

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN MARK'S GOSPEL – CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Jewish Council had sentenced Jesus to death on His confession that He was the Christ, the Son of God. But they had a problem. They had no power to carry the sentence out since Judea was under Roman rule. Their difficulty was to know how to manipulate the Roman governor to execute their Prisoner. Pilate's first question was the only one that mattered to him, the political issue of a claim by anyone except the Emperor to rule the Jews. As with the chief priests, Jesus readily acknowledged His identity though He remained silent when false accusations were made against Him. He, in us, still acknowledges the gospel while ignoring personal criticism. Pilate had never met such a Prisoner before.(15:1-5)

Pilate attempted to escape the trap the chief priests had set for him by appealing to the crowd to choose freedom for their Messiah, because he realised from His welcome into the city the previous Sunday, that Jesus had seemed to have the sympathy of the ordinary people. To his dismay the crowd, urged by the chief priests' undercover agents, called instead for the release of Barabbas, a murderous rebel whose revolt had failed. He then asked what he should do with Jesus and heard in reply the fateful words, 'crucify Him!' Knowing that his responsibility to act justly meant he should have found Jesus 'not guilty' and set Him free, Pilate caved in to pressure and agreed to crucifixion. According to history Pilate had already messed up several delicate situations and was out of favour with the Emperor. He could not afford to have another rebellion break out under his watch by upsetting the Jewish people. To avoid the impression of weakness he ordered Jesus scourged, knowing He was innocent.(15:6-15)

The abuse of the Prisoner by 600 Roman soldiers bullying an apparently helpless man was typical of the behaviour of those with absolute power and has been repeated again and again throughout history. It also revealed the weakness of leadership that chose to ignore such atrocities. The soldiers ended their mockery of a Prisoner who responded to them only with patience and forgiveness and then led Him away to execution. On the way to Golgotha, otherwise known as Calvary, a black man, Simon from North Africa, (Acts 13:1) was plucked out of the crowd to carry the cross. For Simon it changed his life. He carried the cross for Jesus and then watched Jesus carry his sin on Himself on the cross in dramatic reversal.(Mark 8:34) Later he would become one of the Bible teachers in the church in Antioch.(15:16-21)

There follows the stark description of the crucifixion in which He was pierced through His hands and feet,(Ps.22:16) robbed of His few remaining possession,(Ps22:18) crucified between two thieves,(Isa.53:9) after being offered pain relief which He refused,(Ps.69:21) while being abused by the passers by, the chief priests and the thieves.(Ps.22:12,13) No-one could accuse Jesus of faking the many Old Testament scriptures which were convincingly fulfilled in a few short hours. He chose not to call on the power of heaven for rescue because He was there on the cross for us.(15:22-32)

Half way through the six hours in which Jesus hung on the cross, the whole sky went black as Joel 2:10 and 31 had promised. Those watching would have wondered if this was the end of history. At the end of six hours Jesus shouted out the opening words of Psalm 22 so much of which had already been fulfilled that day. He revealed the greatest suffering of that day, not the nails through His hands and feet but the temporary withdrawal of the Holy Spirit because God could not look at the sin of the world which He now carried as if it were His. Some of those watching who did not know Hebrew thought Jesus was calling for Elijah and waited to see what would happen. Jesus surrendered His life. Immediately the temple curtain was torn in two indicating that what Jesus had just done now opened the way for all who would come into the presence of God with no need for sacrifices or priests. The centurion became the very first convert after the crucifixion. He realised who the Prisoner really was.(15:33-39)

Though the men had run away, the female disciples who had served Him in life were watching and wondering how they could care for Him in death. The opportunity came through an unlikely source. Joseph of Arimathea was one of the Jewish Council, who may have been absent from the trial or else remained silent when he should have spoken out. He now acknowledged that he was Jesus' follower by risking his life to ask for the body and providing his own tomb as a burial place. The women watched and waited for their moment to give their Lord a proper funeral. What a surprise awaited them!(15:40-47)

There is just one chapter left, but it is the most important in the whole book. Without the account of the resurrection, the story would just have ended in a tragic death.

As before can I encourage you to look again at your titles for the sections of chapter 15 and see how you can now improve them in the light of new things God has shown you. I hope by now this has become such a habit that it will continue to be a practice with you in the Bible books you will study on your own.

I suggest the following titles for the divisions of chapter 14 - verses 1,2 murder contemplated; 3-9 love demonstrated; 10,11 betrayal bargained; 12-16 fellowship prepared; 17-21 treachery confronted; 22-25 communion invited; 26-31 desertion predicted; 32-42 prayer agonised; 43-50 resistance offered; 51,52 courage failed; 53-65 accusation ignored; 66-72 warning remembered.

My suggestions for dividing chapter 16 are follows:- verses 1-8; 9-11; 12-13; 14-18; 19-20 but by now you know that you can do it any way you choose. There is no right answer.

Section 1 - verses 1-8

Q.1 Which three women came to the tomb early on the resurrection morning? What else do we know about Mary Magdalene?(Mark 15:40, 41; 16:9; Matt.8:2; 27:56) Who is the other Mary described here? (Matt.13:55) What other information do we have about Salome?(Mk.15:40,41)

Q.2 Why did they come to the tomb? What does this tell us about their understanding of His teaching? (Matt.16:21) And about their love for Him?

Q.3 When you compare Mark's account of who saw Jesus after His resurrection with that of Matthew, Luke and John what do you notice? At what time that Sunday morning does Mark say this visit took place? How does this help us to resolve the apparent conflict between the four gospels?

Q.4 What did they find when they arrived at the tomb? What evidence was given to them which convinced them that Jesus had risen from the dead?

Q.5 What instructions were they given? To whom especially were they told to report? Why might this have been? Did they do what they were told? What stopped them witnessing to His resurrection? What stops us?

Section 2 - verses 9-11

Q.6 Do these verses refer to the same occasion as verses 1-8?(Jn.20:11-18) What took away Mary's fear and allowed her to witness freely? What response was there to her story? Why was this? Do you think that her past life had anything to do with their disbelief? Why then did God choose her for this privilege?

Section 3 - verses 12,13

Q.7 Which appearance of Jesus is described next by Mark?(Lk.24:13-25) Why were these two disciples not believed either? What did it take to convince people that Jesus rose from the dead?

Section 4 - verses 14-18

Q.8 To whom did Jesus now appear?(Jn.20:19-23) For what did the Lord rebuke them? What did it take to produce real faith in them?

Q.9 What instructions were the eleven given? Did they follow them? Why?(I Jn.1:1-3) What promise and what warning did He give them? How was this particularly effective in the light of their own response to the news of His resurrection?

Q.10 What miracles did Jesus promise would occur after those first people had believed? Did all these things happen? Did Jesus say how often these signs would occur?

Section 5 - verses 19-20

Q.11 What event is referred to now?(Acts 1:9) Did they immediately go out and preach everywhere? What had to happen first? Why? What evidence was there that it really was His work through them? Does the Lord do such things today?