

Mark 9–16



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Contents

1	The mission of the Messiah (Mark 9).....	5
1.1	Seeing the Son (9:1-8).....	6
1.2	The Elijah to come (9:9-13).....	8
1.3	When evil won't let go (9:14-29).....	9
1.4	How God uses his power (9:30-41)	10
1.5	What Jesus says about <i>Gehenna</i> (hell) (9:42-50)	12
1.6	Conclusion.....	16
2	The journey to Jerusalem (Mark 10).....	17
2.1	The question of divorce (10:1-16)	17
2.2	The values of Jesus' kingdom (10:17-31).....	20
2.3	Jesus' third explanation of the cross (10:32-34)	23
2.4	Serving in Jesus' kingdom (10:35-45).....	25
2.5	Even a blind person can see who Jesus is (10:46-52).....	27
2.6	Conclusion.....	28
3	The authority of the king (Mark 11:1–12:27)	29
3.1	The capital celebrates her king (11:1-11)	29
3.2	Conflict between temple and Messiah (11:12-26)	30
3.3	Rejecting the Messiah's authority (11:27-33).....	33
3.4	The Son and the tenants in God's vineyard (12:1-12)	34
3.5	Paying dues to Caesar or to God? (12:13-17).....	36
3.6	Relying on God to undo death (12:18-27)	36
3.7	Conclusion.....	38
4	The city that rejects its king (Mark 12:28–13:37)	39
4.1	The way to God's kingdom (12:28-34).....	39
4.2	God deals with Messiah's enemies (12:35-37)	40
4.3	Pretence verses practice (12:38-44).....	42
4.4	The temple will fall (13:1-4).....	43
4.5	The difficulties God's people face (13:5-13).....	44
4.6	Judea's distress at Jerusalem's fall (13:14-19)	46
4.7	Overturning the powers (13:20-31).....	48
4.8	Conclusion.....	50

5	Preparing for the death of the king (Mark 14)	51
5.1	Anointed for burial (14:1-11)	51
5.2	Passover and the new covenant (14:12-26)	53
5.3	When following Jesus is too difficult (14:27-31)	56
5.4	When there's no answer to his prayer (14:32-42)	56
5.5	Arrested by temple guards (14:43-52)	58
5.6	Condemned by the Sanhedrin (14:53-65)	59
5.7	Distanced from his disciples (14:66-72)	61
5.8	Conclusion	62
6	The Messiah: killed and raised (Mark 15–16)	63
6.1	Tried by Rome (15:1-15)	63
6.2	Mocked as a king (15:16-20)	65
6.3	Crucified (15:21-25)	66
6.4	Mocked by rebels and temple leaders (15:27-32)	66
6.5	The king forsaken by God (15:33-39)	67
6.6	Buried (15:40-47)	71
6.7	Raised up by heaven's decree (16:1-8)	71
6.8	How does the story end? (16:9-20)	73
6.9	Conclusion	75

1 The mission of the Messiah (Mark 9)

Last term we looked at Mark 1–8 where the key question was, “Who is this?”¹ Eventually Peter provided the answer: “*You are the Christ!*” (8:29)

Mark 9–16 then deals with the mission of this Messiah. *The Christ* is the anointed ruler sent by heaven to rescue the earth. The Christ restores us as a society under heaven's reign, what Jesus called *the kingdom of God* (Mark 1:15; 4:11, 26, 30; etc).

Jesus explains that the path to power for this Messiah involves a cross. As soon as they recognized his authority, *he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again* (Mark 8:31).

How does the cross save us? That's the main theme of Mark 9–16.

The last 2000 years have offered many explanations of how the cross saves us. They're called *atonement theories*.² Most theologies of atonement are drawn from the epistles, and one case in the Gospels where Jesus used the word *ransom* (Mark 10:45 || Matthew 20:28).³ Surprisingly, most atonement theories are not based on the extensive teaching Jesus gave about the cross.

Listening to Jesus reshapes how we understand the cross. Some Christians think, “Jesus suffered for us, so we don't have to,” but the first thing Jesus says about the cross overturns that view: “*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (8:34, compare Matthew 10:38; 16:24 and Luke 9:23).

Whatever Jesus was doing with the cross to save the world, he wants us to do it too. The kingdom follows what the king does. We participate in Messiah's mission by absorbing the evil done against us, just as he did. We follow him in bearing away the sin of the world in our bodies too, for the renewal of creation.

The cross is not a theory about how God sets individuals right with himself; it's the foundation for the society that comes to life in Christ. By following him we share in the death and life of the Messiah whom God raised up to lead his kingdom.

That is what the cross achieves as we follow him. Are you ready to explore the Messiah's mission as he describes it in Mark 9–16?

¹ For notes and podcasts on Mark 1–8, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2026/04/30/mark-1-8-formed-in-gods-story/>

² For a survey, see <https://allenbrowne.blog/2022/04/06/rich-texture-of-atonement/>

³ For example, John J. R. Lee, and Daniel Brueske. *A Ransom for Many: Mark 10:45 as a Key to the Gospel*. (Lexham Academic, 2023).

1.1 Seeing the Son (9:1-8)

The first verse of Mark 9 continues the discussion in Mark 8:

Mark 9:1 (NIV)

And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

As soon as they recognized him as the Messiah (anointed ruler), Jesus began explaining how he would receive the kingship. He would be killed and their lives would be in danger too (8:31-35). Yet some of them would live to see him raised to life and ascending to heaven to share the glory of his Father's throne.

Peter's declaration and Jesus' explanation is now confirmed by a voice from heaven:

Mark 9:2-8 (NIV)

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

We call this the transfiguration, as Jesus was momentarily transfigured so they could see who he really was. Jesus never wore regal robes like Herod. He looked ordinary. In this moment they caught a glimpse of the regal glory his Father would give him.

Rarely in Scripture does God speak directly and audibly on earth. When God created the heavens and the earth, his commands established what was good (Genesis 1). When God created the covenant with Israel, his ten commands declared what was good. But Israel found God's voice too terrifying: *They trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die”* (Exodus 20:18-19).

God honoured their request. God spoke to his people through a prophet (Moses) who delivered the Torah to them. God wrapped himself in a cloud as he silently lead them through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15-18; 33:9-10; 34:5; 40:34-38).

Later, when they strayed from the covenant relationship, God sent prophets to call them back to himself. Elijah was the foundational prophet at the time the kingdom split, when most of Israel turned from worshipping the LORD and recognizing his anointed Davidic king (*the sins of Jeroboam* in 1 Kings 16:31; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29-31; 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:22). Other prophets then continued what Elijah began: the prophetic ministry of calling God's people back to himself.

That's the story of the Old Testament, or as the Jewish people called it, *the Law and the Prophets* (Matthew 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16; Acts 13:15; Romans 3:21). Moses represented the Torah (Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:3-5; 12:19, 26), and Elijah represented the Prophets (as in Malachi 4:5-6).

In this vision, Jesus' conversation partners are Moses and Elijah. The glorious kingship of the Messiah is the fulfilment of what God has been saying all along through the Law and the Prophets.

But in this moment, God speaks not only through the Law and the Prophets. The one who wrapped himself in a cloud at Sinai now speaks directly! God confirms what Peter said, that Jesus is God's anointed. God affirms what Jesus said, that the Father would give authority to the Son he has chosen.

This is the second time we've heard a voice from heaven in Mark's Gospel. At his baptism, the Spirit descended on the anointed ruler, *and a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"* (1:11).

It seems God has one message for the world. The one who reigns in the heavens has entrusted the throne to the Son appointed to reign on earth. God's command to the people of the earth is, "*Listen to him!*" (verse 7). This is the message from heaven that brings atonement (literally *at-one-ment*) between heaven and earth.

Everything else fades as the vision ends. They no longer see Moses, Elijah, the cloud of God's presence, or the glorious robes of the heaven-anointed king. They see *only Jesus with themselves* (a word-by-word rendition of the end of verse 8).

Your thoughts on the transfiguration?



1.2 The Elijah to come (9:9-13)

Mark 9:9-13 (NIV)

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.

¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

¹² Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? ¹³ But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.”

The Torah teachers were hoping for the kingdom of God to be restored. They called it *the day of the LORD*. Back then, the times were defined by the reigning monarch (e.g. 1 Kings 6:1; 14:25; 15:1, 9, 25, 28, 33). *The day of the LORD* was therefore the day when they would have YHWH reigning over them again (e.g. Isaiah 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1-31; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14).

Malachi said God would send a prophet to prepare his people for his reign:

Malachi 4:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ “See, I will send the prophet **Elijah** to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

Jesus understood John the Baptist to be the promised prophet sent in the tradition of Elijah to call God's people back to himself. The opening verse of Mark's Gospel identifies John the Baptist as God's *messenger who will prepare the way before me* (quoting Malachi 3:1).

But there's a problem! *Although the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him, confessing their sins* (1:5), John was arrested and killed by the current overlord of Galilee (6:14-28). Elijah led Israel to declare that the LORD was Israel's true leader (1 Kings 18:39), yet the existing rulers tried to kill him. Elijah ran for his life, never managing to bring Israel back to the LORD's reign (1 Kings 19).

Now it's happened again. As promised, God sent John, but the rulers *have done to him everything they wished* (verse 13). The leaders of God's people in Jerusalem are not ready to recognize the Son God has sent them. He remains in mortal danger. They will kill him.

For their own safety, Jesus embargoed the transfiguration experience: *giving orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead* (verse 9).

1.3 When evil won't let go (9:14-29)

If you're listening to Mark's account from the perspective of the disciples, you may be struggling with two truths that feel hard to reconcile:

- a) Jesus is God's anointed ruler, so God will raise him up as king and restore the earth as a kingdom of God in his leadership.
- b) The present leaders on earth will kill God's Messiah to preserve their own power, so the life of anyone who follows Jesus is in grave danger too.

The disciples cannot make sense of *what* "raising from the dead" meant (verse 10). They do not understand how the cross defeats evil (8:32).

And they do not see evil willingly submitting to Jesus' authority:

Mark 9:14-29 (NIV)

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

¹⁹ "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

²³ "'If you can?'" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately,
“Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

²⁹ He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

What are we to believe about Jesus? Does he have the authority to defeat evil?
Or will they see evil kill him? The disciples haven’t got this figured out yet.

They’re as confused as the generation God led out of Egypt, the generation that saw the signs God did but would not trust God to lead them to become his kingdom (Numbers 14:3). That’s the *unbelieving generation* Jesus compared them to (verse 7). That’s why Jesus presses the boy’s father regarding what he believes (verse 23).

Verse 26 is a picture of an evil spirit unwilling to yield to Jesus’ authority. It would kill its victim rather than release him. It’s as if the boy had died (verse 26), and Jesus must raise him to life. (The word *anistamai* in verse 27 is used of lifting someone up and also of raising the dead).

The whole event therefore becomes a picture for the disciples of something that is beyond them. When Jesus refers to *this kind* (verse 29), he implies they were up against an intense form of evil, the kind of evil that would rather kill its victim than let go. And they will see the ultimate evil—death itself—take Jesus. But death will release him. While they are feeling powerless to help, God will raise him up.

That’s the context of this story. Before (verse 9) and after (verse 31) it’s all about Jesus receiving the kingship because the Father raises him up out of death.

So, we pray, “*Your kingdom come! ... Deliver us from evil*” (Matthew 6:9-13).
We trust the Father who raises up his Anointed to lead us to life.⁴

Thoughts?

1.4 How God uses his power (9:30-41)

To make sure we get the point, Mark again places the disciple’s inability to overthrow that kind of evil within the framework of Jesus’ death:

Mark 9:30-32 (NIV)

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were,³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.”³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

⁴ The word “fasting” is probably a later addition to this text. See Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2001), 268.

The *Son of Man* is the human descendant who inherits the authority God gave humans in the beginning. But humans no longer use the power God gave us to represent God's authority; instead they fight God's authority and kill his representative. They have power to destroy God's Messiah, but on the third day they lose that power. That's how the cross overturns evil, releasing earth to be a kingdom of heaven again.

So, will Jesus' followers take the way of the cross? Or will we be like the rest of the world in rebellion against God—seeking power for ourselves?

Mark 9:33-37 (NIV)

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

If Peter's ambition was to be Jesus' prime minister (8:33), the others are also concerned about their place in the hierarchy of Jesus' government (verse 35).

The little child gives orders to no one. People pay for access to important leaders, but Jesus is found in those we think of as unimportant, without influence.

Verse 37 upends our view of God. God as the most important and influential person in the universe, but how does God use his power? Here he is—not in Rome or even Jerusalem, but in *Galilee of the Gentiles*, the first region Israel lost to foreign powers (Matthew 4:12-16). These children, growing up in oppression, will know his name. It's to them he is delivering the kingdom of God.

So where do you look to see God? We see God's face—God's image—in humans. That's by design. It's hard to see God's face in Pilate, or in the high priest who will hand Jesus over to be crucified. It's easier to see God's face in the powerless people.

Don't seek power, Jesus tells them. Be human, like the Son of Man who is not seeking power for himself, but inherits it because that's how God designed the world to be.

We don't even need to protect God's power:



Mark 9:38-41 (NIV)

³⁸ “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

³⁹ “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, ⁴⁰ for whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.”

1.5 What Jesus says about Gehenna (hell) (9:42-50)

The final verses of Mark 9 are the most detailed teaching about hell anywhere in the Bible. Let's take time to understand what Jesus taught.

Mark 9:42-48 (NIV)

⁴² “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into **hell**, where the fire never goes out.

[⁴⁴] ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into **hell**.

[⁴⁶] ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into **hell**, ⁴⁸ where

‘the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched.’ [Isaiah 66:24]

The word hell (*Gehenna* in Greek) occurs only here in Mark, in three other contexts in Matthew (5:22-30; 18:9; 23:15, 33), and once in Luke (12:5). James 3:6 is the only occurrence outside the Gospels.

Another word (*hadēs*) has sometimes been translated “hell,” though it simply means “the dead,” the equivalent of *šheōl* in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalm 6:5). When Jesus said the gates of Hades would not block the assembly gathering around his kingship (Matthew 16:18), he was declaring that death would not hold him.

2 Peter 2:4 borrows the word *Tartarus* from Greek mythology, the place where the Titans were said to be imprisoned in the afterlife. There's also some visual imagery in John's visions (e.g. Revelation 20:14 -15), but our aim is to understand what Jesus taught about *Gehenna*.

So what is *Gehenna*? The picture of hell that many of us have today comes from the Middle Ages when the church gave hell a prominence it does not have in Scripture. Despite the fact that Paul never mentioned hell in any of his letters and none of the

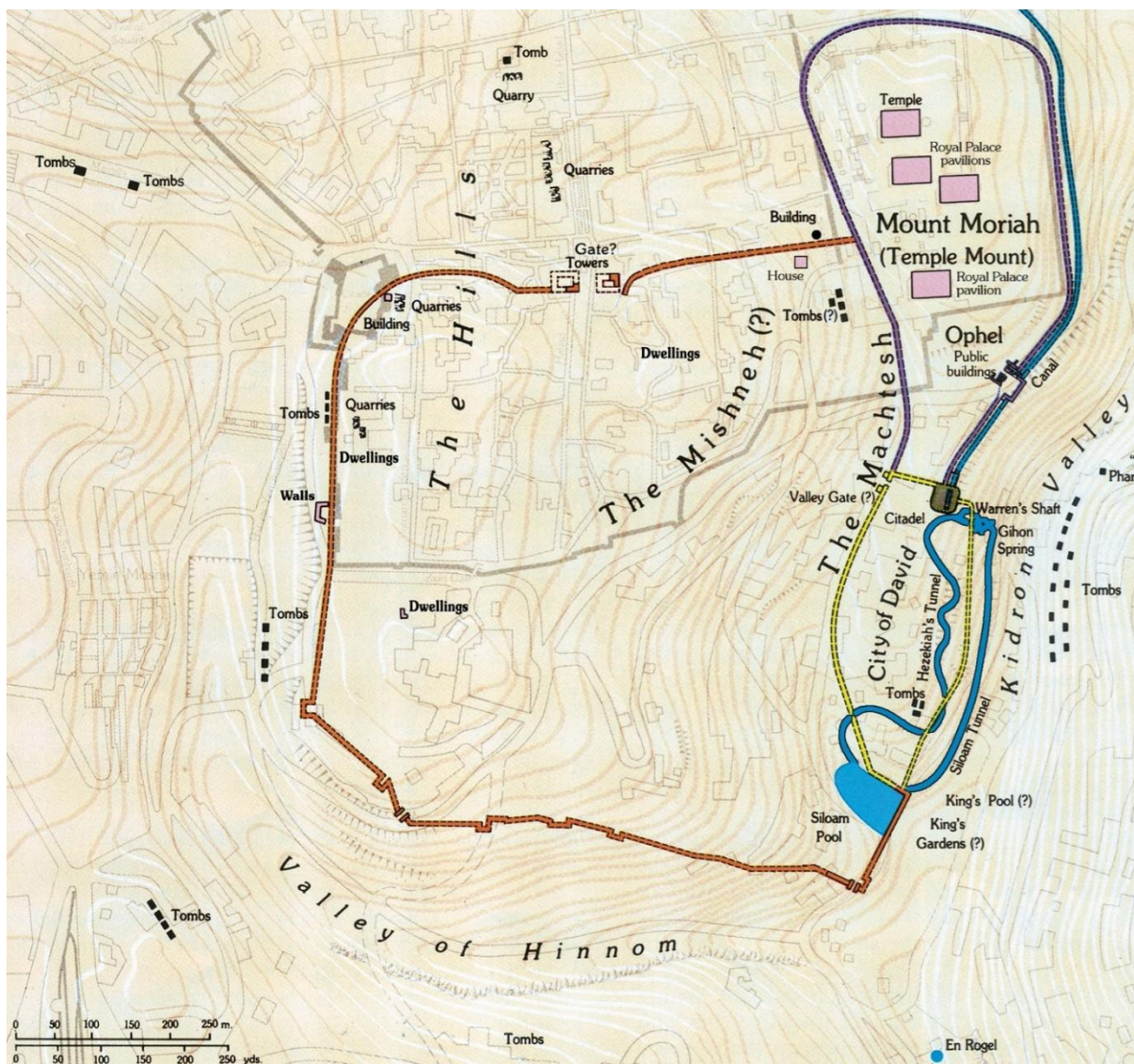
apostles mentioned hell as they preached the gospel in Acts, hell became a convenient tool for the church to threaten people with guilt and fear.

Catholicism claimed Jesus had given Peter the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:19). The church could therefore use the keys to let people into heaven or to send them to hell. All those yarns about Saint Peter at the Pearly Gates deciding who goes to heaven and who goes to hell are based on that claim.

The church painted lurid images of damned souls suffering eternal conscious torment. Dante's poem *Inferno* graphically imagined what it would be like to descend into hell. The walls of the Sistine Chapel illustrate how central the message of hell had become.

None of these images are the background for Jesus's comments. What did *Gehenna* mean to Jesus and his audience?

Gehenna was a real place. It's just south of the temple mount in Jerusalem. *Gehenna* (Greek) derives from *Ge Hinnom* (Hebrew). *Ge* is the Hebrew word for "valley," and Hinnom was the original owner of this valley (Joshua 15:8; 18:16). It was often called *the Valley of Ben Hinnom*, since Hinnom's sons inherited the valley (*ben* = son).



"The first temple period" in Dan Bahat, *The Carta Jerusalem Atlas*, (Jerusalem: Carta, Jerusalem, 2011), 23.

This valley had a terrible history. People from Jerusalem burned their children there:

- King Ahaz *burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his children in the fire* (2 Chronicles 28:3).
- King Manasseh *sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom* (2 Chronicles 33:6).
- King Josiah tried to stop these evil practices: *he desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire to Molek* (2 Kings 23:10).

The LORD was horrified they thought he wanted such a thing. God said:

Jeremiah 7:31 (NIV)

“They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.”

Did you get that? Burning people in this valley (*Gehenna*) was evil. Such a thing had never entered God's mind. This statement comes as God explains why he abandoned the temple they'd built for him in Jerusalem (7:1-14). And because God withdrew, the city fell to Babylon.

Jeremiah goes on to say that if they want their children slaughtered in Gehenna, the Babylonians will give them more than they want:

Jeremiah 7:32-33 (NIV) (compare Jeremiah 19:6 and 32:35)

³² So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. ³³ Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds and the wild animals, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

Jeremiah's words were fulfilled in 586 BC. Those who tried to defend Jerusalem were slaughtered. There were too many to bury, so their bodies were burned in Gehenna.

Gehenna became a symbol of the unfaithful people of God who lost their lives in the conflict with Babylon. It became a warning to the following generations.

But the bodies burned in Gehenna were not suffering eternal conscious torment as Catholicism taught. That idea comes from Greek thinking, for the Greeks taught that humans are eternal souls that live on after our bodies die. In Jewish thinking, humans are mortal, and those who receive the gift of eternal life receive new bodies in the resurrection.⁵

Which version of hell is Jesus talking about? Disembodied souls suffering forever? Or people losing their life, like those whose bodies were burnt in Gehenna?

⁵ See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 32–207.

The disembodied option doesn't fit Jesus' comments. He's talking about your body: hands, feet, and eyes. Matthew makes it even more obvious: *It is better for you to lose one part of your **body** than for your whole **body** to go into hell* (Matthew 5:29-30).

He's talking about people losing their lives, people who are not raised to life to share eternity with God. Their bodies don't burn forever without being consumed (like Moses' burning bush in Exodus 3:2). They *perish*—a word that's used many times in Scripture (Matthew 18:14; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16-17; 10:28; 11:50 etc.). Perishing is not the same as being tortured forever.

In verse 48, Jesus refers to the closing verse of Isaiah:

Isaiah 66:24 (NIV)

²⁴ “And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”

As you'd expect, Isaiah speaks of *dead bodies*, not consciously suffering souls. Worms eat the dead bodies, but the worms never die out. Fire consumes the dead bodies, but the fire never goes out. In generation after generation there is no shortage of dead bodies to fuel the fire and feed the worms.

That's the background for Jesus' comments. His comments are actually targeted at those who abuse their place in the community by tripping up those who have less power and understanding, *the little ones*. It would be better for them to meet an untimely end, perishing in the sea, Jesus says (verse 42). In the end, their bodies will be burned or eaten by worms, not raised to life to participate in God's eternal reign (verses 47-48).

Hear God's heart. God is not torturing disembodied souls forever. Isaiah 66:24 is God's lament over losing *those who rebelled against me*. God sees their dead bodies being burnt, in generation after generation. The worms survive, while many of his people do not. This is the grief God spoke of when he called Isaiah to prophetic ministry (Isaiah 6:9-13), the grief Jesus knows too (Mark 4:12 || Matthew 13:12-17).

Would you like to discuss what Jesus was saying when he spoke of *Gehenna*?

..... ,

What matters most is how we represent God. If the Scriptures do not teach that God keeps his enemies alive to torture them indefinitely, we misrepresent God by saying so. In the words of Edward Fudge, the traditional view of hell as everlasting conscious torment is “a horrible doctrine, unworthy of God, foreign to the Bible, spawned by pagan philosophy and preserved by human tradition.” ⁶

⁶ Edward William Fudge, “Response: A Conditionalist Response to Traditionalism,” in *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical & Theological Dialogue*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 208.

You may have noticed verses 44 and 46 are missing from recent translations. No early manuscripts of Mark's Gospel have these verses, which simply repeat verse 48 (the Isaiah quotation). It's an example of the church adding to Scripture to underscore its threats against any who might resist its power.

The chapter concludes:

Mark 9:49-50 (NIV)

⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

Verse 48 spoke of the fire that never seems to go out as the rebels keep dying and their dead bodies are burnt. But even the godly suffer (verse 49).

Salted with fire is an odd phrase, probably drawn from the sacrificial language of the Old Testament. Grain offerings were *seasoned with salt* (Leviticus 2:13), and burnt offerings were *sprinkled with salt* (Ezekiel 43:24). Jesus may therefore be calling everyone to *present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your true and proper worship* (Romans 12:1). This is right response to God, unlike the rebels whose dead bodies end up burned anyway (verse 48). If that's right, the contrast between verse 48 and 49 is similar to what Jesus said in 8:34-38.

So the challenge for the people of God is not to lose our saltiness. When Israel/Judah lost their unique flavour, they found themselves exiled from the land, thrown out and trodden underfoot by the gentiles (Matthew 5:13). The community that lives under King Jesus needs to give each other the same grace God has given to us, so we experience the God-flavour in each other. Then we'll be at peace with each other as a response to being at peace with God (compare Matthew 6:14-15).

1.6 Conclusion

Meditate on Mark 9. What does this chapter mean to you?

- 1) What's the significance of the transfiguration? What does it reveal about Jesus?
- 2) What's your response when your prayers are not answered?
- 3) In what ways are you giving your life in support of people who don't have power?
- 4) What conclusions do you reach about Jesus' teaching on Gehenna?

In preparation for next week, **read Mark 10**. As Jesus makes his final journey to Jerusalem, he responds to people's questions and describes how the kingdom of God is so different to a world characterized by unfaithfulness and greed. For even his disciples struggle with seeking power over each other.

2 'The journey to Jerusalem (Mark 10)

Last time we heard God revealing Jesus' glory, instructing us to "listen to him!" (9:1-8). We learned that casting out evil is not as simple as the disciples imagined (9:9-29), for God does not use his power as we might expect (9:30-41). We heard Jesus describing Gehenna, how God deals with his enemies (9:42-50).

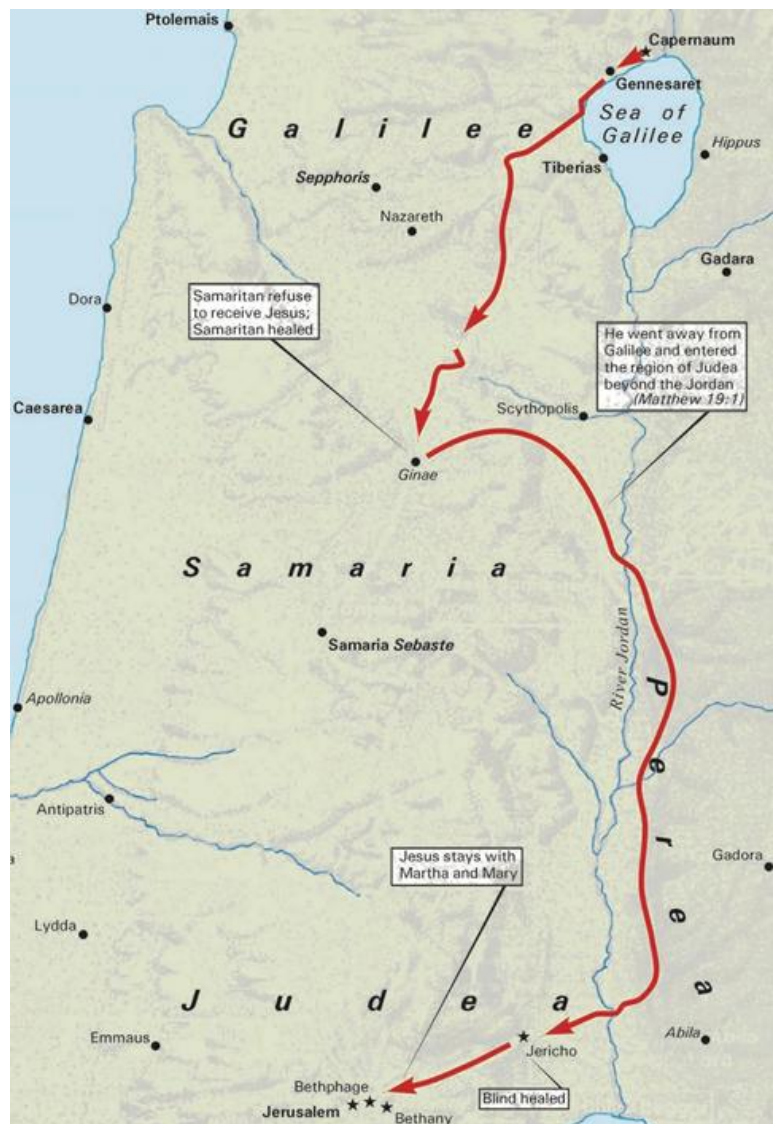
Do you have pressing questions we must deal with before moving on to Mark 10?

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Tonight we join Jesus as he leaves Galilee to make his way to the capital for the last time. On the journey, he responds to questions about the difficult relationships: marriage breakups, and how money is a god. Again, he explains the cross, what it means to give his life to redeem his people, and how his followers need to do as he does rather than what the rulers of the nations do.

Ready to follow where he leads?



"Jesus' Last Journey to Jerusalem" in *Understanding the Life of Jesus: An Introductory Atlas*, (Carta Jerusalem, 2019), 31.

2.1 The question of divorce (10:1-16)

Jesus now responds to a question they ask him:

Mark 10:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

⁵ “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. ⁶ “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ [Genesis 1:27] ⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ [Genesis 2:24] So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

They were “testing” Jesus (verse 2) by drawing him into a dispute about how to apply the Law regarding divorce. There's no question that the Torah permitted divorce:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (NIV)

¹ If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house ... ⁴ then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again ...

The Sinai Law is patriarchal of course; there's no provision for a woman to divorce her husband. So, on what grounds was divorce permitted?

- Rabbi Hillel based his teaching on the word *displeasing*.
The Law permitted a man to divorce his wife if she no longer pleased him.
- Rabbi Shammi based his teaching on the word *indecent*, interpreted as adultery.
The Law permitted a man to divorce his wife only if she'd been unfaithful.

They were asking which view Jesus held: Shammi's (divorce only after adultery), or Hillel's (divorce for any reason, compare Matthew 19:3).

Jesus asked them how they understood the Law. All they say is that the Torah permitted divorce, without commenting on the real question (the grounds).

Jesus bypasses the legal argument, asking them to consider what God intended in the beginning. Long before there were Jews, gentiles, or a Sinai covenant, God gave the gift of marriage to the peoples of the earth, so two people can share one life. Divorce is an afterthought, added later so people who cannot make a shared life work would not murder each other.

What Jesus does here is crucial for making sense of the Old Testament. Many of the commands in the Sinai Covenant Law are concessions rather than God's ideal. Divorce, polygamy, patriarchy, slavery, capital punishment, and sacrificing animals are examples of God accommodating a fallen world as he led his people towards the salvation that would ultimately arrive in Christ. Looking back to what God intended in the beginning gives us a far clearer picture of how God intended life to be.

So, that's how Jesus continues the discussion with his disciples. God's intention for marriage was always life-long faithfulness (verse 10-12).

Unfortunately, these verses are sometimes read legalistically, as if Jesus was laying down laws for Christians. If that were the case, Jesus provided no legal grounds for divorce here in Mark. Matthew disagrees. According to Matthew 19:9, a person whose partner has been unfaithful is exempt. From a legal perspective, Matthew and Mark give contradictory answers.

But Jesus was not laying down the law! The whole point is that, even though God permitted divorce in the Law, God's intention was always enduring faithfulness. The follower of Jesus who asks, "Can I have a divorce?" needs to wrestle with how our human relationships reflect the faithful character of God. Even in cases where there has been unfaithfulness, it may be possible to salvage the relationship (e.g. Hosea). And even in cases where there has not been unfaithfulness, it may not be possible to salvage the relationship (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:15).

In summary, it's clear what God intended for us when he gave us the gift of marriage in the beginning, and that's always the ideal we strive for. But it's also clear that human relationships are messy, and the issue of sustaining our relationships is often beyond our control. When relationships end through death, unfaithfulness, abandonment, or abuse, Jesus was not calling us to condemn each other.

Crucially, Jesus is calling us to the kind of faithfulness that reflects God's heart. Can you imagine God divorcing his people? When God sent them into exile, some of them felt God was divorcing them, but God never gave them a certificate of divorce (Isaiah 50:1). As challenging as it is, this is the faithfulness of God that Jesus calls us to live.

At the same time, we will find ourselves needing to support people whose relationships have fallen apart, including the collateral damage that comes from divorce:

Mark 10:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Children don't vote. They don't have status in the wider community. They don't have much power over their own lives, let alone over the lives of others. They do have a dependency on those who care for them.

In many ways, that's what it's like to be a child of God. It's more about dependency on Father's care than being in control. The kingdom of God functions as a family that

trusts God's care and listens to the wise leadership of our older brother to whom God has entrusted the kingdom (compare Hebrews 2:11-12, quoting Psalm 22:22).

When Jesus speaks of *receiving the kingdom of God* (verse 15), please do not substitute "going to heaven when I die." He's literally talking about how heaven's reign returns to earth. The one who insists on asserting their own power cannot function as a citizen of the kingdom that God has established in the Messiah.

Your thoughts?

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2.2 The values of Jesus' kingdom (10:17-31)

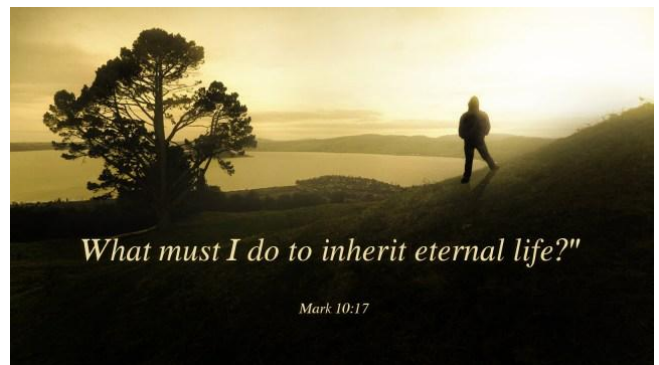
One day, Jesus was asked the question we'd all love to hear:

Mark 10:17-19 (NIV)

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments:

'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.'"



Is that how you would have answered the question? Obey the commandments? Why didn't Jesus say, "What do you mean, 'Do?' You're saved by faith, not by works. Invite me into your heart. I'll forgive you so you can go to heaven when you die"?

It gets worse:

Mark 10:20-22 (NIV)

²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Okay, so the price for eternal life is to give everything away? Are you making any sense of Jesus' message? We better start by looking at this in Jesus' Jewish context rather than just applying it to ourselves.

The guy was living under the Sinai covenant that called its people to obedience to the commands. Jesus wasn't making that up. That's how it was under the old covenant.

So, what did the guy mean by *eternal life* (verse 17)? You don't find that phrase anywhere in the Old Testament until Daniel 12:2 speaks of *many who sleep in the dust rising to everlasting life*. In the Maccabean period (160s BC), many Jews were killed for holding onto their faith. They hoped God would undo this injustice by raising them from the dead when he restored the nation as a kingdom of God under the Messiah.

Jewish writings outside the Old Testament confirm this expectation:

2 Maccabees 7:9 (ESV-Catholic Edition)

And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an **everlasting** renewal of **life**, because we have died for his laws."

4 Maccabees 15:3 (NRSV with Apocrypha)

She [the mother who saw her children martyred] loved religion more, the religion that preserves them for **eternal life** according to God's promise.

Psalms of Solomon 3:15 (Lexham O. T. Apocrypha)

But those who fear the Lord will arise into **eternal life**,
and their life will never come to an end in the light of the Lord.

It seems the guy was asking what he needed to do now to ensure he'd be raised to life in the age to come when a son of David would again be reigning over Israel. In the Maccabean period, the emphasis was on the commands that distinguished Jews from gentiles: keeping the sabbath, eating only kosher food, and maintaining ethnic purity (marrying another Jew). Jesus goes for more basic commands (verse 19).

The guy isn't satisfied. He's never murdered anyone, cheated on his wife, or lied in court. Like Saul of Tarsus, he saw himself as *faultless* in regard to the Law (compare Philippians 3:6). Surely God expects more from those he will raise from the dead?

I love the guy's persistent searching heart. Jesus did too (verse 21). I'd love it if Jesus said, "Okay friend. You're hoping to be raised to participate in God's eternal reign in the Messiah. I have a secret for you: he's right here in front of you! You're talking to the son of David who will overturn the powers of evil and death that destroyed the reign of God in Old Testament times. In a few weeks, you will see me rise from the dead, the firstfruit of all who will rise to eternal life in me."

But, as Jesus keeps telling his disciples, it's way too dangerous to say that.

Announcing that the Messiah was already among his people would get him killed. Instead, Jesus explains how the guy can participate in the life of the kingdom now: by letting go of all the things he's living for (verse 21).

When Christ is king and the world is operating as God intends, there won't be any rich people. No one will claim to own all the resources while others miss out. God has already provided abundantly for the world he created. There's more than enough for all the people and creatures to live well. The problem is when we spend our lives to build our own little kingdoms. Making money is the goal of life for most Australians.

It's the reason we get up in the morning: to go to work or build our companies or buy another house. We live to gain wealth.

This guy may have thought his *great wealth* was God's blessing on his life. Jesus said no: that's not how the kingdom of God operates. Greed is a substitute god (Colossians 3:5), and it's a terrible taskmaster, impossible to satisfy. No one can simultaneously serve God and the things God provides (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus loved the guy by pointing out how he was wasting his life.

Mark 10:23-27 (NIV)

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Please don't read verse 23 as, "The rich cannot go to heaven." Earth was created as a kingdom of heaven, and that's what the Messiah is restoring it to be. But those who hold onto their wealth instead of sharing what God created cannot participate in that kingdom life. It's really hard for them to let go. It's easier to squeeze a camel through the eye of a needle than to get a rich person to share their wealth to everyone can enjoy what God has provided (verse 25).⁷

That's the problem that hasn't gone away in 2000 years. 150 years ago, the industrial revolution saw a few factory owners become very wealthy while the rest became labourers in the industrial machine. Communism was born to violently overthrow this injustice and forcibly redistribute wealth. It hasn't stopped the inequality.

Today the AI revolution threatens to make the inequality worse. Those who own the Artificial Intelligence become trillionaires while the rest of us become obsolete. It's unclear where this will take us, but it's not the path to the kingdom of God.

So, is there any hope for the world? Is there any possibly of rescuing the world from this spiral into meaninglessness and inequality? That was the disciples' question (verse 26).

⁷ You may have heard people talk of a gate called the Eye of the Needle through which a camel could squeeze with difficulty. There is no evidence for such a gate. For discussion, see Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, (Zondervan, 1993), 25.

Jesus answer is simple: unsatisfying, but profound. When it comes to how people lead the world, it really is hopeless. Like the rich young ruler, people cannot release their hearts from the grip of wealth. But remember that people don't run the world. God does. And God knows how to restore the world as a kingdom of heaven (verse 27).

It's like Jesus said. The rulers who refuse to let go of their own power will kill him. But God will do the impossible to restore the earth as a kingdom of heaven: raising up his Messiah as Lord of all.

He is the hope of the world. Recognizing his leadership is what establishes the kingdom of God on earth. So it's really important that we listen to him when he calls us to live generously under his leadership for the sake of the world rather than to live to accumulate wealth for ourselves.

Mark 10:28-31 (NIV)

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

²⁹ "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

What about you? Willing to let go of everything to follow where Jesus is taking us?

2.3 Jesus' third explanation of the cross (10:32-34)

For the third time, Jesus explains the atonement. The cross is as terrifying theme that can only save us when God steps in to overturn the powers of evil and death that cause such injustice:

Mark 10:32-34 (NIV)

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

Let's take this a step at a time:

- a) Jesus is leading his people to the capital to restore God's reign after 600 years under foreign powers. He will be welcomed as Messiah: *the one who comes in the name of the Lord*, and *the coming kingdom of our father David* (11:9-10).

- b) But the leaders of God's people (*chief priests and Torah teachers*) will reject the human to whom God gives authority (*Son of Man*). Instead of recognizing their God-appointed king, they will *condemn him to death* (see 14:64).
- c) Mocking and rejecting his kingship, the leaders of God's people will betray him to their gentile overlords to have him killed (see 15:1, 13).

The cross is therefore the ultimate rebellion against God's kingship. It's the same kind of rebellion against God's authority that previous kings like David suffered from the rulers of this world. In the words of Psalm 2:2, *the kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed*.

This is how the apostles understood the cross too:

Acts 4:24b-27 (NIV)

²⁴ "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“ ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’ [Psalm 2:2]

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

So, how does the cross save us? If God's anointed ruler comes to the capital where the leaders reject his authority, the cross is the ultimate expression of the sin of the world. It's what our heavenly sovereign does in response to the assassination of his Christ that overturns the reign of evil and death, restoring us as a kingdom of God in him:

- d) *“Three days later, he will rise”* (verse 34).

That's how the atonement works! "The cross" refers to the whole event: the crucifixion and burial of the Messiah, and God raising him from tomb to throne. That's what saves us: *The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1 Corinthians 1:18). The oldest statement of the gospel we have is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: that the Christ died at the hands of the rebellion against God's authority (the ultimate revelation of human sin), that the rulers thought they'd won when he was buried, but the life-giving God overturned the power of sin and death when he raised up his Son from tomb to throne, bringing us to life in him.

The cross saves because of God's response to our sin (the assassination of his Son). After we'd buried him, God raised him out of death, giving him the kingship on earth as in heaven, delivering us from the powers of sin and death, breathing his resurrection life into us, so earth becomes a kingdom of heaven as God had always promised and Jesus always preached.

This way of describing the atonement is called *Christus Victor*, the victory of the Christ over the present powers, freeing us from evil, restoring us to God's reign.⁸

So, this is the society Jesus creates in his reign: a society that protects the little ones (9:42-50) and embodies the faithfulness of God in our relationships (10:1-12). It's a society that honours those who have little to contribute (10:13-16) and challenges those who struggle to let go of their claims to the resources God created (10:17-31).

Thoughts?

2.4 Serving in Jesus' kingdom (10:35-45)

Jesus' disciples don't yet understand the cross as foundational to the kingdom of God. They want positions of power:

Mark 10:35-40 (NIV)

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him.

"Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

The problem with the world has been people grasping power over others. This is not how Jesus becomes king. He becomes king when God raises him up after those in power killed him. Jesus cannot give them what they request because it is God who gives authority (verse 39).

But to whom does God give authority? Not to those who grasp it. Not to the disciples who tried to trap Jesus into promising it (verse 35). God gives authority to those who serve, even when it costs their lives. This is not an easy cup to drink (Mark 14:36). To be raised up with his Father's authority the Messiah must be baptized into the death of his people (verse 38).

In seeking the greatest positions in the kingdom, these queue-jumpers triggered jealousy, an animosity that Jesus must address:

⁸ Aulén, Gustaf, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*. (Wipf & Stock, 2003).

Mark 10:41-44 (NIV)

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The rulers of the Gentiles (verse 42)? That was the story of the fallen kingdom of God:

- Shalmaneser of Assyria who took most of the Promised Land.
- Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took the rest, ending the reign of God's anointed.
- Alexander the Great forced himself on everyone.
- Antiochus Epiphanies killed those who followed God's Law.
- Julius Caesar invaded Palestine, placing it under Roman control.
- Herod the Great exercise his authority by killing the children of Bethlehem.
- His son Archelaus was so brutal that Rome dethroned him for abuse of power.
- Jesus avoided the Herod Antipas who decapitated John the Baptist.

“It must not be so among you!” Jesus insists. This is not how the Son of Man inherits the authority God gave humans over creation. He is king not because he forces people to serve him but because he gives his life. Instead of taking lives to gain power (as the rulers of this world do), Jesus gives his life to emancipate his people from their control (the rulers who serve the powers of sin and death).

Did you notice the word **ransom** in verse 45? A *ransom* is a payment to unlock the documents criminals have encrypted on your computer. A *ransom* is the payment you make to have a kidnapped person released. For some theologians, the *ransom* refers to the payment God demanded in compensation for our sin.

Anselm lived in the eleventh century. In the feudal system of his time, a serf who had brought dishonour on his lord needed to make a satisfaction payment, whatever the lord determined was necessary to restore his honour. Anselm defined sin as anything that is an affront to God's honour. Jesus then offers his life as the satisfaction payment for human sin, the payment that restored God's honour and satisfied God's justice.⁹

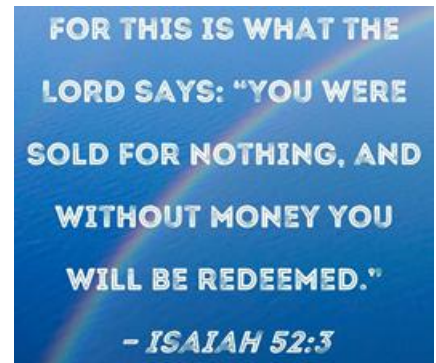
That approach paints a horrid picture of God. It sounds like God was so offended that somebody had to pay, and Jesus had to be killed to satisfy God's honour. That is not how the story of Scripture works. The language of ransom and redemption begins with the exodus.

⁹ Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*.

Pharaoh enslaved Jacob's family. The LORD demands, "*Let my people go!*" Pharaoh refuses. God leads his people to freedom. They declare their trust in his leadership: "*In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have **redeemed***" (Exodus 15:13).

God did not make a payment to Pharaoh. God did not receive payment from Pharaoh. They were ransomed without payment.

Later, when the nations captured God's people and took them into exile, God promised a new exodus: "*You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed*" (Isaiah 52:3, referring to Exodus 15:5). Jesus' life is not a financial compensation to satisfy God's offended ego.



Joel Green explains the language of ransom in the Bible story:

"Ransom," or "means of release" (λύτρον), belongs to the semantic domain of "deliverance" or "salvation." Jesus's counsel to his quarrelling disciples that they comport themselves as slaves rather than despotic rulers ... recalls that great act of deliverance that lies at the foundation of Israel's peoplehood, when God ransomed Israel from Egyptian slavery. As the Lord told Moses, "Go! Tell the sons of Israel, saying, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from the domination of the Egyptians, and I will deliver (λυτρόομαι) you from slavery, and I will redeem you by a raised arm and great judgment' " (Exod. 6:6, NETS). God ransoms Israel not by "paying someone off" but by delivering them from Egyptian slavery (e.g., Exod. 6:6; 16:13). ... Metaphors like "ransom" can have more than one sense, not all of which are realized in a given context. ... In Jesus's message, we hear nothing about an exchange of payment.¹⁰

We become like the God we worship. If you think God is someone who demands payment to compensate the way he has been dishonoured, you will behave that way also. That's how the rulers of this world behave. And that's exactly what Jesus told us not to do.

2.5 Even a blind person can see who Jesus is (10:46-52)

Jesus and his entourage are getting to Jerusalem now. They've reached Jericho at the southern end of the Jordan valley. From here they turn east for the 3000-foot climb through the Judean wilderness towards the capital.

Mark 10:46-52 (NIV)

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging.

¹⁰ Joel B. Green, "Theologies of the Atonement in the New Testament," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 117–118.

⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout,
“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted
all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man,
“Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”

⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.”

Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Son of David is a reference to the coming Messiah. David was God’s anointed (Christ/Messiah). God promised the kingship to David and his sons forever, so *son of David* meant the Messiah, the descendant of David who would restore David’s fallen kingdom. The Torah teachers understood that (12:35).

Jesus asks Bartimaeus what request he would make of his king. It’s better to invite people to express their needs rather than make assumptions about what to pray for.

Bartimaeus can now see where he’s going. He follows the Son of David to the capital. Even a blind person can see who Jesus is.

Wouldn’t it be amazing if everyone in Jerusalem recognized the Son of David as he made his way to the capital to redeem his people from the rulers who serve sin and death?

2.6 Conclusion

How are you responding to Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10?

- 1) How do you understand what Jesus said about divorce? How does this help when friends or family are going through breakups?
- 2) How much of your life is spent on gaining wealth? Do you feel challenged as you hear Jesus’ response to the rich young ruler? Are your values his values?
- 3) How does Jesus’ cross save us? How does Jesus’ explanation of the cross shape our understanding of the atonement and our willingness to take up our cross too?
- 4) In following Jesus there’s no room for grasping power over others as evil rulers do. Is this something you need to watch for at home, at work, in other contexts?

Next time we’ll see what happens when the Messiah and his followers reach the capital to restore the kingdom of God. **Read Mark 11:1–12:27.**

3 The authority of the king (Mark 11:1–12:27)

Last time we accompanied Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem. We listened to Jesus' responses to questions about divorce, wealth, and eternal life. We heard his third explanation of the cross. He warned us not to be like the rulers of the nations, but to serve as he served us by giving his life for us. Even a blind person could see this was the Christ, the son of David.

Were there things in Mark 10 we need to discuss before moving on to Mark 11 tonight?

Tonight we join the celebration as God's anointed arrives in the capital. The crowds welcome him, but the temple leaders do not recognize his authority. Jesus repeatedly warns the leaders that God will overthrow the temple, exile them from his vineyard, and still raise him up as king even if they murder him.

3.1 The capital celebrates her king (11:1-11)

It was 616 years since a son of David had ridden into Jerusalem as king. Zedekiah was the final king of Judah when Babylon captured Jerusalem in 586 BC. To ensure his sons would never reign, *they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon* (2 Kings 25:7).

Now, the *son of David* was on his way to the capital (Mark 10:47-48) to free his people from foreign powers and restore them as a kingdom of God. His mission is dangerous, with uncertainty at every step:

Mark 11:1-6 (NIV)

¹ As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

³ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

⁴ They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵ some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" ⁶ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

This king has no war horse, or even a war budget to re-establish the kingdom. What he's doing sounds as crazy as trying to push a camel through the eye of a needle (Mark 10:21-27). All he has is what his people will give him. A donkey colt will do.

Mark 11:7-11 (NIV)

⁷ When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

¹⁰ “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The people treat Jesus as their king. They celebrate him by placing their coats on the donkey and on the road, giving him a gentle entry to the city. They cut branches to wave in celebration of the king returning after all this time. They applaud Jesus as the king who has divine authority to save them:

- *Hosanna* is a celebratory cry meaning, “LORD save us.”
- *The one who comes in the name of the Lord* is the LORD’S anointed, the king who represents heaven’s authority on earth.
- *Hosanna in the highest heaven* recognizes Jesus is coming to save them with the authority of the Lord, the name above all names.

These are the hopes Jerusalem celebrated every Passover. They sang the Psalms, especially Psalms 113–118. They declare this hope is fulfilled in Jesus this Passover:

Psalm 118:22-27 (NIV)

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ **LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!**

²⁶ **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.**

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

This is Jesus’ enthronement ceremony, as the king leads the festival procession to the temple for his coronation—assuming the temple recognizes his authority.

But it’s late in the day. The crowd must wait until tomorrow.

3.2 Conflict between temple and Messiah (11:12-26)

Next morning Jesus skips breakfast to make the 20-minute walk back to Jerusalem. On the way, he does something the disciples do not understand:

Mark 11:12-14 (NIV)

¹² The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry.

¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it

was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it.

Did you get that? It's not fig season, but Jesus curses the fig tree that has no fruit! Can you make any sense of that? Let's read on. Is the temple ready for the coronation of the king?

Mark 11:15-17 (NIV)

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? [Isaiah 56:7] But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” [Jeremiah 7:11]

Why is Jesus overturning the temple's operations? As diaspora Jews arrived from all over Europe and Asia for Passover, *the money changers* provided the local coinage required for the temple tax, and *those selling doves* provided the sacrifices needed for the poor who could not afford a lamb or a goat. Everyone needed these gifts, for the LORD had said, “*No one is to appear before me empty-handed*” (Exodus 23:15).

Jesus' critique is deeper. The temple was the house Israel provided for the King of the Universe to live among them and lead them as the nation that revealed God to the world. They were meant to be praying for the nations to know God in them. Instead, the house built to represent the LORD's authority had been taken over by bandits—thugs who take authority that does not belong to them.

A den of robbers is Jeremiah's phrase. The leaders of the first temple told Jeremiah it could not fall to Babylon because the LORD was there. God said, “*Will you steal and murder ... and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things? Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?*” (Jeremiah 7:11).

Seventy years after Babylon destroyed Solomon's temple, they built another. Jesus is now overturning this second temple as a sign that it too will fall. It's no longer a house where God is welcome. It is occupied by thugs who serve their own interests. They are robbers who will murder the Messiah to take his authority for themselves. God has rejected this temple. It will fall. As Jesus goes on to say, “*Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down*” (Mark 13:2). As Jerusalem fell to Babylon, Jesus said it would fall to Rome because it rejected the authority of the LORD in his anointed. That's the warning Jesus enacted as he overturned the temple.¹¹

Did the robbers in the temple listen? As Jeremiah asked, “*Will you steal and murder?*”

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (SPCK, 1996), 413–428.

Mark 11:18 (NIV)

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

Oh, dear. This rejection by those in authority is just as Jesus anticipated (8:31; 10:33). Will his popularity with the crowds prevent their evil intentions?

Mark 11:18-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

²⁰ In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!”

In the space of a single day, the fruitless fig tree had begun to wither. In light of what just went down at the temple, we can recognize Jesus' declaration about the fig tree as another enacted prophecy, a sign that God will not tolerate the leafy show of a temple that produces no fruit (compare Isaiah 5; Psalm 80).

Jesus explains that prophetic declarations work by declaring what God is doing:

Mark 11:22-23 (NIV)

²² “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered.

²³ “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.”

What is *this mountain*? (verse 23) On the journey eastward from Jerusalem towards Bethany through the Kidron Valley, only one significant mountain is in view. They're looking back towards the Temple Mount. This mountain—the one under the control of the bandits who are plotting to kill the Messiah and steal his authority—this mountain will be brought down. That was the point of Jesus' prophetic action in overturning the temple. That was the point of Jesus' prophetic action in cursing the fruitless fig tree.

This mountain will fall, yet God will raise him up. It's what Jesus believes, and he's betting his life on it.

There will be times when we also will be called to take up our cross, suffering at the hands of those who reject God's authority and force their will on us. When that happens, Jesus wants us to do as he did, praying, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

Mark 11:24-26 (NIV)

²⁴ “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

This is how the Babylons of this world fall and the kingdom of God comes on earth: through the cross of the Messiah and the kingdom that comes to life in him.

3.3 Rejecting the Messiah's authority (11:27-33)

Two anointed leaders represented the Lord's authority in ancient Israel: the high priest (Leviticus 8:12) and the king (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13). Ideally, the two anointed leaders worked together, though that didn't always happen.

Both roles ceased during the 70 years of exile to Babylon. In 515 BC, the returning Jews built a second temple and anointed a high priest named Joshua. Since they were still ruled by foreigners, they could not anoint a king. Zerubbabel (descendant of David) was told to wait until the Spirit of the LORD anointed a king (Zechariah 4:6). One day they would see the king riding into Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9-11), but in the meantime the high priest bore the responsibility of the Branch from David's line and wear the crown (Zechariah 6:11-13).

After centuries of carrying that authority alone, the temple was not about to recognize the authority of the king:

Mark 11:27-28 (NIV)

²⁷ They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”

What they're implying is that Jesus has claimed authority for himself. A true king is proclaimed by a prophet who recognizes the LORD's anointed (e.g. 1 Samuel 16:12). What prophet named Jesus as the king to represent God's reign after all these years?

Mark 11:29-33 (NIV)

²⁹ Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

³⁰ John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”

³¹ They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’

³² But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

³³ So they answered Jesus, “We don't know.”

Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

John the Baptist was the prophet who announced the restoration of the LORD's reign through the one he had chosen, “*the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worth to stoop down and untie*” (Mark 1:7). If John was speaking for God (a prophet), then the authority given to Jesus as God's anointed was from God. That would make the temple leaders rebels against God's authority, a den of robbers.

But the high priest and his family were Sadducees. They regarded the Torah as the important part of Scriptures. The Prophets were merely calling people back to the Torah. It was okay for John to do that, but they did not regard him as speaking for God. If they said that out loud, though, it could start a riot, since most of the people thought it was amazing to have a prophet speaking for God in their own time.

The temple leaders do not accept that God has anointed a king. They'd prefer to see him dead rather than recognize his authority. So how does Jesus use his God-given authority? He confronts them not with violence but with stories.

3.4 The Son and the tenants in God's vineyard (12:1-12)

In Galilee, Jesus used parables of the kingdom to teach a people who were “*ever seeing but never perceiving*” who God had appointed as king (Mark 4:11-12). Now he takes the same approach in Jerusalem:

Mark 12:1-8 (NIV)

¹ Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

⁶ “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

⁷ “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

Who do you think are the tenants in God's vineyard?

Who are the servants God sent over the years to call them to fruitfulness?

Who is the beloved Son whom God has now sent?

The main point of the story is that, just as they abused the prophets God sent them, the temple leaders will not hesitate to kill the heir to whom God has given authority, the Son whom God has chosen as king. (For more detail, see Matthew 23:27-39.)

This is not very subtle. Jesus calls them out as murderers for what they will do to him, and *they knew he had spoken this parable against them* (verse 12).

Jesus' question is whether the landowner would accept this from his servants, or call them to account as expected in the Law:

Mark 12:9 (NIV)

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do?

He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

Jesus does not fight these murderous leaders. He warns them that God will deal with them. They may kill him to keep their power, but they will not keep their power. The house that has become *a den of robbers* (11:18) will fall and they will lose their tenancy. *The mountain of the house of the LORD will be cast into the depths* (11:23). As God did in Jeremiah's day, God will evict them from the land, *giving the vineyard to others* (verse 9). On the temple mount, *not one stone will be left on another; every one will be thrown down* (13:2). As war comes to Jerusalem, he advises *those who are in Judea to flee to the mountains* (13:14).

But Jesus' main message is not just that God will remove the robbers from his house.

Mark 12:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ “Haven't you read this passage of Scripture [Psalm 118:22-23]:

‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”

Jesus was not merely proof-texting a verse about rejection. Psalm 118 describes how God would restore a son of David to reign over his people after the exile.

It begins with a call to worship the LORD for his enduring faithful love (verses 1-5). Then this leader speaks of his suffering: *“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies”* (verses 6-7). He declares, *“I will not die but live. ... He has not given me over to death”* (verses 17-18). Because the LORD saved him (verse 21), *the stone the builders rejected become the cornerstone*, the foundation for the restoration of God's reign as a new covenant and temple where God lives among his people (verse 22). The Messiah does not bring down the builders who threatened his life, for God does: *the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes* (verse 23).

The rest of the Psalm contains the words the crowds were singing as Jesus rode into the capital: *“Hosanna ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. ... With boughs in hand, join the festal procession up to the horns of the altar”* (verses 25-27).

So do Jerusalem's leaders repent, turning to recognize the king God has sent them?

Mark 12:12 (NIV)

¹² Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

The conflict between king and temple is not over.

3.5 Paying dues to Caesar or to God? (12:13-17)

The Sinai covenant established Israel as the nation under God's rule after he freed them from Pharaoh. But for half their life they've been serving human rulers again. In Jesus' time that was Caesar. So were they dishonouring the name of the LORD when they recognized Caesar as Lord by paying him taxes?

That's the trap question they ask Jesus. If he's the Messiah sent to restore God's reign, he cannot say, "Yes, pay taxes to Caesar." If he says, "No, give tribute to God alone," the Romans will arrest him and hang him for treason. Either way, Jesus loses.

Mark 12:13-17 (NIV)

¹³ Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴ They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶ They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

Jesus asks them to bring the common coin they trade with. He asks whose image is on the coin, and whose name. Since it has Caesar's image and name, it seems you have Caesar's coins, give it back to him. That's Jesus' advice.

Then Jesus adds the clanger: "As you return Caesar's currency to him, give God what belongs to him." What creature bears God's image? (Genesis 1:27) What nation bore God's name? (Numbers 6:27). "No other gods, no other image, and no other name" were the foundational laws of the Sinai covenant (Exodus 20:3-7).

Jesus left them holding the blasphemous coin with the image of the emperor who claimed to rule the world. The inscription on the front proclaimed Augustus to be the son of a god, and the inscription on the back named him as the high priest. "Give this blasphemous coin back, and give yourselves to the sovereign whose image and name you bear," the anointed king told his people.

3.6 Relying on God to undo death (12:18-27)

Resurrection is central to Jesus' rescue operation for the earth. This is how he expects to receive the throne after Jerusalem's leaders kill him (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34).

But resurrection is not prominent in the Hebrew Scriptures. You may find a reference in the Prophets (Isaiah 26:19) or later post-exilic Writings (Daniel 12:2), but you don't find it in the Torah so it's not something the Sadducees believed.

They told vulnerable people that the hope of meeting your loved one in the next life was misguided:

Mark 12:18-23 (NIV)

¹⁸ Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹ “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

If your partner marries again after you die, who gets to be with them in the next life? Sadducean teaching relied on the Torah, so they based this story on the law that required a man to marry his brother’s widow to ensure she was cared for and the family line didn’t die out (Deuteronomy 25:5).

Mark 12:24-27 (NIV)

²⁴ Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵ When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶ Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

Jesus approached the Scriptures differently. The Sadducees treated the Law as instruction on what was permissible and what was not. Jesus treated the Scriptures as *the power of God*, the revelation of who God is and what God is doing to save the world (verse 24). How God uses his power reveals the character of God. Whatever text you’re reading the crucial question is, “What does this reveal about God and how God relates to us?”

Verse 25 then deals with the question of who gets the partner who was married more than once. Marriage is part of this creation. Relationships in eternity are different. Angels don’t have sexual union, and neither will we.

So will we still recognize each other in the life to come? Of course we will. I can’t imagine the angel having to visit a lot of people to ask, “Who are you?” until he finally finds Mary. The angel knew things about Mary that she doesn’t know about herself, like that she was the most *highly favoured* woman (Luke 1:28).

The relationships we will have in eternity involve a depth of love greater than anything we can imagine now: *Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see*

face to face. Now I know only in part; then I shall know fully as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The text Jesus uses to prove that God's relationships with us last forever is an odd one. Instead of quoting Isaiah or Daniel, he quotes from the Torah, the passage where God reveals his identity. Moses is living among the Midianites who think he's Egyptian (Exodus 2:19). He's *a foreigner in a foreign land* (2:22), not a Hebrew.

But there in the land of Midian, the God of the Hebrews reveals himself to Moses. The LORD's attendant appears like flames in a bush. Moses goes to see what this means and finds himself in the presence of the heavenly ruler who tells Moses: "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.*" (Exodus 3:6).

It's more than 400 years since Abraham's time. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all deceased. But God does not say, "I was the God of Abraham." The LORD is still in relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Death is not the end. As Jesus puts it, "*He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*"

Jesus is relying on the God of the living to raise him when the Sadducees who run the temple think they can be rid of him by handing him over to death. Jesus warns them, "*You are badly mistaken!*" (verse 27)

If you read Exodus 3 just for information, you would not reach the conclusion Jesus did. He read Scripture relationally: it's the revelation of God and God's faithfulness in relation to us. This relational hermeneutic changes how we read. Without this reading like this, we *know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God* (verse 24).

How does what Jesus' relational hermeneutic affect the way you read Scripture?

3.7 Conclusion

Jesus faced two very different responses as he arrived at the capital to save his people:

- Crowds welcomed *the son of David* arriving *in the name of the Lord* to save them (*hosanna*). Can their words and actions help our prayer and worship?
- Leaders saw Jesus' authority as a threat to their autonomy. How does Jesus' response help us speak to those who don't want Jesus' authority today?

Jesus is a polarizing figure. The gospel calls us to recognize Jesus as our God-anointed king. That's the confrontation point we can't avoid: his identity as the Christ, and his mission to restore the reign of heaven to earth. But we can learn from Jesus how to respond creatively: with stories, not swords.

In preparation for next week, **read Mark 12:28 –13:37**. It's all about Jesus' kingship.

4 The city that rejects its king (Mark 12:28–13:37)

Jesus rode into Jerusalem acclaimed as the son of David arriving in the name of the Lord to save his people. But the temple would not accept his authority, setting up the confrontation that results in his crucifixion by the end of the week. Any questions on what we covered last week before we proceed?

Tonight we hear Jesus publicly warning the leaders not to reject their king (12:28-37), and then privately answering his disciples' question about whether Jerusalem would actually fall and how he will become king (Mark 13).

4.1 The way to God's kingdom (12:28-34)

Of the 613 commands in the Torah, which was the most important?

Mark 12:28-31 (NIV)

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this:

'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ **Love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' [Deuteronomy 6:4–5]

³¹ "The second is this:

'**Love your neighbour** as yourself.' [Leviticus 19:18]

There is no commandment greater than these."

Jesus' answer was not controversial. He chose the passage from Deuteronomy 6 known as the *Shema*. (*Shema* is the opening Hebrew word, meaning "Listen.") The *Shema* still is regarded as the foundational creed of Judaism. Observant Jews repeat the *Shema* in prayer three times a day.

Jesus wasn't asked for the second command, but he gave it anyway. This theme was present in Judaism, but the Messiah brought it to prominence. His brother calls it *the royal law* (James 2:8). His close friend treated the second command as the litmus test for whether we're doing the first (1 John 4:19-21).

The guy who asked the question had given Jesus an easy one. He was pleased with how Jesus had put the Sadducees in their place as "*badly mistaken*" (verse 27).

Mark 12:32-33 (NIV)

³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Yes, the guy was having a dig at those who run the temple. They gave God burnt offerings every morning and night, as well as the sacrifices everyone brought for festivals like Passover. But God is looking for a responsive people rather than rituals:

Psalm 50:9-13 (NIV)

⁹ “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰ for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ...

¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. ¹³ Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?”



If that was so even in Old Testament times, we cannot treat the cross of Christ as a blood sacrifice required by God. Hebrews 7–10 explains how the rituals of the previous covenant have reached fulfilment in Christ, but it's important not to import pagan views of sacrifice into our understanding of the cross.¹² God did not want the temple leaders in Jerusalem to sacrifice his son: that's called sin.

Mark 12:34 (NIV)

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

“Not far from the kingdom?” The guy needs to take the next step and recognize who is king. That's the entry point for the kingdom of God.

Hearing the challenge Jesus gave to this supporter, no one else is game to say anything in support or challenge of Jesus. So, he takes the initiative, putting the temple leaders on the spot.

4.2 God deals with Messiah's enemies (12:35-37)

Mark 12:35-37 (NIV)

³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?

³⁶ David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“ ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.” ’ [Psalm 110:1]

³⁷ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

¹² N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (HarperCollins, 2018).

Have you noticed how often Jesus refers to the Psalms? Especially the Davidic psalms? The psalms of David describe how David and his sons constantly struggled against enemies who did not recognize them as the LORD'S anointed. And from the very first Davidic psalm, his enemies are from his own family (Psalm 3:title).

When we studied the Psalms, we saw how they're arranged into five books that tell Israel's story.¹³ David's psalms dominate the first two books (56 of 72 psalms). The kingdom falls in Book 3, so David is almost absent from Book 4 (just 2 psalms). But David returns in Book 5 with the promise of the kingdom of God restored in the Messiah (15 psalms). Psalms 108–110 are the earliest Davidic psalms in Book 5.

Psalm 110:title-2 (NIV)

Of David. A psalm.

¹ The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

² The LORD will extend your mighty sceptre from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of your enemies!"

Who are the people in this Psalm? *The LORD* (block letters) is the covenant name in Hebrew (*YHWH*). He addresses someone David calls, "*My lord!*" David was the fountainhead of the entire kingdom in Old Testament times, so who is this? God is enthroning someone greater than David.

The enemies are still here. David's lord is to reign while God brings his enemies under his authority. The Messiah receives the sceptre of his father David to rule from Zion even while his enemies remain on the scene.

If you ever wondered how Jesus knew he was not to fight like David did, here's your answer. This is why King Jesus has not been collecting an army to subdue the rebellion against his authority. He knows God will raise him up and give him the kingship even if they kill him.

But what will God do with his enemies if the temple has become *a den of robbers* bent on taking the Messiah's authority through violence? Is this the end of the temple leadership, the high priesthood descended from Aaron and the Levites? Would God remove the temple and the Levitical priesthood, turning their authority over to the king from the tribe of Judah instead?

Psalm 110:4 (NIV)

⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind:

"You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."



An Egyptian throne with footstool, from the time of King David. (Allen Browne, 2016).

¹³ <https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/07/22/the-story-of-the-psalms/>

Genesis 14:18 describes Melchizedek as both a *king* and a *priest of God Most High*. So here's the precedent for God to remove the priesthood from the Messiah's enemies and give it to the king who is not a descendant of Levi.

This is why Jesus keeps referring to the Psalms. The Messiah inherits and fulfils all the promises God gave to David.

4.3 Pretence versus practice (12:38-44)

That was really putting the temple leaders in their place, and the crowd enjoyed it:

Mark 12:38-40 (NIV)

³⁸ As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

Jesus' critique is that those in power over God's people are not serving for the love of God and the love of the people. They're missing the main message of the Torah and the Prophets (verses 28-34). They're serving their own interests.

For example, when a widow could not pay her debt, they saw an opportunity to acquire her assets cheaply. Instead of caring for the flock, they're *devouring* them. That was Ezekiel's explanation of why the kingdom fell in Old Testament times: “*This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them*” (Ezekiel 34:10).

The Messiah himself is among those whom the leaders would chew up and spit out to feed themselves (compare Matthew 23:27-38). The city that refuses to follow the king God sent them will fall again. He tells his people the city cannot be defended, so when you see foreigners taking Jerusalem run for the hills. Yet even in the face of this disaster, God still gives the kingship to the Son of Man. That's all coming in Mark 13.

Jesus reserved his strongest words of condemnation for the shepherds of Israel, the leaders who are meant to be caring for God's people but only care for themselves. But among the struggling people are some who do have a deep and genuine trust in God:

Mark 12:41-44 (NIV)

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

We're still talking about this amazing widow's faith because the king noticed her. What a contrast to how the religious leaders taking advantage of widows.



4.4 The temple will fall (13:1-4)

Now we come to a passage that some understand as referring to the end of the world, while others understand as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. The NIV tries to have it both ways, with the heading: *The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times*.

So what is this chapter about? Was Jesus speaking of what would happen to Jerusalem within 40 years, the destruction of the city and temple by Roman armies in AD 70? Or was he speaking of events that are still future for us?

Mark 13:1-2 (NIV)

¹ As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

² “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

The disciples were not tourists who'd never seen the temple. They were responding as the sons of Korah had in Psalm 84: “*How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty!*” Every year for festivals like Passover they came to *the courts of the LORD* to meet *the living God* and to pray for the coming of *your anointed* (84:9).

But there's more than that in their words. Remember when Jesus first told them they were off to Jerusalem where *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law* (8:31)? They wanted Jesus to avoid this conflict: *He spoke plainly about this, but Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him* (8:32).

Now they've arrived, the conflict between king and temple has escalated. He overturned this *den of robbers*, a *withered fig tree*, a *mountain to be cast down* (11:15-23). He said God would *remove the tenants* from his vineyard because they rejected his Son (12:7-8). Maybe the disciples are still asking Jesus to back off, to avoid conflict with the temple.

Jesus won't back off. He's adamant. The house meant to bear God's name has become a den of robbers who will kill to take the Son's inheritance for themselves. Brick by brick, the massive stones and magnificent buildings will be reduced to rubble.

Mark 13:3-4 (NIV)

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,
⁴ “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”



The temple mount from the Mount of Olives. (Photo: Allen Browne, 2017)

The disciples cannot imagine the temple mount without the temple. Their question is, “When?”

Jesus' response is the longest monologue in Mark's Gospel. The king speaks of:

- a) the difficulties God's people face (verses 5-13)
- b) Judea's distress at Jerusalem's fall (verses 14-19)
- c) God shaking down the powers that run the world (verses 20-27)
- d) the Son of Man receiving the kingdom without human forces (verses 28-31)
- e) the importance of his servants being about the king's business (verses 32-37).

Let's take these one at a time.

4.5 The difficulties God's people face (13:5-13)

Jesus is very aware that he is not delivering the kind of kingship people want. They expected a son of David to fight their enemies and liberate Jerusalem. Instead, Jesus is speaking of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Disillusioned people will ask the question John asked as he faced death in Herod's prison: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Matthew 11:2).

Mark 13:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.”

Within 100 years of Jesus' time, a number of people claimed to be God's anointed leader to free his people from foreign rule. All these rebellions were unsuccessful, usually ending in the death of the so-called messiah and some of his supporters.¹⁴

At the heart of these messiah movements was the belief that Israel was meant to be a kingdom under God. God freed Jacob's family from Pharaoh, and freed his people through the judges and kings. God wanted to free his people from the powers that conquered them such as Babylon, Persia, Greece, the Seleucids, and Rome. Their

¹⁴ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (SPCK, 1992), 170–181.

occupation by foreigners was the result of centuries filled with wars and rumours of wars. Jesus warned:

Mark 13:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ “When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.”

Did you notice what Jesus said? I've heard evangelists use this text to achieve the exact opposite. They list all the wars, earthquakes, and famines of our time as proof that the end is near, whereas Jesus said not to regard these tragedies as signs of the end: “*The end is still to come.*” These preachers want people to be alarmed so they will make decisions, whereas Jesus said, “*Do not be alarmed*” (verse 7). If people are alarmed, we need to reassure them that God's plans to redeem the world are still on track, that the current painful events are nothing more than the labour pains of what God will ultimately bring to birth.

God has given the world into the management of his Messiah, even though it may not feel that way when other rulers are making you suffer:

Mark 13:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

Jesus' disciples certainly understood what it was like to be called before local councils to give an account of what they meant by declaring Jesus as king. They were flogged by Synagogue leaders who wanted to suppress the message that Jesus is the Messiah. They were called before governors and kings to present evidence of Jesus' kingship. You'll find all of that in the Book of Acts, throughout church history, and in the present day. The Messiah is reigning *in the midst of his enemies* (12:36; Psalm 110).

So why does God leave his enemies in place? Why hasn't he made them part of the Messiah's footstool already? What's he waiting for? God's clock is not set by wars, earthquakes, famines or disasters. There is one reason for God's patience:

“First, it is necessary to announce the good news to all the nations.”

The **gospel** is *the good news about Jesus the Messiah* (Mark 1:1), the announcement of the restoration of God's reign (1:2-3 quoting Isaiah 40), the coming of the great ruler (John's message in 1:7), the voice from heaven announcing the arrival of the Spirit-empowered Son (1:10-11), the good news that the time had come for God's reign to come near as Jesus himself described the gospel (1:15). It's *the gospel of the kingdom* as Matthew 24:14 reports Jesus' words here.

The gospel is God's proclamation that he has rescued the world from serving the powers of sin and death, transferring it into the reign of his anointed ruler. That's the message we bear to the rulers of the nations. King Jesus appointed Paul "*to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings*" (Acts 9:15), so Paul *appeals to Caesar* (25:11) so he could *stand trial before Caesar* (27:24) where *he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about Ruler Jesus the Messiah—with all boldness and without hindrance* (28:31). That's the trajectory of the Book of Acts (compare 1:8).

Mark 13:11 (NIV)

"Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."

It's hard to defend Jesus' kingship in a court that relies on human law. As Jesus explained in John 16:7-11, the Holy Spirit is his legal advocate in the world that does not judge right and wrong correctly. Holy Spirit's testimony affirms Jesus authority, empowering us to do the same (John 15:26-27).

The trouble is that the issue of Jesus' kingship divides the world:

Mark 13:12-13 (NIV)

¹² "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child.

Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

¹³ Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

When a court case divides a family, is it worth pursuing? The matter of whether Jesus is the Saviour of the world is worth holding on to at all costs (Matthew 10:32-36).

4.6 Judea's distress at Jerusalem's fall (13:14-19)

Having framed the Messiah's kingship in this way, Jesus turns to what it will be like for his people when Rome rips apart what was meant to be God's Holy City:

Mark 13:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. ¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak."

What does '*the abomination that causes desolation*' refer to? Between the destruction of Solomon's temple by Babylon in 586 BC and the destruction of the second temple by Rome in AD 70, there was a moment when the temple ceased to function. A gentile ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes IV overpowered Jerusalem, entered the temple, erected an idol to Zeus, and sacrificed a pig on the altar. For three years, the temple was defunct.

Daniel described this temporary cessation as '*the abomination that causes desolation*' (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). That's the reference the reader is meant to understand. Jesus' audience would see Rome invading the temple, defiling the Holy Place, bringing the sacrifices to an end. It would cease to function.

These words are specifically addressed to *those who live in Judea* (verse 14). He tells them not to fight but to *flee to the mountains*. Just as Jeremiah told his generation they would be slaughtered if they tried to defend the city when Babylon attacked, Jesus told them to escape *when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies* (Luke 21:20). Forget your possessions. Run for your life. Don't go back to get anything, not even the coat you need to survive the cold nights (verses 15-16).

What I find astounding is the empathy the king feels for his people:

Mark 13:17-19 (NIV)

¹⁷ “How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter, ¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equalled again.”

Imagine a very pregnant woman trying to run to escape the soldiers. Imagine a young mother hiding in a cave with the other refugees telling her, “Get rid of that crying baby, or we all die.” These are the horrors of war (verse 17).

If it's winter, the vulnerable may not survive (verse 18). Matthew 24:20 says Jesus also told them to pray their flight would not take place *on the Sabbath*. Jews would travel only a limited distance of the Sabbath, so they might not be able to escape. All of this makes perfect sense if we're talking about the first generation of Jewish Christians who still lived by the customs they'd inherited, but it makes no sense if you want to interpret Jesus' words for a later time in history.

Jesus takes responsibility for the unbearable distress of his people (verse 19). If he'd followed the way of Joshua and the judges, and the kings who fought to free their nation, it would not be like this. But Jesus believed he was to save his people with a cross, not a sword. In taking the way of the cross, Jesus was giving them a cross also. It is through self-sacrifice that he would receive the kingdom (Mark 8:34–9:1).

Jesus describes this as the worst time for his people. When humans claimed the knowledge of good and evil for themselves in the beginning, it had a devastating effect on creation, so God called Abraham to create the nation that would restore the blessing of his reign to the world. When that nation fell to Babylon, God promised the restoration of his reign in the Messiah. When they rejected the Messiah God sent to save them, it was the worst of times for God's people (verse 19).

4.7 Overturning the powers (13:20-31)

Again, Jesus is so conscious that his people may seek other messiahs because he has not met their expectations and his people have suffered as a result:

Mark 13:20-25 (NIV)

²⁰ “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

²¹ At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁴ “But in those days, following that distress,

“ ‘the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light; [Isaiah 13:10]

²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” [Isaiah 34:4]

Please don't impose our modern cosmology on the imagery Jesus was using. This is not about blood moons, eclipses, or literal stars falling from the sky. The ancients viewed the stars as the gods that reigned in the heavens. Earthly rulers claimed to be in power because of the starry hosts, so if the starry hosts fall it means the earthly rulers fall with the gods they trusted.

That's how Isaiah was using these terms. Specifically, Isaiah 13 is *an oracle regarding Babylon* (Isaiah 13:1). It progresses into *a taunt against the king of Babylon* (14:4). Nebuchadnezzar claimed to be the brightest of all stars (*the morning star*), but Isaiah describes God bringing him down to earth: *How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations* (Isaiah 14:12).

In the same way, Isaiah 34 is God addressing the leaders of the nations who claim the starry hosts gave them power. So when they fall the starry hosts fall, they fall.

Unlike the nations, Jesus does receive the kingship directly from God, without the backing of earthly armies:

Mark 13:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶ “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”

Jesus chose phrases from Daniel 7. After trying to get the rulers to acknowledge that power is given by God (Daniel 1–6), Daniel sees the rulers of this world as warring beasts bent on taking God's kingdom too (Daniel 7:1-8). It would take an act of God

to remove authority from the beasts and give it to someone more human-like, someone who inherits the authority God gave us when he made us in his image:

Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV)

¹³ In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like **a son of man**, coming **with the clouds of heaven**.

He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

¹⁴ He was given authority, **glory and sovereign power**; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

That's what Jesus is relying on as he faces the beasts who will tear him apart in Jerusalem. Without relying on a human army, he will come to power as the Ancient of Days raises him up. Supported by the heavenly hosts, he will gather his scattered flock from the ends of the earth where they've been scattered while they had no shepherd (compare Mark 6:34).

When God raised up the one whom the rulers killed, Jesus received *all authority in heaven and on earth* (Matthew 28:18). The disciples saw the Father give him the kingdom that arrived without human force in their own lifetime, just as Jesus had said (Mark 8:34–9:1). He now repeats that promise:

Mark 13:28-31 (NIV)

²⁸ “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

God's kingship is enduring, more enduring than the realms themselves. That's what Jesus says about the enduring authority God has given him over both realms.

Finally, Jesus responds to the “*When?*” question they asked back in verse 4:

Mark 13:32 (NIV)

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

The “*When?*” question is not a useful one. Pharisees asked *when the kingdom of God would come*, and Jesus told them it wasn't something they could observe. Instead he told them how the kingdom comes: “*The kingdom of God is in your midst*” for the king was already in their midst (Luke 17:21).

After his resurrection, the disciples asked him, “Is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” Again, he said that the wrong question: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” Instead, Jesus told them

how the kingdom comes, not in an instant but progressively: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:4-8).

For those of us who recognize the king, the kingdom is already here and functioning. It's not fully here yet, for there are still people who don't yet recognize the king.

That's why it's so important for his servants to be about the king's business now, as we wait for the fullness of God's reign to restore the whole creation:

Mark 13:33-37 (NIV)

³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

³⁴ It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

4.8 Conclusion

We've understood Mark 13 as Jesus' explanation of how the world becomes the kingdom of God. The city that rejected its king falls. The rulers who do not serve God fall. The murdered son of man is raised up with heaven's support, inheriting the authority God gave humans, leading the world into the glorious reign of his Father.

There are other ways to understand this chapter. Some treat the word *distress* in verses 19 and 24 as a technical term for a future period of 3–7 years: the *Tribulation*. They debate whether the *Rapture* is pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation. *Rapture* is another technical term for God snatching the godly out of the world, who later return with Jesus' second coming. *Rapture* is not a word found in the Bible, and the view is a montage assembled from various places since no single passages teaches this sequence of events.

Some interpret *the fig tree* (verse 28) as the nation of Israel restored by the League of Nations in 1947. A popular book by Hal Lindsay predicted Jesus would return within 40 years of 1947 (a *generation*), but 80 years later he was clearly wrong. Jesus told the generation listening to his words in AD 30 that they would see everything he'd spoken about in their lifetime.

Eschatology (the study of things will end) can be divisive. What are your thoughts?

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In preparation for next week, read **Mark 14**.

5 Preparing for the death of the king (Mark 14)

We've reached the second last day of Jesus' life. We saw the crowds welcoming Jesus as their long-awaited king arriving at the capital, but the temple rejected his authority. Jesus confronted Jerusalem's leaders with stories, not swords (Mark 11–12). Privately, he disclosed the tragedy Jerusalem was bringing on itself: the city that would not follow his leadership would be invaded, and its temple demolished (Mark 13).

Any questions on what we covered previously before we continue to Mark 14?

5.1 Anointed for burial (14:1-11)

His end is near. The only question is when:

Mark 14:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

Passover was one of three annual festivals everyone was to attend (Deuteronomy 16). It celebrated their liberation from slavery in Egypt, as death “passed over” the households that identified as belonging to the LORD (Exodus 12). It was the foundation of their nation as they entered into covenant relationship with the LORD (Exodus 24).

But the nation had fallen to other rulers again. God promised them a new exodus and a new covenant to reestablish them as his kingdom. That gave Passover an unpredictable element: some, like the zealots, might use this time to try to overthrow Roman rule.

The temple leaders knew this festival was a time for caution.

Mark 14:3-9 (NIV)

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could.

She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”



Alabaster jar with seal.

Bethany was a just short walk from Jerusalem. Simon is no longer a leper if he's hosting this party, but the memory of his uncleanness might be unsavoury for those who regard ritual purity as desirable in Passover week.

Why did the woman approach Jesus and pour out her life savings on his body? In a society where men and women were segregated, even at the synagogue, Simon's guests were uncomfortable with her expression of adoration for Jesus.

Ben Witherington provides the background:

Nard was a well-known eastern perfume with a very potent fragrance which came from a root found in India. The cracking of the vessel indicates that the woman intends to perform an extravagant act, not saving any of the perfume for later. ... The perfume was worth a year's wages of a day labourer, which leads Hurtado to suggest that "the substance may have been a family heirloom, something that could be sold in times of financial need." If so, this woman is acting very much like the widow with the two lepta, using all her social security for an act of devotion.¹⁵

Unlike the crowd that *rebuked her harshly* (verse 5), Jesus does not question her motives. He accepts her gift as more significant than she knows: "*pouring perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial*" (verse 8).

That was the traditional way of honouring a person's body before it began to decay. Jesus died just before the Sabbath began on Friday evening. The first opportunity to prepare his corpse would be Sunday morning, and that will prove to be too late (16:1).

This wealthy woman has taken the only opportunity to take care of Jesus' body like this (verse 8). Before Jesus bears in his body the stench of human sin and death, she has done what humans ought to do: honoured him with the aroma of her recognition and devotion.

The disciples missed the miracle. Yes, Jesus' kingdom values include caring for the poor, but here's a rich person acknowledging Jesus' worth. That's more difficult than getting a camel through the eye of a needle—something the disciples regarded as impossible. Jesus assured them that God knows how to bring the rich and the poor together in the kingdom of his Messiah: "*For people this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God*" (Mark 10:25-27). And here's the evidence: a wealthy person letting go of it all for the sake of the Messiah. That's worship.¹⁶

This wealthy woman became the forerunner of what the gospel calls all nations to do: recognize God's anointed as our Saviour and Lord (verse 9). She valued Jesus in a way that will never be forgotten.

¹⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2001), 367.

¹⁶ The word worship comes from the Old English word *weorthscipe*, meaning 'worthiness, acknowledgement of worth. See the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Judas doesn't believe it. He wants a social transformation where the rich are brought low and the kingdom is given to the poor. If Jesus is accepting extravagant gifts for his burial, the Jesus movement is coming to a dead end in his view:

Mark 14:10-11 (NIV)

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

The world of business and politics tends to divide over rich and poor. Jesus draws us all together under his leadership: the widow who trusted God with the little she had (12:44), and the wealthy woman whose extravagant gift honoured the king in ways that went beyond her understanding. What do you think?

5.2 Passover and the new covenant (14:12-26)

Passover is a week-long festival. The meal celebrating their release from slavery was probably held on Thursday night. ¹⁷ Each household prepared a lamb to recall the events of the night in Egypt when the LORD freed them from Pharaoh. Unleavened bread recalled how suddenly their deliverance arrived: no time for bread to rise.

Passover is still a major annual event for Jews today, but they do not serve lamb because animals should only be sacrificed at the temple, and there is no temple. ¹⁸

Mark 14:12-16 (NIV)

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

¹⁶ The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

Jesus is not like earthly kings. Herod lived in Galilee, but had a house in Jerusalem too. He had staff to prepare his meals and guards to protect him from traitors. God's anointed king borrows a room and asks his students prepare the meal. And among them is a traitor *looking for an opportunity to hand him over* (verse 10).

¹⁷ There is some difficulty in synchronizing the chronology of the Passover in John's Gospel with the Synoptics.

¹⁸ https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/3288556/jewish/Can-We-Sacrifice-a-Paschal-Lamb-Nowadays.htm accessed 2026-08-08.

In the first century, people reclined around a low table for a meal, not on chairs:

Mark 14:17-21 (NIV)

¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.

¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

²⁰ “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper* (c. 1495–1498). Wikipedia.

Picture the body language. As each one asks Jesus about their loyalty, do you see his eyes connecting with them each in turn? Eventually, Judas joins the choir so as not to stand out like a sore thumb: “*Surely you don’t mean me?*”

Betrayal hurts so much. King David knew: *Even my close friend, someone I trusted, who shared my bread, has turned against me* (Psalm 41:9). Perhaps taking his cue from his ancestor, Jesus leans in towards Judas, offering him his bread.

I doubt Judas could return Jesus’ searching gaze. I doubt Judas could take the bread.

It’s clear now. The Son of Man inherits all that’s wrong with the world, including the betrayal and the violence of those who kill to keep their power.

But the Son of Man is not like the beasts. He does not kill this traitor. He leaves Judas to God’s justice (verse 21). That’s what we’re called to do too (e.g. Romans 12:2-21).

The disclosure of the traitor provides an opportunity for Jesus speak of giving his life:

Mark 14:22-25 (NIV)

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. ²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

This is arguably the most important teaching anywhere in the Bible regarding what the death of Jesus means for us. Instead of taking the life of the traitor, Jesus offers his life as the means to reconcile heaven and earth, our eternal sovereign and the world that betrays and assassinates God's anointed.

In Jesus' body, we see two truths: the world seeks to eliminate him, and God raises him up. The disciples eat the Passover bread that represents both the death of the lamb and their emancipation to be kingdom led by the one God raises to life to lead us.

Jesus' statement about the *blood of the covenant* (verse 24) refers to Exodus 24:8, the original covenant that formed Israel into a nation under God's reign. When that kingdom fell, God promised *a new covenant* (Jeremiah 31:31-33). They would be God's kingdom again when David's son rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, bringing peace to the nations as *the blood of the covenant* brought a new exodus for God's people (Zechariah 9:9-11).

The new covenant is established with Jesus' blood. His blood declares two truths: the full extent of human sin is visible in the bloodshed of God's Messiah. But God's response to this murder is to raise him up and give him the kingship over the world—a new covenant in his blood that brings the earth back to heaven's governance.

Jesus explains this was his last meal with them before his death (verse 25). Next time he shares a meal with them it will be because he has been raised up and given the kingship, as he told them (Mark 8:38–9:1; Luke 24:25-49; John 21:13; Acts 1:4).

Mark 14:26 (NIV)

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

This is the only time Jesus sang (|| Matthew 26:30). There's no record of a gathered church singing in Acts either, just some prisoners singing in jail (Acts 16:25). So why do churches today focus so much on singing? Worship is far more than singing.

What would Jesus have sung? Dick France says it was probably the Psalms:

The singing of the 'Egyptian Hallel' (Psalms 113–118) was an established part of the ritual of the Passover meal. According to the Mishnah, Psalms 113–114 would be sung before the meal and Psalms 115–118 after it (*m. Pes.* 10:5–7).¹⁹

Psalm 118 was significant. The crowds used Psalm 118 to welcome King Jesus to Jerusalem (Mark 11:9). Jesus used Psalm 118 to warn the temple leaders not to reject the Son God had sent them (12:10-11).

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 2002), 574.

5.3 When following Jesus is too difficult (14:27-31)

Jesus understood that the cross was a bridge too far for his followers:

Mark 14:27-28 (NIV)

²⁷ “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written:

“ ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’

²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

The quotation is from Zechariah 13:7. After Zechariah declared that a son of David would ride into Jerusalem as the king restoring God's reign (9:9-17), the next two chapters focus on the *shepherds* who will lead them (fourteen times in Zechariah 10–11). Tragically, the shepherd would be struck down, and God's flock would be scattered as they were in the exile (Zechariah 13:7), yet God's reign would still be established: *The LORD will be king over the whole earth* (Zechariah 14:9).

Jesus understands these chapters of Zechariah as applying to the Messiah. He will be struck down as the shepherd of God's people, crucified as “*the king of the Jews*” (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). The little flock following the shepherd would be scattered in disarray, no longer knowing what they believed. Yet the Father would raise him up, and he would *go ahead of them*, leading them as a Middle Eastern shepherd.

Jesus referred to Zechariah 9–14 several times. It's one of the passages that informed Jesus about how he would become king: by dying and being raised up by his Father. But his followers are still not prepared to see the Messiah arrested and placed on trial:

Mark 14:29-31 (NIV)

²⁹ Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

³⁰ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

5.4 When there's no answer to his prayer (14:32-42)

Jesus is now facing death. Sometimes people imagine Jesus as all-knowing and almost floating above the ground, unaffected by pain and anguish. Mark won't allow that. Jesus' emotional state is *deeply distressed and troubled* (verse 32), *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death* (verse 34). His little flock will scatter as they see him struck down.

Mark 14:32-36 (NIV)

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”



Gethsemane. (Photo: Allen Browne, 2017)

He calls on his *Abba*—the Aramaic word for “father.” Surely no father wants to see his child going through this. As King Théoden said beside his son’s grave in *Lord of the Rings*, “No parent should have to bury their child.”

Isn’t everything possible for God? Surely there’s another way?

The anguished Son waits for his Father’s help. Tonight there is only silence.

“*Take this cup from me*,” Jesus prayed. There is no response. He will give his life.

Mark 14:37-42 (NIV)

³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

His disciples are no help at all. He asked them to “*keep watch*” (verse 34), but his watchmen fell asleep (verses 37, 40, 41). For the rulers of this world, that would be a capital offence. But tonight it’s the king who is giving his life for his people, as they fall asleep with no understanding of what he is doing for them.

He wakes them to the reality of what the world is doing. *The Son of Man* (the one who inherits the authority God gave humans in the beginning) *is delivered into the hands of sinners* (the leaders who have taken authority into their own hands).

Last term we discussed how Jesus did not label people as “sinners” like the Pharisees did. Mark 14:41 is the exception: Jesus labels the rulers who are about to be rid of him as *sinners*. The ultimate expression of human sin is the rebellion against God’s authority, expressed in assassinating his anointed.

5.5 Arrested by temple guards (14:43-52)

Judas guessed where to find Jesus:

Mar k 14:43-51 (NIV)

⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸ “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

Mark says a *crowd armed with swords and clubs* had been *sent from the chief priests* (verse 43). They were led by *officers of the temple guard* (Luke 22:52). Temple guards (or *gatekeepers*) normally guarded the holy space, but there was a precedent for killing a false claimant to the throne (Queen Athaliah in 2 Chronicles 23:1-15).

The *kiss* (verse 44) is the normal cheek-to-cheek greeting in the Middle East. Judas has arranged that the first person he greets is the one they are to arrest.

Betrayal by a trusted friend feels soul-destroying. The kings knew the feeling:

Psalm 55:12-14 (NIV)

¹² If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it;
if a foe were rising against me, I could hide.

¹³ But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend,
¹⁴ with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God,
as we walked about among the worshippers.

At least one disciple is armed—Peter according to John 18:10. He swings into action to protect his king and slay his enemies. Picture the scene. The high priest's servant would be standing in front of his master to guard him. Peter swings. The servant ducks to the side, losing his ear rather than his head (verse 47).

Jesus halts the fight. Their response makes him look like a rebel leader who would kill to establish the kingdom of God. It contravenes everything he has taught them about taking up the cross and loving their enemies. They don't understand how non-violence saves the world. “Fight or flight” are the only options they know. Since Jesus removed the “fight” option, they flee (verse 50).

Is there something wrong with this picture? Weapons of violence under the cover of darkness, when Jesus has been with them every day in the temple courts?

Why does Mark include the detail of a fleeing disciple caught by his coat, choosing to leave his cloak to save his life? Is this Mark himself, as some church fathers suggested? Is it a reference to Amos 2:16 where *the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day*? All we know for sure is that even this strong young man is fleeing for his life, leaving Jesus alone to face those who want him dead (verse 50).

5.6 Condemned by the Sanhedrin (14:53-65)

The temple guards bring Jesus to the **Sanhedrin**. This was the highest Jewish council in Jerusalem, consisting of the upper echelon of the priesthood, the elders of the nation, and some experts on the Torah. These are the guys in power, the ones Jesus has repeatedly warning about (8:31; 11:27; 12:12).

Mark 14:53-59 (NIV)

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any.

⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

⁵⁷ Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him:

⁵⁸ “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’ ”

⁵⁹ Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

Is this how you conduct an unbiased trial? They're scratching around for evidence to affirm their prejudice. The Torah warned against false witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:18-19), requiring at least two witnesses in agreement (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

Jesus is accused of **threats against the temple** (verse 58). As we've said, the conflict is between the two anointed roles: high priest, and king. Jesus said the temple would fall when Rome invaded (13:1-19). He said God would deal with the tenants who killed his son (12:1-12). He never threatened to take action against the temple. He said God invited him to take a seat while God dealt with his enemies (12:35-36). He said heaven would bring down the reigning powers and raise up the son of man (13:24-26).

They've twisted something Jesus said about his body being God's temple: that **they** would destroy the temple, and he would raise it up again in three days (John 2:19-22).

The real issue is the temple's rejection of Jesus as God's anointed king. They're not about to share power with the one the crowds recognized as the son of David who has come in the name of the Lord to save his people (11:9-11).

Mark 14:60-65 (NIV)

⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” ⁶¹ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”

⁶² “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. ⁶⁴ “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”

They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

Jesus offers nothing in defence (verse 61, compare Isaiah 53:7). No credible witnesses have been found, so the high priest seeks to condemn Jesus by his own words, placing him under oath (Matthew 26:63).

The high priest's question contains two phrases that both mean the same thing. *Messiah* means anointed ruler, and the king was *the son* who represented on earth the reign of *the Blessed One* who reigns in the heavens (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7). The high priest was not asking Jesus if he was the second person of the trinity, a doctrine he'd never heard of.

Jesus' words in verse 62 refer the high priest to Daniel's vision, where the Ancient of Days promised to rescue his people from the oppression of kingdom after kingdom:

Daniel 7:9, 13-14 (NIV)

⁹ “As I looked, **thrones** were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. ... ¹³ And there before me was one like a **son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven**. He approached the Ancient of Days and was **led into his presence**. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and people of every language worshipped him ...”

The *son of man* inherits the authority God originally gave humans, not through the forces of human armies (like the beasts do) but with the support of the angelic hosts (*clouds of heaven*). *Thrones* (plural) are set, and the son of man is led into the presence of the Ancient of Days, where he is given authority to reign over all the peoples of the earth. Of all the Messianic promises of the Old Testament, this one defines for Jesus his identity and vocation:

- His identity is son of man (81 times in the Gospels).
- His vocation is to save his people from the dominion of evil and death, restoring heaven's reign over the earth.

But Jesus does not look like the king they were expecting. He has no army to free his people as David did. He's a Galilean without the right connections. He has no formal training in interpreting the Torah and the Prophets. The high priest regards Jesus' regal claim as a *blasphemy* against the heavenly sovereign (verse 64).

The Sanhedrin condemns Jesus as *worthy of death*. They mock his claims to be anointed with God's Spirit, demanding he prove it by prophesying. After all, when Saul was anointed, *the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him and he joined in their prophesying* (1 Samuel 10:10). Note that prophecy is not predicting the future; it's speaking by direct revelation. If he a "seer," can he see who is being physically abusive while blindfolded? (verse 65).

Jesus has a radically different view of divine justice. The Sanhedrin has met to give Jesus what they think he deserves. The king is giving his life for his people instead of giving them what they deserve. Instead of handing out what we would consider just, he leaves the matter of justice to his Father to sort out.

5.7 Distanced from his disciples (14:66-72)

After running from the Garden, *Peter followed at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest* (verse 53). He would be arrested too if anyone recognized him as a follower of Jesus.

Mark 14:66-72 (NIV)

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

⁶⁸ But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." ⁷⁰ Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

⁷¹ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

A servant girl (verses 66, 69) is about as low on the ladder of first century society as you could get. Her word doesn't carry much weight, but she persists and others join in. It begins to look like Peter might end up literally carrying a cross, following Jesus down the road to crucifixion. His third denial is supported by curses—calling on God to deal with him if he really is a follower of Jesus (verse 71).

Jesus said they'd all abandon him, and that Peter would disown him three times before morning (14:27-31). As the rooster heralds Friday morning, Peter remembers his brash promises the night before.

Is this the end for Peter? Do those who disown Jesus publicly have any place in God's family? (Matthew 10:32). Does anyone have a place in God's family if the Son is killed? Peter *broke down and wept* (verse 72).

5.8 Conclusion

What has challenged you from Mark 14?

- a) The wealthy gift, unwittingly preparing for Jesus' burial?
- b) The Passover meal, transformed into a new exodus with a new covenant?
- c) The silence, the unanswered prayer in Gethsemane?
- d) The contrasting approaches to divine justice shown by the temple and the king?
- e) How we follow a king who'd die rather than fight those in power?

Your thoughts?

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In preparation for next time, read the final two chapters: **Mark 15–16.**

6 The Messiah: killed and raised (Mark 15–16)

In the final chapters of Mark's Gospel, Pilate's court condemns this "king of the Jews." Rome's soldiers mock the most absurd "king" they've ever seen. As he is crucified, the Jewish leaders join the mockery of "this Messiah, this king of Israel." Late Friday afternoon, Jesus dies as a condemned criminal. He is buried.

After the Sabbath, some supporters go to the tomb to honour his dead body, but it doesn't work out as they expect. They are deeply disturbed, terrified by news that Jesus is no longer dead. What do they do with this incredible message? Will the world ever hear this good news?

Are you ready for how Mark's account of the Good News of Jesus the Messiah ends?

6.1 Tried by Rome (15:1-15)

Mark 15:1 (NIV)

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and **handed him over** to Pilate.

Handed over (paradidōmi) is the same word used of Judas *betraying* Jesus (14:10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42, 44). If Jesus is the God-anointed king, this is treason. The Jerusalem leaders betrayed their king by handing him over to their Roman overlords.

Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin was about his claim to be *the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One* (14:61). For Pilate, that translates to *the king of the Jews*:

Mark 15:2 (NIV)

"Are you **the king of the Jews**?" asked Pilate.

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

Pilate knows royalty when he sees it: the golden chains and majestic robes. He seems to enjoy picturing this pathetic Galilean in dusty garments as the representative of the people for whom Pilate has no respect.

Jesus doesn't try to explain his kingship to Pilate. Jesus has not been going around claiming to be king, so Pilate has nothing but hearsay. "Your word; not mine."

Mark 15:3-5 (NIV)

³ The chief priests accused him of many things.

⁴ So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer?"

See how many things they are accusing you of."

⁵ But Jesus still made **no reply**, and Pilate was amazed.

Why offer no defence? Several reasons. First, Pilate's court is not unbiased: it was established to preserve Roman rule. Second, the accusations come from the leaders of his own people who have already made up their minds. There is no defence against

this collusion of Jewish and gentile rulers. Jesus' only hope is for his Father to raise him up after they kill him. But here's a possible escape:

Mark 15:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called **Barabbas** was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

As a gesture of good will, Rome released a prisoner each Passover. It was often a political prisoner, like Barabbas who had fought in an uprising against Roman rule. Barabbas saw himself as a redeemer for the nation that was meant to be under the LORD'S rule. He was doing what the judges had done in fighting off their oppressors, what Joshua had done in evicting the Canaanites. Barabbas saw himself as a freedom fighter, while Rome saw him as a terrorist.

Jesus and Barabbas represent two views of how God would overturn the oppression of his people and restore them as a kingdom of God. Which one do the people want?

Mark 15:9-11 (NIV)

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of **self-interest** that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

This is not about justice, but power. *It was out of self-interest that the chief priests* want Jesus removed. The real issue is the conflict between temple and king. Pilate riles them by referring to Jesus as *the king of the Jews* (verses 2, 9, 12, 26, 18, 32).

Mark 15:12-15 (NIV)

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted.

¹⁴ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

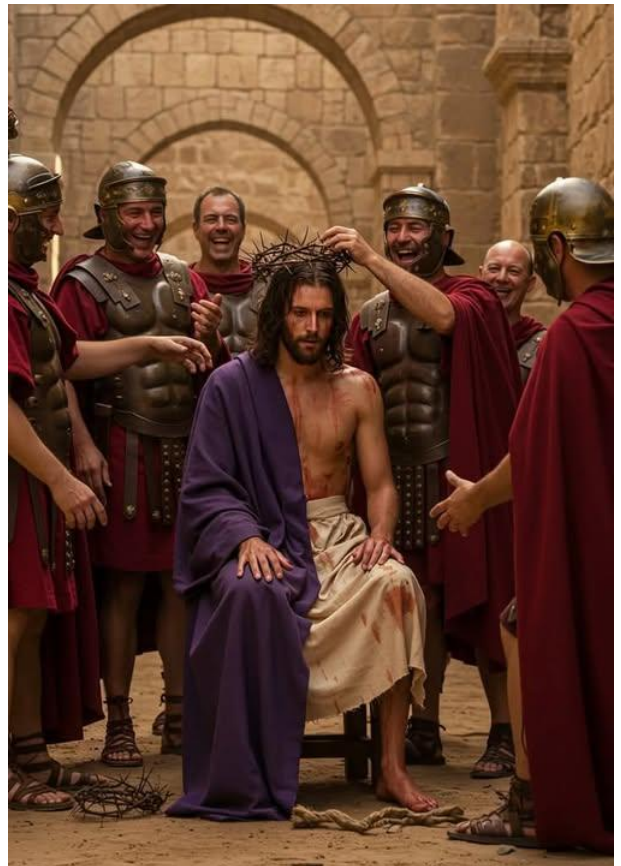
¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

There is no justice here. The crowds that welcomed the king into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday now call for his execution. People can be manipulated so easily. Is there a warning here for the way we're drawn into mob rage in social media?

6.2 Mocked as a king (15:16-20)

Mark 15:16-19 (NIV)

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the **palace** (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole **company of soldiers**. ¹⁷ They put a **purple robe** on him, then twisted together a **crown of thorns** and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, “**Hail, king of the Jews!**” ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a **staff** and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid **homage** to him.



The soldiers mock Jesus as the most pathetic king. Their parody highlights what Jesus does not have:

- a) **Palace:** The *Praetorium* was the governor's official residence, the nearest thing Jerusalem had to a palace. This is a mock enthronement ceremony.
- b) **Company of soldiers:** A king needs a force at his command, to enforce his rule.
- c) **Purple robe:** Purple was the royal colour because the colour-fast dye was so costly: “Since approximately eight thousand molluscs were required to produce one gram of purple dye, purple cloth was extremely expensive.” ²⁰
- d) **Crown:** Thorns represent the pain of a world that rejects God's authority (Genesis 3:18). This is the only crown the world gave God's Messiah.
- e) **“Hail, king!”:** A king should have the honour of his people recognizing him.
- f) **Staff:** The ruler's staff (sceptre) is used against him, to inflict pain.
- g) **Homage:** Bowing was a posture of recognizing authority. The same word (*proskyneō*) is used for worship, for worship is bowing before his throne.

Jesus has already contrasted his power with the way the rulers of this world exercise their authority (10:42-45). He has not come to force people to serve him, but to serve them and give his life to redeem them—even soldiers like these!

But recognizing God's anointed ruler is not what the forces of this world want to do:

Mark 15:20 (NIV)

And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²⁰ D. Irvin, “Purple,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 3:1057.

6.3 Crucified (15:21-25)

Mark 15:21 (NIV)

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Cyrene was in north Africa. *Simon* is a Jewish name. It was unusual for someone else to carry the crosspiece. Normally the prisoner carried the crossbar to the site, where it was attached to a stake already in the ground (the upright part of the cross).

Mark 15:22 (NIV)

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”).

Golgotha is Aramaic for “Skull Place.” It was outside the first century walls of Jerusalem, probably near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre today.

The Latin word *Calvary* comes from Catholicism, not the Greek text of the New Testament. It's better to use *Golgotha*.

Mark 15:23-25 (NIV)

²³ Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

²⁴ And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵ It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Wine mixed with myrrh would be regarded as a sedative (drugged wine).

The soldiers divide up the only thing Jesus owns: *his clothes*.

The explanation for Jesus' crucifixion is attached to the cross: he is *the king of the Jews*. The Jewish and gentile rulers together have raised their hand against the LORD and his anointed (Psalm 2:2; Acts 4:27). That's the meaning of the cross of Christ.

6.4 Mocked by rebels and temple leaders (15:27-32)

The cross is not unique to Christ. Many others were also crucified under Roman rule:

Mark 15:27-32 (NIV)

²⁷ They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left.

²⁸ ²⁹ Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can't save himself! ³² Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The *rebels* were probably insurgents against Roman rule, similar to Barabbas. Since a king was always accompanied by attendants, the executioners give the “king” a rebel servant on each side. It’s all part of the mockery of his kingship.

The Messiah was expected to save his nation, but this “king” can’t even save himself. Some Christians do not understand *Christ* as a reference to Jesus’ kingship. *Christ* (*christos* in Greek) is the most frequently used title for Jesus in the New Testament, occurring more than 500 times! The word literally means “anointed,” and it translates the Hebrew word *messiah* which also means “anointed.” To call Jesus the *Christ* is to recognize him as the God-anointed ruler for the earth, rescuing us from the dominion of evil and death, restoring earth to the reign of his Father in the heavens.

Mark will not let us ignore the kingship of the Christ (*Messiah* in the NIV). *Christ* means *king of Israel* (verse 32). The regal understanding of the Christ is central to Jesus’ entire programme of establishing the kingdom of God. It’s central to how the other NT writers use the word Christ as well.²¹ The cross is the world mocking the kingship of the Christ.

6.5 The king forsaken by God (15:33-39)

Mark 15:33 (NIV)

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

This is three hours after Jesus was first crucified (verse 25). It’s the middle of the day. The darkness is not an eclipse, for it holds the land for three hours.

In the closing chapters of Isaiah, God promised to send a *redeemer to Zion*, a *Spirit-anointed leader* to restore *covenant* relationship with God’s people (Isaiah 59:20-21). The kingdom under his leadership would function as the light of God for a dark world:

Isaiah 60:1-3 (NIV)

¹ “Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³ Nations
will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

But instead of receiving their king and living as his kingdom, Jerusalem chose to join the darkness and extinguish the light of the Messiah’s life. They plunged the whole land into darkness. So, where are God’s promises? Why does God allow the darkness to take over and snuff out the light of his son? That’s Jesus’ question:

Mark 15:34 (NIV)

And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice,
“*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*”
(which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

²¹ Joshua W. Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*. (Eerdmans, 2020),

I don't know if you've ever felt that level of disconnection from God, as if God has turned away from you, as if God doesn't know or doesn't care what's happening for you. This is what Jesus felt in Gethsemane with his Father not answering his prayers. This is what Jesus is feeling at Golgotha as people mock and murder him. Worse than the physical pain of crucifixion, worse than the rejection of his own people, is the sense of utter isolation—that even God is leaving him here to die.

But Jesus is not the first to feel abandoned like this. The cry of dereliction comes from his ancestors:

Psalm 22:title–8 (NIV)

... A psalm of David.

¹ **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest. ...

⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

⁸ “He trusts in the LORD,” they say, “let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.”

Whose words are these? Why does Jesus re-use David's words to describe his grief?

Something had gone wrong for David in Psalm 22. Perhaps he'd lost a battle where many had died, and the kingdom was blaming the king. If David was the LORD'S anointed, why did they lose? Why didn't God give them the victory?

And now, Jesus, this son of David, this king of the Jews, was crushed by his enemies, feeling the same sense of failure and defeat. David described the enemies who overpowered him as animals that were hunting him to kill him:

Psalm 22:11-18 (NIV)

¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks
to the roof of my mouth; **you lay me in the dust of death.**

¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.

The Holy Spirit gave David words to describe his pain, and those words seem even more applicable to the sufferings of Messiah who came to restore the fallen kingdom:

- At Skull Place, Jesus is surrounded by the beasts who want to kill him.
- Suspended by crucified hands, his bones are literally *out of joint* (verse 14).
- Gasping for breath, *his mouth is dried up like a potsherd*. (verse 15).
- His Father has handed him over to be laid in the dust of death (verse 15).
- His executioners have pierced *his hands and his feet* (verse 16).
- Crowds stare at him and mock him as their king (verse 17).
- They divide his clothes by lot (verse 18).

As David prayed for the LORD to save him from death, he said:

Psalm 22:22-31 (NIV)

²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you. ...

²⁷ All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. ...

³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the
Lord. ³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

David survived the defeat of Psalm 22, but the Davidic kingship died when Babylon invaded Jerusalem. Jesus entered into the death of the kingdom for his people. He suffered rejection by his own people and defeat at the hands of the beasts who ruled them. And just as David survived the cry of dereliction in Psalm 22:1, Jesus survived being laid in the dust of death. He rose to declare the authority of God's name in the assembly that gathers around the king (verse 22),²² restoring God's reign to Israel and the nations (verse 28). Truly, David's words were for a future generation who would see God doing right for a people yet unborn (verse 31).

All that anguish and hope is implied by Jesus seeing himself following in the steps of his father David, restoring the kingdom of God after his death, when his Father raised him up.²³

But the people watching the crucifixion have no idea what Jesus is talking about. They mistake his cry for *Eloi* ("My God" in Aramaic) as a call for Elijah to help him:

Mark 15:35-37 (NIV)

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said,
"Listen, he's calling Elijah."

²² The word *assembly* (in Psalm 22:22 and 25) is the word for "church" in the New Testament (*ekklesia* in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The church is the assembly of people from all over the world that gathers around King Jesus. See <https://allenbrowne.blog/2019/09/06/why-church/>

²³ See <https://allenbrowne.blog/2024/08/07/psalm-22-davids-defeat/>

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Death is so final. We’ve just witnessed the ultimate injustice. Here’s God’s response:

Mark 15:38 (NIV)

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

The *curtain of the temple* is the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the room where the priests were allowed (Exodus 26:33). The Most Holy Place was a private chamber where God sat *enthroned between the cherubim* (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:3; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalms 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16).

If this curtain was ripped *from the top*, the tear comes from heaven’s side. God has rejected this house as no longer suitable for him to inhabit.

There was a previous time when God had moved out because “*the sin of the people of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice*” (Ezekiel 9:9). Slowly, *the glory of the LORD* moved out of the temple (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4; 10:18; 11:23), leaving it vulnerable to destruction by Babylon.

Now it’s happened again. The house meant to bear God’s name has become a den of robbers who would kill the Messiah to take his authority (Mark 11:17-18). God will evict the tenants in his vineyard who kill his son, and make his son the foundation stone for what God is building (12:9-12). So once again, the temple in Jerusalem would be torn down leaving not one stone on another (13:2).

This temple is no longer fit for purpose. God has torn the veil, and left the house because his servants killed his Son.

There is another temple! In the body of the Messiah, God was “tabernacled” among his people (John 1:14). They destroyed this temple, but in three days God will raise him up (John 2:19-21). The resurrected body of the Messiah is the foundation stone for a global temple made of people (living stones) who recognize God in his Messiah (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

And that recognition of the Messiah begins here at the cross:

Mark 15:39 (NIV)

And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

How’s that for an unexpected source? The Roman officer overseeing the execution of the king of the Jews declares Jesus’ innocence. Justice has not been done. This man really was appointed by God as the ruler of his people.

6.6 Buried (15:40-47)

Jesus is dead. Those who believed he was the Saviour of his people can't comprehend what this means. Once again, the leader appointed by God is killed by their enemies. Everything they've hoped for has died with him:

Mark 15:40-47 (NIV)

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

Preparation Day is the name for Friday. The Sabbath would begin at sundown. They don't want to leave Jesus' corpse hanging there, so they must move him quickly. Now we learn there is at least one member of the Jerusalem Council who was *waiting for the kingdom of God* to be restored, and watching to see if Jesus might be that king.

Joseph from Arimathea provides the tomb where Jesus' body can be laid to rest.

6.7 Raised up by heaven's decree (16:1-8)

The final chapter of Mark's Gospel is a brief one: just eight verses. The ending feels unsatisfying, a cliffhanger with no sequel. Later writers added more detail and an explanation of how we're meant to respond to what God has done in Christ.

Let's cover the first eight verses first, and then we can look at the verses that are not found in the oldest copies of Mark's Gospel.

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

¹ When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. ² Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb ³ and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

⁴ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

⁶ “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. **He has risen!** He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is **going ahead** of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’ ”

⁸ Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

The resurrection is at the heart of these verses: “*He has risen!*” (verse 6). It’s what Jesus has been telling them all along, that he would be killed and raised to life (8:31; 9:10 -31; 10:34).

The women who’ve been supporting Jesus from Galilee days are the recipients of this good news. The sun is barely up on Sunday morning when they take their spices to pay their respects to Jesus’ corpse. They’re not prepared for what they see. The stone door to the tomb has been rolled open. There is no corpse inside. Instead there’s someone sitting beside where the body had been. They’re shocked. And terrified.

The young man in the white robe knows they’re looking for Jesus, and he knows Jesus was crucified. He insists, “*He has been raised! He is not here. See the place where they laid him*” (verse 6). He instructs them to tell the disciples, including the one who denied Jesus. They will see the risen Messiah again, just as he told them. He would *go ahead of them* the way a shepherd leads a flock (verse 7).

For the women who saw Jesus’ dead body being taken from the cross and placed in this tomb on Friday, this makes no sense. How would you cope if you heard someone was alive after you saw them die a horrific death?

They’re *alarmed* (verse 5). They’re *bewildered and trembling* (verse 8). They flee from the empty tomb, without comprehending its significance. Mark’s final sentence is this: *They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Seriously, Mark, you can’t end there! Did they tell Peter and the others? Did they return to Galilee? Did they meet with the resurrected Jesus as he promised?

After all the Old Testament narrative that Mark said Jesus was fulfilling, after the disciples walked with Jesus for three years and started to see him as the Messiah, after all that God did through him—including raising him from the dead—*they said nothing to anyone because they were afraid?*

Surely the proclamation of the gospel of the Messiah who died at the hands of injustice and was raised to restore the peoples of the earth to heaven’s reign—surely that good news needs to be proclaimed for the rescue of the world? How can it end with saying nothing to anyone because of fear?

Before we're too hard on these women, remember the men had already fallen away the night of Jesus' trial (14:27). The women kept following (15:40), saw where Jesus was laid (15:47), and came to the tomb to honour him (16:2).

But what happens if the followers of Jesus do not proclaim the good news that God has raised up his Son as the Saviour who rescues the earth from the dominion of sin and death, restoring us with his resurrection life? Wouldn't that be the ultimate tragedy if God had done all this, but we said nothing to anyone because we're afraid?

Maybe that's the point. Is Mark's cliffhanger the ultimate challenge to the followers of Jesus to share the good news? What do you think?

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6.8 How does the story end? (16:9-20)

Most copies of Mark's Gospel from the fifth century onwards include verses 9-20. A few copies have a shorter ending that you can read in the NRSV.

What are we to make of how Mark's Gospel ends?

- a) Did Mark write the longer or shorter ending?
- b) Did Mark write an ending that's been lost?
- c) Did Mark intend his book to end with verse 8?

Dick France explains the consensus:

The almost unanimous conclusion of modern scholarship is that both the Shorter and Longer Endings, in their different ways, represent well-meaning attempts, probably sometime in the second century, to fill the perceived gap left by the 'unfinished' ending at 16:8.²⁴

Tom Wright explains why most believe Mark did not write the longer ending:

The longer ending looks very much like a compilation of bits and pieces from the resurrection narratives of Matthew and Luke, with some extra parts added. If, as most believe, Matthew and Luke were written later than Mark, this alone should arouse our suspicions. The passage starts, too, as though beginning the chapter again, introducing Mary Magdalene as though she hasn't already been mentioned several times in the preceding two paragraphs. We can't say for certain that nothing in this passage comes from the original Mark, but it doesn't seem to me likely.²⁵

Robert Gundry thinks there must have been a lost ending, similar to how Matthew's Gospel ends:

²⁴ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 2002), 687.

²⁵ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (SPCK, 2004), 226.

To reconstruct the lost ending of Mark, we should use Matt 28:9–10, 16–20 ... Presumably, the lost ending of Mark contained a version of the Great Commission ... It would probably be foolhardy to speculate any further.²⁶

The United Bible Societies advises translators to indicate the ending is not from Mark:

Most modern translations continue to print it [verses 9-20] as part of Mark. Some, however, indicate its non-Markan nature. ASV adds a footnote ... RSV prints the whole section in the margin ...

Any modern translation should indicate, by such means as these, that the Longer Ending is not part of the Gospel of Mark.²⁷

Whether verses 9-20 belong in the text or not makes little practical difference, since the content is supported elsewhere in Scripture. One possible exception is verse 18: *they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison it will not hurt them at all*. This verse has been misused, e.g.:

- Snake-handling churches in the United States base their practice on this verse.
- Cult leader Jim Jones killed his followers with a drink laced with cyanide.

So, did Mark intend to end his book at verse 8? Is this a satisfactory ending?

Mark 16:8 (NIV)

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.
They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Here are some of the ways scholars today have understood Mark's intention to end his Gospel at verse 8. Robert Stein summarizes:

Mark was now seen as intending to end his Gospel at 16:8, and many offered explanations for why Mark chose to end his Gospel this way.

Mark was seen as seeking to ...:

- force the readers "to think out for [themselves] the Gospel's challenge" (Best 1983: 132);
- encourage readers to persevere despite the disobedience and failure of the disciples (Lincoln 1989: 283–300);
- challenge the reader to become "the perfect disciple" and fulfill what the disciples and women failed to do (Tolbert 1989: 297–99);
- have the readers "make their [own] decision" of obedience (Geddert 1989: 172);
- "leave his readers to make the crucial step of faith for themselves, without presenting them with less ambiguous evidence for the resurrection" (Hooker 1991: 392);

²⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Eerdmans, 2000), 1021.

²⁷ Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, (United Bible Societies, 1993), 507.

- elicit “a call for deeper commitment ... from its hearers” (Danove 1993: 222); and so on.²⁸

If we can't be certain of how the Gospel of Mark originally ended, are you okay living with the uncertainty?

6.9 Conclusion

Jesus is *the Christ*, the anointed ruler who restores earth as a kingdom of heaven. That's *the gospel* according to Mark (1:1-14).

Once people began to recognize him as the Christ, Jesus told them how he would become king. Those in power would kill him, but his Father would raise him up. All who live under his leadership must also take the way of the cross (8:29–9:1).

That's the path Mark follows in these chapters:

Mark 9	Jesus defines his mission.
Mark 10	The king leads his people to the capital.
Mark 11	The crowds welcome their Messiah, but the temple rejects his authority.
Mark 12	Jesus warns the leaders they'll lose everything if they murder the Son.
Mark 13	The temple and city will fall, but the Son of Man receives the kingship.
Mark 14	Jesus is betrayed, arrested, condemned, and abandoned.
Mark 15	Jesus is mocked and condemned. He dies alone, and is buried in a tomb.
Mark 16	On the third day, his body is no longer in the tomb. Heaven's messenger says he's alive and ready to lead them. Do they follow?

What has transformed your faith and actions most from these chapters?

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²⁸ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Baker Academic, 2008), 733–734.