

Mark

Section 7 – 13 weeks

- 64 - Focus on the Spiritual 14:1-9
- 65 - Am I A Betrayer 14:10-21
- 66 - Living the Passover Celebration 14:22-26
- 67 - Potential In All 14:27-31
- 68 - Personal Prayer 14:32-42
- 69 - Root of Bitterness 14:43-52
- 70 - False Charges 14:53-65
- 71 - Repentance 14:66-72
- 72 - Please God First 15:1-20
- 73 - Obedience is Fruitful 15:21-39
- 74 - What Does Jesus Need 15:40-47
- 75 - Minister to Living 16:1-8
- 76 - Signs For Today 16:9-20



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.

We are continuing with the series - Fishers of Men in the Gospel of Mark. The section we begin today is known by most Bible scholars as the Passion narrative. And it is understandable that some would think we would skip this section, or maybe end the series on Fishers of Men at this point. But I beg you to stay with me a few more lessons - because I wish to share with you the beautiful and powerful messages Jesus has stored in this last part of Mark - for those of us who wish to be Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 14:1-2 and make notes:

Rather than the typical way of relating time in the Gospel of Mark - with non-specific time frames such as "later", or "after that time" - the passion narrative begins with a very specific time marker. The passion narrative in Mark begins 2 days before Passover.

There is nothing about this time marker that makes any necessary link to the previous sections in Mark. This leaves open the possibility that Jesus could have already been in Jerusalem for some time - maybe several weeks - maybe even several months. For a number of reasons, the exact chronological table of the preceding sections is not all that important – as for as the message to Fishers of Men found in Mark. And for some very similar reasons, it IS important for us to be aware of the chronological order of events from this point forward.

We see the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to make a note of a specific time when this section begins. The "Passover" designates the festival of redemption that is celebrated on the 14th day of the month of Nisan (April/May) - and this festival continues into the early hours of the 15th of Nisan - somewhere between sunset and midnight. This festival was followed immediately by the Festival of Unleavened Bread from the 15th to the 21st of Nisan. While these two festivals were technically two distinct festivals - it had become common practice, even at that time, to refer to the two festivals as the 7 day "feast of Passover".

The intention of certain chief priest and scribes to have Jesus put to death is something that goes back a long way. We find references to this desire on their part as early as chapter 3. And it is mentioned a couple of other times between that time and where we are now in the Gospel of Mark. The only thing that had kept them from doing something about this so far was the fear of the response by the people.

As much as Jesus was hated and despised by the “professional priests” - he was loved and respected by the people. And it was not that these priest were afraid the people would take their "priesthood" away from them. They feared that if they caused the people to get into an uproar - the Roman government would send in troops and settle things down with military troops - and who knows - this could lead to some new laws that would bring more restrictions upon them all.

The estimates are that the city of Jerusalem typically had approximately 50,000 people in it on a regular basis - but during the Passover season, the number of people in the city would usually rise to somewhere around 250,000 people. As you can imagine, a city that was home to approximately 50,000 people would be very crowded if there were 250,000 people in the city for a couple of weeks.

That kind of crowded conditions would make a normally peaceful person be on edge. It just wouldn't take much to make someone mad. Their angry response and outcry - would most likely lead some others to join them - and before you know it - you could see a real large scale riot - the kind of thing that would get the military attention. And the first thing the Roman government would think - civil rebellion against Rome - "gotta squash it fast".

We learn from the parallel text in Matthew that those conspiring to destroy Jesus met at the house of Caiaphas, the high priest. We learn from the account in John that it was Caiaphas who pronounced the decisive word on this issue. Just make a note of this detail - as to who the primary instigator was - in the plot to kill Jesus.

Read Mark 14:3 and make notes:

This anointing took place in an atmosphere of opposition, misunderstanding, and impending suffering. A number of the chief religious leaders were plotting and scheming to kill Jesus. And one of Jesus' inner circle, Judas, was conspiring with these religious leaders. Into this boiling pot of hatred, jealousy, mistrust, disappointment, treachery, and deceit - comes an anonymous woman - with absolute pure devotion. What a contrast!

Here we get a small glimpse of God working behind the scenes to accomplish His will - while people are hustling about to destroy the work of God. Don't you see - right in the faces of those who are plotting and scheming to kill Jesus - Jesus' body is prepared for burial through an act of faith and love.

This was not a situation that occurred after Jesus was dead! If this had happened after Jesus was dead - it could have always been said by some that this was just the thing of necessity. It wasn't that anyone actually cared or wanted to do this for his body. It was necessary to keep the awful stench from interrupting the surrounding people who live near by. But this was done while he was still alive. There is nothing of urgency or necessity in it at this time. There is no other way to interpret this - but as an act of love, faith, and devotion.

This aromatic ointment, nard, was truly costly. It was extracted from a root found only in India. It was so costly that it was preserved in an alabaster container and sealed. When it was time to use the nard, you had to break the neck of the container. Nard was not put on every dead body. There were other commonly used herbs and perfumes that were used. An alabaster container of nard was typically a family heirloom, passed down from one generation to the next until someone felt surely, their special event was worthy of this expense.

What must have been in the heart of that woman - who took what was probably the most expensive heirloom in her family's possession - and broke it open to anoint Jesus while he was having supper.

Read Mark 14:4-5 and make notes:

Most bible scholars agree, the ones objecting to this use of the very expensive ointment were some of Jesus' disciples. Before we become too hard on these disciples - at least consider that it was customary to take time on the eve of Passover to remember the poor with gifts. It had become customary to give a part of a second tithe to the poor during this time in Jerusalem.

The thoughts of those who were with Jesus were on this token giving to the poor practice - and in comes some woman and pours out an expensive ointment on Jesus that probably cost more than all the disciples put together were going to give to the poor that season. How would you feel, if you were at a Christmas party where you were told to bring a \$5 gift to share with the others there - and one person opens their package to find a set of car keys with a note that says you have just been given a Brand New Car?

Some of us would go "wow, that person sure got blessed" - but at least one person would be thinking - if not saying it out loud - "hey, that's a lot more than \$5" - "I should have got that gift" - "I need a new car more than that person does not" - "that person will never appreciate that car like I would" - "hey moderator, I'm pretty sure the gifts got mixed up - — that person got my gift."

While I am pointing out their reaction to this woman's gift was rather normal - it doesn't make their reaction acceptable.

Read Mark 14:6-8 and make notes:

Jesus defends the woman and her actions. There a few ways we can read this. One way is to hear Jesus say "she has done a beautiful thing - and she did it to me." Another way is hear Jesus say "this thing she has done - while it looks wasteful to you - it looks beautiful to me." You are free to read it however you prefer - but after careful study of this text - I prefer to read the second way.

While those present saw only wasteful extravagance - Jesus saw beauty. Those present saw only the actions - the outward things that were happening. Jesus was looking at the heart.

As shared earlier - this was probably the most valuable thing not only that this woman had - but it was probably the most valuable thing her family had. This would make it true that this woman gave Jesus the very best she had - but the real beauty goes much deeper than the earthly value of the gift she gave.

Jesus recognized the level of generosity that was in her heart. And this woman's gift was actually rather appropriate when we consider how close and imminent was the death of Jesus. Psalm 41 speaks of the poor but righteous sufferer. Jesus was about to take on the exact literal role of the poor but righteous sufferer. Oh, how appropriate her gift appears in the light of this fact.

Read Mark 14:9 and make notes:

In Psalm 41:2, it says the one who pays heed to the poor has the assurance of blessing from the Lord. In the eyes of man - those disciples who spoke out against the use of this ointment - and the potential it had in helping the poor - would be the natural view to receive the blessing spoken of in Psalm 41:2.

Jesus says it is this woman who will be spoken of everywhere the gospel is preached. Jesus realizes that his death and burial will be a big disappointment to his disciples. They will get downright discouraged and want to give up.

Jesus looks beyond his death, beyond the grave, beyond their time of wanting to give up - and Jesus sees the gospel being preached throughout the world. Here stands Jesus - on the very brink of suffering, public humiliation, and death - and he is looking forward to the gospel being preached throughout the world.

What are we to take home with us, as Fishers of Men, from this lesson?

1 - Don't base your service on approval from religious leaders.

We should follow Paul's example and submit our ministry work to others in the ministry - to make sure we don't wind up running this race in vain. But please remember, it was the highest religious leaders that were plotting and scheming to kill Jesus.

Do you remember a couple of lessons back - Jesus said if you follow me, there will come a time when the religious leaders will bring you before tribunals - and they will use the local meeting houses to do this? If we are going to be the Fishers of Men we need to be - we must get our approval from the Holy Spirit first and foremost.

2 - Don't get so focused on the physical that we become deaf to the spiritual.

The disciples were so focused on doing the customary religious practice - giving gifts to the poor at Passover - that they were completely deaf to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was about to die - some preparations needed to be taken care of - and the "ministers" were so caught up in the customary - that God had to call on a "layperson" to get the ministry accomplished. It's okay - in fact it appears to be helpful - for us to have customary practices - but we always need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

If we are going to be the Fishers of Men God wants us to be – then we need to be listening and watching for the Holy Spirit - as we just might be directed on any given occasion to do something that is not all that customary. Just keep in mind – it wasn't those who thought of the utmost ways to accomplish the customary religious practice – who was given the place of recognition everywhere the gospel is preached - like selling an alabaster container of Nard and helping a large number of poor instead it was the one who followed the leading of the Holy Spirit – even though it appeared to go against the stream of that which was the customary practice.

3 - Don't be blinded by the apparent end in front of you.

As Jesus stood there at the very rim of the cup of suffering and death that awaited him - He did not stare into that cup and become blinded by what was in that cup. Jesus raised his eyes and looked beyond the cup of suffering and death - that was his to drink - and he chose to look at the preaching of the gospel that was going to take place.

Regardless of what the devil makes you see - regardless of how destructive he convinces you it is going to be for you - Fishers of Men - do not stare into that cup – but instead, raise your eyes and look beyond. And know that the gospel will be preached until Jesus comes again.

The more the devil tries to convince you that you are about to be destroyed - just smile that little smile that annoys the devil so much - the one that tells the devil that regardless of what happens to me - I KNOW - that in the end Satan loses - God is still on the throne - And JESUS IS STILL LORD.

So - Are you focused on the physical - Or on the Spiritual?

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

Fishers of Men in training - there is an important message for us in the account of the preparation for the Last Supper.

Read Mark 14:10-11 and make notes:

This introduction of the actions of Judas just seems to focus the already sharp contrast between the selfless devotion of love on the part of the woman we read about in the last lesson - and the treachery in the hearts of the religious leaders.

When we consider the selfless love Jesus has demonstrated for 3 years in his ministry - doesn't it sort of boggle your mind - how one of the twelve disciples could be so willing to betray Jesus - to those who wish to destroy him? However it can be real - the religious leaders are seeking to arrest Jesus without causing a riot - and Judas is seeking a way to hand him over. Judas' goal is to find a time and a place when he could alert the religious leaders that Jesus is away from the crowd - and Jesus can be arrested without the public noticing.

Scripture doesn't give us the motive behind Judas' desire to betray Jesus. I personally find it rather interesting that Mark controls himself when recorded this event. Mark only records the bare facts and does not include any commentary of what is wrong with Judas.

Judas collaborated with the Sanhedrin - Judas received money for his services. There are those who have suggested that Judas was a secret agent for the Sanhedrin. That he had been assigned to infiltrate the group of Jesus' disciples. And when the time was right, Judas would help the Sanhedrin capture Jesus in order to destroy him.

That does make an interesting story - but it really doesn't fit well with the accounts in the Gospels. We have already admitted the Scriptures don't tell us what Judas' motives were - but just look at the text in Mark.

It says Judas went to the chief priest to betray Jesus - "They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over." It doesn't say Judas "reported in" - it reads more like Judas initiated the contact with the chief priest - and they were delighted to hear he was willing to help them.

Read Mark 14:12 and make notes:

From the Scriptures - we know that technically speaking - the "first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread" would be the 15th of Nisan. And that would be the day following the Passover - which takes place on the 14th of Nisan. The Passover Lamb is sacrificed on the day of Passover - the 14th of Nisan.

Verse 12 causes a lot of problems for people who always stay in the technical side of reading everything. This verse says it was the "first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread." It also says it was the day to sacrifice the Passover lamb" - and it says the disciples asked Jesus "Where do you want us to go and make preparations to eat the Passover?"

Technically - it can't be both the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread – and the Passover. But I remind you of what was shared in the last lesson – it had become customary for the people to call the Passover – the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Even though the two celebrations were two distinct events - they were just back-to-back and it makes sense to people to relate them as one big week long celebration.

When we understand the common practice was to consider the Passover day as the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread - we have no problems with this account. We understand they are talking about the 14th of Nisan - the Passover day - and the day before the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins. This text is one of those which stands as a good evidence – that the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples was the Passover meal.

Read Mark 14:13-16 and make notes:

This account is a parallel of the one recorded in chapter 11. In chapter 11, Jesus assigned two disciples to go into the city. He told them exactly what they would see, what to say when they saw it, and what to do. Here Jesus assigns two disciples to go into the city. He tells them exactly what they will see, he tells them what to say, and then to prepare for the Passover Meal.

It doesn't tell us which two disciples but if it is the same two as before - they probably had no problems or reservations about it. Having learned from the first experience - they no doubt fully expected to find what Jesus said they would find - and probably didn't hesitate to say to this person what Jesus told them to say.

There are several things about this account that just spark your interest when you think about it. One is to consider - if Jesus had secretly made some arrangements with this man in the city before hand - or was this man preparing for a large group to celebrate the Passover in his upper room - by the divine inspiration of God.

Another is to consider that it was normally women who carried water in jars. Jesus told these two disciples to watch for a man carrying a jar of water. Was this a pre-arranged signal? If the disciples had been told to follow a woman carrying a water jar, they may have had some problem figuring out which woman - for there would be many carrying water in the evening so that their household would have water ready in the morning.

Had this particular man, procured the Passover Lamb? Had he gathered the other necessary elements of the Passover Meal? Did he kill the Passover Lamb to get it ready for the meal?

Even if the man had done all these things - the preparations by the disciples would include setting out the unleavened bread and wine, preparing the bitter herbs and the sauce of dried fruit - along with other spices and wine that would be used in roasting the Passover Lamb for supper. Now, this is not a small sign - please make a note of it: out of an entire city filled with people - the man carrying "the water" was the one to follow.

Read Mark 14:17 and make notes:

The Jews reckoned the day from sunset to sunset - so "evening" meant it was what we would know as late in the afternoon. The Passover lamb would have had to be killed before the sun went down.

The Passover meal was eaten sometime after sunset and could go on as late as midnight. The Passover meal was always to be marked with a level of excitement. The celebration of the Passover was to be observed as a night of watching unto the Lord - it was in the night that the Jews were delivered from Egypt - and many of them believed it would be in the night that they would be redeemed in the future.

Read Mark 14:18-20 and make notes:

Don't you just imagine the solemn yet excited mood of the evening was shattered when Jesus stood and said, "one of you will betray me - - one of you who is eating with me." Of course, it would be natural for all of those who had come to love Jesus - would begin to protest - maybe even beg - that surely it would not be me. And Jesus reinforces in v20 – "It is one of the Twelve."

It wasn't just one of the followers that was going to betray Jesus - it was one of those closest to him – one of the "inner circle" if you please – one of the twelve. The contrast of the parties is again brought to light in this event. Jesus' generosity in sharing this sacred meal with intimate friends – stands contrasted against the hypocrisy of the traitor who is standing in their midst.

Read Mark 14:21 and make notes:

In the last section - a lasting blessing was pronounced upon the woman who expressed such selfless love and devotion. In this section a woe is pronounced upon the one who would betray Jesus.

It would be in error to read any vindictiveness into the tone of Jesus' words. The death he is to face is important - and it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of all peoples everywhere. Even so, the heinous actions of the betrayer will not be excused.

The consequences for such a betrayal will be so dire that Jesus says "it would be better if they had never been born." Jesus is going to his death in accordance with the divine plan for the salvation for people. But this betrayer is morally responsible for his actions and will bear the horrible consequences for those actions.

There are those who teach Judas was created by God to do this very thing. As a result, Judas could not help himself - he had to betray Jesus. If Judas was simply doing what he was created to do - what would be the explanation for the sorrowful consequences for his actions?

Judas did not have to make the decisions he did. If Judas had refused to betray Jesus, he would have spared himself of painful consequences. And if Judas had refrained from betraying Jesus, the devil would have found someone else to betray Jesus. But - it did not have to be Judas. And like all of us, Judas did have to reap the consequences for his choices and his actions.

Don't you find it rather remarkable that Judas was not mentioned by name in the account as they began to ask "is it I"? And Judas wasn't identified to the others as they betrayer when Judas left the room a little later. Jesus could have done that, but he didn't.

God - or Jesus - did not make a mistake in choosing Judas to be one of the followers. When Jesus pronounced the "woe" for the betrayer - he was making this pronouncement not only to Judas - but to Satan as well.

When we consider the disciples quickly asking "is it me" - it reveals the disciples had a tendency toward being self-critical. Jesus did not reveal the betrayer for the disciple's own good - for it caused each one to begin to examine their own heart and attitude. A little self examination is good for all of us.

Look at how Jesus handled having his betrayer in his presence. Jesus was able to go ahead with the meal intended for family and close intimate friends. Jesus didn't let the presence of a betrayer cheat him and the other disciples out of this important and intimate time together. Jesus could have pointed out the betrayer - but he gently stated that one of them would betray him. This would cause the others to examine their own conscience as well as their heart - and it communicated to the betrayer that he knew about the scheming, the deception, and the betrayal.

For Jesus to say, "it is one of you who shares a bowl with me and dips your bread with me" - highlights the shamelessness that has come into the heart of the betrayer. This betrayer can come to the common table of love and participate in that which is being so generously provided. While Jesus is being sold for a few pieces of silver - at that very same time - Jesus is paying for the salvation of every man, woman, boy, and girl who would ever call upon his name to be saved.

What is there in this account for us as Fishers of Men?

1 - Follow The Person Carrying The Water.

If we are going to choose a person to follow - Let it be the person who is carrying the "Water" - which is the Word of God! Let us be careful - and guard against the temptation of our flesh:

To follow after the miracle worker -

To follow after the prophecy giver -

To follow after the natural leader -

Unless they are also carrying the "Water" of Life. Do you remember just a few lessons earlier – Jesus warned against being fooled or deceived by miracle workers?

2 - Preparations For Fellowship With Jesus Need To Be Made.

As Fishers of Men - we can't just ride along expecting everything to be handed to us. Jesus and the twelve disciples could not have shared the Last Supper - if preparations had not been made. Whether the man who prepared the room - and gathered the ingredients was asked to prepare by Jesus directly - or whether this man was led by divine guidance - the point is - preparations had to be made.

How many of us - who call ourselves Fishers of Men - or who want to be Fishers of Men - simply show up at church and expect to be fed spiritual food - through praise and worship - prayer - teaching of the word - and personal ministry? How many of us make preparations for the spiritual meal we hope to share together?

If we are going to be effective and successful as Fishers of Men - we need those who are faithful to make preparations - for every meal time. Both the physical fellowship meals - and the spiritual fellowship meals we call Church Services. Ask yourself - "What do I do to help the church service - be all that it can be?"

3 - Self-Examination Is Required.

To be the Fishers of Men we are expected to be - we must regularly examine ourselves. What are the motives of my heart? What is my attitude? Is my conscience clear and clean? Am I headed down a road that will betray Jesus - to the people with whom I work - my neighbors - those I do business with? Ask yourself, "Is there anything about my actions, words, or responses, that is betraying Jesus to those with whom I have contact?"

4 - Don't Let The Presence of a Betrayer Cheat You Out of Intimate Fellowship.

We can get caught up in the ugly actions of certain people. Can the ugly actions or words of any person be more personally painful to me than what Judas did to Jesus? Let's follow Jesus' example and make sure we have those beautiful intimate times of fellowship – regardless of the servants of Satan.

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

There are many that will argue the text of the Last Supper does not have any message relative to Fishers of Men. But it has a message that is precisely for those of us who desire to be Fishers of Men! So, please join me as we take a close look at the Last Supper as recorded in Mark.

In the last lesson, evidence indicated that this was the Passover meal. The detailed elements of the Passover meal were fixed for many years by the time Jesus and his disciples sat down at this Passover. The things that were to be included in the Passover meal and even the specific words to be said at the Passover meal had remained unchanged from centuries.

After the Passover meal had been served to each participant, but before any of them began to eat - the head of the household would stand and lift up the platter of unleavened bread and say, "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let everyone who hungers come and eat; let everyone who is needy come and eat the Passover meal." And each of the other elements of the Passover meal were introduced in the context of Israel's experience during their time of bondage.

The bitter herbs recalled the bitterness of slavery - the stewed fruit had the consistency and color of clay and it was to remind them of the making of bricks - and the Passover lamb was to remind them of the grace of God that He had his death angel to "Pass Over" their homes - and spared them from the plague of death of the firstborn.

And just before the participants would eat the bread during the Passover meal - the head of the household pronounced this blessing over the bread - "Praised be You, O Lord, Sovereign of the world, who causes bread to come forth from the earth." Then all those present would respond, "Amen." The head of the household would then break off a piece of bread for each person around the Passover table. He would give the piece of bread to the person next to him and they would pass it around to the next. The bread would pass from person to person until everyone had bread. This usually took place in an atmosphere of silence and reverence.

Read Mark 14:22 and make notes:

Please notice that it says "While they were eating." After they had done the things required to fulfill the Passover - except for the concluding drink and the closing song - "While they were eating" - Jesus stands again - takes up this bread that had been used to fulfill the Passover requirements. This same bread over which the Passover blessing had been said - this same bread from which a piece had been taken and given to everyone present - according to the Passover ritual. Jesus "gave thanks." I'm so glad the Holy Spirit didn't have the words of Jesus recorded here - for I am sure those words would have been made into a religious formula that many would require of us today.

The first important thing for us to note - is the thankful heart and attitude with which Jesus presented the bread. The second important thing for us to note - is the new proclamation Jesus made concerning this "Passover Bread" - "Take it; this is my body."

The original language of this text can be literally translated to say, "I am myself, this bread" or "my person is this bread." Now what was this bread? Do you remember the Passover proclamation concerning this bread? "This is the bread of affliction." With that in mind, re-consider what Jesus is saying when he picks up this bread the second time: "Take it; this is my body." - "I am myself, this bread."

The important aspect of this bread IS NOT that it was broken. The important aspect of this bread is that it was distributed to everyone. They were all sharing from the same bread. "This is my body" - when you remember what we discussed in the last lesson about the treachery and betrayal that was present at this very intimate time - Does the words, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" - seem to come to life for you?

Read Mark 14:23-24 and make notes:

This is where it can be viewed as Jesus having done something new and different. Following the Passover meal - the head of the household would again stand and say, "Speak praises to our God, to whom belongs what we have eaten." Then those present were to respond, "Praised be our God for the food we have eaten."

At this point the head of the household would take the third cup of wine - usually red wine mixed with water - he would focus his eyes squarely on the cup - say a prayer of personal thanksgiving - and then he would end his prayer with the words, "May the All-merciful One make us worthy of the days of the Messiah and of the life of the world to come. He brings the salvation of his king. He shows covenant- faithfulness to his Anointed, to David and to his seed forever. He makes peace in his heavenly places. May he secure peace for us and for all Israel. And say you, Amen." - and those present would respond "Amen."

This text says Jesus took "the cup." It can be understood to be the "third cup." Many bible scholars like to think it was the third cup because the third cup was usually a mixture of red wine and water - and this makes a nice symbol of the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side when he was on the cross. But the important part here isn't which cup. The first important part is that all of Jesus' disciples shared what was in that cup And the second important part is what Jesus proclaimed about this cup - "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

Again, I ask you to consider what was said about the third cup at the end of the Passover meal - and compare it to what Jesus said about "this cup." The third cup according to the Passover ritual was looked at and used to focus on God's covenant-faithfulness. And Jesus shares this cup and says, "This is my blood of the covenant."

Jesus is reframing the way his disciples are to look at this cup. The cup was no longer to be looked at as a reminder of the old-covenant faithfulness. But is now to be looked at as a reminder of the new-covenant faithfulness. And don't you just love the fact that Jesus said it was "poured out for many"! This "many" is not just the small tribal nation of Israel - this "many" is the redeemed community of believers who experience redemption through faith in Jesus.

Read Mark 14:25 and make notes:

This is an interesting promise on the part of Jesus - "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." Some have interpreted this as a vow of abstinence of Jesus' part until we all get to heaven and we join him at the marriage supper of the lamb. And when He does drink it in the "kingdom of God" it will be a "new" festive cup. In each Passover meal there was a clear messianic expectation - an expectation that they would one day share in a messianic banquet of fellowship.

There was a fourth cup of wine at each Passover meal. The fourth cup was the last one to be shared - and it signaled the conclusion of the Passover celebration. If the cup Jesus held up when he made the statement about it being the cup of his blood of the covenant - then it would seem Jesus refrained from drinking the fourth cup. This would mean the Passover Celebration was not concluded that night for the disciples. And if that is the case - this would mean Jesus did not conclude that Passover Celebration until he had become The Passover Lamb - sacrificed once for all. The Passover Celebration did not end that night!

Read Mark 14:26 and make notes:

It had become customary for the devout Jews to linger for some time following the Passover meal. The conversation would typically be about God's past - and God's future acts of redemption.

At some point in time the head of the household would lead those present in the recitation of one of the Hallel Psalms. And it was usually sung by the head of the household singing one part of the text - and then those present would sing by repeating what the head had just sung. Much like what we know as singing a chant - where one person sings a line and the congregation sings that same line in a echo-like fashion.

Isn't it great that the Holy Spirit didn't have Mark record which song Jesus and his disciples sang that night? If Mark had told us which Psalm it was - for many of us it would be the only Psalm we would be allowed to sing at the end of our communion celebrations.

What does this have to say to us today as Fishers of Men?

There is one major point I believe God wants us to take home with us from this passage. As Fishers of Men:

Live our daily lives as though we are still participating in the Passover celebration.

It would appear that Jesus did not drink or serve the final cup - so the Passover celebration was not concluded. The Passover celebration was to be a time of intimate fellowship. The Passover celebration was to be a time of remembering God's deliverance in times past. The Passover celebration was to be a time of expectation of God's deliverance in the future as needed. The Passover celebration was to be an attitude of expecting fellowship with the Messiah.

Maybe some people can be a Believer in Jesus Christ and live their life with some less remembering or acknowledgment of God's grace and mercy. Maybe some people can be a Believer in Jesus Christ and keep their focus on the world and it's grinding pain that is going on around them. But as Fishers of Men - we cannot live our lives so self focused. The attitude and acknowledgment - that we are attending and participating in the Passover celebration - is to be the characteristic of our daily lives. Where is our focus - not just today - but in our daily life?

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

As I have stated on a number of occasions as we have gone through Mark – the text in this lesson is another one where it is important that we do not separate it from the previous text.

If you will remember, in the previous text Jesus told the disciples that one of them was going to betray him. Each one of them begged "please don't let it be me." I shared with you that Jesus could have relieved - or even prevented - a lot of anxiety on the part of the disciples - if Jesus had simply told them who the betrayer was. But instead he let each one of them sit there examining their inner parts - examining their own heart and attitude. Jesus didn't tell them – and each disciple did some deep self-examinations that night.

And don't you think, when Judas left that night - Jesus could have told those remaining disciples, "okay, you can all calm down now - the betrayer is Judas, and he is gone to do his thing." If Jesus had told them - they would have all been so relieved. But they would have also stopped their self-examination.

Believing that people then - were like people today - they would have probably traded their anxiety - for some Judas "put-down" time. Can't you just see them beginning to say things like, "you know, there has always been something about that guy I just never liked." Even if they liked him and bragged on him for the excellent way he handled the finances - once they find out he did something bad - they would express how they never trusted him - or something like that.

But placing that aside - as we begin this portion of the text - keep in mind the simple fact that Jesus let the disciples go on wondering about who the betrayer was going to be. There are those who believe the text we will read in this lesson took place in the upper room before they set out for the Mount of Olives.

If you remember, in the previous lesson, of the Last Supper, we ended with it saying, Jesus and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives. Look ahead to verse 32, the text that follows the one we are about to read. It says they came to Gethsemane - this gives us the impression that the text we will read in this lesson - is a record of a conversation Jesus had with his disciples while they were traveling.

Read Mark 14:27 and make notes:

As we read this text, it is clear that Jesus was fully aware of the events that were about to unfold. And that he will be re-united with his disciples after his resurrection. Jesus uses a prophecy from Zechariah (13:7) to tell the disciples that they will fall away. Some have been confused by the prophecy and by Jesus' statement. To them it sounds like God is causing chaos and anxiety among the flock. But if you study the text in Zechariah, you discover the message has to do with refining. So, God allowing the Shepherd to be struck down, which leads to the sheep being scattered - is an integral part of these sheep experiencing the refining process that is so necessary for those of us who want to be part of the new people of God.

In Zechariah 13 we see that the prophecy is associated with the opening of a fountain for the cleansing of sin on behalf of the house of David. The passage Jesus refers to in his message to the disciples then speaks of the necessity which leads to redemption. The death of Jesus will mark the loss of the center point of the disciples communal fellowship - which will cause the disciples to desert Jesus and scatter from one another.

Read verse 27 again. It seems to emphasize the offense the disciples will experience which appears to be caused by Jesus. To be offended at Jesus is the opposite of believing in him, isn't it! Jesus is predicting that the disciples will desire to be disassociated from Jesus - because being too closely associated with him could invite the same treatment that he is receiving.

Read Mark 14:28 and make notes:

Praise God for verse 28. The promise of being re-united brings a counter-balance to the prophecy that they will be scattered. The prophecy of the disciples being scattered - speaks of the failure of the disciples to keep the faith. The prophecy of them being re-united - speaks of them being restored in relationship with Jesus. It speaks of renewal. Please take note that this promise of restoration was given BEFORE the failure even took place.

Read Mark 14:29 and make notes:

Bless Peter's heart - and I am so thankful God had Peter's responses recorded for us. Because Peter is so much like a great many Believers today.

If you remember from chapter 8 - Jesus was telling his disciples that he must suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, that he will be killed, and that he will rise again after three days. In that account it appears that Peter only heard the first part of what Jesus said - because he quickly took Jesus aside and rebuked him for saying such a thing.

When we look at verse 29 - it looks like Peter hasn't changed. Peter heard the first part of what Jesus said - but it doesn't sound as though he listened long enough to hear the rest of what Jesus said. We get the impression that Peter took offense at what Jesus prophesied.

Here's the sad part - this bold affirmation of absolute commitment to Jesus probably intensified the completeness of the disciples' failure - later when they denied him and scattered as predicted.

Read Mark 14:30 and make notes:

Jesus asserts that in spite of all the good will and good intentions being expressed at the moment - Peter will indeed find himself stumbling and falling. In the very early morning hours - before the rooster crows for the second time - Peter is predicted to deny Jesus 3 times. To say Peter will deny Jesus 3 times indicates the thoroughness of Peter's failure.

Any of us could slip up once in a while. When we do slip up, we tend to be careful to keep from doing so again. But when one has failed in their faith - as Peter would do - we no longer slip up - we make bad choices - and bad statements - over and over - don't we?

Read Mark 14:31 and make notes:

The original language reads as though Peter's response this time could have been with a certain level of vehemence - "I most certainly will not!" "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" - "It will never happen where I am concerned." And then this little - almost going without being noticed - tag is attached - "all the others said the same thing."

Jesus spoke of scattering and denial. The disciples spoke of sharing his destiny. Then within a very few hours, the disciples fled in fear of their lives, quickly deserting Jesus into the hands of treacherous people - only later, wondering about how Jesus is doing.

What is the message for us today as Fishers of Men?

First - We all have the potential to Fail in our Faith!

In the previous lesson - I shared with you how Jesus could have eliminated a lot of anxiety on the part of the disciples - if he had just told them they were not the one who was going to betray him. But he didn't tell them. When they began to ask – maybe even beg "please don't let it be me" – Jesus didn't tell them who it was – he allowed everyone of his disciples to look inward. He allowed them to experience a certain level of anxiety that so often accompanies self-examination fearing that we might find something we won't like.

Jesus knew that within every one of his disciples that day was the potential for betrayal. Sure, only Judas was going to betray Jesus to the Sanhedrin - but each of the others had within them - the potential to betray Jesus in so many different ways - to the people around them - to themselves in their daily lives and actions. And within every disciple today, there is the potential to betray Jesus. Within every disciple today, there is the potential to fail in our faith.

We will meet from time to time - those who claim to be believers in Jesus Christ - and they make statements about how they will never sin - they will never fail God, etc. Fishers of Men, we cannot afford to believe the lie that we will ever become “too strong to fail.” As long as we live in these earthly bodies, we have the potential to fail in our faith. Whatever grievous and ugly sin we find another brother or sister has fallen into - Fishers of Men need to have the attitude, "But for the grace of God, there go I." Anyone of us who allows ourselves to get into a wrong relationship with God – or out of relationship with God – will commit sin!

Remembering that within me is the potential to betray Jesus - Remembering that within me is the potential to fail in my Faith - Gives me incentive to stay close to God. It gives me incentive to do a self-examination on a daily basis - to see if any evil thing has taken up residence within me. It gives me incentive to daily ask for forgiveness and cleansing. And this really needs to be one of the hallmark characteristics of Fishers of Men.

Second - We can be restored!

Even before any of the events began to take place, Jesus told those first disciples they would be restored in fellowship. When one of God's people fails today - the devil will bombard their mind with thoughts that they do not deserve to be forgiven - "the rest of the Christians will look down on you when they find out what you have done." And he will send message of condemnation after message of condemnation. Satan does not want us to be restored to fellowship with God - so he lies to us - and we usually believe just about everything Satan has to say.

Just like Jesus knew before the events took place - that his disciples were going to fail him - today - even before the trial or temptation comes our way – Jesus knows when - and where - and how we will fail him. And just like with the first disciples - when we come back to him – he will forgive us – he will cleanse us – and he will restore us to a place of fellowship.

Fishers of Men - we need to remember this message for ourselves and remind ourselves of it from time to time. But Fishers of Men need to be ready on a daily basis to remind fallen brothers and sisters - that Jesus knew they were going to fall before it ever happened - and Jesus made plans in advance to forgive - to cleanse - and to restore them to fellowship with him.

So take them by the hand if you need to - and walk with them back to Jesus. Being a good and faithful Fisher of Men doesn't just mean taking the lost from darkness into light. It also means taking the fallen from the darkness **BACK TO** the light!

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

Some people object to the idea that the Bible could tell us what Jesus prayed - since He is said to go aside from his disciples when he prayed. In the ancient world it was customary to pray out loud. The idea of praying silently is something that has come about in more recent generations. For this reason, it is reasonable that the disciples Jesus took aside were close enough to hear Him pray. This means it is reasonable that at least one of these disciples was able to tell the others "what Jesus prayed." But it is also important to remember, since the Holy Spirit was telling Mark what to write - telling Mark what Jesus prayed would not be a problem.

The prayer of Jesus - praying to be delivered from the suffering - is located between the prophecy of being deserted and the actual betrayal and desertion. Many people through the years have failed to get anything meaningful from this particular passage. And yet others have found within this text the encouragement and strength to accept their personal suffering with a level of dignity and even gratitude.

The passage we are going to examine in this lesson is the third recorded account of Jesus in prayer we find in Mark; chap 1, chap 6, and now here in chapter 14. In each account of Jesus praying, we find the setting is one of solitude, it is night time, and there is an awareness of the demonic activity by Jesus.

Read Mark 14:32 and make notes:

Most Bible scholars believe this was an estate, which had a large olive grove. The word "Gethsemane" is a Hebrew word which means "oil press." The road from the Kidron valley provided a boundary to the south - and the estate named "Gethsemane" - which probably had a rock wall - provided a boundary to the north.

There were obviously other oil presses around the region - but it is likely that something of note to the local people had taken place here - and the estate was given the name of the "oil press" – Gethsemane.

While we do not know exactly why this particular place - or estate - had become a familiar place for Jesus and his disciples - the indications are that they were in fact familiar with Gethsemane. Also, the request from Jesus that his disciples wait while Jesus prayed would not seem like anything unusual to the disciples. As already noted, Jesus had a practice of praying alone.

Read Mark 14:33 and make notes:

The fact that Jesus pulled Peter, James, and John aside was nothing unusual either. We find Jesus did this sort of thing in chapters 5 and 9. I can't tell you why Jesus took these three, because the Scripture doesn't tell us. But let me point out that it was Peter who so boisterously declared that he would never deny or desert Jesus - and it was James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who had affirmed that they were able to drink the cup Jesus would drink.

These three men obviously did not understand what it meant to share Jesus' destiny. I believe their heart and intention was sincere - but Jesus knew that these three men did not understand what they were saying. To be identified with Jesus at this point had a great deal to do with sharing in shame and suffering. And it is likely these three men – being convinced that Jesus was the Messiah – probably had more of a vision of sharing in fame and privileged status of some kind.

The innocent but ignorant self-confidence of these three men - probably had set them up for the most painful failure any of the disciples would experience. There certainly may have been more to it, but I believe this is the primary reason Jesus pulled these three men aside.

Read Mark 14:34 and make notes:

"Overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." The original language reads more like "shuddering horror." Jesus is appalled and profoundly troubled. In the wilderness Jesus had determined to bear the burdens of God's people - chapter 1. Several times during his ministry - Jesus had revealed details and spoken passionately to his disciples about his purpose. When Jesus talked with his disciples in chap 10 about the baptism and the cup he must experience - it lets us know that Jesus was aware of the cost of this kind of submission to the will of God. Also, in chap 10 - Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem with such a strong resolve that it amazed his disciples and caused them to feel a level of fear.

It is highly probably Jesus had witnessed men being crucified in the years before he began his earthly ministry - maybe even during his ministry - since this was a common Roman practice. However, it is not so much that Jesus is desiring to withdraw from the level of physical suffering he is about to experience.

If you look into the Scriptures, Jesus' demeanor throughout the arrest and the trial was nothing less than calm. The dreadful sorrow and the extreme anxiety was more likely due to the dark spiritual moments that lay ahead. We can only imagine what it would be like to live wholly in communion with the Heavenly Father.

Jesus not only knew - Jesus lived completely - in every area of his life in communion with the Heavenly Father - on a daily basis. Can we begin to imagine what kind of horror the thought of losing this communion would bring?

Read Mark 14:35-36 and make notes:

Separating himself - maybe a few yards - from Peter, James, and John, - Jesus prostrated himself on the ground and began to pray about "this hour" and "this cup." In v36 Jesus prayed "Abba, Father." The word "Abba" is literally translated "my father" or "my daddy." This is such an encouraging verse of Scripture - this lets us know that Jesus prayed in everyday language. Jesus did not pray in the language of the high priestly words of sophistication and proper grammar.

In all the writings of the religious leaders of that day that have been found and translated - none of them give any evidence of "Abba" being used as a personal address to God. To the Jews of that day - to use familiar household or common everyday language in reference to God would have been considered highly disrespectful.

Jesus did something new in the way of praying. Jesus spoke to God as a child speaks to their father. Not the person who is technically or officially their father - but the father with whom the child is familiar - the father with whom the child has spent time - the father who has communicated to the child that I care for you.

To the Jewish community of that day - the relationship with God was more of an official relationship - a relationship that had many complicated rules. Jesus was demonstrating a relationship with God that was more intimate, caring, and very personal. The complete surrender to the Father by the obedient Son is revealed in the words "if it is possible" and "not what I will, but what you will." Jesus had personal desires - but he had trained himself to condition his personal desires to the will of the Heavenly Father.

Read Mark 14:37-38 and make notes:

Many people have assumed Jesus went to Gethsemane to receive sympathy and support from his disciples and that is why he was so disappointed - when he found them asleep instead of watching and praying. That probably is NOT the case. Jesus had a lot of experience with his disciples.

The Gospels indicate that the greater the stress of the approaching passion - the more selfish and the more confused the disciples appear to become. The disciples had failed Jesus time and time again. When Jesus took an intermission from his praying and returned to his disciples - he found them sleeping. Jesus came to these disciples because he was concerned about them. Jesus did admonish Peter for sleeping instead of praying - but do you notice that Jesus did not ask them to pray for him and the situation he was about to face? Jesus instructed them to pray for themselves.

Jesus doesn't make it "all about him" at this point - he is praying for himself - and he is suggesting they need to pray for themselves. The question concerning sleep and the failure to keep watch was addressed to Peter - maybe because Peter had so strongly affirmed his allegiance to Jesus.

Read Mark 14:39-40 and make notes:

We are not going to go there today - but I will mention this briefly - there are those who teach that if we pray for something more than once - we are showing a lack of faith. They teach that we are supposed to pray one time for a thing and then show our faith that God will do it. This text shows that teaching to be false.

Jesus once again went aside and prayed "the same thing" he had already prayed. The real emphasis of this text is not that Jesus prayed the same thing twice, but it points to Jesus returning to find his disciples sleeping "AGAIN." When they were found to be sleeping instead of praying - even after being warned - they "did not know what to say" to Jesus.

Read Mark 14:41-42 and make notes:

This text just seems to underscore the inability of the disciples to understand the significance of the moment. "The hour has come" - when he sees Judas coming with a company of men - it indicates all that Jesus had talked with his Heavenly Father about was settled. Jesus is going to be handed over into the hands of sinners. The cup is not going to be allowed to pass. Jesus will drink of this cup of suffering!

Earlier when the disciples were basically begging Jesus to identify the one who was going to betray him - he didn't reveal which one. Now, Jesus acknowledges to them all that Judas is the betrayer. But do you notice what Jesus says here in v42? "Rise, let us go." Instead of Jesus telling the disciples to "run for your lives" - Jesus says "let us go." What Jesus is basically saying is "let us go to meet the betrayer."

What does this say to Fishers of Men today?

1 - We must not become so focused upon ourselves that we lose concern for others.

One of the remarkable things in this passage - in the midst of Jesus' great personal agony - he comes again and again to check on his disciples - and to warn them of the danger of falling.

We cannot become so self-focused that we do not have concern for those around us. Do we face times of pain, maybe even face times of destruction? Certainly we do! Some of us have faced, and some are facing now, the threat of some physical illness or pain. How does our physical threat compare to what Jesus was facing?

Some of us have faced, and some are facing now, the threat of financial loss - maybe even complete financial ruin. How does our financial loss - even bankruptcy - compare to what Jesus was facing?

Some of us have been threatened with the loss of a special relationship - at least we thought it was a special relationship. But how does our loss of relationship compare to Jesus facing being cut off from the continuous communion and fellowship he had lived daily with the Heavenly Father?

And yet, in the face of horrendous physical threat - loss of the most important relationship threat - in the face of the most humiliating public disgrace known at that time - Jesus still moved himself above his worries and woes - to check on the disciples - to encourage the disciples to pray – and to encourage them to watch that they do not fall into temptation.

To be Fishers of Men, we should pick ourselves up above our personal woes, troubles, trials, and struggles. We should check on those around us - to encourage them to be watchful - to encourage them to continue to pray for themselves and their families.

2 - Have a personal relationship with Jesus rather than a business relationship.

My Daddy, Heavenly Father - "all things are possible for you." Intimate, personal, relationship with the Heavenly Father - will result in an unswerving faith in God's ability.

For those Believers who have a business relationship with Jesus - they will experience a relationship of rules, regulations, and formality. For those few Believers who have an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus - they will experience a relaxed, free, and joyful relationship.

To the legalist, the lack of formality will appear to be showing disrespect for Jesus. But to those who have a personal relationship with Jesus, - there will be plenty of respect, appreciation, gratitude, and love - but there will be so little concern with calling Jesus by his formal name or title.

The pastor may in fact insist that the children of the church call him "Pastor." But he wants the children of his home to call him "dad." And he wants his grand-children to call him "grandpa" or "poppa."

It is not disrespectful when his children call him "dad" or when his grandchildren call him "poppa." To make sure no one misses the point - the personal relationship of "dad" and "poppa" - indicates a higher relationship – or a more intimate relationship - than the one of "Pastor."

The personal relationship with Jesus may lead us to call him something more familiar than just "Lord" or "Savior" or "King of Kings" - and he is in deed all of these. The personal relationship with Jesus is a higher relationship than simply accepting Jesus as "Savior" and "Lord." To be the kind of Fishers of Men we are expected to be and to truly be effective as Fishers of Men - we must move into a personal relationship with Jesus.

3 - Be Faithful in Prayer for Ourselves.

Watch and pray to guard against being caught weak and off guard. If you look closely at the life of one who is lazy and inactive – you will likely see the footprints of the devil all around them.

It truly is disappointing to know how few who claim to be Christians actually pray on a daily basis. Satan comes to Christians and tells us we are being selfish and self-centered if we pray for ourselves. Satan tries to convince us that we should only pray for others.

Here's a little secret: if we don't pray for ourselves - if we don't keep ourselves prayed up - we will become weak - we won't be able to pray for others! If we don't pray for ourselves - we will be caught off guard so often that we will be unable to pray for others - because we need others to pray for us. And Satan is very aware of this reality.

Jesus told his disciples to pray for themselves. Jesus told his disciples to watch and not be caught off guard by temptation.

I am expecting temptation to come - and I plan a way of responding to temptation before it gets here. How much thought do you give to what you would do if you were tempted? And you know, exactly in what areas you are most likely to be tempted.

To be effective Fishers of Men - we must regularly pray for ourselves - we must continually be watchful so that we are not caught off guard. So we will be ready and available to pray for others and to encourage others.

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

Today's passage is one that is given very little attention - even by those who choose to study Mark. But it has a message for Fishers of Men that is crucial. So, I am asking, even if you have read and looked into this passage before - please don't check out mentally - as we examine it for a message for today's Fishers of Men.

Read Mark 14:43 and make notes:

Judas had knowledge of the places where Jesus would go, where he would spend the night, etc. Judas guided the arresting party to the place where they could find Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane.

It is worth noting that Judas is identified as "one of the Twelve." Some have tried to find fault with this - and use it as one of their reasons why the gospel of Mark - or at least this portion of the gospel - should not be relied upon as trustworthy. On the one hand - surely it would be fairly common knowledge who the disciples of Jesus were. We can look at what happens after Jesus' arrest - some of the people recognized Peter as one of the disciples.

On the other hand - Judas was a fairly common name in those days. When the Holy Spirit inspired and instructed Mark as to what should be written down - it would seem to be an important point that we understand this wasn't just "some Judas" that turned Jesus into the arresting authorities - it was "the Judas" that was one of the Twelve who betrayed Jesus.

I fell certain - if the Holy Spirit had not instructed Mark to record this little detail - that there would have been those in the church who would have argued that it had to be some other Judas. Surely none of the disciples that Jesus hand picked would ever betray him - Surely no one who had been able to spend personal time with Jesus could ever do such a thing! Surely no one who had received personal teaching and personal instruction from Jesus could ever do such a wicked thing - certainly not betray Jesus.

But, you see, it was in fact one of those who had been in the inner circle - it was one of those who had been the closest to Jesus - it was one of those who had been allowed to experience personal time with Jesus. Another thing worth noting here - this posse that was commissioned to go out and arrest Jesus - was "sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the Elders. This is a description of those who made up the Sanhedrin. This means it was the recognized religious leaders of that day - that was responsible for the arrest and mistreatment of Jesus.

Read Mark 14:44 and make notes:

From this short text we can learn several interesting details - one is that the arresting party was not familiar enough with Jesus to pick him out of even a small crowd – they had to have a pre-arranged signal – so that Judas could let them know which one was Jesus. Another interesting thing is that Judas must have realized how much the other disciples loved Jesus. Judas had told the arresting party to lead Jesus "away under guard." This makes it sound like Judas expected the other disciples to be willing to fight for Jesus.

Read Mark 14:45 and make notes:

In our society, the great majority of people see the "kiss" considerably different from the way it was viewed in that culture. Most of the people in our contemporary culture would only think of a kiss as something sensual – or at least intimate - between two people.

I don't doubt that it was also used in that manner in that day and time - however, in that day and in that society, a "kiss" was also given to someone as a sign of respect. When two men would meet, if one of the men wanted to demonstrate his respect for the other - he would go the other man and kiss him on the cheek.

It is not unreasonable to believe the disciples customarily greeted Jesus with a kiss, when they had been away and returned to him. The word "Rabbi" literally means "teacher" - but it was customary for it to be used in the sense of "my master." The idea was that the person we recognize as our master would also be one we should learn from.

It would have been a serious betrayal if Judas had simply led the arresting party to Gethsemane - hid on the outskirts and pointed out to them which one was Jesus. But Judas compounded the level of betrayal by going right up to Jesus – in front of everyone – with his words and with his actions – gave the impression of homage and respect - while he was in fact betraying Jesus – there was no homage or respect in Judas' heart – only betrayal.

Read Mark 14:46 and make notes:

This has been the focal point of much arguing among those who like to think of themselves as theologians - was the arrest of Jesus justified? The various charges of "blasphemy", "violation of the Sabbath", or the "practice of magic and sorcery" - were all serious charges in that day. But did any one of them warrant having him apprehended in this manner - and at this time of the night?

The simple point is this - the arresting party had been given a warrant by the highest Jewish court of that day, the Sanhedrin. - This posse had to arrest Jesus - and yes, it was legal for them to do so. If you want to argue about the legality of the Sanhedrin having issued the warrant - that's another issue.

Read Mark 14:47 and make notes:

In the gospel of Mark, we read of only one attempt to resist having Jesus arrested - but it is not as small a point as many think. One Bible commentator wrote that it was a feeble attempt. I don't believe that is a good way to describe it. Look at what this says - "drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear."

It is apparent that this person intended to cut the servants head off. If he had swung the sword downward along side the servants ear - he would have probably cut into the shoulder as well as the ear. If he had swung the sword upward, he would probably have cut into the arm, or shoulder. Just about the only way he could have cut off the servants ear - would have been for him to swing the sword horizontally in an effort to sever the head from the shoulders - the servant tried to duck to one side – and was fast enough to lower his head but not enough to lower the ear - the ear was cut off.

The other gospel accounts tell us this impulsive act was committed by Peter. This does indicate not only impulsiveness on his part - but it shows a level of commitment on his part.

Read Mark 14:48-50 and make notes:

A lot of people read this response by Jesus as having an indignant tone to it. That is entirely possible. I believe that I would likely have an indignant attitude if I was in a similar situation.

But I see Jesus a little differently. As we read how Jesus responded to the previous attacks and attempts to trip him up – he appears to have shown more interest in helping these misguided souls to come to some knowledge and understanding – rather than putting them down – and certainly not trying to put them in their place.

I believe Jesus' tone was more likely to have been that of a teacher who is trying to get the students to re-think things. "Students, examine and evaluate the conclusion you have so quickly come to." "Consider again the facts and the issues – and see if this conclusion makes any sense to you at all."

Jesus speaks to the posse that has come out to arrest him, - "Now think about it – is there any evidence that indicates I am leading a rebellion?" – "and here you come with swords and clubs to arrest me" - "and consider this – every day I was in the temple courts teaching – did you arrest me?" - "even though my actions certainly do not warrant your actions – the Scripture must be fulfilled – so go ahead and take me in."

At this point, all of his disciples were so thoroughly confused and afraid that they didn't even need to call for a vote – they got out of town. His disciples deserted him – this included those who said just a short time before - "even if we have to die with you, we will not leave you." They too are gone.

Read Mark 14:51-52 and make notes:

This is not a separate account of people deserting Jesus - but is rather an explanation of the nature and the completeness of the desertion. We have already been told that they all abandoned Jesus - here it is explained that one young man was so eager to get away - that he was willing to leave his clothes behind and run away naked rather than be arrested with Jesus.

The normal outer garment of that day was made of wool. The fact that this young man was wearing a linen garment could indicate he came from a wealthy family. But the fact that he had no undergarments would indicate he dressed and left rather quickly.

It may be that he was so eager to follow Jesus that he was willing to go without underwear rather than be left behind. If that is the level of his eagerness to follow Jesus - we would think that is something to brag on - we certainly would want to compliment him. But he was even more eager to not be associated with Jesus if it meant being arrested.

The focal point of this passage is not so much that the disciples deserted Jesus! The focal point of this passage has much more to do with Jesus' reaction, response, and attitude - in the face of complete betrayal and desertion!

So, what is the message we are to take with us as Fishers of Men Today?

1 - Allow No Root Of Bitterness.

Oh, the depth of Judas' betrayal! He spoke like he respected Jesus - he called him Rabbi - he acted like he respected Jesus - he was willing to kiss him in public. But these very actions and words were pre-arranged signs of betrayal. This wasn't the unfortunate "slip-up" in a moment of weakness. This was pre-meditated deception – hypocrisy – and betrayal.

Look at how Jesus responded to this despicable sham on the part of Judas. Jesus didn't call Judas the "abominable one" - or any other derogatory name - but instead called Judas by his proper name. Jesus had washed the feet of Judas - Jesus had given bread to Judas - not just on the night of the last supper – but on several occasions. And Judas was allowed to eat of the miraculous fish and bread that Jesus provided.

It is so sad for me to have to tell you this - but we will meet and experience a Judas or two in our walk as Christians. There will be false teachers in the church - and among the Christian family. There will be evil stewards - and most of us as Christians will experience betrayal by someone who by all outward appearances looks and sounds like they are committed to us and willing to defend us!

When this happens - Will there be bitter tone in our voice? Will we call them all kinds of derogatory and degrading names that describe to others just what this person has done to us?

Desertion is a type of betrayal. Most Christians are going to experience at least this type of betrayal. It is probably only a matter of time until someone deserts you in your time of need. And this desertion may in fact be by someone who just a short time before – not only expressed their complete commitment to you and their faithfulness to you – but may have done something as an act of support or even defense. Like when Peter was willing to decapitate one of the arresting officers.

Jesus did not allow the words or actions of others to \ determine his attitude. Jesus did not allow the lack of faithfulness of others to determine his attitude. Jesus did not allow the betrayal of others to determine his attitude.

In spite of the fact of being betrayed - Jesus kept his voice calm and his heart clear. The betrayal by Judas was compounded and intensified by the desertion of all the other disciples. And yet, in the face of complete and total betrayal and desertion - in the clear and un-mistakable state of having no one left in his corner - Jesus kept his heart clear of bitterness and hatred and revenge.

For those Fishers of Men – who will be betrayed and deserted – have you set you mind, your heart, and your soul in advance? Have you determined and committed that you will not allow bitterness and vengefulness to take root in your heart and attitude?

For those of us who have already been betrayed - do we today have any level of bitterness with in us? Do we have any seeds or thoughts of revenge in our hearts or thoughts?

Why is this such an issue? Let me share with you a fishing experience we had some years ago. We went out on a long dock to fish. We had been told to place the small bait fish on our hooks and lower them into the water.

A couple came out onto this dock who were arguing about something. One of them was obviously mad. When they would place the little bait fish on their hook, instead of lowering into the water - they would swing their rod, line, and bait over their head and into the water with great force. The bait fish would make a hard splash into the water. Most of the time, the bait fish would break off of the hook when it slammed into the water. This meant that person had to reel in their line and place another bait fish onto their hook.

This - of course - meant they would cast it into the water just like before. When this person would splash their bait fish into the water - while we could not see below the surface - you just knew that the fish we were trying to catch were scattering - getting away from the "big splash" zone. It wasn't long until the other people trying to fish from this dock - began moving further and further away from this person who kept slamming their bait into the water. I don't guess I have to tell you this person didn't catch any fish. And neither did those who stayed close to this person.

Today, when we have been betrayed by someone – maybe one we thought was a brother or sister - the pain is going to be deep and intense. I can testify from experience. If we allow bitterness to take root in our hearts and minds - if we allow our thoughts to go down the paths of retribution and revenge - we will be like that person slamming their bait into the water. Our tone of voice will become harsh - there will be many more words of condemnation than words of mercy and grace. Even when we speak of God's mercy – we will have harsh tone.

When we pray for people – we are more likely to speak harshly. And before we argue that our prays are only intended for God - if we are praying out loud – those around us are hearing those harsh words and the harsh tone of voice.

When we try to witness to others - they will hear harsh tone of voice - and our words will often sound like the bait fish slamming into the water. The fish we desire to catch will be scattering from our presence. And the other Fishers of Men will began to move further and further away from us and we will find ourselves complaining about how no one wants to hear about the Lord anymore. And we will find ourselves complaining about how no other Christians will have anything to do with us.

We simply cannot be the Fishers of Men we are expected to be and the kind of Fishers of Men we need to be - if we are living our lives with bitterness in our hearts or minds. If we allow bitterness to take root - if we allow our thoughts to run through the paths of retribution and revenge - It want be very long until we are finding ourselves feeling very alone - and very non-productive. It won't be the fault of those ungodly people and it won't be that all the other Believers have grown cold and indifferent.

Today is a very good day to cast out any roots of bitterness and to stop all those thoughts of revenge - so we can get on with the very important business of Fishing for Men.

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

There are a number of people who object strongly to this portion of Mark - claiming it simply cannot be reliable. Their argument centers on the idea that proceedings of the Sanhedrin on the night of the Passover - just wouldn't take place because there was a prohibition against capital trials on feast days.

There is some truth in this – however - these people seem to overlook passages such as Deuteronomy 13:12, 17:13, and 21:21- which told the Israelite people that in the case of particular serious offenses, the execution of an offender at such a time would serve as a deterrent for all of Israel to see, hear, and to fear.

Others have argued that if Jesus was sentenced to death by the Sanhedrin, then he would have been stoned to death – as called for in Jewish law. But those with this argument ignore historical records. The Roman empire jealously guarded their right to carry out a sentence of death anywhere in the Roman Empire.

The Jewish Sanhedrin, while they might have personally enjoyed getting to stone Jesus to death - would have given themselves a death sentence if the Roman government discovered they had taken the life of someone who was within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The bottom line is that Jesus was sentenced by the Sanhedrin on the night of the Passover. They did sentence him on a charge of blasphemy, and they had to prepare some kind of political charge against Jesus in order to get the Roman government to carry out their desire to have him killed. And yes, it is perfectly natural to wonder what message for Fishers of Men could there be in the passage on the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin.

Read Mark 14:53 and make notes:

The three groups of people mentioned here - are the descriptions of those that made up the Sanhedrin. We know from other records that the high priest at this time was Joseph who's surname was Caiaphas. It would appear this man was a very good diplomat or administrator. The average term of office for the high priest was about 4 years. Caiaphas held the position for about 19 years.

Jesus was led from Gethsemane back into town and taken to the residence of Caiaphas. The rest of the Sanhedrin assembled there - most likely in the upper room or on the roof.

This is an interesting piece of information. In all of the historical documents of that era - there is no evidence that the Sanhedrin routinely used a private residence for its hearings. It makes an interesting question to consider why the Sanhedrin met to try Jesus in a private home rather than their official meeting hall.

I suggest to you that it was much easier to keep the meeting a secret by conducting it in the house of one of the members. If they had used the official Sanhedrin meeting hall, there would have been a number of people - outside the Sanhedrin officials - who would have been aware of what was taking place. This could have led to the word getting out and a possible uprising from among the people could take place.

The Sanhedrin did not want to make the people angry concerning Jesus - for he was admired by the majority of the populace. It was not unusual for a criminal to be tried immediately after being arrested - so there really isn't anything abnormal about the haste of the matter - except it started by an arrest in the middle of the night.

Read Mark 14:54 and make notes:

There are those who claim this verse is sort of disruptive to the account of Jesus being brought before the Sanhedrin. Please keep in mind - the Holy Spirit is telling Mark what things to write down - so the Holy Spirit didn't think it was a disruptive statement. That would mean we should be looking for how it fits rather than thinking it should be cut out.

The council session and the denial by Jesus' followers are concurrent events. That is they took place at the same time - and they are intricately connected. Mark records the hearing proceedings before he records the denial by Peter - but by introducing the location of Peter at this point - it helps us understand that the denial of Peter is a part of the overall event - and we know where Peter is physically while the hearing is taking place.

While Jesus is being set up by bogus charges on the inside of the house - Peter is right outside warming himself by the fire of those who arrested Jesus. Peter is not in the presence of Jesus - but he is not far away from Jesus. Even if I don't say anything more about this little detail - doesn't this sound like a description of a lot of people today. They are not in the presence of Jesus - but they are not far away from Jesus.

Read Mark 14:55-56 and make notes:

The proper way to begin such proceedings was to collect evidence of the criminal acts. To convict someone of a capital offense - Jewish law required evidence from at least two witnesses. In Jewish proceedings, the witnesses would give their testimony in front of the judges. If their testimony varied from the other witness in any way - they were forbidden from giving the death sentence.

The fact that "many testified falsely" - indicates someone had been busy going around and getting people to agree to give testimony - probably while the arresting party was going out to make the arrest. The fact that they were having trouble getting the testimonies to agree indicates they didn't have much time to coach the witnesses.

Verse 55 is a rather bad indictment against the Sanhedrin. It tells us they "were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death." They were not looking for the truth - they were not trying to determine if a crime had been committed - they were not trying to ensure justice was taking place - they wanted to kill Jesus. How frustrating it must have been for the members of the Sanhedrin - to have to listen to all these witnesses - and time after time their statements didn't agree!

Read Mark 14:57-59 and make notes:

Finally - at some point - probably rather late in the testimony and witness phase - a pretty serious charge was leveled against Jesus. Maybe these had been coached during the time the disappointing testimony on other charges was being given - but when these stood up – "even their testimony did not agree." Jesus had in fact said not long before - "if this temple be destroyed, in three days I will raise it up" - and it wasn't until after the resurrection that the disciples understood - Jesus was talking about his physical body - "this temple."

If the disciples didn't understand until after the resurrection - it is reasonable that those without the benefit of being in a close relationship with Jesus – would have naturally taken this statement to be a threat to destroy the sanctuary of the Jews – the temple in Jerusalem. Any self-respecting Jew of that day would be willing to take immediate action against anyone who was threatening to destroy their temple.

This was a serious threat - not only the destruction or but even the desecration of the temple would be a capital offense. But, and this must have been very disappointing for the Sanhedrin, - these witnesses didn't agree in their statements either. Over the technicality of the lack of complete agreement of the testimony – these witnesses had to be declared – false witnesses.

Read Mark 14:60-61 and make notes:

Since witnesses had failed to secure any charge against Jesus - we see the high priest standing to his feet and beginning to interrogate Jesus personally. Jewish law required the accused person to answer the charges against them. "Jesus remained silent and gave no answer." This not only went against the Jewish civil law - it had to infuriate the high priest.

Jesus' lack of response brought the proceedings to a dead halt. The witnesses had failed to give reliable testimony - now in what was probably seen by the Sanhedrin as a last resort - or last chance at convicting Jesus - Jesus was depriving the court of anything that could be twisted or distorted or being exploited.

This direct question by the high priest was a shrewd question. "Are you the Messiah?" If Jesus answers "yes" - the Sanhedrin has won their case - they no longer would need two witnesses to agree - they would have the confession of the accused. If Jesus answers "no" - the Sanhedrin would not win the case - but all of those who were starting to believe Jesus is the Messiah would have to seek another.

Jewish tradition had many expectations of the Messiah. He would do many things that would give evidence of his being the Messiah. Someone claiming to be the Messiah who could be imprisoned, - abandoned by his followers. Someone who was helpless in the hands of his foes – simply could not be the Messiah.

Read Mark 14:62 and make notes:

As we study the Gospels - it is apparent Jesus was careful not to call himself the Messiah. When we study the Scriptures and historical documents - it becomes clear that many of the traditional expectations of the Messiah were wrong - or at least misguided.

There was much about the Messiah that remained veiled in Jesus' public ministry. Jesus being "the Truth" - could not answer such a direct question of "are you" any other way than - "I Am." Jesus then follows this admission with a prophetic statement - "you will see."

This is not a vengeful reply - but it is a response to the thought there is a lack of proof to his being the Messiah. They, of course, wanted and expected the proof to come first - but Jesus is saying the proof will come after.

Read Mark 14:63-64 and make notes:

We must evaluate their actions on the basis of where they are and what they believed - rather than where we are and what we believe. For the Jewish culture of that day, anyone who claimed to be God was blaspheming Yahweh Jehovah. God is so far beyond mere man that it is a seriously derogatory thing toward God to claim that a mere man could be God. Blaspheming God was worthy of death - in that culture.

Even though Jesus had performed a great many miracles - these men had not seen any evidence that indicates that Jesus was the Messiah. We can recognize today that these men were looking for the wrong signs and indications - but the fact remains that they did not see what they were looking for. So in their assessment - Jesus was not the Messiah - and for him to claim to be the Messiah - was blaspheming God.

Just like the high priest had asked Jesus an "are you" question - he now asked the Sanhedrin a "what do you think question" - pointing out to them "you have heard the blasphemy" - and all of them having heard Jesus say "I Am" - they responded with "he is worthy of death"

There was no court of appeals in the Jewish legal system. The decision of the Sanhedrin was binding - and it was final. The only logistical problem at this point - no one was allowed to carry out an execution on any subject of the Roman Empire except the Roman government.

Read Mark 14:65 and make notes:

This is truly a sad text to read. We must remember - Jesus was being interrogated by the religious leaders of that day - and when it says "some began to spit at him" - and "they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, Prophecy" - this was the religious leaders who were acting in such a disgraceful manner. We would all like to expect mature behavior from our religious leaders - we would like to think our religious leaders would handle all people with a level of dignity and respect.

It was a part of their culture to spit on someone when they wanted to express a complete lack of respect. So this could possibly be overlooked to a degree - when we consider they were convinced Jesus had blasphemed God. But the actions of blindfolding Jesus - hitting him - and them demanding that he prophesy and tell them who hit him - that is just people out of control.

There is Old Testament text from which the Jews came to believe the Messiah - when he comes - would be able to pass judgment without even seeing the parties involved. Some have tried to say this action was just an effort on the part of the Sanhedrin to test whether Jesus was really the Messiah.

I could almost give them this - until you stop and really consider it. If a person is rational - if they are using all of their mental facilities - would you want to blindfold a person - hit them with you fist - ask them to tell you which one of you hit them - as a test to see if this was the Messiah - and then discover this is the Messiah?

Would you want to be the one who hit the Messiah and have Him tell you it was you? I would not want to hit the Messiah.

This wasn't part of a legitimate test for the Messiah. In v55 - at the beginning of today's text - we were told the Sanhedrin was just looking for a reason to kill Jesus. Keeping this in mind - there is no justifiable reason to think they have suddenly decided to see if Jesus is the Messiah. These actions at the end of today's text only help to reveal the heart and attitude of those who are setting Jesus up. They were irrational - they were mean - they were unfair - they were in fact willing to make up things if that is what it takes. They intended on destroying Jesus. And there is no justifiable reason to sugar coat it and make these out to be nice guys.

Message for Fishers of Men today?

There is a proper way to respond to false charges. Remain silent and give no answer!

Jesus sat there and listened as person after person stood before the Sanhedrin and made up lies about what Jesus had done wrong. Jesus listened to one falsehood after another. But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

When we hear someone say something about us that is not true - we can't seem to respond fast enough. We want to deny it immediately - and we want to make sure everyone hears us say it is not true. But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Some of us think we would explode if we kept silent when someone lies about us. And Jesus sat there and listened to a great number of lies being told about him. Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Jesus only responded when they finally said something that is truth. When Jesus did respond by acknowledging these people did say something that was true - he didn't use this as a door to set in and tell them how wrong they were on all the other issues. When Jesus admitted that he was in fact the Messiah - he didn't say "and you are going to regret the day you were born."

Here's the practical side of this issue: When we are falsely accused - and we deny that we did it - the majority of people say to themselves if not publicly - "that's what they all say." And very few if any will believe our denial - they will instead believe the lie.

It does not do any good to deny the lies. If it does anything - it gives the liar some level of acknowledgment. If you feel you must respond to false accusations - then ask the person to forgive you! Even if you did not do the thing - they aren't going to believe you if you say "I didn't" - but they might forgive you if you ask for forgiveness.

Asking to be forgiven - might result in them letting go of the offense and accusation. Denying it - will only result in the majority believing you are guilty and are not willing to admit it.

In Jesus' situation - when the assembled group had every intention of finding a reason to kill him - how much good would it have done Jesus to deny each and every false charge? How much good would it have done Jesus to have been able to provide evidence to prove each and every accusation to be false?

The group that had assembled that day would have continued until they found something for which they could declare Jesus GUILTY! And that is pretty much the way it is going to be for those who have decided they are going to prove you guilty.

When the devil can get Fishers of Men to respond to false accusations - then the Fishers of Men will spend so much time defending themselves that they will not be able to Fish for Men. Fishers of Men - What has God called us to do?

We can not Fish for Men while we are busy trying to refute false accusations. So today - Fishers of Men - we are being asked to choose: Will we try to defend ourselves against false charges - Or will we Fish for Men?

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

The message found in this lesson's text - without question - is needed by every person who is saved ! So it has a message for Fishers of Men. But today's text can also be of help to those who feel the tug of God on their heart to be saved. So let's take a look at the passage in Mark that records Peter's denial.

Read Mark 14:66-68 and make notes:

Back in v54, we were told that Peter was in the courtyard while Jesus was being tried on the inside of the house of the high priest. In the last lesson, we suggested the trial may have been conducted in the upper room or on the roof. Verse 66 tells us Peter was below.

The things that we are reading in these verses - were happening at the same time as the things we read about in the verses of the last lesson. Jesus is on trial personally inside the house – and Jesus is on trial indirectly outside of the house. While Jesus' words and actions are being lied about on the inside of this house – Jesus' relationship is being lied about on the outside of the house.

Here is where one of the great pains comes about. At the same time that great scorn is being heaped upon Jesus on the inside of the house - at the very same time - the prophecy that Peter would deny Jesus was being fulfilled outside the house.

This account in Mark indicates the servant didn't ask Peter if he was one of Jesus' followers - but she stated that he was one of Jesus' followers. Many people believe we should read this as the servant girl using a tone of voice that accused Peter of being a follower.

Considering the tone and attitude that is going on inside - it might very well have been a contemptuous tone and attitude on the part of the servant girl. Then Peter responded by denying it - "I don't know or understand what you're talking about."

Then Peter went into the entryway. You know, kind of like what we do when someone is trying to talk to us and we don't want to talk to them - we go somewhere else - to the other side of the room - to another room - we go outside - you know. Consider for a moment Peter's denial. Peter didn't just say "I am not one of his followers." Peter went so far as to say "I don't know what you are talking about" - "I don't understand what you are talking about."

Come on now! Anyone who is awake and at the house of the high priest this night - would at least know what is going on. They may or may not agree with what is being done - but they would know about it.

For Peter to be there and to say "I don't know what you are talking about" would be a major "duh" moment. And no one is going to believe such a denial. Peter's refusal to admit his relationship with Jesus is denial - but for Peter to deny even knowing about Jesus is a major denial.

The very person who said "even if I have to die with you, I will never betray you" - this is the person who is now denying any relationship. Peter was very likely concerned for his physical safety. Peter may have desired that night to find some approval from the people he was with. This would mean Peter wanted approval from bystanders more than Peter wanted a relationship with Jesus.

Read Mark 14:69 and make notes:

Peter had relocated himself to another area - away from this servant girl. The devil is a relentless "annoyer" isn't he? The servant girl sees Peter and goes over to where he is standing and tells those standing around Peter - "This fellow is one of them." You can almost hear the condescending tone in her voice "he's one of them." I can imagine it sounding rather disgusting to be "one of them." This is Peter who didn't shutter in the presence of those with swords and spears - who is now cowering and running from nothing more than the words of a girl servant.

Read Mark 14:70 and make notes:

Again, Peter refused to acknowledge his being a disciple of Jesus. "After a little while" - Peter has been given at least two chances to admit being a follower of Jesus. Both times he said much more than needed to be said - even if he was denying the fact. All that talking gave the others around time to evaluate and consider the accent with which he spoke.

His accent gave him away - "you are a Galilean - surely you are one of his followers." If Peter had kept his mouth shut - maybe they wouldn't have heard his accent!.

Read Mark 14:71 and make notes:

When it was pointed out that his accent gave him away - Peter felt provoked to the point that he gave a vehement reply of denial. There was a practice in that day - when someone was being accused - and they were maintaining their innocence - that the ultimate claim to innocence was to call down a curse upon themselves if they turned out to be guilty. But it was also a curse on their accusers if they turned out to be innocent. Now, if you were the accuser - and you weren't 100% sure this person was guilty - would you want to continue pushing the issue?

Just look at how complete and total Peter's denial of Jesus has become - "I don't know this man you're talking about." Peter was even refusing to use the name of Jesus - instead he said "this man you're talking about." Now Peter's denial of Jesus is complete - we might even say it has become a full and total denial.

Read Mark 14:72 and make notes:

What a little thing - the rooster crowed! It was such a common thing that the average person wouldn't even notice the rooster crowing. It happened every morning - the people were used to it. At some level they did hear it - but it didn't register consciously. And this little thing sparked Peter's memory - painfully so - for when Peter remembered the prophetic word - the prophetic word that Peter said can't be true - the prophetic word that Peter said - "I reject that" - the prophetic word that Peter made such a public issue of. It had already come to pass - when Peter remembered it. "And Peter broke down and wept!"

On the inside of that building that day was the integrity and faithfulness of Jesus. On the outside of that building that day was the faithlessness of a disciple of Jesus.

Not some time later - not in a different place - not under different circumstances - but at the very same time - and in one aspect - in the very shadow of Jesus' faithfulness - we find the faithlessness of Peter.

Message to today's Fishers of Men?

1 - Past Faithlessness Does Not Disqualify Us From Restoration and Usefulness.

You can read the rest of the New Testament. Peter was in fact restored in his relationship with Jesus. Peter was used as a minister. This passage provides such a significant and important word of encouragement - and especially to those who have been called to be Fishers of Men.

Who among us has denied our relationship with Jesus - more thoroughly than Peter? Who among us has denied Jesus with stronger words than Peter used? And yet - Who among us has ever been ashamed to admit we are a follower of Jesus? Who among us has ever wanted the approval of those around us more than we wanted a relationship with Jesus? Isn't it true that this has happened to most us at some point and time?

This passage is so encouraging - because it helps us see how complete and thorough Peter's denial was - and yet we can see later in the New Testament that Peter was indeed restored. It is possible that some of us may have denied Jesus completely and thoroughly - but it couldn't be more so than did Peter. So, if we haven't denied more thoroughly than Peter did - and he was restored - then there is hope that we can be restored - and that we can be used in the ministry. And the same is true for those of us who didn't deny Jesus - but we did sin and fall short of what we know he wanted for us and our life.

2 - The Key To Being Restored Is Repentance.

"And Peter broke down and wept!" Judas felt really bad when he realized he had failed Jesus - that he had betrayed Jesus. And in response to his "feeling bad" - Judas went out and killed himself.

Peter felt horrible when he realized he had failed Jesus - betrayed the relationship with Jesus. And in response to his "feeling horrible" - Peter repented.

There is something about our fleshly nature that would rather die - than to admit that we were wrong. The eventual end of that line of thinking is found in the example of Judas.

It does indeed go against the grain of the fleshly nature to admit that we were wrong. But when we repent - we find release and new life and new freedom. We often find new power and strength in our lives - after we repent.

We may not receive forgiveness and release from other people - but we do receive forgiveness and release from God. It is sometimes the desire for approval of others that leads us to deny Christ. It is often times the desire for the approval of others that keeps us from repenting. We can find approval from others - but that will leave our heart in turmoil - it will leave our heart imprisoned.

When we find approval from God - we find release for our whole being. Fishers of Men - especially those struggling with past failures - usually don't do much actual fishing - after all, we don't deserve to be fishing! Fishers of Men - who have repented of past failures - can openly and unashamedly fish - for they know we don't deserve to be fishing - but we know we get to enjoy the Grace of God.

Don't let your past failures of faith keep you from serving Jesus. Don't stay in the prison of your knowledge of failure. Repent and move on boldly with Jesus.

For those who have not yet accepted Jesus as their Savior - Don't let your past failures keep you from accepting the saving Grace of Jesus Christ. He really does want to forgive you of your sinful choices. And he desires greatly to welcome you into the family of God. Just do what Peter did – Repent!

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

In the trial of Jesus before Pilate - Mark doesn't give a detailed account of the trial itself - but instead appears to give a sketch of events. The Sanhedrin had found Jesus guilty of blasphemy according to Jewish law. But that would be of no concern to the Roman government. The charge Jesus was being tried for before Pilate was High Treason.

The Sanhedrin had mocked Jesus and treated him with contempt as a messianic prophet. Jesus was treated rudely by the Roman soldiers as one who claimed some kingship. The technical charges and reasons were different between the Sanhedrin and the Roman government - but both sentenced Jesus to die as the Messiah - and this was in fact according to God's plan and God's will - more so than the evil plan of any man.

Jesus had told his followers that they would be handed over! And as those first century believers did - so can Believers today - take from this passage that we should not expect preferential treatment at the hands of those who take us before tribunals. But! - There is a subtle and much more important message for Fishers of Men today to be found in this passage.

Read Mark 15:1 and make notes:

As mentioned in an earlier message - the Sanhedrin could pronounce judgment upon Jesus - but they had to surrender their prisoner over to the Roman government if he was to receive the death penalty. The Roman prefect - in this territory that was Pilate. He could either confirm the death penalty or he could override it and there was no appeal.

In order for Jesus to receive the death penalty, the Sanhedrin had to convince the Roman court that Jesus had committed some crime against the Roman government that was deserving of death. Roman law had no consideration for blasphemy - but high treason was a charge that could not simply be dismissed in Roman courts. The legal trials of the Roman government began at the earliest hour of daylight. The work day of the Roman officials were concluded as early as possible to allow for an organized period of being a Roman gentleman each day.

This made it necessary to bring prisoners - and the charges against these prisoners to the Roman - officials as early as possible each day. Had the Sanhedrin waited until morning to try Jesus, they would probably had to wait until the next morning to take Jesus to Pilate. It would have been unfavorable to bring a prisoner and charges to Pilate during the Roman gentleman part of the afternoon.

This may very well be the reasoning Caiaphas used to get the Sanhedrin to capture and try Jesus during the night - so they could take him to Pilate at first light - and get this over with in one day.

Read Mark 15:2 and make notes:

The Jewish leaders that made up the Sanhedrin - may have been blind to the reality of Jesus being the Messiah - but they were not a bunch of dummies. To the Jewish people - someone claiming to be the "king of the Jews" - was clearly a claim to being the Messiah. No Jew would interpret this phrase any other way. But to the Roman government - someone claiming to be the "king of the Jews" - would be interpreted as someone claiming to be a leader of resistance against the Roman Emperor.

The Sanhedrin realized that it would get them nowhere - by telling Pilate - Jesus was guilty of blasphemy - so they told Pilate, Jesus was claiming to be the "king of the Jews" - knowing this would get the attention of the Roman government. Isn't it interesting that the very statement about Jesus that disturbed them the most - the statement they all declared to be "not true" where Jesus is concerned - is the very statement they take to the secular government!

The Sanhedrin adamantly proclaims this to be a false claim - and yet they want this to be used to get Jesus the death penalty in the secular court.

When questioned about this statement by Pilate - Jesus had to answer that it is true. Remember - Jesus is The Truth - and even though Jesus knew this statement was interpreted very differently by the pagans - it was still true in the Jewish realm. Jesus was, and is, the Messiah. But Jesus didn't make it easy on Pilate either. If Jesus had simply answered "Yes" - or "I am" - then the trial would be over. Pilate would have heard the confession of the accused and would have sentenced him to death. But Jesus didn't answer a simple "yes" - instead, Jesus said "Yes, it is as you say,"

Roman law was quite technical and precise. The evidence had to be clear and unquestionable - in all cases, but especially in capital cases. Jesus' reply would be very similar to a person on trial today in one of our courts as saying "no contest" to the charges. The accused would not have said I am guilty - but would have only said - I won't bother defending myself.

To put someone to death - the evidence needed to be a little more certain than a man being charged - and the accused choosing not to defend himself. This means Pilate had to examine Jesus and these charges more closely.

Read Mark 15:3-5 and make notes:

The Sanhedrin recognized Jesus' reply as failing to be an admission of treason - so they began to accuse Jesus of "many things." This had to sound like the previous night starting all over for Jesus - so many accusations! Even when Pilate noted the long list of charges - and encouraged Jesus to answer the accusations - Jesus "still made no reply."

Pilate basically challenged Jesus to define his position but Jesus remained silent to false accusations. The response by Jesus "amazed" Pilate. While this kind of response by any accused was probably very new to Pilate - we saw it in the trial the night before didn't we? Jesus only responded when the Sanhedrin said something that was true. Here before Pilate, Jesus does the same thing. Jesus only responded when a true statement was made. He is the King of the Jews - but to all the false charges - Jesus says nothing.

The average person - even if they knew they were innocent - would feel very uncomfortable not responding to false charges against them. For Jesus to just sit there like that in the face of such hostility toward him - communicated to Pilate that Jesus had a presence of dignity about him.

Read Mark 15:6-10 and make notes:

It is clear that Pilate did not believe the charges against Jesus. So Pilate offers to release Jesus - to fulfill a custom by the Roman government - to acknowledge the special feast days of the Jews.

Read Mark 15:11-14 and make notes:

The response of the crowd of people gathered here that day can seem rather callous. And the crowd was "stirred up" by the chief priest - and ultimately all this stirring up came from Satan. But the rationale for this kind of response is not so evil in itself. The Sanhedrin - the highest civil court as well as the undisputed religious leaders of the Jewish people - had declared Jesus to be guilty of blasphemy - All of the people in Jerusalem were hearing that Jesus had threatened to destroy the temple - this would not be a small threat to any Jew of that day. It would be easy and natural for any Jew to ask to have Jesus put to death. Why take a chance - this guy may try to carry out his threat to destroy our temple.

On the other hand – Barabbas - while he had violated many laws - including murder - Barabbas had led a revolt against the Roman government in an attempt to set the Jewish people free from Roman rule. Barabbas was clearly a hero in the eyes of the Jewish people - it would be just as natural for them to want him to be set free - after all, if he is free he just might try again - and who knows, he might succeed the next time.

Don't forget that Satan is behind the plan to have Jesus killed - and don't forget that it is God's plan for Jesus to die for the salvation of all people. So, the response of the people that day was not so callous as it might first appear. They were just being normal people responding in a rather predictable way under the given circumstances.

The heart and attitude of the Sanhedrin - was at least misguided, if not evil - but the heart and attitude of the people was that of just being normal people. Sometimes, just being "normal" - we cause real hurt and we do serious wrong!

Read Mark 15:15 and make notes:

It is important to remember that Pilate did not have to do what the crowd asked of him – in neither the case of Jesus or that of Barabbas. He had complete legal right to confirm the charges against Jesus - or to dismiss the charges against Jesus. Pilate could choose to release Barabbas - or he could choose to release another prisoner.

Read Mark 15:16-19 and make notes:

"The whole company of soldiers" was called together to humiliate and torture Jesus. We learn from other accounts of this event what v15 indicates - Jesus was flogged before the soldiers had their time of mocking.

Jesus had already been stripped naked, and beaten until his back and shoulders were bloody. When the soldiers place this purple cloth on his shoulders and back - and the crown made of thorn on his head - the soldiers then went around him saying "Hail, king of the Jews!" Over and over they would hit him on the head with a long stick and they would spit on him. Some of them even bowed on their knees and pretended to pay homage.

This is one of the unusual things about Jesus' crucifixion. Typically the prisoner who was sentenced to be crucified - would be stripped naked and then they would tie the cross beam to their shoulders. As this naked prisoner walked to the place of crucifixion carrying the cross beam - they would be whipped and flogged along the way. This was a way of the Roman government sending out a message to the people of the empire. They wanted as many people as possible to see what happens to criminals. So they would flog and whip the prisoner - as they walked along through the streets - where the common people lived, worked, and shopped.

The prisoner first was left no dignity - they had to walk through the streets naked. Next the prisoner was beat to a bloody pulp - in the busy streets where the common people lived and moved about. It didn't happen behind closed doors - but instead, it happened in their face!

Read Mark 15:20 and make notes:

This must have been an act of God - moving upon the hearts of a pagan people. Surely there was no one among these Roman soldiers who cared anything about Jesus' dignity.

But when they had finished mocking Jesus - they removed the purple cloth - and they put his own clothes back on him. It may have only been his under garments - but he was clothed again in his clothes. Then they led him out to crucify him.

What is the message for Fishers of Men today in this passage?

1 - Desire to Please God first and foremost!

The primary thing we should take home with us from this message to become the kind of Fishers of Men God desires for us to be - the clue is found in v15 - "Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them." As we mentioned earlier - Pilate could have released any prisoner. If Pilate were to have dismissed the charges against Jesus - then the choice of which prisoner to release would not have even included Jesus.

The important thing to note in this text is that Pilate "wanted to satisfy the crowd." Pilate realized Jesus had done nothing wrong! Verse 10 tells us Pilate realized it was out of envy that the religious leaders had asked to have Jesus killed. Verse 14 tells us Pilate even asked the people "What crime has he committed?" For Pilate to know Jesus had done nothing wrong - and to know he had been handed over only out of envy - the only right thing to do - was to dismiss the charges against Jesus. But Pilate desired to please the crowd more than he desired to do the right thing. And that led to Jesus being humiliated and mocked and disrespected among the people.

Now here's the painful reality! Today, when we desire to please those around us more than we desire to do the right thing - it causes Jesus to be mocked and disrespected among the people.

I certainly do believe Christianity is being treated in a most shameful way today. I certainly do believe Christianity is often treated with prejudice. But it is very important for us to realize that the major cause of this attitude toward Christianity today - is a result of too many of God's people desiring to please those around us more than we have desire to do the right thing!

It is only natural to our fleshly body - we all want to be liked - we want the people around us to approve of us. For some people it may be a radical change - but change we must - if we are going to be the Fishers of Men we have been saved to become. We **MUST** desire to do what is right - more than we desire to please those around us. We **MUST** desire to Please God First! Pilate desired most to please the crowd. Jesus desired most to please God. Look at where they both are today. Where would you rather be?

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

Few, if any, would deny that crucifixion was one of the most cruel forms of punishment ever conceived by human beings. And yet in the Roman provinces, crucifixion was a customary means of making sure the common people remained obedient to the Roman government.

The Jewish law had no provision for crucifixion. They did have a provision for a really bad person to be hanged out in public - but that was to be done only after they had been stoned to death. Or after they had been killed in battle. To have one's dead body hang out in public view - rather than being placed into a tomb - was to say this person is "accursed of God".

For the Romans, there was no more painful way to die - than to be crucified. For the Jews, there simply was no greater disgrace - than to have one's dead body hanging out in public. And yet, for the Christian, - the cross of Christ has become the focal point of our faith, our salvation, and our hope for a life with God.

Read Mark 15:21-22 and make notes:

It was a common practice - both of the Romans and the Jews - to execute people outside the residential area of the town. While the Romans made sure to parade the condemned person through the streets - so that as many people as possible could see what happens to criminals - they did not kill them in the inhabited area of the city. The actual killing took place outside the city.

Simon was a common name of that era - and it would appear the Holy Spirit wanted us to know which Simon it was - because he had Mark to record the names of his sons. This distinguished him from the other Simons. This Simon would appear to have been from one of the Jewish families that was taken away captive from Jerusalem and some of the family later returned.

Just a little side note of some historical importance - and a suggestion as to why the Holy Spirit wanted us to know which Simon this was - Paul sends greetings to a Rufus in the letter to the Romans. Many have suggested it was this Rufus mentioned here. And in the 1940's - a burial chamber was uncovered which belonged to "Cyrenian Jews" - and one of the items was inscribed "Alexander, son of Simon." While we can't be sure - it is reasonable to think both sons of this Simon were impacted for the cause of Christ that day - and they both took a place in the church.

Read Mark 15:23 and make notes:

It is too easy to read quickly over this verse and speed on. Let's stop here for a minute and soak it in. There was an old Jewish tradition of providing a narcotic drink to those who were condemned to death. This practice was rooted in Proverbs 31:6-7 which says *"give strong drink to him who is perishing. . ."*

Typically, the women would prepare this drink and provide it to the condemned person. In a Roman execution, the women would prepare the drink and bring it, but one of the Roman soldiers would actually give it to the condemned criminal.

It was during the first century A.D. that a Roman army physician, named Dioscorides Pedanius, did a study on some 600 plants – producing approximately 1,000 drugs. He documented the narcotic properties of myrrh.

This verse tells us Jesus refused to take the narcotic drink. Jesus refused the opportunity to become numbed - and consciously agreed to experience the full sufferings that had been appointed to him – on our behalf. If we always avoid the struggle – will we ever become stronger? The hands that never experience stress – do not develop a callous!

Read Mark 15:24 and make notes:

From the beginning of man's existence on this earth, - Satan has been distorting the truth and leading man astray. For many years, Satan spread the story that Jesus was not, nor was anyone else was actually "nailed" to a cross. Satan had men with reputations say that the victims were merely tied to the cross with ropes and allowed to die of exhaustion. And that did happen to some people, but Jesus and many others were indeed actually "nailed" to the cross.

In the late 1960's - a tomb was discovered in the northeastern part of Jerusalem. The remains had clear evidence of having been nailed to a cross. Both of the feet had been pierced by a single nail – 17 to 18 centimeters - and it was made from iron. The arms had each been nailed through the forearm, - very near the wrist. The lower leg bones had been broken.

There simply is no intelligent reason to think Jesus died in any other way than what the bible has told us. Jesus' died, - having his body nailed to the cross! When the text says he was crucified - that is what it means.

Other historical evidence has shown us that the cross for crucifixion was typically not much taller than the height of a man. Occasionally a person would be placed on a taller cross - when it was desired that they be viewed from a greater distance. The really bad criminal – or the more infamous criminal - would be placed on a taller Cross - so that more people could see the crucified person and from a greater distance.

We will see a little later that a man placed a sponge soaked with vinegar on a stick and lifted it up to Jesus. That would lead us to think Jesus had been placed on a taller cross. If Jesus had been on a cross of normal height, they probably could have reached him with their arm outstretched.

Read Mark 15:25-27 and make notes:

The Roman law did not give the death penalty for robbery. A historian from that era, Josephus, tells us that those taking a leadership role in an insurrection were given the death penalty. It is very likely that these two, who are called robbers, were part of the insurrection spoken of earlier - perhaps the same one in which Barabbas had been a part.

Barabbas had been called a murderer and these two are called robbers - but the greater crime for which they received the death penalty was probably that their robbery took part during the rebelling - and trying to overthrow the Roman government.

Read Mark 15:29-32 and make notes:

Those who were jealous of Jesus - had wanted for so long to destroy him - they have now managed to get the Roman government to destroy the one who made them envious. They go by and hurl insults at him - they taunt him to "come down" from the cross - as they shake their heads indicating the shame they project upon him - they say "what a shame that he was able to save others but he can't save himself." I do find it interesting that these religious leaders changed the wording. Pilate had the notice written to say "Jesus - King of the Jews." But these religious leaders said it correctly when they said "King of Israel." Oh how their vision and their understanding had become clouded. They were thinking that he surely can't be much of a Messiah - or Christ - if he can't free himself from this cross.

Here is the truth of the matter: Jesus COULD HAVE freed himself from that cross. Jesus could have come down off of that cross and simply walked away. But if he had done that - no one of that day - and no one of this day - and no one of any time in between - and no one of any future day - would have any hope of salvation - if Jesus had come down off of that cross.

The fact that he was willing to remain obedient - even in the face of no respect - no support - and taunting from the very ones he was trying to save - speaks volumes of His Love for you and for me!

Read Mark 15:33-34 and make notes:

In their ignorance, they had killed the "light of the world." In his taking on of the sins of mankind - Jesus became separated from the Father. All because you and I needed to be restored to the Father - Jesus endured the full brunt of the pain you and I deserve.

Jesus not only experienced the physical pain - he not only experienced the emotional pain of being - rejected by the people he loved enough to give his life for - Jesus endured the pain of separation from God. God had to turn away and could no longer look upon Jesus - because of the sins Jesus had taken upon himself. It was as though the universe closed it's eyes as well - darkness covered the land. The eyes of the universe were shut - and no light entered in.

It would not be inappropriate to say this darkness helps to signify that the death of Jesus has not only global impact - but it had a cosmic impact as well. The death of Jesus on this earth does impact the principalities and powers of the air! And because it does, we do not have to fear demonic forces.

Read Mark 15:35-39 and make notes:

Isn't it interesting? When Jesus was healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, delivering the demon oppressed, and setting the captives free - they couldn't see him as the Son of God. But, when they see the way he died, they can say, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Please consider: The one who came to give life and to give it abundantly - had his life taken from him in the most excruciating way. The one who turned water into the sweetest wine - is offered vinegar to drink. The one who used spittle to heal the blinded eyes and open deaf ears - has his face covered with the spit of spite. The one who was completely innocent - took on the totality of guilt. And He did so - in order that you and I could have relationship with the Heavenly Father.

Jesus was obedient through the rejection - Jesus was obedient through the pain - Jesus was obedient through the shame - So you and I could not only come into the presence of our Heavenly Father - but we could come before Him with singing.

Because Jesus was obedient - We can come before our Heavenly Father with the knowledge that He forgives our sins - when we repent. We can come before Him with the knowledge – that He will receive us with joy.

What message is there in this passage for Fishers of Men?

1 - Sometimes, we need to allow others to help us bear our cross.

How many times do we hear some Christian say, "I just don't want to burden anyone?" Who among us is more powerful than Jesus Christ? Who among us believes we are stronger than Jesus Christ? Who among us believes we are able to endure more than Jesus Christ? Surely, we all realize that we cannot hold a candle to Jesus - in the areas of endurance and strength. And Yet - it was Jesus who needed someone to help bear his own personal cross - And here we are thinking "I'll not look for - nor will I accept any help in bearing my cross."

While we are busy at Fishing for Men – Satan is going to make sure some "Life Storms" will come our way. We will in fact have times when we will wonder if we are going to be able to make it through what we are having to deal with. If we would just pay attention, we will see someone God has prepared and God has provided - just to help us bear our cross. And if we are going to survive and continue to be Fishers of Men - we will lay down our pride and accept the help.

If Jesus needed some help in bearing His Cross - it only makes sense that we will from time to time - also need some help in bearing our cross. You see, we all just might believe that you caught a fish that was so big that when you pulled it into the boat that the water level in the lake went down 2 inches - but we will never believe you pulled that fish in by yourself. So go ahead and accept the help - and then admit that you needed the help - and give credit to those who gave the help. AND please remember this - "There is no place for Lone Rangers among Fishers of Men."

2 - Obedience is not always pleasant or easy.

There are two examples of obedience in today's text. One - and the greatest example - of course is the obedience of Jesus. How difficult it must have been to be obedient to such an assignment - as to be asked to take on the sins of all mankind - then to accept the suffering for all those sins - and then to die the death all those sins deserve. And as difficult as that would have had to be - how much more difficult it must have been to remain obedient in the face of such mean spirited people - saying such hurtful things. And not one of them acting even a little bit grateful for what Jesus was sparing them from.

The second example of obedience was that of Simon. Here is a man with his two sons - they don't live in Jerusalem - they are from Cyrene. Imagine being asked to pick up this cross and help this condemned man bear it to the place of execution. What father would be at peace with leaving his two sons unattended in a strange town?

First consider, if this Simon is obedient to this demand it will be physically stressful - the cross beam is heavy - and to carry it some 600 yards will be hard work. Then there is the public shame of being seen carrying a cross through the streets? Don't you know that many people would assume you are the condemned person - after all you are the one carrying the cross - and that is what the condemned are required to do.

So for this Simon, there was a certain level of public shame as a result of being obedient. Then there is the emotional stress of what might happen to my children? As Simon was struggling physically with the load of the cross beam - and he is hearing people taunt and say hurtful things as he walks through the streets - he is concerned for the safety of his children every step of the way. Sometimes – obedience is not easy!

3 - Our Obedience Bears Fruit In Others.

Because Jesus remained obedient - you and I can have spiritual life today. And we can have hope of forever having spiritual life. Our Salvation is the Fruit of Jesus' Obedience! One thing Simon must have been concerned about was his two sons. But with every step of obedience - Simon was receiving more favor and blessing from the Heavenly Father. Something about the obedience of Simon - had an impact on his sons Alexander and Rufus.

How many times have you heard some child say - "I don't want to have anything to do with church because my parents gave first place to the ministry?" That might be what they say - that might be the excuse they give - but that IS NOT the reason they are refusing to follow the way of Christ Jesus. If that were true - then all the children of all those who are faithful to the Lord's work would be living in sin.

That statement is kind of like hearing them say, "I have to make lemonade, because my parents always brought home bananas." If the parents always brought home bananas - wouldn't it make more sense if they said "all I know how to make is banana pudding, banana bread, etc?" Children who don't follow Christ when their parents were faithful - are simply following the example of another.

Alexander and Rufus wanted to become part of the church - and I believe the obedience of their father Simon - at least got their attention to it . Being Obedient - in our service to Jesus Christ - will be a reason our children will go to him. It will never be the reason our children turn away from him.

To be the kind of Fisher of Men God desires for us to be - we may have to be obedient through some unpleasant circumstances. And we may from time to time need the help of someone to help us bear our cross. But Our Obedience will produce fruit in others.

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

In the series of lessons for Fishers of Men found in the Gospel of Mark – this is one that few want to hear. We want to hear those messages that make us feel all warm and fuzzy. We want to hear those messages that tell us we are alright just the way we are. But I warn you – this lesson is one of discomfort for many people. And a message that may in fact call for a larger sacrifice than many are willing to give. Are you ready to at least hear the message?

Read Mark 15:40-41 and make notes:

It was customary that relatives and friends would come to be near the place of execution. We are not so different today, we tend to think it is sad for someone to die all alone. So, it is a common thought that someone should be with them when we think a person is close to death. Here we are told that not only was Jesus' mother present to observe the execution, but several other women were there - and it tells us these women had followed Jesus while he was in Galilee.

We learn from the other gospels that some of these women had been healed by Jesus - and at least one of them had been delivered from demons. And we are told these women were active in their service to Jesus during his earthly ministry.

A few tidbits of interest: Mary Magdalene is distinguished from the other Mary(s) by the label "Magdalene" - that is what they called people from Magdala. This was a small fishing village on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She is one of those who was delivered from demonic possession.

Salome was the wife of Zebedee. She was the mother of the disciples James and John. Salome is the one who came to Jesus earlier and asked that one of her sons be allowed to sit on Jesus' right side and the other son sit on Jesus' left side when he came into his kingdom.

"Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses" - among Bible scholars there is a difference of opinion about this Mary. The original language can be translated "younger" or "less" depending upon the way it is used. You will find it translated "younger" in some translations and "less" in others. Some believe "James the younger" is probably the same as "James the son of Alphaeus" - and he is distinguished from James the brother of John by calling him either the "younger" or the "less" - because he was probably both younger and less prominent in the early church.

I admit that is a reasonable possibility - but I like to keep things consistent when I am reading the Word of God. In Mark 6:3, we were told that Jesus was the son of Mary and the carpenter, the same Mary who was also the mother of James and Joses. So I am with the other Bible scholars who think "James the younger" is the younger brother of Jesus - and maybe even the next in birth order after Jesus - and this Mary listed here in Mark, - "the mother of James and Joses" - would be consistent with the earlier part of Mark. That is one reason I believe this is the mother of Jesus.

Whether Mary is, the mother of Jesus, or another Mary - the bottom line is that - in addition to saying, "Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there." Mark identified several women by name that witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus.

Read Mark 15:42-43 and make notes:

We find in historical records that the sentence of death by crucifixion in the Roman empire also meant the forfeiture of personal property and the right to be buried. The crucified person was typically left to decay on the cross and to be eaten by the wild scavengers. There are some records that the Roman magistrate even proclaimed there could be no public mourning of the condemned person for many who were crucified.

It is also recorded that on occasion, that the family members of an executed criminal would make a request for the body and sometimes, the magistrate would permit the family to take the body and give it a burial. This was a risky thing to do - to go before the Roman magistrate and ask for the body of a convicted criminal - remember, if they were given the death sentence by crucifixion - then this person was typically guilty of a serious offense against the Roman empire.

For the Jews, the burial of the dead was an act of piety - they even considered it a duty to bury their enemies - unless of course this particular enemy was seen to be "accursed of God."

The other side of this issue involved the belief - that if the dead body of a Jew was left hanging in public during one of the high holy days - such as Passover - it could bring a curse upon the Jewish land - or at least cause God's blessings to be withheld.

If there was to be a petition brought before the Roman magistrate - it should be from the family - but in this case the request came not from a family member - but it came from one of the men who was a respected member of the Sanhedrin. Remember, this is the same group that requested Pilate have Jesus killed.

This was actually a risky thing for Joseph of Arimathea to do. First, if he goes before the Roman magistrate to request the body, it was possible he could receive punishment from the Roman magistrate for trying to do something nice for a person the Roman government has determined deserved nothing nice. Remember, those sentenced to be crucified usually lost everything of personal property and the right to burial. So Joseph risked losing some of his property and maybe receiving some physical punishment as well. Secondly, if Joseph of Arimathea makes this request - then he could be seen as a follower of Jesus by the rest of the Sanhedrin.

Making a request like this – one that is usually made by a family member – could make him look as though he was close to the family. It could make the members of the Sanhedrin wonder if Joseph had been a secret follower of Jesus. So Joseph risked his public, religious, and political career. We have already been told that the leader of the Sanhedrin wanted Jesus dead - no matter what!

The gospel of John tells us that the Jewish leaders did not want the dead bodies of Jews hanging out in public on their Sabbath day - so they asked Pilate to have the legs broken - so that all three of them would die quickly and they could be buried.

Matthew and John tell us this Joseph was a disciple of Jesus. Luke tells us he kept this a secret because he was afraid of what the others might say or do. The gospels tell us this Joseph was a man who was looking for the kingdom of God to come - he was looking for and expecting the Messiah to come.

Even if this Jesus was not the Messiah - why risk the nation of Israel losing God's blessing by leaving the dead body of a Jew hanging out in public on the Passover? So, for this Joseph to do what he was sure was the right and decent thing to do, he placed himself at risk. Joseph of Arimathea did what "Jesus needed to be done."

Read Mark 15:44-45 and make notes:

We read earlier in Mark that Pilate did not believe Jesus was guilty of any crime - and that Pilate only had Jesus crucified to placate the Sanhedrin and its stirred up mob. The fact that Pilate was willing to release the body of Jesus to someone who was not even a family member - gives further evidence that Pilate did not see Jesus as a guilty person. One convicted of high treason against the Roman empire is least likely to have their body released.

There is a valuable piece of information in this verse - some like to argue that Jesus did not actually die, he just went into a coma like state and then later recovered in the cool tomb. This text tells us clearly that Pilate had it investigated. Pilate sought - and received - confirmation of Jesus being dead.

Pilate would not have allowed Jesus to be taken off the cross unless he was dead. The Roman centurion would have placed his own life at stake had he lied about Jesus being dead. It is extremely unlikely that he would have even considered that risk.

Read Mark 15:46 and make notes:

Some have tried to make an issue out of the fact that only Joseph did these things because he is the only one mentioned. While it is possible he purchased the linen alone, and that he alone wrapped the body - it is most likely that he needed help to roll the stone over the entrance. So he probably was not alone.

It is noteworthy that Joseph purchased linen. Joseph didn't just place the body in a tomb to get it off of the cross . If his only concern was to not have a dead Jewish body hanging on the cross during Passover - it would have been reasonable that he just placed the body in the tomb. But Joseph did the right thing - he wrapped the body in linen - according to the custom of decency and proper preparation of a body for burial.

Maybe the others did nothing more than help roll the stone - maybe Joseph is the only one who touched Jesus' body.

A little issue emerges at this point - according to Jewish law - if a person touches a dead body - they are unclean for several days. Since Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in linen and placed his body in the tomb - Joseph would be unclean – and he would not be able to share the Passover with his family. He couldn't even be with them - he would have to stay away from them until his time of being unclean was over. By that time the Passover would be finished. It cost Joseph of Arimathea something in order to do what needed to be done.

Please consider: Being an influential person – he could have paid someone who was already “unclean” to bury Jesus' body!

Read Mark 15:47 and make notes:

Another reason to think this Mary is the mother of Jesus! Of the several women named who witnessed Jesus' death - only two are named as witnessing Jesus' burial. This is an interesting fact to be recorded in the gospel of Mark. In Jewish culture, the testimony of women was of no value - so this certainly wasn't recorded for the Jews.

This is important to us - the Holy Spirit made sure that it was recorded that there were two witnesses who saw where Jesus' body was placed. When we read later that Jesus' body was not in the tomb - we know there were two people who knew exactly which tomb his body was placed into.

If we did not have this fact, we could be lied to, and we could be told that everybody just got confused about where his body was placed. But the Holy Spirit was thinking of us and made sure it was recorded – that here were two people who knew which tomb. This gives us a dose of "lie repellent" - and keeps us from being susceptible to the lie.

What is the message to Fishers of Men in today's text?

1 - It's Not All About Me!

For several years now, there has been a very popular saying we usually abbreviate with "WWJD" - "What Would Jesus Do." And this is a good thing to ask ourselves when we are confronted with a decision. But as Fishers of Men, I submit to you that we need to be asking ourselves frequently, "WDJN" - "What Does Jesus Need" from me?

On the day that Jesus died on the cross - Jesus had needs! Most Bible scholars agree that Joseph, the man that married Mary and served as an earthly father to Jesus - was probably dead by this time. The Scriptures make no mention of him, even in passing, during Jesus' ministry. The other children of Mary - Jesus' earthly brothers and sisters didn't even believe he was the Messiah until after His resurrection. Mary and her other children were probably way too cautious and concerned for their safety - they could not bring themselves to ask for the body.

Jesus had more to do in the way of ministry - He was to return from the dead. It was important that he not be placed in a common tomb - in a pile of bodies - perhaps along with the two thieves that were crucified with him. How would we have ever been sure it was Jesus' body that resurrected and not the body of one of the others in that common tomb? It was important that Jesus be placed in a tomb all alone where there was no one else - no way to be confused about who is missing from that tomb.

It is not likely that Joseph of Arimathea was thinking in those terms - but this is in fact what Jesus needed at that time. But At least Joseph of Arimathea was considering "What Does Jesus Need" At this time? Whether he understood "why" Jesus needed this is questionable - But that Joseph responded to the leading of the Holy Spirit - and did "What Jesus Needed" is without question.

What if no one was willing to respond to "What Does Jesus Need" on that day?

Because so many of us are weak in faith - and because so many of us find it difficult to believe - the Holy Spirit inspired someone - in fact I believe the Holy Spirit inspired several someone(s) that day - such as Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea and the women who witnessed which tomb.

Today, we have a great many people who confess to being a "Believer" in Jesus Christ as Savior. Today, we have many people who say they are willing to be a Fisher of Men - but they won't do anything in the way of ministering to another - UNLESS it is convenient for them - unless it doesn't cost them too much.

How many Church People do you know - who would miss their favorite television program - in order to do "What Jesus Needs" today or tonight? How many Church People do you know - that are willing to do "What Jesus Needs" right now - if it meant they would not get to go out to eat and fellowship with the others who are going out? How many Church People do you know - that would miss out on anything they desired in order to do "What Jesus Needs" from us today?

Fishers of Men – it is not "All About Me!" Praise God, there are many times of personal blessing in serving Jesus - but sometimes it will call for us to sacrifice the thing we desire in order to do "What Jesus Needs" right now.

Please consider: There are many times when someone around us has a need. When we do it unto the least of these – then we are doing it unto Jesus. When someone has a ministry need – then this is "What Jesus Needs" right now. Not one of us is called to meet the need of everyone around us. But Each One of us is called to meet the need of someone around us!

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

Continuing with the Fishers of Men series from the Gospel of Mark - we have come to the resurrection. One thing that is worth noting at this point - the crucifixion is a historical fact - and that the body of Jesus disappeared from the tomb is a historical fact. And I might add, that Jesus' body disappeared from a tomb that was being guarded by a detachment of soldiers as well as having been sealed with the Roman seal.

Historical documents record that on a given date, at a defined place, the man Jesus was crucified – and historical documents record that a few days later the body of Jesus mysteriously disappeared from this sealed, guarded tomb.

Secular history is unable to explain in any way this event. Nothing in our physical reality conforms to this event and we are unable to explain it in the reality of our physical dimensions. While, secular historical records leave us with something of an unexplained event - Mark's record stresses the point, - to a certain degree, - that the crucified one is the same as the risen one.

Another thing worth noting - the mysterious activity of God in this resurrection event was accompanied by some specific, knowable things, which can, and do, confront our human experiences. The purpose of these phenomena are not to create faith but they are to inform those of faith of certain consequences.

If the resurrection had not taken place - the history of Jesus of Nazareth might have been no more than one or two lines in the Works of Josephus as he recorded Jewish history of that era. The witness of the Gospels in the New Testament are in unity by telling us that following the crucifixion of Jesus - the disciples were scattered, their hopes were all smashed to the ground, and they were afraid. And if something had not taken place - the whole messianic movement - as far as these disciples were concerned - would have come to a complete halt.

Read Mark 16:1 and make notes:

"When the Sabbath was over" - would be after sunset on Saturday. The same women who had witnessed the crucifixion and the burial - now purchase some aromatic oils with which they plan to go and anoint the dead body of Jesus. This was not a religious ritual - or even a worship experience. This was a practical matter to control odor.

The actions of these women tell us clearly they had no expectation of finding Jesus alive - they fully expected to find his dead body lying in that tomb. These women had no hope or expectation of the resurrection.

Read Mark 16:2 and make notes:

Some people like to find problems in this text - they usually point out that the phrase "very early" - was typically used to refer to 3-6 a.m. – earlier than sunrise. So they find a problem with the phrase "very early" and "just after sunrise" being used together.

For those poor folks who are so hung up on this issue that they are missing the message God really intends for us to get out of this. I would ask them to consider that the separating of the text into verses and chapters did not occur until many years after the text was written. And here is one of the few places in the Bible that the verses just may have divided the text poorly.

I suggest to you that the phrase "Very early on the first day of the week" - probably was written as part of what we have as verse 1. What I am suggesting is that verse 1 is telling us: "When the Sabbath was over" - these three women - "bought spices" - "very early in the morning" - "so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body." And Verse 2 is telling us: "just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb." If they were going to be "on their way to the tomb" - "just after sunrise" - then they would have had to purchase the spices and oils some time before sunrise. So the purchasing was done "very early" before sunrise and then shortly after sunrise - they were on their way to the tomb.

Read Mark 16:3-4 and make notes:

These women had witnessed the burial of Jesus - they knew where the tomb was. But as we read the gospel accounts - it would appear these women did not know about the - seal that was placed on the tomb - or the guard that had been stationed outside the sealed tomb. The seal and the guards were placed after these women left the tomb area. So, these women were not concerned about how they might get the guards to let them enter the tomb. They were not concerned about breaking the Roman seal. Their only concern was a very practical one - how will we get that large stone away from the entrance far enough that we can get into the tomb?

The placing of a large stone over the entrance to a tomb was also a practical matter. The physical body was treated with great respect - it would not be wrong to say the Jews - then as well as now - hold a certain reverence for the human body - believing the human body to be in the image of God in some way.

So when someone died - they would place the body in a tomb - and to keep scavenger birds and animals from eating the body and tearing the body apart - they would place a large stone over the entrance to the tomb. The large stone would keep the critters out - and it could be rolled aside to allow some family member to go in and cover the body with spices and oils to control odor - then the large stone could be placed over the entrance again.

When these women arrived at the tomb - the large stone that had covered the opening had already been rolled away from the entrance. This did not cause a deep spiritual experience - it caused a deep emotional pain experience. That's one of those "who did this" - "how did this happen" moments. We see from the Gospel accounts that these women did not break into the "hallelujah chorus" when they saw the tomb was empty.

Read Mark 16:5 and make notes:

When the women entered the tomb - they were probably expecting to see nothing other than the dead body of Jesus - but they saw "a young man dressed in a white robe." I don't think I have to explain why these women were alarmed - many of us in this room have had the experience of seeing someone where we did not expect to find someone - and the usual response to this is "alarm" - if not fear - or even panic.

Have you ever entered a room that you thought was empty and have someone speak to you? - "Yikes!" Have you ever gone into a room of your house when you thought you were alone - and find someone in that room?

The original language communicates something of a strong fearful emotion on the part of the women. What do you think your emotions might be - if you entered a tomb expecting to find a dead body - and you are greeted by a young man dressed in a white robe?

Read Mark 16:6 and make notes”:

God is so good! God realizes that we humans are easily frightened - so most of the times He has sent an angel with a word to his people - God has the angel to say something like "Don't be alarmed" - "Don't be afraid."

God didn't have to send this angel to tell them Jesus had risen. Jesus told them on more than one occasion that he would rise - after three days - and Jesus told them he would meet them in Galilee. God could have taken the attitude - "Well, I told them ahead of time, if they aren't going to pay attention - let them suffer and do without!" That's kind of like what we would say if we were God - isn't it?

But let's get back to the practical side of things here - these don't appear to be highly emotional women - who were caught up in their emotions - and making wild chaotic decisions. These women were being very practical in their actions. So, believing these women to be very practical people what conclusion would they have drawn when they arrived and found the tomb empty?

The natural conclusion would be "someone has taken Jesus' body." There is nothing about the empty tomb that gives evidence of the resurrection. The empty tomb only says - the body is no longer here. It doesn't say where the body is and it certainly does not say the body is alive again. The emptiness of the tomb only raises the question - "what happened to the body?"

These women were misguided in their seeking of Jesus - the announcement by this angel was very necessary to get them to stop being limited to the physical nature. The angel declared to them - "He has risen." The words of the angel leave no place for questions or doubt about who has been raised from the dead. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!"

The same Jesus that was crucified - the same Jesus that was laid in this tomb - He is the one who has risen from the dead. "No ladies - you didn't get confused - you did not go to the wrong tomb." "Look right here - this is the place where Jesus was laid - he is not here."

Read Mark 16:7 and make notes:

The fact that women were the first to hear the announcement of Jesus' resurrection just might be of some significance. According to Jewish Law at that time - women were disqualified from being a witness. The Early Church would never have made up this part of the story - because this detail did in fact cause the Early Church some difficulty. Since women were considered to be ineligible as witnesses - it was something of a problem that women heard the announcement first - and to make matters worse - these women were told to "go to the men and tell them that Jesus has risen."

It is interesting in this passage that they were to go and tell the "disciples and Peter." From the account of Peter denying Jesus until this account - you just don't find Peter mentioned in the Gospel of Mark. As we read Mark - it would appear that Peter is held in some shameful light after he denied Jesus - but here Peter is specifically named and singled out. The summoning of the disciples to Galilee and calling Peter by name individually communicates to all of them that they are forgiven by Jesus - even Peter who may have felt the greatest shame to himself if not by the others.

Do you remember in an earlier lesson - that I shared how our pain is intensified when we so loudly proclaim that we will not fail – and then we do? Jesus had told the disciples before hand that they would meet again in Galilee - now the angel gives the same message - you will be restored to Jesus in Galilee - so go there, now.

Read Mark 16:8 and make notes:

The fear - the bewilderment - the flood of astonishing emotions - the incredible message of the angel - simply reduced these women to silence - "They said nothing to anyone."

In the Jewish teachings of that day - for those Jews who believed there would be a resurrection - they associated the resurrection with the end of time. If these women believed Jesus had been raised from the dead - then it could only mean one thing - the end of the world is here.

What could they say? - Where could they go? - What could they do? - How would people respond if they tried to tell anyone? The practical possibility of them being able to be received as a "witness" is almost "none!"

Message to Fishers of Men today?

1 - Don't be limited by the Natural Laws.

These women - when looking at the evidence before them from a practical and earthly point of reference - found themselves in a place of confusion - having a lack of understanding, they found themselves in a state of weakness.

As Fishers of Men today - if we cannot get beyond the limitations of earthly physics - we are likely to wind up having a lack of understanding and discovering ourselves to be in a state of weakness. How can we be a witness? - Who do we dare tell?

If Fishers of Men today limit ourselves to the earthly laws of physics - when we are confronted with the possibility of being a witness for Christ - we are likely to find ourselves trembling - bewildered - afraid - and saying nothing to no one. The God we serve is NOT limited by any of the Natural Laws!

2 - Don't Believe that you cannot be used by God.

In the culture of that day - not one of these women would have been accepted as a witness to anything. And yet God chose to give the announcement of Jesus' resurrection to women before anyone else. And then to make matters worse - according to the culture of that day - God told these women to take the message of the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples - "ladies, take the message to the men."

Many of us have very real and practical reasons from our past - to think that our testimony of what Jesus has done for me - simply would not be accepted by others. But that is based completely on man's way of viewing things.

Regardless of our past lifestyles and sins - regardless of the family or nationality from which we come - if we have accepted Jesus as our Savior - we are to be Fishers of Men. Being saved is all the qualification we need to be a Fisher of Men!

3 - Minister as if we are ministering to a living Savior.

These women were going to minister that morning in an attitude that they were going to minister to a dead Jesus - rather than a living Jesus. If we truly desire to be the Fishers of Men God has called us to be today - we need to ask ourselves some questions: How am I approaching Jesus - as someone dead or someone who is alive?

These women were being very practical - if Jesus had been dead, then what they had planned to do for Jesus would have been very appropriate. Many Believers today are approaching Jesus in much the same way as these three women - they see Jesus as someone who was once alive - but he is dead today - and they even admit that it's great that he left some good teachings behind – But alas, he is dead now!

And while some of us might want to argue against my having said it that way - consider what it is that we are planning on doing for Jesus. This ministry or service we plan to do for Jesus - is it something we would do for someone who is dead or someone who is alive?

Without trying to be silly - we plan to serve or minister to a dead person very differently than we do to a living person - don't we? Who wants to have personal fellowship time with a dead person?

When someone dies – we usually turn our ministry or service to the ones left behind by the dead person. That's the problem with many Believers today. They are attempting to minister to the ones left behind – instead of ministering to Jesus.

So consider again - what is this service you are planning on providing - or doing? Is this service appropriate for one who is alive and well?

We cannot be the kind of Fishers of Men God has called us to be - if we are going about doing our "works of service" as the things one would do for a dead person.

Fishers of Men - we are serving a living God - One who has died for us so that we don't have to die - one who was buried and defeated death - so that death could have no hold over us and make no threat against us - and one who has risen from the dead so that we can have fellowship with him and he with us.

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

There are a number of people who teach that verses 9-20 of chapter 16 - were not part of the original gospel of Mark. They often teach these last verses were added somewhere in the 5th through the 8th century after Christ.

It could take up several lessons to discuss all the arguments on both sides of this debate - and that isn't what God is leading me to do. Let me share with you a few summary thoughts before we get into this lesson. Summary reasons why I believe they belong - and why I teach from them.

#1 Even those who claim the original Mark ended with verse 8 - admit that it is very abrupt and reads as though something is missing - like when the last page falls out of someone's book.

#2 As early as the 2nd century after Christ - several of the early church fathers refer to things in what we know as verses 9-20 of Mark 16.

#3 What is written in these last 12 verses - fits well with the original premise with which Mark begins.

When we understand these last few verses in the context of the purpose of why the Gospel of Mark was written - there just doesn't seem to be any reason to want to discard them. So, please join me as we look at this last lesson to Fishers of Men we find in the gospel of Mark.

Read Mark 16:9-11 and make notes:

The Jewish Preparation Day comprised the suffering death of Jesus. The Jewish Sabbath Day comprised the burial and rest of Jesus. The Jewish First Day of the Week begins with the Resurrection and beginning of the rest of the ministry of Jesus.

Let me share with you what was written in the 5th century by an unknown author. Speaking of the First Day of the Week - what had become known as "*The Lord's Day*":

"Let us keep this day with gladness and rejoicing. Why should we do so? Because the sun is no longer dark; instead everything is bathed in light. Because the veil of the temple is long rent; instead the Church is recognized. Because we no longer hold palm branches. This is the day of triumph in the truest sense, the day custom consecrates the resurrection, the day on which we adorn ourselves with grace, the day on which we partake of the spiritual lamb. Let us keep this day with gladness and rejoicing, not by running off to the taverns, but by hastening to the martyr's shrines; not by esteeming drunkenness, but by loving temperance; not by dancing in the marketplaces, but by singing psalms"

The sacredness of the Lord's day is suggested in the Scriptures and it is recorded in the Church's history - that it was considered sacred from the beginning of the Church's existence.

On the first day of creation - the elements of our world were formed. On the first day of the week - manna first came down to the children of Israel. On the first day of the week - Christ arose from the dead. On the first day of the week - the Holy Spirit came and indwelt the first apostles.

We don't don't have to try hard to make a list of reasons why we would want to celebrate the first day of the week. There just doesn't seem to be any more appropriate day to worship Jesus And to celebrate our relationship with the Heavenly Father - than the first day of the week – Sunday!

As mentioned in an earlier lesson - a woman's testimony was worthless among the Jews. This has caused a great many people to question why there wasn't men there to witness the resurrection instead of women.

I want to offer you a suggestion - as to why it was a woman - or women - that God ordained to witness this glorious event. Mary Magdalene was there by divine appointment of God. Part of "why Mary Magdalene" had to do with her heart relationship with God - but another part was precisely because she was a woman.

It was woman - that first experienced death in the garden of Eden - it was Eve that first experienced the fall. For which "woman" has carried the guilt of transgression in the eyes of many men throughout the generations of man's existence. But it was woman that first witnessed the resurrection of Christ. And that means woman does not have to bear the perpetual guilt of transgression.

Men please consider this - women carried the guilt of being the first to transgress for about 5,000 years. Don't you think that is long enough to hold them guilty? Let me point out - that it was also a woman who first proclaimed "to the apostles" that Christ has risen. Oh - where sin once abounded - the grace of God much more abounds.

But the disciples did not believe her report - they did not believe her testimony. They just kept on believing that Jesus was dead.

So many people are quick to recognize that by Jesus' recognition of Peter - after Peter betrayed Jesus - was a clear sign that God wasn't holding Peter forever unworthy of being used in the ministry.

Why do we fail to see that by God calling women to be the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection – and the first ones to share the “good news” of the resurrection” - is a clear sign that God has accepted the women as worthy of being used in the ministry.

Read Mark 16:12-13 and make notes:

These couple of verses are not to be separated from the previous verse about the women's testimony. The Holy Spirit inspired Mark to record the failure of the apostles to believe the testimony of the women. If it ended with that - there would no doubt be a case to be made that since the apostles didn't accept a woman's testimony neither should the church today. So the Holy Spirit also inspired Mark to record that Jesus appeared to two of the disciples and they went to the other disciples and told them Jesus was risen and they had seen him. But, the other disciples didn't believe these guys anymore than they had believed Mary Magdalene earlier.

The issue - the point - the problem - wasn't in the fact that the one giving the testimony was a woman. The problem was in the faith of the disciples. That's an important point the Holy Spirit wanted the church to know today. There isn't a problem with the Gospel when it is shared by a woman. The problem is always sin in the heart of the hearer!

Read Mark 16:14 and make notes:

Jesus was right in rebuking the Eleven for their lack of faith. You see these who were about to be commissioned to go preach the gospel - would be expecting people "who have not seen" to believe - when they themselves - "who have seen" - have failed to believe.

Sometimes the church has been guilty of making the first apostles out to be "bigger than life." Here are the men who were to become the "fathers of the faith" - and they are busy mourning and grieving instead of rejoicing and believing.

Isn't God's Word wonderful - we get to read of these disciples - and to see what they were like before they became "mighty men of God." Here they are - the ones who are to be the teachers of the faith - and they don't yet believe themselves. Even though they had seen Jesus raise people from the dead - they failed to believe that He himself could return from the dead.

Read Mark 16:15 and make notes:

I find so much encouragement in this passage! When Jesus came to his disciples - he found them in despair instead of faith. If Jesus had been like most of us - he would have fired everyone of them - and picked a whole new team. But Jesus took this band of men - who were stumbling all over themselves with their failure of faith - and Jesus commissions these "weaklings in the faith" - to go out and preach the "good news."

These were just common men - they weren't bigger than life. These men were not trained in public speaking. These men had not shown themselves to be faithful in all areas.

It was God's will that these common people - even with their failure of faith - should go to other people and share what faith they do have - to share what they have seen - to share what they have experienced - So that all human sufferers may come to the knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Read Mark 16:16 and make notes:

And it is important to note what verse 16 tells us that we do not condemn anyone. Those persons who choose not to believe - it is their unbelief that condemns them - not the Lord - and not us. But this is the promise of God - "whoever" believes and is baptized will be saved. This "whoever" includes everyone - and leaves out no one.

Read Mark 16:17-18 and make notes:

"These signs will accompany those who believe." It is very important to note that these "signs" will "accompany." These signs do not bring about salvation - but these signs do "accompany" those who believe.

Another thing that is important to note - These things that will be done by believers – these things that are signs - they will be done "in Jesus name!"

If we attempt to do any of these things for the purpose of drawing attention to ourselves - or to draw attention to our local church - it cannot be said that we are doing these things in the name of Jesus. To do anything "in the name of Jesus" - means we are doing it on his behalf - and for his purpose - and that he gets any and all glory associated with it.

Read Mark 16:19-20 and make notes:

Jesus being taken up into Heaven - serves as a pretty good confirmation that Jesus was in fact who he said he was. Jesus dies - and then Jesus destroys death's hold on man - Jesus goes down to Hades - and Jesus leads souls upward - Jesus is buried - and then Jesus rises again - Jesus ascended into Heaven - and Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

Once Jesus took his place at the Father's right hand - it was then possible for Jesus to be everywhere at once – omnipresent. And because he could now be everywhere at the same time – when these men – who were so weak in faith – when they went out and preached "everywhere." Jesus worked "with them" and confirmed His Word by the signs that accompanied the sharing of the good news.

Please remember – the gospel of Mark is written in summary fashion – we have very few places in the entire gospel of Mark where we are given details – for the most part things are recorded in Mark by just giving us the big picture.

We learn from the other gospels that this empowering to have the signs accompany the sharing of the gospel came to the disciples only "after" they received an infilling - or a baptism - with the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus who is confirming His Word by the signs and not the believer themselves.

What Message is there for us as Fishers of Men?

1 - The Testimony Of Women Is Valid.

If there ever was a lesser place given to women - their place of being "along side" man was restored when God chose to have women be the first to witness the resurrection. And while some would like to make an issue out of the woman's testimony not being received when she told the disciples - they didn't even believe two of the men when they came and gave the same testimony. When God sends a message to his people - we need to be careful that we don't throw out the message just because it comes in a feminine form.

2 - It Isn't Only Those Full Of Faith Who Are Called.

The original disciples were so lacking in faith that Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith. And yet, even though they were having a faith failure at the time - Jesus still commissioned them to go and share the good news. And this is a good place to remind ourselves - that these first disciples who were having trouble with their own personal faith - were the same ones through whom God confirmed his message by working signs through them.

Today - God is still commissioning common people - often times people with weak faith - to simply go and share whatever faith they do have - to share what they have seen - to share what they have heard - and to share what they have experienced. So, that means everyone one of us can share the gospel and expect Jesus to work with us to reach the hearts of those around us.

3 - The Signs Are For God's Glory, Not Ours!

The signs are for the very purpose for which the Gospel of Mark was written. Do you remember at the beginning of this series on Mark - I shared with you that everything in Mark was to help us become the Fishers of Men God has called us to be? Well, the signs are given to make the job of Fishing for Men more productive - and more fruitful. The purpose of the signs - is to help us Catch the Men and Women - for whom we are fishing!

When someone is attempting to use any one of the signs to draw attention to themselves - this isn't Fishing for Men. If I take hold of a poisonous snake just to show you my faith - that ain't fishing!

If I drink or eat poison just to show you my faith - that ain't fishing! If I cast a demon out of someone just to show you that I can - that ain't fishing! If I babble in some language that you don't understand just to show you that I can - that ain't fishing!

Anything you or I do - that directs attention and glory to anyone other than God - is a perversion of the gift and a perversion of the signs. But because of the gifts of the Holy Spirit - and because of the promised Signs - Fishers of Men can go Boldly and share the good news.

We don't have to worry if there might be poisonous snakes – demons - or a language barrier. If we are obedient to go and to share as directed by God - then there is nothing that can stand in our way of sharing the good news.

The signs are still to be expected today. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are still being given today. And When God's people go about Fishing with the faith that they have - and without pretending to be something we are not - and when we obediently go about whatever part of Fishing that God has called us to - we will see these signs accompanying the sharing of the Word.

Who is ready to be commissioned to be a Fisher of Men?

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