples is not an easy life. His concern is that the gospel must be preached on a global scale. (10)

And here is the surprise. The gospel will spread and pervade all sections of society through suffering. Stephens martyrdom will promote a missionary movement. (Acts 8:4) Paul will reassure the young church at Philippi that he imprisonment as served to advance the gospel. And as he makes his way as a prisoner to Rome officials and governors will hear of Jesus Christ.

- Jesus speaks as he does so we will have a happy ending. Do we have our eyes on the right destination?
- The challenge is to stand firm to the end (13) Our stability comes through allowing Gods word to inform our expectations.

### **Mark 13:24-37.**

Verses 1-23 deal in local and world events. The last part of the chapter describes things in terms of cosmic events. This is a quote from Isaiah. (13:9-11) This heavenly upheaval accompanies Gods final judgment. We live in a world of injustice. The first part of the chapter makes that clear. Evil seems to triumph. That certainly will be how it seems to the disciples as they watch their leader be crucified. The book of Acts tells us that following the stoning of Stephen the Christians in Jerusalem are scattered. This chapter reminds us that the King remains at all time in control. At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. (26) And though his people are scattered and discarded by the powers that be he knows where they are and will come and find them. (27)

His final word to us is Watch! (37) He is not inviting us to speculate over the events of history or the upheavals of the natural world. These things are like labour pains (8). We know what is coming next but we don't know the precise timing. (32) Our task is to be alert and to be serving faithfully. If you believe in final judgment that should mean you will invest in gospel ministry.

- This chapter is here to reassure disciples who are shortly going to feel their world has collapsed. Will we allow these words to reassure us when life seems confused and disordered?
- Pray for those you know who are not ready for this final event.

### **Mark 14:1-11**

As events move towards their climax the pace quickens. We are now only a few days away from Passover. The religious leaders scheme to arrest and kill Jesus. (1) One of the Twelve goes over to their side. (10,11)

While this is going on Jesus is out for dinner. Jesus really is the King and events will unfold at his pace and timing not theirs. (2). And at this meal he is recognised as the King by a woman who anoints his head with perfume. (3)

This action provokes a response from some of those present. They complain about what should have been done. They do the maths and calculate the value. They rebuke the unnamed woman for her wastefulness. (4,5)

If they were expecting Jesus to be impressed with their wisdom they were disappointed. Jesus calls her action a 'beautiful thing'. Lavish love that isn't measured pleases the King. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. In contrast to those who talk about what should have been done he commends her as someone who 'did what she could' (8)

Their words show how out of touch they are with Jesus and his mission. He is on his way to death and burial. The woman seizes the opportunity to honour Christ. (7) Jesus is rarely impressed with our ability to complain and criticize the service of others no matter how extravagant it seems.

- Christ's love for his people is lavish. Is our response to him measured?
- Are we prone to fault finding and criticism?
- Are we afraid of what people will say if we serve extravagantly?
- Is there an opportunity to express our love for Christ that we need to seize?

## Mark 14:12-31

Jesus enemies are responding to events. They plan to murder but they are not sure when they will be able to pull this off. Their prospects take a turn for the better when Judas contacts them. By contrast Jesus is firmly in control of all that is happening. Asked by his disciples where he wants them to go and prepare the Passover they discover he has made all the arrangements. (16)

Whereas earlier he has made a very public entry into the city, this time his arrival is shrouded in secrecy. The care he takes over it though serves to emphasise its importance for his disciples and future generations. The atmosphere is heavy. Jesus speaks of betrayal and desertion. He is soon to be utterly alone. The meal becomes a picture of what he is going to do for his people. But these people are not faithful friends but those who will abandon him in his hour of need.

They have met to eat the Passover but there is no mention of the lamb or any of the normal accompaniments. Their attention is being re-directed from the death of an animal all those years before to the sacrifice of the Son of Man. They may desert him but he will keep the covenant promise to them even though it costs him his life. Here the events of the next day are spelled out. Jesus is giving himself for them. He is sealing the new covenant, the solemn promise made between the Father and the Son that guarantees our acceptance on account of his sacrifice.

The atmosphere maybe heavy but its not despondent. He speaks of drinking the fruit of the vine new in the kingdom of God. (25) He predicts his resurrection and tells them he will go ahead of them into Galilee. (28) Peter and the disciples though assert their loyalty (31) It is not wise to contradict Jesus. Better to listen and to submit to his assessment.

- The word of Jesus is reliable. The disciples found things just as he told them (16) So will we as we take him at his word
- It is a great relief to appreciate Jesus dies for flawed people. Far from my sin disqualifying me, it gives me a share in these events
- Jesus means us to remember these events. How important is eating the Lords supper to us?

## Mark 14:32-52

Gethsemane illuminates the cost. As Jesus anticipates the coming ordeal he is described as being 'deeply distressed and troubled'. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (34) His distress is consequence of 'the cup' that is confronting him. Both Isaiah (51:17-23) and Jeremiah (25:15-18) describe it as the cup of his wrath. It is the terrifying prospect of being the object of Gods righteous anger towards sin. We sometimes speak of people 'getting a taste of their own medicine' referring to misfortune rebounding on an evil person. He gets a taste of our medicine.

The thing that sustains Jesus in this hour is the one whose will he is struggling to come to terms with. This is Abba. There are a very few places where the Aramaic

word is preserved by the gospel writer. But so astonishing was it to hear God being addressed as a small child would speak to its parent that Mark has recorded the very word. It illuminates the closeness and loving intimacy that exists between Father and Son.

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. Jesus seeks to impress upon the disciples that the place of prayer is the place of power. They fail to pray so in turn they fail. Watch and pray is an instruction to watch our weaknesses and to know our besetting sins. Our weaknesses ought to drive us to the Lord for his sustaining strength.

- Jesus looked to his disciples for company in his hour of need. Is there someone who would appreciate our companionship as they go through a difficult time?
- Give thanks for Jesus willingness to not pursue his will but to submit to his Fathers
- What are our 'weaknesses'?
- Do we believe that if we don't pray we will fail?

### **Mark 14:53-72**

The theme of witness is central to this passage as Jesus is brought at dead of night for trial before the High Priest and the ruling Jewish Sanhedrin.

Firstly in v55-61 we have the false witnesses who bring false testimony against Jesus. We should not miss the fact that Jesus was innocent of the charges against him. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life. He could only die for our sins because he had no sins of his own to pay for.

Secondly in v61-65 we have the true witness and testimony of Jesus. The prosecution have got nothing on Jesus, their false witnesses have failed miserably. The High Priest now addresses Jesus directly 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' (v61.) If Jesus remains silent then he might be able to save himself but Jesus is the true witness and so he tells the truth (v62.) He is God's Son, the Messiah, the Son of Man. He is God's Chosen King, who sits at the right hand of the Father and who will come in power to judge the living and the dead. As the faithful witness he will speak the truth even though it is his testimony that gives them their excuse to execute him.

Finally we come to Peter, the ashamed witness (v66-72.) Only hours before Peter had boldly insisted that he would stand by Jesus come what may (14:31) but when the heat is on Peter melts (notice how he is already hanging back in v54.) Three times Peter is accused of being 'one of them' and three times Peter denies it.

When the heat is on Peter lies to protect himself, in stark contrast to Jesus who told the truth so that he would be handed over to death.

- Peter was ashamed to be identified with Jesus and all of us will have known that feeling at one time or another. Let us give thanks that where we are unfaithful, Jesus was faithful in testifying to the truth and going to the cross for failures like Peter and us.
- Think of the different situations that you are going to find yourself in in the next few days. Pray that God would give you the strength to be a faithful and fearless witness to Jesus.

### **Mark 15:1-20**

It is now very early on Friday morning as Jesus is handed over to Pilate. It can be very easy to see something of ourselves in Pilate. He knows that Jesus is innocent (v14) and does not deserve to be crucified and yet in the end he is more concerned to please the crowd rather than do what is right (v15.) It is easy for us to sit there and judge Pilate for wanting to please the crowd rather than do what is right but don't we often put the opinion of other people above pleasing God? Have there been times recently when you have been more concerned about fitting in rather than doing what was right?

This brings us to the next character of Barabbas. He is a murderer and a rebel who has been sentenced to death (v6-7.) As we see Jesus taking Barabbas' place and dying instead of him so that Barabbas can go free we have a powerful picture of what Jesus has done for us. Even though we are rebels like Barabbas and often cowardly like Pilate, Jesus died in our place that we might go free.

Next we come to the Romans soldiers. They mock Jesus and pretend to worship him and yet they are actually speaking truer than they realise. The man before them really is the King and he really does deserve their worship, and one day they would meet him again in all his kingly power and glory.

Finally think about Jesus in this passage. In contrast to Pilate the coward who took the easy option King Jesus chose to do his Father's will even though that meant going to the cross to die for rebels like Barabbas and us. Again Jesus could have defended himself in the trial but chose not to (v5) and he could have called down angels to stop the mocking and beating of the guards and yet he didn't. It looks like Jesus is just a helpless victim but actually he is the one who is in control. He is ensuring that everything happens so that he dies at just the right time to give his life as a ransom for many.

- Have there been times recently when you have been a crowd-pleaser like Pilate? Spend some time confessing your sin and praising God that King Jesus didn't take the easy option?
- Spend time reflecting on how you are like Barabbas. Praise God that Jesus died in your place so you could go free. How will you use your freedom to serve your King today?
- Do you know people who are hostile to Jesus like the Soldiers? Pray for them by name to come to realise the truth of what the soldiers were saying.

### **Mark 15:21-47**

This passage is rich with fulfilment of the Old Testament. The drink Jesus is offered (v23 cf Psalm 69:21), the soldiers gambling for his clothes (v24 cf Psalm 22:18), the insults hurled at him (v29-32 cf Psalm 22:7), the darkness of God's judgment (v33 cf Amos 8:9) and Jesus' cry (v34 cf Psalm 22:1) are all fulfilled different Old Testament texts. Immediately this teaches us that Jesus' death is going according to God's plan, even down to the tiniest details. It looks like God isn't in control as people crucify his Son, but in reality God is in complete control.

The other thing to notice is the expectations of the people. Re-read v29-32 and notice the logic behind what they are saying. "If Jesus is the Messiah, then he will save himself." The assumption is that if Jesus really was the Messiah then he would save himself and so because he isn't saving himself then he must not be the Messiah. Jesus was perfectly able to save himself but if he had save himself then he would not have been able to save us. The taunts of the crowd echo the temptation that Jesus faced in the garden not to drink the cup that the Father has put before him(14:32-42). Both in the garden and now on the cross Jesus resists the temptation to avoid suffering.

This passage shows us that God's ways are not our ways. He does not do things the way that we would expect and the cross is the ultimate example of this. Very often God will confound our expectations, the question for us is whether we will respond like the crowd who dismiss Jesus when he doesn't meet their expectations? Alternatively will we trust that God knows best and that his ways are always for our best even if we don't see this at the time.

- Spend some time marvelling at God's sovereign control that even some of the smallest details of Jesus' crucifixion were prophesied centuries before they happened.
- Praise God that Jesus didn't save himself as the crowds were urging him to do. Thank him that he saved us by giving himself.
- God's ways are not our ways, but they are always for our good - The cross shows us the truth of this. Are you finding God's ways confusing at the moment? Is life

not working out as you expected? Ask God to help you to remind you of the cross and trust that he has good plans for you.

### **Mark 16:1-8**

The women who we met briefly in 15:40-41 and 15:47 now take centre stage as they go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body (v1.) From their worried conversation about moving the stone (v3) they clearly are not expecting what comes next. The stone has been rolled away (v4) and inside there is an angel (v5) who explains what has happened (v6.) The angel's message is crucial because without his explanation all they have is an empty tomb. He not only reassures them by explaining why the tomb is empty 'He has risen' but also commissions them to go and tell the other (v7.)

Yet the women don't do as they are told because 'Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.' (v8.) What are we to make of this strange end to the gospel?

Firstly, it shows us that 'The resurrection does not magically dispel fear and cowardice, transforming fallible human characters into faithful disciples.' (Edwards.) They had seen the empty tomb and heard the good news and yet they were still terrified and silent. We have not stood in the empty tomb nor have we heard an angel but we have heard the same good news and Jesus commissions all his people to go and tell others the good news. Like the women, we too have often failed to tell others out of fear. Wonderfully there is good news for fearful failures like us in v7. It's easy to miss but notice that the women are told to go and tell Jesus' disciples and Peter that Jesus will see them in Galilee. The last time we saw the disciples they were deserting Jesus (14:50) and the last time we saw Peter he was denying that he even knew Jesus (14:66-72.) Peter and the other disciples had badly let Jesus down and yet because Jesus was crucified and raised there is now forgiveness and hope for failures like Peter, the Disciples, the Women and us.

- Jesus sends us to tell others that he was crucified and is risen. How can you be involved in this mission today?
- The death and resurrection of Jesus means that failure is never final with Jesus. Spend time confessing the ways that you have failed Jesus recently. Come to him trusting that he will forgive you and recommission you as he did with Peter.