

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

Chapter 14 described contrasting attitudes to Jesus' coming crucifixion - love and devotion on the one hand, and betrayal and denial on the other. There was no room for any compromise in between; they loved Him or they hated Him. Nothing has changed. Where do you stand?

The first move was made by the chief priests and their supporters committed to killing Jesus, but without alienating public opinion. His arrest needed to happen out of sight.(14:1,2)

In wonderful contrast was the woman who poured out the fabulously expensive perfume worth a year's wages for the ordinary person. Being from the same village she was almost certainly inspired by the example of Mary who only 4 days earlier had done the same thing.(Jn.12:3-8) Mary in turn may well have known of the prostitute who several years before up in Galilee shocked everyone by doing the same as a mark of her repentance.(Lk.7:36-39) Each time there had been a reaction from those watching. Judas, motivated by his own greed, had claimed it was bad stewardship to be so outrageously generous. Now the other disciples followed his hypocritical example. Her action, Jesus said, would preach the gospel powerfully for generations to come.(14:3-9)

Judas, perhaps finally exasperated that he was not being listened to, went off to the chief priests to become the secret agent they were seeking.(14:10,11)

The story returns to someone else who loved the Lord, the man whose upper room became the scene for the last supper. Like the owner of the donkey, he was unnamed but was recognisable by the pitcher of water he carried. Such work was normally done by women but he was unafraid of being seen to be different. His room was prepared and available to Jesus when He wanted it as those who love Jesus now make all they have available to Him for any need. When they sat to eat the Passover together, Jesus warned that one of them would betray Him. Each of them including Judas protested his innocence. Jesus spelled out for the last time to the 12 the terrible place in history which one of them would choose that night. Then He used two of the items of food before them to describe what was to happen the next day. He was to die for them but the bread pictured how they could become part of His body on the cross, and so they could be forgiven, part of His body in heaven, so they would have eternal life, and His body the church on earth so they would have a job to do right here. The wine pictured His blood which would be poured out in sacrifice and then poured into them by the Holy Spirit as their new life. He left them with the intriguing thought of when would He be with them in the kingdom of God?(14:12-25)

Verse 26 describes the only occasion in the gospels when Jesus is recorded as singing. Following the song was a warning that they would all fail Him but at the same time a promise that He would not give up on them. Peter as always had to say something. He was willing to die with Jesus. The Lord spelled out his coming threefold failure that very night. All effective ministry begins with the realisation we will always be failures, so we need Him. To illustrate His point Jesus took Peter, James and John to pray with Him at the darkest moment of His life so far. Even though they saw His distress at the prospect of carrying the sin of the world on the cross, they were soon fast asleep! He prayed, not to escape the cross, but to survive the terrible burden of those hours beforehand, the emotional shock of which could have killed Him. Three times Jesus had to wake them to pray for their own protection, to be alert and listening to the Father. Finally He gave them the terrible news; the betrayer was close.(14:26-42)

Judas' kiss of greeting was the prearranged signal to Jesus' enemies. It has become infamous as the ultimate betrayal of One who had always been a friend to him. Peter,(Jn.18:10) tried to show his preparedness to die with Jesus, but the Lord was not going to fight the enemy with weapons but with love and truth. All the rest ran away together with an unnamed young man, possibly the writer, Mark, who added his testimony, 'Yes I too was a failure.'(14:43-52)

The chief priests called the whole Jewish Council together for a sham trial to try to justify what they were about to do. The Council would have included Joseph of Arimathea,(Lk.23:50) and probably

Nicodemus.(Jn.3:1) The first attempts at witnesses who misquoted Jesus' words regarding the temple,(Jn.2:19) were ineffective. The high priest invited Jesus to defend Himself but He remained silent as He wants us to do when falsely accused. He then asked one final question, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of God?' The Lord would not deny His ministry and so by His own admission was condemned to death for what they considered blasphemy. His captors expressed their hatred by abusing Him, as the strong have so often abused the weak when power is unrestrained.(14:53-65)

Peter, hiding in the shadows, was exposed as a follower of Jesus three times, by a servant girl and then a bystander. In, most likely, anger rather than cowardice, he denied it, finally adding some choice fishermen's language. The cock crowed, Jesus caught his eye, and he burst into tears.(Lk.22:61)

After a chapter of dramatic events and powerful emotions, we are approaching the climax of this book. Review your titles for the sections of chapter 14 to see how your ideas have developed since your first impression. My suggestions for titling the divisions of chapter 13 are these; verses 1,2 the destruction of the temple; 3-8 the signs of the times; 9-13 the priority of the gospel; 14-23 the opportunity to escape; 24-27 the return of the Son of Man; 28-32 the time is a secret; 33-37 the need is to stay alert. Now let us do the same exercise with chapter 15 by giving a title or theme to each section. My suggestions for division are verses 1-5; 6-15; 16-21; 22-32; 33-41; 42-47.

Section 1 - verses 1-5 Q.1 Since the Jewish Council had already decided that Jesus deserved to die, why didn't they kill Him themselves? Why did they hand Him over to the hated Roman governor, Pontius Pilate? Again what does this tell us about their sincerity? Why would Pilate's first question to Jesus be all important to him? Why did He answer this question but not the false accusations of the chief priests? What effect did His silence have on Pilate?

Section 2 - verses 6-15 Q.2 How were Barabbas and Jesus similar, and how were they different? What choice does this represent for people today? What practice had Pilate adopted to try to be popular with the Jewish people? How did Pilate suppose he was going to solve his problem over Jesus' innocence? How did his plan go wrong? What should he now have done? Why didn't he do it? What method did Jesus' enemies use to get the death penalty against Him? Why did Pilate order scourging on someone he believed innocent?

Section 3 - verses 16-21 Q.3 Why did the ordinary soldiers treat Jesus as recorded? What does this tell us about their leaders? How had Pilate and his soldiers unwittingly helped to fulfil scriptures like Isa.53:1-9? Assuming that Simon of Cyrene is the same man referred to in Acts 13:1, what must have happened to him as the result of his experience in verse 21? Niger means black. What does that suggest as to why the Roman soldiers picked Simon out of the crowd? How would Mark 8:34 have had special meaning for him?

Section 4 - verses 22-32 Q.4 Wine and myrrh would have had some pain relieving effect. Why did Jesus refuse them? Matt.27:34 tells us that He tasted before declining? How did this and verse 36 fulfil Ps.69:21? Gall can also be translated 'poison'. What does this tell us about taking the easy way out in difficult times? Crucifixion was a cruel punishment invented by the Phoenicians a couple of centuries earlier. How could this have been promised a thousand years beforehand?(Ps.22:16) What other scripture was fulfilled at this time?(Ps.22:18) What effect would all this have on the watchers who knew their Bibles? How can we use these fulfilled prophecies today to point people to Jesus? What worldly possessions would Jesus have been left with? Why did the charge inscribed on the cross upset the chief priests?(Jn.19:19-21) How again were godless men unintentionally fulfilling God's purpose? What three groups of people abused Jesus on the cross? What did they say and for what reason? Again what does this show us about why ordinary people get drawn into inhumane behaviour?

Section 5 - verses 33-39 Q.5 How long was Jesus on the cross?(verses 25,33) What happened at the sixth hour, midday? How did this fulfil scripture?(Joel 2:10,31) What was God's message to man in this time of darkness? From where do Jesus' words in verse 34 come? Why did He particularly quote this scripture? What effect would this have had on those who watched? Was Jesus doubting God? What can we learn from His example here? Why did someone think He was calling Elijah?(Mal.4:5) What happened to the temple curtain at this moment? What did this say about access to God's presence in future?

Section 6 - verses 40-47 Q.6 What effect did these events have upon the women present at the cross? What does the story of Joseph of Arimathea's involvement tell us about the impact of Jesus' trial before the Council? How should it encourage us when everyone seems against us?