

Mark

Section 6 – 9 weeks

- 55 - Defiant or Faithful 12:1-12
- 56 - Render The Image 12:13-17
- 57 - Know God's Word 12:18-27
- 58 - Greatest Command 12:28-34
- 59 - Humble Extraordinary Faith 12:35-40
- 60 - Do Your Part 12:41-44
- 61 - Do Not Quit 13:1-13
- 62 - Conduct Matters 13:14-23
- 63 - Be Vigilant 13:24-37



This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

In this lesson we are going to examine the parable of the defiant tenants. This was not a strange situation Jesus described in the parable. Papyrus scrolls discovered in recent years reveal this area had a large number of estates which were operated by tenant farmers. This was not so different from share croppers in the United States in the years following the Civil War. The scrolls reveal tenant farmers were common for a span of time approximately 280 years before Jesus and for a number of years afterward.

It was a common and frequent area of tension and friction between the tenants working the land and the absentee owners who lived in distant places. It seems it had become a common thing for these absentee owners to live in some other area where they could live a life of ease and luxury - and expect to be paid by the tenant farmers - and at the same time not wanting to spend money on upkeep and repairs around the farm - or vineyard.

Many of the absentee owners seem to have thought the tenants would do the repairs and spend their own money in order to keep the farm going. So, while the Scripture tells us Jesus was teaching by way of using a parable - it appears that what we read in verses 1-9 describe a very real and commonly known situation that was taking place in the land.

Read Mark 12:1 and make notes:

"He then began to speak to them in parables." The "them" is understood to be the members of the Sanhedrin that had come out to question his authority. If you will remember from the previous lesson they had asked a question and Jesus had promised to answer their question "IF" they would answer his. They didn't answer his question - and even went so far as to lie to him about it - so Jesus said "neither will I answer your question."

While I have already said the situation described by this parable really existed in those days - it is also worth noting that the initial details concerning the building of a vineyard can be taken from Isaiah 5 - commonly referred to by Bible Scholars as the Song of the Vineyard.

The fact that the situation described was commonly known to exist - and the fact that Isaiah had something to say about this situation - both of these facts had to cause this parable to connect with these Jewish religious leaders of the Sanhedrin. The construction of the vineyard is a small detail - the more important detail was the fact that an owner of the land had leased his property to some farmers who had accepted the responsibility to work the vineyard. The typical contract called for the payment of rent in the form of what the vineyard produced.

Read Mark 12:2-5 and make notes:

At the proper time, the owner sent a representative to collect the rent. The landowner didn't send his representative too early so we can't say the landowner was pressuring the tenants. The landowner didn't send his representative too late - so we can't say the tenants had a reason to think the landowner didn't really care. The representative of the landowner came at the appropriate time - harvest time. The landowner in this parable can only be seen as reasonable.

It is here in v5 that we see Jesus was taking the parable beyond the mere actual things that were taking place in the land. When Jesus mentioned the landowner sent many others, it seems he intended to make those listening to the parable to connect this parable with the history of Israel.

Throughout the Old Testament the prophets were frequently called the "servants of God." And it is too easy to find the reference to the tenants "beating some" and "killing others" to miss it being connected to the prophets God has sent to the people of Israel.

Read Mark 12:6-7 and make notes:

This is the section that had to begin to make the pain real for those of the Sanhedrin. The parable describes the situation where the landowner finally sends his son instead of more servants. People were not different in those days than they are today. It was natural that these tenant farmers might not have respect for the servants.

Many of the tenants might see themselves as being "better than" or even "above" those who are mere servants. But everyone would understand the son of the owner would certainly be worthy of respect.

In those days there was a civil law that said when the owner of a property was dead and there were no heirs - the property was considered "ownerless property" and it could be claimed by anyone who wished to do so - in a "first come" situation. In this parable - when the son arrived - it is reasonable to understand that the tenants assumed the owner must have died - since the son came in his place. Being aware of the "ownerless property" law - these defiant tenants figured that if they killed the son then there would be no heirs - and they could claim the property for themselves.

Read Mark 12:8 and make notes:

Here is where the parable begins to be prophetic more so than descriptive of the people's past behavior. In this parable - it was a great lack of respect that would allow the tenants to kill the son of the landowner. But it was the highest level of disrespect for them to simply cast the body "out of the vineyard" without the proper burial.

The picture is one where they killed the one to whom they should have shown respect - and then they dumped his body over the wall with no more consideration than that which would have been given to garbage. With this verse, Jesus begins to let them know that he knows - the kind of thoughts they are having toward him.

Read Mark 12:9 and make notes:

The foolish assumption by the defiant tenants that the landowner was dead has placed them in a very dangerous situation. In this parable the owner was not dead - so Jesus poses a question to the Sanhedrin - what will this landowner do? The foolish wicked thoughts of seizing the property have just been shattered - when it is revealed that the owner was not dead - but alive. The owner would have all the resources of the government at his disposal - it would not be just another representative of the owner - it would not be just the owner himself which maybe they could overpower him as well. It would now be the force and strength of the government.

There is no question the landowner could have these defiant tenants forcibly subdued - imprisoned - punished - and a number of other things - and naturally the landowner could then give the vineyard to others. For those who are paying attention - Jesus is telling these religious leaders they are about to reject God's final messenger - and when they do - serious disaster will follow. The sacred trust that had been given to the chosen people will be given to a new chosen people.

Read Mark 12:10-11 and make notes:

This quotation is from Psalm 118. This refers to the building blocks that had been gathered at the site of Solomon's Temple. A stone that was rejected in the construction of the temple later proved to be the keystone to the porch. The stone's rejection followed by its vindication - and being given a place of prominence speaks clearly to the place Jesus is going to be given by the Heavenly Father.

Read Mark 12:12 and make notes:

The references to Israel's history of rebellion and unfaithfulness in the face of God's divine grace - had to cause a stinging and biting guilt to rise within these religious leaders. And the only thing that stopped them from laying hold of him at that moment - was the large crowd of people that was there.

So how does this apply to us today as Fishers of Men? If the chosen people of God - could have what was entrusted to them taken away and given to another - what makes us think it cannot happen to us?

I am not talking about losing one's salvation. I am talking about our place in ministry.

A few years ago, I was present when God spoke to a man that had been in God's service for years. This man, in years past, had given much in time and money. He had served in a number of positions in the church. Then after a number of years of service - he came to a place where he showed no compassion to those who were hurting. He did what he wanted to do - and even interfered with those whom God had called - when it wasn't what he wanted to do. I had been present when God - on more than one occasion - had given a word to this man through several different people.

He rejected everyone of them - even ridiculed a couple of them personally. Then the time came that I mentioned as I began this illustration. This man was told by God that because of his stubbornness and lack of obedience - he would never be used of God again. He was told that his salvation would not be taken from him. He was told that his rewards for the things he had done in previous years would not be taken from him - but he would never be a part of a local church again. He would never be used of God to minister again. He was told that he would be spiritually put out to pasture to simply eat and exist until his days were fulfilled.

I had the opportunity to observe this man for the remaining days of his life. It was several years - and he moved from church to church - and never belonged to any of them. He had a desire to fill some position and to serve - but none was offered.

As we talked not long before he died - he realized that he had no friends at any of the churches he had left. In looking back, he realized that he had not had a friend in any one of them while he attended them. That is no way to live out our last years!

As Fishers of Men - we must be faithful to what God has called us to do. There are many individual jobs and tasks on a Fishing vessel. And every one of them is important to the effective "Catching of Fish."

For some today - this lesson is an encouragement - don't grow weary in doing good - don't give in during the fight - keep on doing what you know is right. For some - this message is a warning - please don't stand defiant before the Savior until judgment is passed.

I believe if some of those in the Sanhedrin had repented that day - Jesus would have forgiven them and set them free from the judgment about to fall upon the people of Israel. Jesus would have restored them to a place of ministry and it would have been an exciting new place in a new people - called "the Church".

And for all of us - until judgment is passed upon us - we can repent of our refusal to serve - we can repent of our lack of respect and honor - and we can be restored to that which God has called us to. And we need every person doing what God has called them to do. Whether it is one of the “upfront in plain view jobs” - or it is one of the behind the scenes nobody ever seems to notice jobs. We need everyone being faithful to their tasks - so that we can be effective at catching men for the Kingdom of God.

How many people can we take from darkness and bring into the light of God? How many people can we snatch from the path to eternal pain and suffering - and bring to Jesus for Salvation - and eternal blessing in God's presence? How many - depends upon how faithful you and I are to the jobs we have been assigned by the Heavenly Father.

So, what will we be? Will we be defiant tenants of the gospel? Or will we be faithful tenants of the gospel?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The section of Mark - we are going to examine in this lesson - is as relevant to where we are today as any part of the gospel can be. Some very unfortunate things have taken place in the Christian community because many of God's people simply do not understand the principle Jesus laid out in this passage.

Read Mark 12:13 and make notes:

This section is introduced with the typical abruptness we find in the gospel of Mark. "Later" - no specific time reference - could have been immediately after - could have been some time after. It is worth noting early in the Gospel of Mark - chapter 3:6 - we were told that the Pharisees began to plot with the Herodians as to how they might go about killing Jesus.

Here we are very late in the Gospel of Mark - chapter 12 - after representatives of the whole Sanhedrin failed in the attempt to trip up Jesus in regards to his authority - we find the Pharisees and the Herodians coming together as a team - to attempt to snare Jesus in a question about taxes - or tribute.

This is an interesting coalition. The Pharisees were devout Jews who stressed strict adherence to Jewish law, custom, and ritual. The Pharisees felt it would be best for Israel if all the Jews would follow the Jewish law to the smallest detail. The Herodians were Jews - but they were not a religious party. The Herodians were a political party. The Herodians were Jews who felt it would be in the best interest of the people of Israel if they could become a separate country under the rule of Herod's family rather than a part of Rome.

Historical documents have revealed how pagan Herod and his family was. There was nothing about the lifestyle of that family that would compliment the kosher lifestyle of the Pharisees. And yet for somewhere between 2 and 3 years – these two groups – one group religious in nature and one group political in nature - with very different views about what was best for Israel – worked together to find a way to kill Jesus.

As we mentioned earlier - the Sanhedrin consisted of representatives of three groups; the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the teachers of the law. The Pharisees were the ones who held most closely to the Jewish laws and rituals. Isn't it interesting, that the most religiously devout group - was the one that decided to team up with the political group - in an effort to shut up and stop any mention of this Jesus and his teachings?

After the whole Sanhedrin failed to trip Jesus up - the Pharisees took their partners - the Herodians - and decided to give it a try. They came to Jesus to try and catch him "in his word." Before we read the rest of the text - we should consider that the Pharisees and the Herodians were on opposite sides of the issue they presented to Jesus. The text tells us they didn't pose their question to Jesus to get him to settle the argument between them - they posed their question to catch Jesus saying something that would give them their right to destroy him in the eyes of the people.

Read Mark 12:14 and make notes:

The opening words are not words of respect. They are in fact words intended to close any possible way of evading a difficult question. Remember, Jesus had refused to answer the question presented by the whole Sanhedrin.

The Pharisees and the Herodians - as a team - decided they wouldn't allow a loop hole this time. So they start out by reminding Jesus in front of the people that Jesus is a man of integrity. "Jesus, we know you don't pay any attention to the opinions of men - you always teach the absolute commitment to God's way of doing things." When Rome took control of the area - and the nation of Israel became part of the Roman Empire - a great emotional trauma fell upon the Jewish people. The Roman government required an annual tribute be paid to the government.

This was typical of most nations of that day - but it was seen by the Jews as an affront to the sovereignty of God, since they were God's chosen people. The Pharisees and other zealots resented the humiliation they felt this taxation implied.

The Herodians would rather be a free nation - but felt it was unrealistic to try - and felt paying the tribute was better than any more of their people being killed or imprisoned. If we didn't know where the Pharisees and the Herodians were on this issue, we could think this was a sincere question - wanting to know what was the right thing to do. But this was not a sincere question - the point of it was to try to force Jesus to say something that would give legal cause to shut him down.

Just think about it - if Jesus said it was not right to pay tribute to Ceasar - he could be charged with trying to cause a rebellion - because there had already been a number of Jewish zealots who had tried to make an armed rebellion against the Roman government – and each one had been crushed by the military. If Jesus said it was right to pay tribute to Caesar - he could be charged as a religious heretic - because almost all of the Jewish people felt paying tribute to any Gentile by Jews as a slander of God. The way the Pharisees and the Herodians saw it - either way he answered this question - Jesus would be finished in the eyes of the people.

Read Mark 12:15 and make notes:

So they asked Jesus, "Should we pay or shouldn't we?" The question was skillfully designed to place Jesus on the horns of dilemma. Consider for a moment - Jesus has already demonstrated that he doesn't have any problem saying "I'm not going to answer your question." Jesus realized they were trying to trap him in whatever he said. Jesus could just as easily said he wasn't going to answer their question. But Jesus took the time to give an answer to this question - even knowing they were attempting to trap him.

Doesn't it seem reasonable - that Jesus answered their question - not for the sake of the Pharisees and the Herodians - since they really weren't interested in the "correct answer" – but for some other reason. It is apparent Jesus answered this question because it held an important principle for his disciples who were there with him. And the disciples today - really need to understand this principle - at least as much as those first disciples did.

That group so under estimated Jesus - they didn't even come close to causing Jesus to be in a dilemma. "Jesus knew their hypocrisy" - he knew this was not a sincere question - and it is understandable why many people read a tone of exasperation in Jesus' voice when he asked "Why are you trying to trap me?"

Jesus was offering many opportunities for the religious leaders to come to salvation - and they just keep missing the opportunities he provided - maybe even ignoring them. Jesus asked for one of the coins of money issued by the Roman government.

Read Mark 12:16-17 and make notes:

The Roman government would only accept the Roman coin for the paying of the annual tribute. All of the people were familiar with the coin Jesus asked for. The denarius had an image that portrayed the emperor as something divine - and it had an inscription on both sides that constituted some claim to being divine. So the offense of having to use this coin by the Jews had some foundation.

There are two parts - something stated and something implied - in Jesus' answer. Let me rephrase Jesus' question - "Who's image does this coin bear?" Being familiar with the coin - they replied "Caesar's image." Jesus' answer basically said this: – "give to Caesar that which bears Caesar's image." Jesus implied - "give to God that which bears God's image."

The coin carried the image of the one who was responsible for making the coin. The one who made the coin had every right to claim ownership of the coin. Everyone - regardless of the country or nation where they originated - when they picked up one of these coins - they could look on the coin - see the image of the emperor of Rome - and understood the Roman government had a right to claim that coin.

Very early in the Bible - in the creation account - we are told that man was created in the image of God. We won't spend time today debating exactly what that means. For today, let's just accept that man - in whatever way it means - man bears the image of God.

Why are we having such a hard time accepting the most simple truth. Man - or mankind if you prefer - carries the image of the one who is responsible for making man. The one who made man has every right to claim ownership of man. Jesus distinguished sharply between Caesar and God in his answer.

The coin - with it's image and statement on each side was surely an idolatrous thing. But it belonged to a pagan government. Why act surprised by the idolatrous claims and actions by pagans.

We should understand that people who are not saved - by their nature - are going to do and say things that are degrading - to be mild about it. It in no way defamed God to give to the pagan what belongs to the pagan.

Please read carefully what I am about to say. It only defames God - when we give to the pagan that which belongs to God. In civil authority - there is an inherent tendency to attempt to reach beyond its appointed function. Because civil authority is made up of human beings - there is a tendency toward self-glorification. But the New Testament teaches us that the civil authority only exist because God allows it – and even the civil authority is God's servant.

There have been a number of efforts started by those claiming to be devout Christians - to get Christians to refuse to pay federal income taxes. Far too many Christians have followed the instructions of zealous men who have had significant charisma - and as a result - have lost their savings, their homes, and sometimes their families.

Fishers of Men – have no business participating in any effort that tries to avoid paying the rightful and legal taxes. It is wrong for us to attempt to make a claim of earthly sovereignty - to claim we owe no allegiance to the nation to which we are citizens.

It is wrong for us to accept the nation's currency and then attempt to withhold from the nation it's required tribute of that currency. But here is the more important issue for us:

Fishers of Men -
have no right to give to the civil authorities that which belongs to God.
To be the kind of Fishers of Men God has created us to be -
we must recognize and understand what belongs to whom -
or who belongs to whom - and give to each accordingly.

We need to ask ourselves today:

"whose image does my conscious bear?"
" whose image does my lifestyle bear?"
" whose image does my vocabulary bear?"
" whose image does my work ethic bear?"
" whose image does my business ethic bear?"

We may have become like the coin that has the image worn away and people are unable to discern the image - here is the good news - we can be re-stamped! Not only is it true that God can Re-Stamp us - but God desires greatly to do so for everyone who has allowed the friction of this world to wear away the image of God. Yes, God is ready, willing, and able to re-stamp us with his image.

Caesar was seeking his image - and Jesus told the people of that day to render to Caesar his image. God is seeking his image - we most certainly should render to God his image in every aspect and area of our life.

When others look at us - and our lifestyle - and the way we conduct ourselves - What is the image they see? Have we been giving to the world that part of us that rightfully belongs to God?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Some find it easy to challenge the importance of the text in this lesson. They say it lacks relevance for our lives today. I ask you to remember - we are approaching this text just like all the others in Mark - looking for instructions for us as Fishers of Men. There was an important message for those first disciples in this encounter. That means there is an important message for today's disciples in this encounter. So, even with the words of doubt by some, let us dip in with eagerness and expectation.

Read Mark 12:18 and make notes:

There have been a number of suggestions as to just what place the Sadducees held in that day. Some say they were the aristocratic party - some say they were involved politically - others say they were really wealthy. The truth is - we have very few historical documents that tell us much about the Sadducees. We have a number of historical documents that mention the Sadducees - and they are almost always mentioned in the context of being at odds with the Pharisees over some Temple issue. We have documents that tell us the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection - and we have documents that tell us that in a 107 year span of time - there was only one High Priest who was a Sadducee - all the others were Pharisees.

We know the Sadducees supported the idea and worked to get the government to establish a self-perpetuating system of ordained scribes with absolute authority in Jewish Law. In other words – the Sadducees thought it would be good – to have the civil government to establish who was ordained and who wasn't. As you can imagine – the Pharisees were very opposed to this concept – they felt it was best left to the way God set it up for the Levites to be the priest. That's pretty much all we really know about the Sadducees - just about everything else is someone's speculation.

There was a strong belief in the resurrection by most of the Jews - even those who were not very faithful in practicing their religious rituals. As far as we can tell, the Sadducees were the only Jewish group that rejected the resurrection. The main point is not about death - but it is very important that we take notice of the fact that the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. Keep this point in mind as we read the rest of the text.

Read Mark 12:19-23 and make notes:

Just an interesting side note here: it was the customary practice for teaching in that day by the Scribes and the Rabbis - to reference a Scripture - then pose a question regarding that Scripture by connecting it to some real life situation that has – does - or can take place. It was the view of the teachers in that day - that the students would learn best by thinking through a situation and arriving at the answer - instead of the teacher standing and saying "in this situation, do this."

So, the way this question by the Sadducees is set up - is the typical teaching method of the best seminaries of that day (although they didn't call them seminaries). They cited a passage of Scripture regarding Levirate marriage - probably referring to Deuteronomy 25 - they presented a story of a woman and her seven husbands - all who had died - each one leaving her childless.

As a side note - a story almost identical to this exist in a Hebrew book that is not included in the Old Testament . The book of Tobit has this same story as having taken place in ancient Israel.

In the situation they presented - the Levitical ordinance had been fulfilled. Some believe the Sadducees intended to pose a question to Jesus that would open him up to ridicule in front of the people. "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" The Sadducees must have thought they had presented the most absurd case before Jesus - 7 brothers - each one married to the same woman - one after the other - and then comes this alleged resurrection.

I know that was the custom and Levitical law of that day - but I tend to see things a little differently from some. Think about this - a man marries a woman and he dies before they have children. The rule calls for a brother of this man to marry her and to have children by her that could carry on the dead brothers name - but before they could have children he dies. One - two - three - maybe - but somewhere - long before it gets to seven - I would have to be thinking "now hold on here a minute - everybody she marries dies off pretty soon afterward - do I really want to marry this woman?" "I have heard of women having a killer body - but this is too much" - "maybe she's a nice person but just the absolute worst cook in the world - her meatloaf will kill you." Had I been alive in those days - I might have been #2, - maybe even #3 - but I have strong doubts about #4, #5, and #6 - and I'm real sure I had rather take a beating than become husband #7 to this woman.

Let's get back to the Sadducees - they asked in the resurrection - which one of these men will the woman be restored to? Can't you just see some of the Sadducees sort of snickering - imagining Jesus saying something like "she will be the wife to all 7 of them." Can you just imagine what they could do with an answer like that? And what if Jesus says the woman will be restored to the first one only - or to the last one only - the things they can make out of that in front of the people. They can begin to attack the Jewish law - "now look folks – based on what Jesus said – you had better be the first husband – or the last husband – because otherwise you will be left out in the next life – and have to live without a wife." You can just see how the Sadducees were thinking they would attack Jesus as soon as he gives either of these three possible answers.

Read Mark 12:24 and make notes:

Jesus responds with a question and a positive statement. Jesus didn't just say "you are wrong" - Jesus didn't simply ask "aren't you in error" - Jesus stated they are in error and then asked them to consider the reason they are in error. "Are you not in error because" - this doesn't leave open the possibility of being wrong - this says You ARE wrong. The question is regarding the "why" you are wrong "because you do not know the Scriptures OR the power of God." Jesus is pointing out basically three things regarding the Sadducees: one is that they are wrong - the second is that they do not know the Scriptures - and the third is they do not know the power of God.

What Jesus is asking them to consider - is that the reason they are wrong - is because they do not know the Scriptures and they don't know the power of God. In some of the writings of ancient Israel we find some interesting things - one is a Priest writing "Blessed be thou, O Lord, who raises the dead." Another is in the doxology that is to be read when one is buried "Blessed be he who keeps his word and raises the dead." Another is the writing that says "Whoever says that the resurrection of the dead cannot be deduced from the Torah has no part in the Age to Come."

The main cry of the Sadducees is that the Scriptures - what we know as the Old Testament - would never say that there is a resurrection. And yet they had writings from a great number of priests who had taken the time to study the scriptures and they have said there is much in the Old Testament - the Torah - that makes it clear there is going to be a resurrection.

Instead of approaching the Godly lifestyle from the position of logic - if the Sadducees would simply read and study the Scriptures - they would never accept the teaching that says there is no resurrection. Every other Jewish group believed in a resurrection - all the other Jewish groups studied the scriptures and tried to understand them - misunderstood some things but at least they went to the source.

The Sadducees were running primarily on teachings that made sense to man - and these teachings were handed down from Sadducee to Sadducee. None of them thinking it worthwhile to go and study the "old Scriptures." When people say to you - "don't bother reading your bible - just listen to the teacher" - you need to get away from them quickly - they are a modern day branch of the Sadducees.

Let's get back on track here. Jesus' counter question basically was a way of saying "you wouldn't be wrong - if you knew the Scriptures and the power of God."

Read Mark 12:25 and make notes:

Jesus made a statement regarding marriage in the resurrection. This fact - or point - is pretty much insignificant to the problem the Sadducees have; but it helps to illustrate the consequences of their ignorance. Because the Sadducees were approaching everything from the attitude of what makes sense to man – they were messed up on the resurrected life. From their fleshly point of view – if there was going to be a resurrection – then it only makes sense that we would pick up where we left off and continue doing what we usually do.

Jesus pointed toward the concept that earthly relationships were for earthly living purposes - earthly relationships had little or no bearing on resurrected life. The resurrected life of people on earth would become more comparable to that of the angels – where the great purpose - and the center of our communion will be with God – not each other. "If you guys would just get to know the Scriptures you would probably not have asked such a question." "If you guys would get to know the power of God – you would have no question that God has the power to give life to any dead thing - or person." And Jesus is going to demonstrate that power very shortly when he is raised from the dead.

Read Mark 12:26-27 and make notes:

The Sadducees set their question up by referring to a Scripture. So Jesus takes them back to Scripture – Jesus points to the Scripture - to point to God's covenant faithfulness. Jesus takes them back to a root text – to provide them an opportunity to correct the root of error that is running in their minds. If you want to do a in-depth study of the Old Testament passage – you will find it is saying "God is the helper, the savior, and the protector of ."

When the Sadducees repeated "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob" - they did so with the idea that God had blessed their fore-fathers – and for that God was worthy of praise. They recited a benediction prayer that said, "Blessed be thou, O Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, God most high. . .for protecting our fathers and blessing them." Jesus is pointing out to the Sadducees that they had missed the point from the very beginning. God wasn't the God of their dead fore-fathers. God had not said to Moses "I was the father of. . ." God had said to Moses "I am. . ." - indicating He still is even at the time of Moses.

God is the God of the living - then and now. God was the God of Abraham when he was alive on earth - and is now the God of Abraham who is alive with God. God was the God of Isaac when he was alive on earth - and is now the God of Isaac who is alive with God. God was the God of Jacob when he was alive on earth - and is now the God of Jacob who is alive with God.

If the Sadducees would simply study their Scriptures they would find where God said "As I have been the God of your fathers - their guide, their helper, their sustainer, their protector - so I will be your savior in your present affliction." The formula was never about God having been the God of some people who died long ago. The formula was always about God being the God of those who call to him and submit to him in a covenant relationship.

If the Sadducees would just pay attention - Jesus is presenting them with a significant principle here. The Sadducees believed that physical death was a point of extinction for the individual - the person simply ceased to exist. If God had been the protector, provider, deliverer, helper, etc. - for these patriarchs of old but could not deliver them from extinction - then he really wasn't much of a God after all was he?

Jesus is pointing out to the Sadducees the high level of fidelity that exists in God's covenant. Physical death may dissolve the covenant responsibilities between two human beings - but physical death does not end - deter - or dim - the covenant God has entered into with those who come to him.

God continues to be our God - even after physical death - and God continues to be faithful to his covenant with us - even after physical death - because we who are in covenant with God do not cease to live. God is indeed - the God of the Living.

In much the same way as the Pharisees and the Herodians did not ask a question in order to discover the answer - the Sadducees didn't ask their question to discover the answer either. When they asked their question - it was the purpose of doing harm to Jesus. It wasn't a real question. They didn't believe in a resurrection - so any question about what will happen in the resurrection was insincere - it was a falsehood. And Jesus knew the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection - Jesus knew this was not a real question.

I remind you that Jesus wanted these religious leaders to be saved. He wasn't there to simply put them down. Look at Jesus' closing statement in this text - "You are badly mistaken!" And then remember how Jesus started his response to their false question: "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?"

The message for us today as Fishers of Men: Jesus could have simply blown these guys off when they asked this insincere question. The moment he knew they were only trying to hurt him - he could have easily said "get thee behind me." But Jesus took the time to explain a root principle - not only for these misguided ignorant religious leaders but also for his disciples who were with him.

Please remember - Jesus started this gospel with the promise: I will make you Fishers of Men. Jesus did not tell the Sadducees they were wrong because they were stupid! Jesus did not tell the Sadducees they were wrong because they were just evil to the core! Jesus told the Sadducees they were wrong because they did not know God's Word - and they did not know the power of God.

There are many Scripture texts to which we could refer to make a case for the importance of studying God's Word for yourself. But there isn't one that makes it more clear and plain than this one: If we don't take the time to study God's Word - we aren't going to know God's Word.

If we don't know God's Word – we can only know what some other person has told us. If we don't know God's Word - we are going to be wrong about a great many things. And it will often be rather important spiritual principles about which we will be wrong.

What kind of Fishers of Men will we be - if we are wrong? There is just something about our fleshly nature that gives us all a tendency toward being lazy mentally and spiritually. Even people who are willing and faithful to work hard for a living are tempted to become lazy spiritually. "Well, I won't spend the time studying God's Word - I'll just listen to what the Teacher - or the Preacher says."

Folks! That's what the Sadducees had been doing and look at the response they received from Jesus! Jesus was very close to setting these first disciples lose to go out and be the Fishers of Men he had been training them to be. And Jesus did not want them to become lazy spiritually. So Jesus let them see what had happened to the Sadducees - as a result of not studying the Scriptures. So that these first disciples would not come to be ignorant of God's Word - and as a result become WRONG about spiritual things.

Today - every bit as much as in those days - 2,000 years later - Jesus does not want the disciples of today to be ignorant of His Word. It has been people who do not know God's Word that have started cults. It has been people who do not know God's Word that have led many sincere and good people to perform really painful things in the name of Christianity. It has been people who do not know God's Word that have led way too many Believers into religious legalism and even bondage.

If we are going to be the kind of Fishers of Men that God desires for us to be - we must be faithful to study God's Word. We must come to know God's Word for ourselves - and not just what brother or sister so-in-so tells us it says. And as we come to know God's Word - we will come to know God's Power. And when we know God's Word and know God's Power - it will be easy to be the Fishers of Men we our supposed to be.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The text we are going to examine in this lesson doesn't seem to get a lot of attention. But it records a very important message for Fishers of Men. At this point, it is a very short time until Jesus sends these first disciples out to be Fishers of Men. The principles Jesus is revealing to His disciples in these last days before their graduation are really important.

If you remember - Jesus was confronted by the Sanhedrin - and they failed to trap Jesus. Jesus was then confronted by the Pharisees, one part of the Sanhedrin, and they failed to trap Jesus. And then Jesus was confronted by the Sadducees, another part of the Sanhedrin, and they failed to trap Jesus. In this text, Jesus is confronted by the last part of the Sanhedrin, Teachers of the Law. Let's see how they do with Jesus.

Read Mark 12:28 and make notes:

One of the Teachers of the Law had listened as the Sadducees tried to present Jesus with a trap and he was impressed with the response they received from Jesus. This was a typical discussion topic to debate - what was the weightier and the lighter issues of the 613 different laws they had come up with. And this type of conversation wasn't idle talk. When a person violates a law, you need to make sure the punishment fits the violation. So there was some importance in establishing which of the laws were the "big ones" and which were the "small ones."

No doubt, this teacher of the law was thinking in regards to the 613 laws the religious leaders had come up with through the years. So let's take a look at Jesus' response.

Read Mark 12:29-31 and make notes:

Jesus' response goes deeper than some distinction between small and great laws - or commandments. His response indicates Jesus re-directed the question so as to concern the "principle" of the Law. Jesus' reply was not some strange idea! Shortly before Jesus was born - one of the teachers of the law named Hillel - was asked by a Gentile to try and summarize the Jewish laws into one statement. Hillel replied "What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor: this is the law, the rest is commentary." We have historical evidence that some of the Jewish religious leaders did understand the principle of the Law- and yet there were those in the Sanhedrin who perpetuated this ongoing debate about the more important and the less important laws.

Jesus did not hesitate to state clearly in front of the people – and his disciples – that the whole law was summed up in this simple statement – that basically identifies the will of God for man.

Pious Jews – every morning and again every evening – began their prayers with these words: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

This indicates "our God is unique" - unlike the gods of other peoples. This indicates "our God is deserving of being loved" and we are to do so with "all" of our being. The whole man is the object of God's covenant love – so the whole man is claimed by God. Jesus' response communicates the idea that a whole-hearted love for God will express itself in a selfless concern for our neighbor.

Read Mark 12:32-33 and make notes:

This teacher of the law affirms Jesus' statement that "God is one" - and that "there is no other" God but him. As we have already mentioned - some of the teachers acknowledged loving God with "all" that we are and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is the sum of God's law. The only thing that might appear as a surprise is his statement - is that loving in this manner is "more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Here is one of the teachers of the law that seems to understand that for us to Love God with "all" that we have and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves – requires sacrificing on our part - and this type of sacrifice overshadows the burning of animal parts.

Read Mark 12:34 and make notes:

It is noteworthy that it tells us from this time forward "no one dared" to ask Jesus any more test questions. The Sanhedrin as a whole had confronted Jesus and tried to put him down - they failed. Then a small group from the Sanhedrin - made up of the Pharisees and their partners the Herodians - confronted Jesus and tried to trip him up - they failed. Then a small group from the Sanhedrin - the Sadducees - came and tried to trap Jesus - they failed. Then one of the teachers of the law - the last group that makes up the Sanhedrin - came and tested Jesus in his understanding of God's Law - listen carefully - HE DID NOT FAIL!

I have shared with you more than once – Jesus was not desiring to put the religious leaders in their place – even with their "holier than thou" attitudes toward the rest of the people – even with their self-righteous piety – even with their wicked and evil intents – Jesus wanted these people to be saved. Look at what Jesus said to this teacher of the law – "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Doesn't hearing "you are not far from the kingdom of God" sound better than "you are wrong"? or "you are badly mistaken"? What a powerful point to get across to his disciples!

To love God with "all" your heart - with "all" your strength - with "all" your mind - and with "all" you have - And then to love your fellow man as you love yourself. This is better than ritual - this is better than ceremony - this is better than burnt offerings - this is better than any and every work that we could ever perform.

Jesus knew the church he was about to establish - would be tempted continuously by the fleshly desires of human beings. Jesus knew the church would be continually confronted with those who would try to set up all manner of legal do's and don'ts. And Jesus wanted his disciples to hear - **Love - expressed by sacrificial living is the key to fulfilling all the law of God.**

What is the message in this text for us to become Fishers of Men?

God is ONE - this means there isn't multiple gods. God is ONE - this means there isn't a Big God and then one or more small gods. God is ONE - this means there is only one God and everything else and everyone else IS NOT GOD! We are not God and we will never become God.

In the days of the Early Church, there arose a perverted teaching referred to as the Arian heresy. There are still some today who are teaching this perversion. Basically it takes this scripture reference and says "if there can only be one God, then Jesus is not God." Don't let the enemy trap you into going down this path. That statement could have validity if Jesus and God were two separate entities - but the Word of God tells us that Jesus and God are ONE - "if we have seen Jesus - then we have seen the Father in Heaven."

Loving God cannot be divided into several compartments of our lives. If we love God with all that we have – then there is no love given to any other. Look back at v30 for a moment: When we are told to "Love the Lord your God with all. . ." – means there is do division into parts – or even into areas. We are to "love God with all our heart – all our soul - all our mind - all our strength!

If I am loving God with all my heart – what part of my heart do I have to give to another? If I am loving God with all my soul – what part of my soul do I have to give to another? If I am loving God with all my mind – what part of my mind do I have to give to another? If I am loving God with all my strength – what part of my strength do I have to give to another?

If I turn any one of these statements around - it would go something like this: If I am giving any part of my heart, soul, mind, or strength to another - how can I say that I am giving "all" to God?

The "body" speaks of the nutritive part of our being. The "soul" speaks of the vital part of our being. The "mind" speaks of the intellectual part of our being. The "strength" speaks of the power and energy of our being.

Before you write this off and start thinking of something else - this is one part of a very important Kingdom principle - one which Jesus knew his disciples needed to know before they set out to be Fishers of Men. Part A - is that to be Fishers of Men, we are to love God with "all" of our being! So what is Part B? Jesus knew his disciples would be pressured to come back under the law! Jesus knew his disciples would time and time again - face those who are very persuasive in their words - and try to get Believers to come back into a legalistic religious experience.

So Jesus took his disciples to meet with a Teacher of the Law who had it right as far as the "commandment thing" was concerned. The only problem this Teacher of the Law had was he didn't know where to take what he understood. He did not understand that Jesus was the Messiah!

Part B is that to be Fishers of Men we are to love others just like we love ourselves. "Whoever did it to the least of these – has done it unto me." Loving God by loving others is so-o-o-o-o-o much better than burnt offerings and burnt sacrifices. Loving God by loving others is so much better than any religious ritual we can perform.

When religious rituals and religious ceremonies help us remember God - When they help us focus on the mercy and grace of God - When they help us keep the things of this world in the proper perspective - Then religious rituals and religious ceremonies are a wonderful tool for worshipping God. But when religious rituals and religious ceremonies become the primary focus of our religious life - they have become a very bad thing!

So to be the Fisher of Men we are supposed to be - we must keep in mind the most important commandment is to remember that God is One - and we are to love him with all that we are and have. The second most important commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Every other command - and any other command - must be kept in a place of being in submission to these - two commands.

The Primary Directive is this: We are to Love God with all that we are and all that we have - and we are to love others as we love our self! Any other directive that interferes with Loving God with all that we are and have - or interferes with us Loving others as we love our self - Must NOT be obeyed!

We want to be a Fisher of Men. God desires for us to be Fishers of Men. So, lets check our Love.

Do we love Him with all that we are? Do we love others as we love our self?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

We are continuing in our series from Mark on becoming the Fishers of Men God wants us to be. We going to examine one more of the very important messages Jesus wanted to share with his disciples just before he set them out to be Fishers of Men in the New Covenant Kingdom.

Read Mark 12:35 and make notes:

Questions concerning the Davidic lineage of the Messiah found real significance when the people talked about a restored kingdom they believed would take place when the Messiah came. These hopes and expectations were all heightened during the festival season and were fanned - if not started - by the common chant of the pilgrims as they arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals - "Blessed be the kingdom of our father David which is coming." You can see a version of this chant recorded in Mark 11. There was this conviction by the common people - that national deliverance would come under a restored Davidic kingdom - with a divinely inspired - if not divinely endowed - Davidic leadership.

At this time of the year - during the festival season - there was an increase in scribal piety - and an increase in the piety of the majority of the Jews - especially for those who attended the festivals in Jerusalem. The actual phrase "son of David" is not found in the Jewish text until somewhere around the first century B.C. - but by the time Jesus was ministering on earth - it was an important and common part of every messianic deliverer chant.

Jesus' question wasn't to deny the word or the prophecy of the Scripture. His question was for the purpose of raising a crucial issue regarding its proper meaning. It would be an accurate translation to say "What do the scribes mean when they say the Messiah is the son of David?"

Everyone is running around - dancing and celebrating and all the while declaring the Messiah to be the Son of David. Jesus wanted to provoke the people into some thoughtful reflection on what they were saying. It would be kind of like "what you are saying is true - but do you have any idea of what you are really saying?"

On the negative side - many of you understand this line of thinking - I said on the negative side. Do you remember a time when one of your small children blurted out some curse word – or called someone a dirty name? Of course they heard it at school or the neighbors house - not yours. When they said that particular word - you were pretty sure they had no idea what it meant - and you may have said something like "do you know what that word means?" And then they say "no" - they were just saying it because they heard someone else say it and it sounded like a neat curse word. Maybe you explained what it meant - probably didn't - but you did administer some incentive to keep them from saying it again.

On the positive side - these people were saying this phrase - and Jesus was just as sure that they didn't understand what they were saying - as you were sure your little darling didn't know what they were saying.

I have mentioned to you before - that in those days - a favorite method of teaching was for the teacher to pose a question of the Scripture and a real life situation then have the students calculate - discuss - reason - debate - consider the outcome of each possible answer - and then hopefully come to the right conclusion. It was also a common practice for the Scribes to present two Scriptures that appear to contradict one another - they called it a Haggada-question - and then have the students work on finding a meaning for each that would provide harmony rather than contradiction.

Just as a side note - while I have said this before - this is a good place to mention it again. Anytime you have found Scriptures that appear to contradict each other - go back over them and study them some more - for when we have properly interpreted the Scriptures - they will agree with one another and never contradict one another. Any time someone presents you with a contradiction in the Bible - you can tell them that Pastor Bob says, "you have misinterpreted at least one of the texts" (maybe both).

Back to the message in this lesson. Jesus presents to the people something of a Haggada-question. How can you harmonize: (1) a descendent of David will be the Messiah – and the Scriptures supports this as true – and (2) David called the Messiah his Lord – this too is supported by Scripture as true. These people had picked up a saying because it sounded as neat to them to say at their time of celebration - as the bad word sounded neat to your little precious. Jesus didn't indicate that he wanted them to stop proclaiming what they were saying. Jesus just wanted them to consider what they were saying.

Jesus wanted them to be saying - what they were saying - with an understanding. Jesus did not want the people to be ignorant.

Read Mark 12:36-37 and make notes:

Jesus follows his question immediately with a declaration that what David said was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is a reference to Psalm 110 - and if you take time to look at this Psalm - you will see that David affirmed this promise concerned the Messiah and not himself. In what sense is the Messiah the son of David? If David referred to the Messiah as his "Lord," then he understood that the one who would receive the promise was greater than he was himself.

There are a number of other New Testament text that help shed light and understanding on this issue - but we won't go to them in this lesson. It would be a good bible study for anyone who wants to get into the meat of it.

Jesus wants the people to know there isn't going to be an exaltation of the Messiah in opposition to the Messiah being the son of David. Jesus will prove himself to be the “ful-filler” of the Scriptures.

One of the points Jesus wanted to make with the people that day - was that even David himself made a distinction between his earthly political sovereignty - and the higher level of sovereignty that belonged to the Messiah. The Messiah is not only the "son of David" - but he is also David's Lord. The Messiah is not only the "son of David" - but he was before David - and he was with David - as well as coming after David.

Jesus wanted the people to begin to understand that the Messiah is not going to establish an earthly kingdom. The Messiah is not going to restore an earthly sovereignty for Israel. The Messiah is not going to renew or extend the work of David. The Messiah is going to establish a wholly new and different Kingdom.

The kingdom of David was but a sign and symbol of what the Messiah's kingdom was going to be. And as is typical with us humans - we get a spiritual sign and try to turn it into a literal thing. The Messiah fulfillment of the promise goes so far beyond the expectations of the contemporary Jews – as well as the Scribes - and the people had their sights and expectations set way too low.

When Jesus posed this question for the people to consider - it was not some small spiritual principle. Jesus was standing on the verge of great suffering and death. Jesus knew he was standing in an apparent conflict situation - with the current line of thinking - how would they ever understand his death as part of the Messiah's salvation of the people. The battle Jesus came to fight for the people was not against the socio-political Roman empire – or any other earthly empire. Jesus came to do battle with demonic forces and spiritual powers that basically would make the earthly powers look like something hardly worth mentioning.

Jesus knew that the full and total fulfillment of the promise to David included the suffering servant dying on the Cross and resurrection from the dead. This people needed to raise their sights and expectations to look above and beyond the physical limitations of this earth.

From the common view of that day - even among the Scribes - there was no satisfactory answer to the question "In what sense is the Messiah David's son?" The only way the two sides of this Haggada-question could be reconciled was going to be from the viewpoint of the New Covenant. And while the New Covenant was not yet established - it was really important for the people to come to the realization that there is something they do not know - they needed to begin looking beyond the physical boundaries within which they were living.

If the people continued to accept the limited physical view of things they had at that time - they were going to miss the salvation the Messiah was bringing them - because the deliverance and the salvation was way past the social and physical existence of the worldly empire. We could say it was "way beyond the blue." If they would consider Jesus' question - and begin to look beyond their little box - then when the Messiah brought deliverance they would easily see how it all fits together. But if they weren't looking - they would not even see it pass them by.

The Messiah is the son of David and he is the Exalted Lord - who now reigns at the right hand of God and he has fulfilled all the Scriptures and promises of the Messiah - except the second coming. And he has done so, in a manner and a mode that is significantly different from what the Scribes had taught the people to look for.

Please take another look at the last part of v37: "The large crowd listened to him with delight." This gives us an indication that the common people were responding enthusiastically to Jesus' teaching. How much of the penetrating truth they understood - we aren't told. But it does give us an indication that the people quickly realized the interpretations of the Scribes were not going to answer this question.

Even if they understood nothing more - they appear to at least have understood the physical earthly interpretation provided by the Scribes just wasn't going to be enough. The people, even if they didn't yet understand exactly what they were saying "let's go with Jesus" - at least he helped us realize there must be something beyond this earth.

Read Mark 12:38-39 and make notes:

Basically, Jesus was not warning the people against the Scribes. He was warning the people against Scribal abuses. It wasn't that the people needed to be careful of ministers - they needed to be careful about those ministers who abuse people. Many of the Scribes, Levites, and priest of that day insisted on going about in fine linen robes, often with a long bright white mantle, that frequently reached all the way to their feet and usually had a fringe at the end. There basically isn't anything wrong dressing nice – and fine clothes are surely acceptable.

The problem was - these priests insisted on the people treating them as someone distinguished. They demanded the people accept their words as having sovereign authority. The common people were told they had to rise from their seats when the priest would pass by. They insisted on being addressed by such titles as "Rabbi", "Master", and "Father." There is some historical evidence that during the first century B.C. - the title "Rabbi" was changed from a general title used for anyone who was a teacher to be used only for those who were official - or today we might say "ordained" – priest.

When someone would hold a feast or celebration - maybe a marriage - maybe the return of someone from a long business trip - maybe a very good harvest - they were expected to have at least one of these distinguished scribes or priests at their feast. Not only at the synagogues, but at all celebrations or meals - they expected and demanded positions of honor.

Being treated with honor and respect is not a bad thing when it is the choice of those giving honor and giving respect. It is a bad thing when words, actions, honor, and respect - are demanded. It is not a bad thing to sit in a place of honor – when you are invited to do so. It is a bad thing to demand that others give you a place of honor.

It is a bad thing for more than the simple reason than it shows a lack of humility. It is a symptom - or a sign - that this person is going to hurt other people. Just make a notation somewhere - that anytime you find someone who demands to be treated with respect - who demands to be given places of honor - this person needs to be avoided - because it is a matter of time before they begin to hurt others. This concept might be new to you and me - but it wasn't new to Jesus. He knew it - he understood it - and he was on the "look out" for it.

The same thing holds true for ministers as it does for every other person. When we live our lives in an honorable and upright fashion - when we treat others with respect and dignity - people will treat us with respect and honor. If we have to demand it - then we simply need to change the way we are living!

Read Mark 12:40 and make notes:

Jesus makes a shift from the warning regarding the scribes desire for honor and takes the warning fully to abuse on the part of these scribes and priest. In the first century A.D. - the scribes were forbidden from taking pay for their services as a scribe. The people were taught and encouraged to provide for the means of the scribes and the livelihood of their families.

This charge that scribes were "devouring" widows houses is saying they were sponging off of people and abusing some who didn't have any excess to share - but the scribes simply took what they had anyway. It is a wonderful thing when the people would share what they had with the priests. It is a terrible thing when the priest would take what they wanted from the people.

This is still true today. Ministers who demand people give up what they have just so the minister can have it - as we will see a little later - will not be received so well in the end. Jesus found fault with the public displays of these scribes that were meant to convince the people of their deep piety - just so they could take advantage of them. These scribes and ministers had clearly lost perspective in their service to God. The honor that was clearly God's - was being side tracked to those who were supposed to be spiritual servants and not masters and lords.

We have those same kinds of people today but let us not get into a battle with them. Look at Jesus' closing comments regarding this kind of priests and ministers: "Such men will be punished most severely." Not just that these kinds of ministers will be punished - they will be punished "most severely"

What should we take away from this lesson?

First - Don't be trapped by the physics of this earth.

Let us not limit our vision to the physical horizons of earth. Let us not limit our expectation to what is physically possible by all earthly means. Let us remember that our citizenship is in a spiritual kingdom and the only limits upon what is possible for us is the limits of that spiritual kingdom. With God all things are possible!

To be the kind of Fishers of Men we are called to be - we must have our vision, our faith, and our expectations beyond the physical limitations of this earth. When we move our faith beyond this earth - we will witness and experience great and marvelous victories over the kingdom of darkness.

Second - Don't fall prey to the temptation of Pride.

The father of pride will continuously tempt God's people with Pride. Let us not fall prey to the temptation for personal glory. Let us not become the kind of person that demands others treat us with respect and honor. Let us not become the kind of person that demands to be given the places of honor at meetings.

Sometimes we may do something that leads others to want to give us recognition and even congratulations. If it happens - we should receive even that with humility. It might be just as wrong to deny it - as it would to be proud of it and make more of it than it really is. But let us never become a person who places ourselves above another person and demand that they lift us up.

Surely, it doesn't need to be explained how this kind of attitude will keep us from being the kind of Fisher of Men we are expected to be. Let both our Faith in God and our humility before men be extra-ordinary - and beyond what "is usual" on earth.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The text we are going to examine in this lesson must not be separated from the previous lesson from Mark. In the previous lesson - Jesus brought his disciples attention to the sham of righteousness and piety the Scribes were living. In this lesson - Jesus brings his disciples attention to the wholehearted devotion to God on the part of an unnamed person. What a sharp contrast in devotion - what a sharp contrast in heart relationship with the Father in Heaven.

Read Mark 12:41-42 and make notes:

Jesus was seated probably upon a bench - and he was seated across from the box into which people placed their offerings. After watching a number of wealthy people place large offerings into the receptacle - Jesus noticed a woman who's poverty was obvious and plain to anyone who would take the time to look at her. What she placed into the offering receptacle was two coins - which were the smallest coins of the smallest value of any coins being circulated and used at that time.

Read Mark 12:43-44 and make notes:

We don't know the heart or attitude of this widow. It could have been like the widow in Elijah's day. When she was asked to feed him – she said, “okay, I will feed you then my son and I will die.”

Jesus saw something in this widow that his disciples needed to understand – and even appreciate. This widow provided an example of something Jesus knew would be needed in the lives and hearts of his disciples if they were ever going to become the Fishers of Men he had called them to be.

It would be the natural thing for people of that day - just like we are today - to consider the large offerings from the wealthy as the most significant contribution. After all, the ministry can do so much more with the large offering than can be accomplished with the small offering. That is according to worldly value systems. But what was the value of those two small coins according to the Heavenly value system? Jesus must have turned upside down the thinking of his disciples that day. The disciples did not know this woman put in all that she had. The disciples only knew what they saw. She put in almost nothing compared to everyone else – according to earthly terms.

This widow would have been completely within her rights to have kept one coin and only placed one into the receptacle. It is of some significance that she placed "two" coins into the offering. For Jesus tells us these two coins is all that this woman had. The disciples - not knowing this important fact - failed to see the level of commitment of the contributors of large amounts and the commitment of this woman who gave the least amount.

Let us consider this in terms that are a little more contemporary. Let's suppose we have several people who placed offerings into the plate at our church service. One person received \$10,000 this week, and they placed \$1,000 into the plate. Another received \$2,000 this week and placed \$200 into the plate. Then another person received \$10 this week and they placed \$10 into the plate. Who gave the largest offering?

In earthly terms it is an easy answer - the person who gave \$1,000. But that person, as did the one who put in \$200 in this example, gave 10% of what they had received and they each kept 90% for themselves. The last person in our example gave 100% to God and kept nothing for themselves.

In Heavenly terms, the person who gave 100% gave exceedingly more than did any of the others. It was important for the disciples then - and for the disciples now - to grasp the concept that the value of our personal commitment and devotion is what is measured in the Heavenly system.

Not once is it recorded in the Heavenly records what we have given in actual dollar amounts. It is always recorded in Percentage amounts. And then – not in percentage of dollars or currency – it is recorded in percentage of “devotion.”

What should we take with us from this lesson?

There is just one point - but it is a "biggie." If we want to become the Fishers of Men God has called us to be - then **we must come to understand that the quantity does not show up in any audit of the Heavenly system.**

Just like it did for the widow in the text for this lesson - our goodwill - our devotion - our commitment - will always be the measurement of what we give. Just like Jesus did on that day - he still does so today - Jesus does not look at the dollar amount we take out of our wallet - or the dollar amount we write on our check.

When Jesus was watching those people in the temple that day - he was looking at the heart of each person as they came to the offering receptacle. Each person coming up with a heart and devotion to give some small amount of what they had been blessed with - the next - then the next - then the next. Then a person stepped forward to the offering receptacle with a heart to give all that she had and desiring to hold nothing back for herself. This woman displayed and expressed a much deeper faith than anyone who had given before her. And only those looking with spiritual eyes could see it. Those looking with physical eyes could only see the meager earthly value.

When it comes to the kingdom of God - it may turn out that many who had much on this earth - and gave large amounts to the ministry on this earth - may have very little reward in Heaven - while some who had so little on this earth - and was able to give only small amounts may wind up having so much greater reward in Heaven - because their small amounts - amounted to most or all of what they had.

Chrysostom, one of the early church Fathers, declared the Kingdom of God is not for sale. Nothing of the kingdom can be purchased with earthly money.

It is important for Fishers of Men to realize and to remember - all of the things of Heaven are given in gifts to those who show faithfulness. Sometimes it is faithfulness in trying to live a righteous and holy life. Sometimes it is faithfulness in serving and ministering to others.

In light of the text in this lesson - I ask you to consider the faithfulness in living and faithfulness in ministering: Those who are being faithful in trying to live a righteous and holy life - some are going to live a more righteous life than others. Some are going to live a more holy life than others - in terms of doing the right thing and avoiding doing the wrong thing. But some of those who appear to have failed to the greatest degree in doing right and wound up doing the greatest wrong may have been more faithful than some of those who did so little wrong and did much more right.

Take the person who actually does more right things - and did very few wrong things - suppose they knew what they were about to do was wrong - but thought to themselves - "I do the right thing most of the time" - "I hardly ever do anything wrong" - "surely God will overlook this one transgression on my part" - then they willfully and intentionally do wrong.

Now take the person who actually does so few things right - and they did a whole "heap and gob" wrong. But suppose they were trying with all their might to do the right thing – however they kept messing up in spite of their efforts. They didn't do wrong willfully or intentionally - they were in fact using all their faith - using all their strength - and doing all they knew to do in an effort to do the right thing and to avoid the wrong thing.

The same analogy can be applied to the person who performs so much ministry and the person who never seems to do much ministry at all.

Did the one who performed so much ministry from time to time willfully and intentionally refuse to do ministry? And the one who performed so little ministry – was it because they didn't even try – or was it that they tried with all they had to do minister but found themselves too weak and too easily distracted.

The money in this text was only an earthly example that pointed toward a kingdom principle. What is counted – and what is measured – what shows up in the Heavenly audit – is our faithfulness – our commitment – our devotion. It is not the amount we give in literal finances – literal time - or literal service. It is the level of our heart and intention.

One person may be able to give hours and hours each month to the ministry. Maybe they can come to the church and give a lot of time to doing things the church needs done. Another person may be able to give only a few hours each month to the ministry - but they give all they have to give.

One person may be calling, visiting, and encouraging other people every week. Another person may only be able to call occasionally - visit occasionally - encourage only a few - but they do so all that they can.

God does not ask anyone to give more than they can. So I am not going to ask anyone to give more than they can. But I am - in the name of Jesus - asking you today - Are you doing all of your part to help catch men for the Kingdom?

We are commissioned to be Fishers of Men. And then to teach them, train them, and equip them to do the works of the ministry. Are you doing your part?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The section of Mark we are going to study in this lesson is often called the Olivet discourse. It is the longest uninterrupted private instruction recorded in Mark. We will only examine a portion of it today. This section has a little different style of writing and for this reason some have claimed it wasn't part of the original text. But isn't it natural for us to write differently when we write about different topics?

Some people see a sort of farewell address from Jesus to his disciples in this section. An effort to give them some private instruction that might provide them some consolation when his death comes. Others only see the prophetic words concerning the future. And this is to exhort the disciples and maybe even regulate their future conduct to some degree. Some of both of these views is probably the right way to view this passage.

The main point of this discourse is not to give information about the apocalyptic events. The apocalyptic events are used to provide the reason for the instruction and exhortation Jesus is giving to the disciples. The disciples asked Jesus when will "these things" take place and what is the sign that "these things" are about to take place.

Read Mark 13:1 and make notes:

The disciples were amazed with the magnificence of construction and the adornment of the temple and its associated buildings. They, just like we would be, were really impressed with the massive size of the stones used to make the walls.

Josephus records the stones of this temple were "25 cubits in length, 8 in height, and 12 in width". The cubit was the length of the forearm from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. As you can imagine the actual length of the cubit changed as the person in charge changed. But overall the cubit was usually between 17" and 18" in length. In today's measurements - these stones were approximately 37 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet wide.

I understand why the disciples were amazed, for I can't help but wonder, how did these people raise a stone of these dimensions up into the air and place it layer upon layer to the top of the temple?

Read Mark 13:2 and make notes:

This is a rather startling response to the disciples having voiced their amazement of the buildings. Jesus said, "not one stone will be left on another, every stone will be thrown down." It would have been something if Jesus had simply said the temple will be destroyed. But he said not one stone will be left sitting on top of another. This is complete and total destruction. This is a rather violent sounding destruction isn't it?

Earlier, Jesus had referred to the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and said it was punishment for the rebellious acts and attitudes of God's people. Jesus, has been revealing to his disciples in the last several sections of Mark - just how much the Temple Authorities have shown disrespect for the God's intended use of the temple. While this predicted destruction sounds severe, does it surprise us that such a destruction is predicted when we consider God's response to disrespect and rebellion in times past? No!

Read Mark 13:3-4 and make notes:

These two verses introduce the actual discourse. I'm sure Jesus' response to their words of awe concerning the building must have stunned the disciples. The text doesn't tell us here, but it wouldn't surprise me, if the disciples just walked along silently after hearing Jesus say the temple was going to be so thoroughly destroyed.

Jesus has now seated himself on the Mount of Olives and can look back across the valley and see the temple. Four of the disciples do what I am pretty sure I would do - they ask Jesus "when will these things happen?" and "what will be the sign that they are about to happen?"

Read Mark 13:5-8 and make notes:

In verse 5 - Jesus introduces his answer to the disciples question about the destruction of the temple. Disciples, "take care" that you are not deceived by the course of events, and get caught up in the thinking that the end has come. Jesus makes it a point to say to the disciples they need to avoid falling into a false sense of "imminence." It is human nature for us to simply "quit" when we are convinced "it is over." I have witnessed whole teams just stop trying when they become convinced they have lost the game no matter what they do now. I have witnessed people just give up and die prematurely when they have become convinced their condition is incurable and nothing they do will change that.

Can you imagine how people would respond if they knew for certain that this was the last week - the earth and everyone on it was going to be destroyed at end of this week? How many people would bother going to work? What would happen to those people in the hospital and nursing homes? Would the police or fire departments even bother responding to your call for help?

At the very beginning of Jesus' answer to the disciples question. He sets forth a warning against being caught up into a false sense of "this is it folks." Several times in this passage Jesus tells the disciples to "Watch Out." Verse 5- "Watch out that no one deceives you."

Jesus knew that human beings have a tendency to misinterpret the significance of contemporary events - such as wars and natural disasters. And we haven't changed in 2,000 years. Even today, when some significant natural disaster takes place - there are those who begin to cry out "this is the end folks." Jesus told those first disciples - and he is telling us today - these things are really just the beginning of birth pains. The actual event is still yet to come.

Read Mark 13:9-11 and make notes:

In verse 9 - the warning is repeated concerning the prospect of suffering. Now listen carefully, my disciples, persecution does not mean the end has come, so persecution is not an occasion to give up hope. This verse gives us another of those "Watch Out" messages from Jesus; "You must be on your guard." In much the same way that a lot of natural disasters is not the end - neither is it the end just because God's people are being brought before courts and councils.

Some people seem to think v10 interrupts the flow of the message - but it doesn't interrupt Jesus' message at all. The disciples asked when will these things happen. Jesus is giving them an answer by telling them the different things Satan will try to use to get people to just give up – long “before it is over.” And one of the things that is important for Christians to know - is what is said in v10.

Please take note - Jesus has not given the disciples what we know as the Great Commission yet. One of the things we can be on the watch for is - *"And the gospel must first be preached to all nations."* The end is not going to come until the gospel has been preached in all nations! I'm sure his first disciples didn't have a clue at this point that they would be a major part of the beginning of taking the gospel to all nations.

Now listen, when you are brought before trials - and you will be - it doesn't matter whether it is civil trials, military trials, or church council trials. Don't allow yourself to get filled up with anxiety. God will reveal to you what you need to say - and even how you should say it - if only you will pay attention. Regardless of the reputation of the judge you will be going before - regardless of the things you have heard about military tribunals - and regardless of how ruthless you have heard these church councils can be - don't focus on them and their reputation - focus on God and his provision!

Read Mark 13:12-13 and make notes:

These verses are kind of like pouring concrete on the previous verses. These cause what has been said - to set up and you know its going to stand. You asked what would be the signs that the end is near - well here are some of the signs; family members will betray one another; children will rebel against their parents; even to the point of having their parents put to death.

This statement is significant when you consider God's instruction in the Old Testament was - that children who rebelled against their parents were to be put to death. So what Jesus is saying - is one of the signs that the end is near is when things begin to be turned around from their original order - like kids having their parent put to death due to rebellion.

And verse 13 - look at it again - one of the signs is that people will hate you *"because of me."* Some years ago, I got a new job - and after some training and orientation - I was assigned to one of that company's local offices. From the first day I walked into that office building there was this one person who treated me like I had done something terrible to them. After a couple of weeks - I asked someone who had been in that office for many years - what I had done wrong when I arrived that made that person hate me so much. They replied - "oh, that person really doesn't hate you specifically - they hate the man you work for and they transfer that to the people who work for him.

I couldn't let that be - so I went to the person who was treating me so hatefully and I told them I understood that they didn't like my boss - but I would think I shouldn't have to be punished for what he did. Let me be liked or not liked based on what I do. That went over as if I had come and run over their favorite dog or something. They said something to the affect that if that person selected me I had to be as bad as they were. And it didn't get better as long as I was there.

That kind of hatred is irrational - nothing you do can resolve it - nothing you do can make amends for it. Jesus told those first disciples - when you see people hating you - not because you do anything bad - but simply because they hate me - then you know the end is near. BUT - you are to stand firm right to the end - for those who stand firm will be saved!

What is the message we should take home with us from this lesson?

"Watch out that no one deceives you."

As Fishers of Men - we cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by False Messiahs or by False Prophets. Not by wars nor by Natural disasters. For none of these things mean the end has come!

Fishers of Men "must be on your guard" - for we will be handed over to be tried. Please note that in verse 9 - Jesus said it would be by "local councils" and we would be "flogged in the synagogues." It won't be some foreign evil group that comes to our local area and begins trying and persecuting Christians - it will be local councils. And to even imagine - the place that our Heavenly Father said should be a house of prayer - it is in these places that Believers will be flogged.

In those days it was literal flogging - and surely we would all agree that inside the synagogue is no place for a physical flogging. Today, the flogging usually comes about as an emotional and verbal flogging and these kind be even more painful than the literal flogging. The emotional and verbal flogging can leave scars that last longer and run deeper than the physical scars do.

Surely, we will agree that inside the church is no place for anyone to be flogged - not literally - not verbally - and not emotionally. Inside the church should be a place of safety - a place of refuge - sanctuary - a place of healing and restoration - a place of equipping - and never a place of flogging. BUT! when these things start taking place on a regular basis - don't give up - don't despair - God will tell us what to say and to whom we are to say it. And for everyone who stands firm to the end - they will be saved.

The message for Fishers of Men today: don't be discouraged from your course and ministry - no matter how bad the report sounds.

We have ministry to do right to the last hour of the last day. We have some today who have looked at the situation - they have listened to the reports - and they have given up trying. "What's the use?" - "why even try?" - "I give up." The message today includes us not forgetting verse 10 - "the gospel must be preached to all nations."

And in a manner of speaking - the gospel must be preached to every person:

Whether they appreciate it or not

Whether they want to hear it or not

Whether they like you or not

Whether they accept it or not

Whether they persecute you or not.

The Gospel Must Be Preached To Every Person – So Don't Give Up!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

The section we are going to examine in this lesson – can certainly stand alone as a message. But we need to keep in mind that this section is a continuation of the message in the last section.

Read Mark 13:14 and make notes:

The wording of this verse comes across as somewhat cryptic or at least difficult. But the interpretation of this verse is really crucial to correctly understand what Jesus is saying to the disciples - both those first disciples and to us today.

Jesus warns those first disciples about a sacrilege appearing in the temple - one that would be so appalling that it can only call for unparalleled tribulation. When we remember the destruction of the Temple in the Old Testament was said to have taken place because of the rebellion and disrespect of God's people - and when we consider the lack of respect the Temple Leaders in Jesus' day show toward the Temple - it is understandable that an appalling sacrilege would result in complete destruction. So, my disciples, when you see such an appalling sacrilege take place – right in the temple – then understand that this signals the beginning of the destruction of the Temple.

The expression "abomination that causes desolation" is from Daniel and it describes an abomination that is so detestable that it causes those who are God's people to abandon the Temple - and no longer attend. This is an interesting prediction - for in 168 B.C., Antiochus IV Epiphanes, desecrated the Temple. He build an altar to Zeus right over the altar of burnt offering, and then sacrificed a pig upon that altar. He then declared the practice of Judaism to be a capital offense.

No Jew would go into the temple after that took place. It was a number of years before the Jews felt the temple had been properly cleansed from this and some people believe that is what was prophesied in Daniel.

Jesus seems to be saying - as bad as that was – that was not it! And when we consider the Temple had not been destroyed - it seems the best interpretation is to see what Jesus is referring to as something yet to come.

Jesus was telling those first disciples that an act would take place in the Temple - that would be so profane - it would be so appalling - that the Temple would be rejected by God's people - AND by God. It is also interesting that Jesus says it is important for the reader to "understand" - or "let the reader understand."

The most simple reading of this indicates that it is going to be necessary to flee in order to survive - the judgment that is going to fall upon the temple. The devastation will be so terrible as to affect not only Jerusalem but all of Judea. One is going to have to make their flight to the mountains.

Throughout the Old Testament – since the formation of the Jewish people – Jerusalem is often referred to in a way that calls Jerusalem the place of refuge. And this - whatever it is going to be - is going to be so terrible - that the resulting judgment is going to reach well beyond the Temple grounds. There simply will be no safe place in the city or in the area outside.

Now it is kind of important that we stop and think about this for a minute before we read on. This is talking about the complete destruction of the Temple. It is not talking about the end of the world. If it were the end of the world - what good would it do to flee – to the mountains or anywhere?

Since Jesus is telling his first disciples about the importance and the necessity to flee from the area - He is not talking about the end of the world. And also remember - in the previous section - the disciples asked Jesus "when will this complete destruction of the temple take place"? Jesus is answering the question about the destruction of the temple. Jesus is not answering a question about the end of the world.

The original language would sound much more like an imperative to flee - or a command to flee - than what it reads in English. And the following verses highlight this urgency to flee from the area.

Read Mark 13:15-17 and make notes:

These verses just underscore the urgency behind Jesus' instructions to flee. Houses with a flat roof were very common. They had a staircase on the outside of one of the walls to reach the roof. It was a common place to go for prayer and meditation. It was a place above the busy streets. It was also a place where one might go to enjoy a breeze. The point being made - don't take time to go down the stairs and enter the house to get anything – just leave the city. If you are working in the field – don't take time to go back for your cloak – just head for the hills.

Anyone who has ever tried to travel with a pregnant woman – or a mother with a small child – understands you can't go anywhere in a hurry. When my wife and I were first married, it was not unusual for us to decide to go on a small trip – on the spur of the moment – and we would. We didn't require much – and we could decide to go – and then basically go. All that changed when we had a child – when you decide to travel with a small child - first you have to have a large means of transportation – a large bus or tractor trailer truck might be a good choice. Then you have to pack about ten sets of clothes for each day you might be away. You have to pack a small truck full of accessories for every couple of days. And then about that time you just go ahead and pack everything in the house and take it all with you too.

By the time you have packed to take a small child on a trip with you – you have already used up one day of whatever trip you were going to take. Traveling with a small child just isn't going to happen in short order – and once you get started - it “ain't going to happen fast” either.

While some of the literal aspects were different in those days – the basics were not. If a woman was pregnant – or had a small child – they were not going to be able to just jump up and run off – and when they did run – it wasn't going to be fast. “How dreadful” it would be for them. Pregnant women and nursing mothers simply cannot flee quickly!

Read Mark 13:18-19 and make notes:

You can find verse 19 - as a repeat almost word for word in Daniel 12. The reason that fleeing the area is so urgent - is that the coming catastrophe is going to reach a stress level that has not happened since the creation.

Read Mark 13:20 and make notes:

The severity of the judgment reflects directly upon the abuse of Israel's privileged status as God's chosen people - a people who was expected to live in a covenant relationship with God. This judgment was going to be so severe - that if God did not intervene and cut the days of judgment and tribulation short - then no one would survive. But for the sake of God's people - God has already made the decision to intervene and shorten those days - even before the judgment is poured out. Even when God's judgment is poured out in massive doses - it is even then tempered with mercy.

Read Mark 13:21-22 and make notes:

Jesus stated in the previous section – "be careful that no one deceives you." He repeats this warning again here in verses 21-23. It is important we don't allow this to become muddy water in our understanding. Jesus isn't saying "don't flee" - he is saying don't be tricked into thinking the Messiah is over "here" or over "there."

Jesus has made it clear - "get out of town fast." But even in the time when you must flee - don't be tricked into going after a false messiah or a false prophet. This is a way of stressing the danger of turning aside from the instructions to make it to a safe distance from the judgment.

Even if someone is performing signs and miracles - don't go to them - don't follow after them. When it is time for the judgment to fall upon the temple area - you don't need a miracle worker - you need to get to the mountains.

Read Mark 13:23 and make notes:

So, "be on your guard" - "don't let these things alarm you" - "don't let these things get you depressed" - "I have told you everything ahead of time." Those first disciples had asked Jesus "how will we know when this destruction is about to happen"? Jesus has given them the recognizable indication of the impending judgment - now they know what to watch for.

What is the message for Fishers of Men today?

Before I share the message for this text - let me share with you what I believe was the "abomination" Jesus was referring to. During a war in 67-68 A.D. between Jewish Zealots and the Roman Emperor - Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman troops - the Jews inside the city were defiant to all demands to hand over the city back to Roman control.

As a result of the siege - things became really bad inside the city. These Jewish Zealots moved into the Temple – they made the Temple their military fortress – they lived there – they played games there –and they even allowed all kinds of defiled persons and every type of criminal to freely move about in the area that had been the Holy of Holies. It is reported by Josephus they even pronounced a clown named Phanni to be the new High Priest (no, he wasn't a literal clown).

All of this from those claiming to zealously uphold the Jewish religion - over and above the Roman religions. It is important to note – this was done by Zealots of the religion.

As bad as it had been when the Roman leader had built an altar to Zeus in the Temple - as bad as it had been for him to sacrifice a pig in the Temple - as bad as several things were that the Romans did in the Temple - that didn't offend God all that much - for you see the Romans were not God's people. In one sense they didn't know better. But when God's people did the things they did in the Temple — they did know better. It was when God's people were being sacrilegious that it was so appalling - so much so that God would not - in fact could not - stand for it.

First - It matters how we conduct ourselves - regardless of what the non-Christians appear to get away with.

Fishers of Men – we don't have to worry about how awful the non-Christians are. We need to pay attention to our relationship with the Heavenly Father. As long as we stay in the proper relationship with God he will let us know when we need to "get out of town" and "where we need to go."

The greatest abomination – is never going to be anything detestable non-Christians do or say. The greatest abomination is when Christians say and perform detestably – when we know better.

We touched briefly in the last lesson about how the local churches need to be careful that we don't become places of flogging instead of places of sanctuary - and places of worship. Fishers of Men - we need to be careful about how we live our lives. If you have been tempted to think it doesn't matter what you do once you are saved - consider what happened when non-Jews went into the temple and did bad things - then consider what happened when Jews went into the temple and did bad things.

Second - Don't get side tracked by false messiahs or false prophets.

God will tell us when we need to flee and if we need to flee. He told those first disciples what they needed to know and he still tells his disciples today. Don't be fooled by the tricks and promises of false messiahs or false prophets. Jesus will let us know when to run.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

As I have cautioned a number of times through our study of Mark - the section we are going to examine in this lesson, must not be separated from the previous section. In the earlier sections, the disciples had asked Jesus when will the destruction of the temple take place, and how will they know it is about to happen. Jesus not only told them the sign that would indicate it was about to happen, he also told them how important it would be for the Believers to get out of town –in fact go a distance away from town in order to avoid being hurt by the judgment that would fall upon the area at that time. And Jesus warned them not to be distracted by false prophets.

Read Mark 13:24-25 and make notes:

When we read in English the phrase "in those days, following that distress" - we get the idea that what he is talking about now - is at the same time as when the temple is destroyed and immediately following the distress and destruction of that judgment. However, in the original language it doesn't read and sound so immediate. In the original text it sounds more like - "and some time later, after these things happen".

In the previous section, Jesus warned his disciples not to be deceived by false messiahs and false prophets. He said the pretenders would come to the people appearing to perform signs and wonders and miracles. Here Jesus is sharing with the disciples something of comfort. I believe it was intended to take some of the concern out of the hearts and minds of his disciples.

Following the caution not to be deceived and taken advantage of by false prophets and messiahs - Jesus is saying, when he does return, there won't be any mistake about it being him. It is so natural for us as believers, to become discouraged when we see the things of our religious practices being destroyed.

Jesus knew that while the temple was going to be destroyed because of the rebellion and disrespect of the Jews - when it happened, it was going to discourage the believers. So he tells them the glory of his coming would far exceed the loss of the temple.

When you consider the trickery and showmanship the false messiahs and false prophets will present - and then when you see the real thing appear - you will have no problem recognizing it is me. It is an effort to contrast the signs and wonders of the false prophets with the wonders in the heavens and on earth when the real messiah appears again.

Read Mark 13:26-27 and make notes:

When the real messiah returns, it will be more than just some impressive actions and marvelous signs. He is going bring a bunch of the angels with him. And when he comes, he is going to gather - collect together if you will - all of the believers. This particular statement - especially the way it is phrased - brings great comfort to the believers - when they understand it.

I don't know if there has ever been a generation in history that feels so separated and alone as does the one in which we live. Counselors are dealing with such a large number of people who feel alone - who feel disconnected and separated from their family. In this generation, we have so many people who live great geographical distances from their family. There are so many people who don't get to visit with their family very often. Many who don't get to spend holidays with their family. And in this generation, we have a great number of people who may be geographically close to their family but are separated from them emotionally. We have such a large number of people who don't - or won't - fellowship with their biological family - many who won't talk with them - even over the phone.

Unfortunately - even among believers - we find a very large number who feel distant and separated from the family of believers. Jesus is saying - that it doesn't matter how separated you might feel - or even how separated you might actually be - When he comes again, he is going to gather all the believers from the four winds. If he had only said "from the four winds" it would have been comforting - for that would indicate from all over the globe. But Jesus went on to say not just from the four winds - not just from the ends of the earth - but from the ends of the heavens as well. Why even if someone should find themselves floating about in space somewhere - I'll gather them too.

Jesus had told the disciples in the previous section what to watch for as a sign that the destruction of the temple was about to take place. Then in the section we just read, Jesus told them not to be discouraged when the false prophets come, not to worry about being fooled by them - for when the real thing comes - there will be no mistaking him for who he is. Now he goes back to talking about the destruction of the temple - and how you will know it is about to happen.

Read Mark 13:28-29 and make notes:

Here - Jesus returns to answering the question - how will we know it is about to happen. The fig tree is different from the rest of the trees in that area of the world - the olive tree, the oak, the few evergreens, and the almond tree. The fig tree doesn't show any signs of life until very late in the spring. These other trees start putting forth little shoots of leaves early in the spring. The almond even puts out blooms early in the spring, which are sometimes hurt by a late frost or cold snap.

But when the fig tree starts putting forth shoots, you don't only know that it is spring - you know that summer is just about here. When the other trees begin sprouting - you know it is spring, but you don't know how long spring will be or how long it will be before summer arrives. It comes later or earlier in different years.

The fig tree is different. When it starts sprouting, you know summer is about to happen. In the same way that you know that summer is very near when you see the fig tree sprouting - when you see the detestable things going on in the temple - you know this judgment is about to happen. This judgment is "at the door" - all that is left is for someone to open the door.

Read Mark 13:30 and make notes:

This is one of those text that is so easily misinterpreted - or actually it is misapplied. It is not a misinterpretation to understand "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened". It is a misapplication to apply it to the end of time and the second coming of Christ Jesus.

This is one of those areas where it is important for us to slow down in our study and reading to understand that while the few verses earlier were indeed talking about the second coming of Jesus - He has returned to talking about the destruction of the temple.

"This generation" will not pass away until the temple is destroyed. While some of his first disciples did die before the temple was destroyed - that generation was very much alive when the temple was destroyed some 30 years after Jesus said it would happen.

Read Mark 13:31 and make notes:

This is another of the many "comfort" passages Jesus has placed throughout the Word of God. While the earth - and even the heavens around the earth will one day pass away - the words of Jesus will never - never - never - pass away. It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to take your pen and place an asterisk next to this verse. If you are a "highlight" kind of person - use your highlighter on this verse.

Read Mark 13:32-33 and make notes:

I know it may sound odd at first to some people - but this verse is intended to be part of the comfort message to believers. In light of the warning to be careful not to be become deceived by false prophets - make a note would you - "no one knows the day" and certainly not the hour - not the angels, not the Son of God - only the Heavenly Father knows the exact time. So, when someone starts telling which day or hour - you know they are "not for real."

Again to the fig tree analogy - when the fig tree starts sprouting, we know summer is about to arrive - but from the fig tree, can you say exactly how many days it will be until it is summer? When this detestable abomination takes place in the temple - you know the judgment is about to fall on the area - but you don't know how many days there will be before it comes. You just know it is very close. So, "Be on guard! Be alert!" and you will know when you need to leave. If you are willing to say, "I want to be a Fisher of Men" – then become alert and let's read these next verses together.

Read Mark 13:34-36 and make notes:

Several times in these last few sections in Mark - we have read where Jesus has said, Be On Your Guard - Watch Out - Take Care - Be Alert. Jesus, in his response to the question of how will he know it is about to happen, closes out his answer with a parable - to say one more time - Be on your guard.

It is important that we stress at this point what Jesus said about No One knowing the exact time. Those first disciples needed to keep a vigilant watch on what kinds of things were taking place in the temple so that they would know when to "get out of town." Today's disciples need to keep a vigilant watch - not so much as to what is taking place in the church - but a vigilant watch that we are not caught sleeping instead of doing our job.

In this parable Jesus talks about a household where each servant is given an assigned task - and one is even given the assignment to stand at the door and watch. He cautions his disciples that they are not caught sleeping when they should be doing what they were assigned to do.

Since this series is about being the Fishers of Men God has called every Believer to be - I want to return to the Fishing Boat analogy I have used before in this series. Every believer has an assigned task to perform on this fishing vessel we call the Church. Some have an assigned task that keeps them below deck most of the time and very few people ever see what they do. They just notice when it hasn't been done. Some have an assigned task that keeps them above deck most of the time and just about everyone sees what they do.

Few people might actually notice the person who has the job of repairing the nets at night while those who use the net are sleeping. But a lot of people will notice when the boat is not bringing in very many fish, because the nets haven't been repaired and a lot of the fish are able to slip out of the net. Few people might actually notice the person at the helm, but a lot of people will notice if the boat runs into the rocks and crashes because that person was taking a nap instead of driving the boat.

And the analogies could go on for quite a while - about the different assigned tasks. All are so important to this Fishing Vessel being able to catch the fish we have been chartered to catch. God does not ask of everyone - so I make no request of everyone - that we all do the same thing. But God does ask of everyone - so I ask of everyone - let us all do something - let us all perform the task that we can perform - something to assist this Fishing Vessel to be able to catch all the Fish we are supposed to catch - and bring them into the Port. So that the Heavenly Father can "process" these fish and prepare them.

Read Mark 13:37 and make notes:

Jesus did not say this "just" to those first disciples. Jesus is saying this to you and to me today. "Watch!" - that you are not caught being lazy - or sleeping - instead of catching fish.

Let's make this as simple and as plain as it can be. What are you doing to assist in the catching of fish? Let's rephrase this. You and I don't need to ask our neighbor - "hey, what are you doing"? We need to ask ourselves - "What am I doing to help catch fish?" "Am I taking heed?" - "Am I being vigilant about what I can do?"

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: