

COUNTDOWN TO CALVARY

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*A study of Christ's final week on
Earth, as recorded in Mark's Gospel
with David Legge*



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This series is part of a longer study through the entire Gospel of Mark - 'Studies In Mark' is available on our website in both MP3 audio and PDF formats should you wish to continue through his entire Gospel.

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Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 1

"The Servant King's Short-Lived Welcome"

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Good morning, it's good to be with you again to Ards Evangelical to minister God's word. I've really been looking forward to the next four weeks, including today, together as we look at God's word. I do hope sincerely that you're not here to hear me, because you'll be sadly disappointed. I hope that you're here to hear from God, and hopefully through the exposition of God's word you will hear His voice - that's what I've been praying. I've been seeking God over what to bring to you these four weeks, and I feel led to start by turning to Mark's gospel chapter 11. What we're going to do in these four weeks, morning and evening, is to go through the last week of the life of our Lord Jesus. So that's what we're going to do, now I can't make any promises how far we're going to get - I hope we might get through the whole week. We've got eight sessions, I think I'm right in saying, and the Gospel will be throughout these studies - so there'll not be one particular message a Gospel message as such, but the Gospel will be here and there - how could it not be when we're looking at the last week of our Lord's life as He goes towards Calvary, the cross?

So we're turning to chapter 11 of Mark, and this morning I want us to consider verses 1 to 26 - but we're only going to read just now verses 1 to 10: *"Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He", that is, the Lord Jesus, "sent two of His disciples; and He said to them, 'Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here'. So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. But some of those who stood there said to them, 'What are you doing, loosing the colt?'. And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: 'Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!'"*

Let us pray together, and I would ask you please that you pray with me now, do pray with me now that the Lord may speak to you. Are you looking for the Lord to speak to you? You come here, perhaps, with needs, with burdens, with heartaches, with problems, besetting sins, shortcomings. You need the Lord to speak to you. Maybe you have come and your head is cluttered with all sorts of stuff, maybe even how you failed Him yesterday, or last evening, or this morning. All sorts of things can happen, you can have a row with the husband or the wife on the way out to church, and I know what it's like trying to get a clatter of children out as well! But let's just calm ourselves now, conscious that we are in the presence of God, the One whom we've been praising. Let's now supplicate Him, ask Him, to speak to us, and to manifest Himself in a very real way in our meeting this morning.

Father, Abba Father, Holy Father, we come in the name of Your Holy Child Jesus, and we ask

now for Your help as we come to this portion of Scripture, and indeed this very sacred holy week, the last week of our Lord's life. Lord, we pray that this will not just be a Bible study, we pray that it will not just be a session of teaching where we will learn more than we knew before - but we ask in His name that this will be a time, and indeed this series of meetings will be an experience, of meeting the risen, glorified Lord; and that through the Holy Spirit He will come to us. Lord Jesus, that is Your promise to Your people: 'I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you'. So Lord, we pray that as we look at the last week of Your blessed life, that we would not look at this as history, but we would encounter You as real, and that You may minister the truths of those last days of Your life into our lives that we may be changed. For this we know we need the Holy Spirit, and so we ask now for the breath of Your Spirit to be upon us, and to minister not just to us but in us - for the glory of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Now we all know that a man or a woman's last words are very important. There are whole books on that, I have one in my library about the last words of famous men and women. As the last words of anyone are important, so are the final acts, the things that they did before they died. Now of how much more importance must be the last words and the final acts of the Son of Man and the Son of God? Now that's Mark's emphasis from chapter 11 right to chapter 16. If you're familiar with Mark's gospel, you will know that Mark's gospel is the gospel of the Suffering Servant, and it's the gospel of the cross - now that's not to say that the other gospels don't mention the cross, or emphasise it, but Mark in particular gives what we would have to say is a disproportionate amount of his gospel to the last week in the life of our Lord Jesus as He goes to Calvary. So we see clearly that this is his emphasis.

Now the words and the actions of our Lord Jesus Christ - and this is very important - all His last words and final acts were with the perfect knowledge of what was going to happen during this week. That's what makes this week, the last week of His life, different than the last words or final acts of any other human being that has ever lived - because He knew what was going to happen. Indeed, not only had He premeditated the events, but these events were prophesied in the Old Testament, and more than that: they were preordained by God, they had to happen, and they had to happen in the exact manner and order that they did happen as we will see these weeks. That's profound, because I'm left in awe of that: what a Servant! This gospel is about the Servant of the Lord, the One who has come - chapter 10 tells us that He did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many. He has come from heaven, to the babe in the manger, to the man ministering among men, and He's going to the cross - and with utter, complete, absorbing determination, He makes his way to the fulfilment of the determination of God's will.

Here we have the beginning of that last week. The occasion is the Passover season, we call this 'The Triumphal Entry', and it happened at the Passover season. If you don't know anything about that, the Passover season was a religious festival, a feast for the Jews. Thousands of devout Jews from all over the world would come to the holy city of Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, which was a commemoration of how God, through Moses, delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage through the Red Sea and all that. Jerusalem, every Passover, would be filled with religious zeal and nationalistic fervour as Jews from all over the world would come on this pilgrimage. Now this feast was an absolute nightmare, a headache, for the Roman occupying power, because you can imagine that they're trying to keep a grip on anyone who would rise up in insurrection, and all of a sudden a whole load of Jews come from all over the world to celebrate their identity nationally and religiously! There was a great fear among the Romans that this would spill over into some kind of insurrection - these Jews who were always looking for their Messiah and their Deliverer to come, that they would find somebody and put their hopes in him, and before you know it they would have a lot of trouble

on their hands.

So we're at Passover, incidentally the day is Sunday, the first day of the week. In verse 1 we read that Jesus has 'drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany', and we believe that on His journey He would pass through Bethany and then Bethphage. At Bethphage He would be 2 miles from Jerusalem, 2600 feet above sea level - so in other words, the Lord Jesus would be at Bethphage looking down with a breathtaking view of the holy city. He is contemplating now His entrance into that place in fulfilment of God's will. So we read that He sends two disciples into Jerusalem to get a colt, for He's about to ride into Jerusalem as their promised King, as their Messiah, as the Christ.

Now before we study this, the Triumphal Entry, I want you to note - and I think it is very instructive, personally, for you - some interesting principles, I think, here, and lessons from how the Lord directs His people. They are given in His instruction to these two disciples to go and get the colt. If you look at verse 2, look at it: 'He said to them, 'Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it''. Now the Lord Jesus is speaking emphatically here: 'This is what's going to happen: go into the village opposite you, and you will enter and you will find a colt, loose it and bring it to me'. He's speaking with absolute knowledge, omniscience you might say, of this event - He knows what is going to happen. Now I know there's great mystery in God becoming flesh, and what things the Lord Jesus willingly laid aside in use, though He was God in flesh. There is a whole debate there, and a whole discussion we're not going to have this morning - but all I know is this: this Christ is not the Christ of modernism, it is not the Christ of liberalism, this is the Christ of history and the Christ of heaven - the Christ who has the very powers of God at His disposal to know things. Now maybe you're here this morning and you are seeking wisdom from God, you ought to be if you're a Christian. Maybe you're seeking a way ahead from God, maybe you have a dilemma or a decision to make and you don't know how to go about it. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying, here's a lesson: you can trust the knowledge of your Lord Jesus Christ. He knows the way you ought to go. He knows the way to take, and you can trust Him. Now can I ask you: do you trust Him? Do you go to Him when you need counsel, and when you need knowledge?

I've been meditating over Christmas on that wonderful verse in Isaiah: He's Wonderful, Counsellor. Do you need counsel? Do you need guidance? Do you need direction? Well, He has perfect knowledge of your situation, He knows it inside out and He can give you what you need if you will come to Him. So often we don't, we go to all sorts of counsellors, we lift the phone to ring family, we maybe go to godly men or women that we esteem - and there's nothing wrong with getting help - but sometimes those are our first bases, and not God, not Jesus.

Here's something else: we must have faith in His promise. Verse 3, Jesus says: 'If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here'. Now this seems incredible to me, because sometimes we read these stories and we are so familiar with them that we don't enter into the reality of what this must have been like. You know, to put it into modern day parlance, over in Loughries there, the Lord tells you: 'Go over to number 24, knock the door, and tell them that the Lord has told you that He needs your BMW'. Imagine if the Lord told you to do that! And the Lord says: 'Now, immediately he's going to hand over the keys of the BMW' - they'd probably be no use in the ice and snow anyway, sorry if you have a BMW! Maybe they would give it over gladly, I don't know! But do you understand what I'm saying? These people would have thought: 'These are thieves, I mean, who thought up that line, 'The Lord told me that He needs your colt'? These

are thieves!'. But you see, the two disciples had to trust the promise - do you understand? They had to believe that the Lord knew everything, and it was from that faith that He had complete knowledge of the situation that they could place their trust in the promise.

Now can I say something to you: if you really want to go on with God, and go deeper in the things of the Christian life, sometimes the Lord will ask you to do things that are very strange. Often those strange things that He asks you to do will be misunderstood by others, and they might even think that you're doing something wrong - but all that shouldn't matter, and this is where I try to get to in the things I do for God, even though others may not just agree with it, if it is God I must obey Him. I have only one to please, I have only one to obey, and that is God. It's alright saying those things, but if you were in their situation what would you do? We have to believe God's promise: faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God - and so Christ spoke with all knowledge, and they exercised their faith in the promise... but something else was needed, and this is what's missing in what I've been saying already. It takes courage! It does, doesn't it? James says that faith without works is dead, in other words: faith needs to be animated. You've got to step out on faith, if it's a sure foundation it's worth acting on. They had to have the courage and the boldness to go down and to actually untie this colt without asking for it, without asking for it - is that not theft? Well, we'll not go into that, I don't think it's theft, they let them take it - but it could have been construed as that, couldn't it? But they had boldness to do it and to believe that if anybody said anything to them about it, that if they said 'The Lord has need of it', that they would get it. Can I add something to that? If you look at verse 6: 'They spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded' - they did not deviate from the message that Jesus gave them. They didn't engage in Chinese whispers and add their own little spin on it, and try to couch the blow for these people losing their colt. No, they just said it like the Lord told them, and because they spoke the word of God and stood courageously on the foundation of the word of God, what Jesus said would happen did happen.

Can I say something to you? Often when we are obeying God, the devil will fill our heads with all sorts of reasons why we ought not to obey Him, and all sorts of doubts concerning God's word. We suppose this is going to happen, and we assume the other is going to happen, and very rarely does any of it ever happen! Here's why: because when we stand upon God's word, He always honours His word. He has set His word, the Bible says, above His name - in other words, He has staked His reputation on His word. Do you trust it?

When I was studying this, my mind immediately went to Paul the apostle in the shipwreck in Acts 27. If you want to turn to it you can - if you want to turn to it you can! I can hear the pages you know! - Acts 27, I want you to see this, these are not fairy stories, this is reality. Imagine you're in a shipwreck, imagine you're in a shipwreck or a plane is about to go down. He's on his way to Rome and there is a great storm, and everybody is in fear of their lives and start throwing cargo off the side of the boat to lighten the load. Paul says in verse 22 of Acts 27: 'And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship'. So the ship is going to go down, but everybody is going to survive. Here's the basis on which Paul could say this to these mariners: 'For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid'. Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me'. Now that's faith! That's the faith that we're talking about: God has told me, I believe it - and so he was willing to courageously say to these men, who knew more about boats probably than he did, 'Don't worry, we're all going to be saved, but the boat'. I mean, what would you think if somebody said: 'Now don't worry, the plane is going down and it's going to be wrecked, but we're all going to survive'? 'The boat is going to sink but we're all going to be alright', this is before there were lifeboats,

lifejackets! But God told him, and he believed - he said: 'I believe God that it will be even as He has told me'

Now if you're wanting guidance from God - and I know I'm digressing a wee bit this morning, we'll get back into the text in two seconds - but if you want guidance from God, we all want guidance, we treat God like a Sat Nav: 'What turn? Is it right at the lights or left? Straight through the roundabout this decision?'. If you want guidance from God you have got to believe Him, have faith in God, and we'll see He says that later on. You can see it in this ass, this donkey, this colt. It's amazing, the Lord Jesus jumps on it, it has never been ridden before, it's an unbroken beast, but it surrenders to the will of its Creator. That's the key of guidance: the surrendered will. Maybe this beast is more surrendered to God's will than you are, imagine that! An untamed, untrained animal! You see there are many people say: 'This is the key, this is the secret, this is the answer to the Christian life and how to be victorious'. There are many facets to how to really live a successful, victorious Christian experience - but I'll tell you: none of them bypass the will. One of the great secrets of living the Christian life is the surrender of the will.

So that leads us to verse 8, this great commotion, what was it? Well, the Lord Jesus is on a donkey. We find this astounding, but the donkey was the equivalent of a Daimler in these Old and New Testament days - it was a royal vehicle, a royal animal. There is a sign here that gives us the information that this is a royal coronation that we're reading about. If you go into the Old Testament you find that Solomon was on David's donkey when he was crowned King. Now this is the only time that the Lord Jesus permitted a public demonstration of His honour, that's astounding. He healed people and He said: 'Shh, Shh, don't tell anybody. Away you go, do whatever offerings you have to with the priest, but don't tell anybody' - and then everybody went away and blabbed everything. But that's the way the Lord worked, He didn't work for crowds, the common people came and heard Him gladly because He was healing and He was teaching and doing wonderful things - but He didn't seek fame. But this is a time where He does go out of His way, and He allows a public demonstration of His honour. The reason why is to fulfil prophecy, Zechariah 9 and verse 9, over 500 years before this event - Zechariah the prophet said: 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey'. What He was wanting to do was, He was wanting not only to fulfil prophecy but to jog the Jew's memory of that prophecy, for them to realise, the penny to drop: 'This is our King! This is our Messiah that we have waited for!'

For a moment, this moment, He was acknowledged as their King. He was affirming His Kingship before them as the Son of David. They cried, verse 9, look at it: 'Hosanna!', that simply means 'Save, we pray' - they were acknowledging Him as some kind of Saviour and Deliverer. 'Save, we pray!', and then they said in verse 9, the second part, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' - quoting Psalm 118, which is a reference, prophetically, to the promised Messiah. So they're now recognising Him as the promised Christ! Now, all this sounds wonderful, doesn't it? As you read the other gospels you get such a clear picture of the wonderful, vibrant, explosive praise - and I'm not saying it wasn't genuine - these people were rejoicing and welcoming Jesus as the Servant King.

But there's a problem, and the problem is found on Monday - for as we move to verse 12, we see in verse 11 that after the Triumphal Entry, Jesus goes to the temple and looks around, and then goes to Bethany again with the twelve. Then in verse 12 we read this: 'Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it,

He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, 'Let no one eat fruit from you ever again'. And His disciples heard it'. So, on Monday, Jesus comes out of Bethany and curses the fig tree - now, what's all that about? Sometimes we read these portions - and I'm actually welcoming the opportunity to do big chunks of God's word, especially these gospels week after week, because you get a real train of thought of how the writer is linking all these things. He is linking the cursing of the fig tree with the Triumphal Entry. Here's how: the fig tree in Scripture is a figure of Israel, the nation, the people before God. Just as Jesus came to this fig tree and looked for figs, fruit, Jesus had come to His own people, Israel, and looked for fruit from them and found none.

Now, I used to wonder about this story, because it says that Jesus came when it was out of season and was looking for figs. I thought: 'Why would He curse the tree when it was out of season?', but what it's speaking of is the regular bumper crop of figs. You see figs would come on a fig tree at other times in the year, and there would usually be leaves when that happened. But if there was no early fruit - and it's early here, it's not the bumper crop, it's not the season yet - if there was no early fruit on the fig tree, that was a sign that there would be no bumper crop. Jesus saw leaves on this tree, but there was no fruit - it says, look at this, it's a chilling statement: 'He found nothing but leaves'. In other words, this tree was taking up space, but it was fruitless.

Now please note: I believe that this incident is our Lord's interpretation of the Triumphal Entry. I believe He's saying: 'There's a big fuss and hullabaloo about me coming in, and it's to fulfil prophecy, and there are people there that are genuine in their praise, and they're welcoming me - but it's not going to be very long until 'Hosannas' are replaced with 'Crucify''. I think, maybe, verses 9 and 10 where they cry: 'Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' - many of them, patriotic Jews among them who were fed up with the iron heel of Rome upon them, they were crying out: 'Lord, save us! Hosanna! From the Romans! Set up Your earthly kingdom now in order to defeat our enemies'. I just wonder, I can't be dogmatic on this, but I wonder did our Lord ride on that colt of an ass with a heavy heart? You see, these people wanted a Christ of their own making. They wanted a warrior deliverer to put the Romans out, to set up an earthly kingdom, to make them all well and wealthy. You know, I have to say to you that I think that this is an indictment and an ailment of the 21st-century church in the West. We want a Christ of our own making. We come to our churches, and we do our 'Christian things', and we mould Christ according to our expectations, and according to our desires and our lifestyles - rather than moulding our lifestyles, our expectations, and our desires according to Christ and who He really is and His claims upon our lives. We have made a God in our own image, a God and a Christ that suits us, rather than surrendering to the way He really is.

We read in verse 14 He cursed this fig tree - this was remarkable. As far as I can see, apart from when the Lord Jesus sent the demons into the pigs and they ran headlong into the sea, this is the only time the Lord Jesus curses something; or, indeed, rather than blesses, He destroys rather than restoring. Could He have healed the tree? Of course He could have! So why did He not heal it? Because this is a picture of Israel, and soon - if you know the order of these events, and this doesn't come in in Mark, but it comes in in the other gospels - soon He's going to look over the whole city of Jerusalem again, and He's going to weep buckets. He going to say: 'Oh, you that killed the prophets and stoned those who God sent unto you, often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but ye would not!'. He had to curse the fig tree because they would not - they would not what? They would not receive Him, they would not accept Him.

Are you here this morning and you haven't received and accepted Christ as your Saviour and Lord? You haven't recognised Him, you haven't bowed to Him, you haven't surrendered to Him - do you know what's going to happen? You're going to be cursed! You're going to be cursed, and you're going to send yourself to judgement, because you would not!

Do you see what this fig tree is all about? John the Baptist, when he came, he said: 'The axe is laid to the root of the tree', in other words he was going to start cutting this fig tree down - and now Jesus is coming, and He's saying to them with tears in his eyes: 'Your house is left unto you desolate, for you knew not the day of your visitation'. In A.D. 70 the Romans would come in and destroy the temple, and destroy all Jerusalem, and scatter the Jews right across the world. Israel were to be a vehicle for the glory of God, they were to bear fruit for God - you look in the Old Testament, that's the reason why God chose them: to declare God to the nations. Yet Jesus comes unto His own, and He finds the fig tree empty! They are taking up space, but they're fruitless!

Now let me challenge you: there's an awful lot of churches in Ulster just like that fig tree. There's an awful lot of so-called 'professing Christians' just like that fig tree. They are taking up space, they are professing something, but they are empty! They are praising God - we've all been doing it this morning - and yet their praise is shallow, there is no fruit in their life. Could I ask you this morning: is there fruit in your life? What's fruit? Well, if you go to Galatians 5 - we don't have time to look at it, but you look at it when you go home - you've got love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness; the fruit of the Spirit. That can only happen when you've been filled with the Holy Spirit, and most Christians have never been filled with the Holy Spirit because they've never surrendered their will, and never asked God to fill them with the Holy Spirit. If you're an unfilled Christian, you can't bear the fruit for God that you need to. But there's not just the fruit of Christ-like character, which is the most important thing, the most important fruit that people eat - and fruit is for eating by the way, people will feed on you if you're bearing that type of fruit, and you will help them - but there is the fruit of also bringing others to Jesus, and doing all sorts of things for the Lord Jesus Christ and for His glory.

Well, we must move on, for Jesus moves from that fig tree scene to the cleansing of the temple in verse 15. Is it any wonder He cleansed the temple when you see what's going on? Verse 15: 'So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves''. Now, this is the second time the Lord Jesus cleansed the temple. The first time was at the beginning of His ministry, you can read about that in John chapter 2. This is now the second time, and it's almost like at the start and finish He's marking His ministry with the fact that Israel has failed, Israel has been fruitless - outwardly fruitless, but now He's gone into the temple to say that they're also inwardly corrupt. This is not just a problem outside, it's a problem inside.

Now, what can we gather from this action of the Lord Jesus? Very simply - and I'm not going into too much depth in these studies. I can't because time won't permit us, but maybe the surface level meaning is what we need. Sometimes we delve into the minutiae and miss the whole weight of what God is saying: this tells us that Christ hates empty religion! He hates it! He hates hypocrisy! Do you know where hypocrisy comes from? The word comes from the Greek word for 'mask'. He hates people who wear masks and try to pretend to be what they're not deep down. He hates profession without possession! He hates us talking about

things that we have no knowledge of, talking in ways that we have no experience of.

Now imagine, and I know it wouldn't happen here, but imagine some boy comes in here and starts turning over the chairs, and the coffee table is out and he kicks it over. He shouts at you all - some of you, if you were able to hold yourselves back, would be ringing 999 immediately, wouldn't you? This is strange, isn't it? I'm sure there were people saying: 'What kind of a way is this to behave in the house of God?'. This is a special place, the temple - it's more special than here, because we believe we are the temple of God, it's not a place - but they, in the Old Covenant, they believed the temple was the place where God dwelt. Right back to the Tabernacle, we find that 'Tabernacle' simply means 'the dwellingplace of the Shekinah glory of God'. The Shekinah glory was how God manifest Himself in light, and fire, and cloud. He did that visibly in the Tabernacle, and then they move from a transitory Tabernacle tent to a permanent, static Temple in Jerusalem. At the Solomon dedication of the Temple the glory of Shekinah came down, and God filled the house so that everybody couldn't minister any longer. So this is what the Jews understood: 'This is the place where God's presence and glory dwells, and He's coming, this upstart is coming in here and kicking tables over and causing a commotion!'.

Ah, but you have to know all Jewish history. You have to know that in Ezekiel the Shekinah glory of God left the temple because of Israel's idolatry, and it never came back. Haggai the prophet promised that the glory of the latter house would be greater than that of the former, that meant that the new temple that would come after Solomon's Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, the new temple would be more glorious - but it wasn't. It paled into insignificance. When the old people who remembered Solomon's Temple looked at it being built, they wept! But it wasn't talking about the structure, do you know what it was talking about? The Christ of God! God's glory would come into this temple in flesh at this very moment - at His birth, of course, He was brought into the temple for dedication, but now He's coming in but He's coming in in judgement - and when He goes out, and this is what I want you to mark, when He goes out the glory goes out. There is no glory in this temple but Jesus, and when He exits, it exits. Are you with me?

So all these, you know, religious prudes who say: 'What kind of a way is this to behave in the house of God?', the problem was God wasn't in it. Was this not sacrilege? Well, there was nothing of God in it. Can I say something to you: we should not be precious, religiously precious, about things that God isn't in. Do you understand? You can apply that to doctrines which are only the teachings and commandments of men. We can apply it to tradition. We can apply it to a whole lot of things, but God wasn't in it - and that's why Jesus behaved this way. Can I tell you something: you might say, 'Ach, well, you can't apply that to the church' - can I not? Turn with me to Revelation chapter 3 - this is the church at Laodicea, and if you were to ask me what spirit the church has in the West, this is the spirit that I would say they have, the spirit of Laodicea. 'So then', verse 16, 'because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'; and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked'. Point proven! The Laodicean spirit in the church makes the Lord sick. If you're lukewarm, now the Lord loves you, but you make Him sick, you make Him nauseous if you're neither hot nor cold - in fact, He'd rather have you cold than lukewarm, that's a staggering statement! He'd rather have you for or against Him than sitting on the fence the way most Christians do, just ticking over.

Do you know what the problem in the temple was? Well, let me put it like this: Duncan Campbell was used in revival in the Hebrides in Scotland in the 1940s and into the 50s. Later

on in his life, a Faith Mission man, he made this statement: 'Our problem is we have got everything but God'. We've got everything but God! We've got the hymns, and the programs, and the preachers, and the ideas, and the schedules, and the models, and the systems, and the doctrines - but if God is not in it, it's worthless! Is that not what this teaches? 'My house shall be a house of prayer'. Here's one to ask - this is getting hard now - if the Lord came into our places of worship, what would He change? What would He change? Don't think I'm talking about externals, He's not into externals, He's into internals. Have our churches become places of shallow praise - we know the songs because we've listened to them on CD all week - or are we really exalting the Lord? Are we prepared to praise? Were you prepared to come here this morning to praise, to worship, were you prepared? Did you bring something from your heart to God?

You see, the Jewish problem was: they were professing without possession; they were giving lip service, prayers, without the heart - but you know, it gets worse. Verse 17, they were actually making the temple a place for thieves to hide in, a den of thieves! Do you know what that means? The temple was being used to cover up sin! The church can be used to cover up sin! I read a book recently about child abuse in the evangelical church. Oh, we're all hammering the Roman Catholic Church about that, but you know it's going on everywhere. They might have a particular problem, but I'm telling you it's not only to the Roman Catholic Church that it's a problem! This church, now this is going back into a couple of decades ago, this evangelical church - with good motivation, they thought - covered it up! They covered it up, but it came out - even onto the front of the local papers it came out. Now listen: you can't cover up sin! Can I say a word, if you'll permit me, to your oversight here: a tendency in overseers is to close things down, to keep things quiet, to keep things in. Now, I understand there has to be confidentiality, of course there has to, and it's not right to go and blow everything all over the country - but I'll tell you this: there needs to be more transparency than ever in churches today. We cannot cover up sin.

But rather than praying 'This shall be a house of prayer', God's word says - do you know what they were doing? They were not praying, they were preying! They were preying on the people, they were using religion and God's word to make money - and that is going on today! Now you might think this is a negative message - I'm sorry, but I'm just preaching what's in this passage - just be thankful the Lord isn't coming in and turning tables over and all the rest, I'm being gentle on you! I'll just bare my heart - and maybe these are bugbears for me - but, do you see concerts, where you have to pay, you have to take a mortgage out to go and buy a ticket? For the life of me I cannot understand that, I cannot understand that! Bible conferences - now I'm not talking about meeting needed expenses, we've all got to - I mean if you come in and you're using heat, and you're eating five meals a day or whatever, and you're sleeping in somebody's bed, you have to pay for expenses. I know all that, and these people need to live and all the rest. But when you're paying to hear men preach the word of God we have lost our way somewhere! We really have! When men are producing books to make a living - the Lord never wrote a book, apart from the Bible, but He didn't sit down with a pen and write it of course. You know, I have a sneaking suspicion - and I thank God for the amount of Bibles we have, translations and Bible study books - but I reckon there are some people sitting in a room somewhere, probably in America, thinking: 'What about a Bible for ornithologists, or a Bible for cyclists?'. I was in a bookshop yesterday and I found the 100% waterproof Bible. Now if you've got it this morning, don't be offended, because I almost bought it myself because it was such a novelty - I said to the wife, 'You could read it in the bath, look, it's 100% waterproof!'. What do you need a 100% waterproof Bible for? They're producing these things - and tell me they're not producing it to make money, tell me that!

Now, thank God for the resources we have, but we've got a problem here in the West - you know what it is? We have more resources, and therefore more knowledge, than our ancestors ever had - yet we're bearing less fruit. We're taking up more room, like Israel, but we're less effective. Now, how can that be? Then there are folk, and I have to be careful here, and this is not just 'Hit this one, that one, and the other one', but this is from my heart - there are folk in ministry, and years ago the evangelical church would have hammered the established denominations for men who are 'good living for a living', and evangelicals are no different - and I confess to you that at times I may have been guilty of that myself. Their eye is more on their salary than their service.

Now we can't hide from these things - but if you think, 'Aye, he's right in that now, and he's right in that one, and those boys, those pastors, I always thought they were hungry for the wee brown envelope'. Malachi said to Judah: 'Can a man rob God?'. What he was getting at was: the people retorted back to Him, 'We have not robbed You, in what way have we robbed You?'. God says: 'In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation'. There is the curse coming in. God was pouring resources into them, but it wasn't coming out in fruit for God! What do you do with your money? Do you know the materialistic Western church has even invented doctrines to service lust for money? The prosperity gospel, you know, 'Give me \$1 million, and God will give you \$100 million' - but why doesn't he give away all his hundred million dollars to get more? It doesn't figure. They're lies, that's why, they are liars, false prophets a lot of them - not all of them, but a lot of them are.

Here's a thing that you need to waken up to, and I do as well: dead religion or false prophets, the Lord Jesus is sick of them! He is! Both the ones who have all the right doctrines but there is no life there, and the ones who are running around claiming life and all they are interested in is the fast buck. I'll tell you, you see when you start preaching the way I'm preaching, and behaving the way the Lord Jesus behaved, false prophets and false professors don't like it. Look at verses 18 and 19: 'The scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching. When evening had come, He went out of the city' - they sought to destroy Him. They didn't like it.

Now, is there an answer for this problem? Problem? What problem? Shallow praise, false profession, empty lives taking up space but really not producing anything for the Lord, lukewarmness - is there an answer? Is there any hope? Well, yes there is, verses 20 through to 26. Now if you persist in empty profession there is no answer, if you persist in a profession without power - having a name that you live, but you're dead - there's nothing can be done for you until you waken up to it, and say 'Look, there's something wrong here, there's something wrong here'. The 'something wrong' might be in verse 20, 'Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots'. They go by this scene again after the cleansing of the temple the next day, and they see that the tree has dried up from the roots. Now, if there's no fruit in your life it's more than likely the case that the problem is with root - there is something wrong with the roots deep down. You need to ask yourself are you truly saved? A lot of evangelicals in Ulster need to ask that question, because some of them just - you know, if you're born a Muslim over there in Iraq or Iran, you know, you're born an evangelical here and you just follow what you learn - I'm telling you, a lot of people do that in Ulster in Christian homes. All they have is a tradition and a way of life of their parents, and they have never been born-again! Have you been born-again? Maybe the lack of fruit in your life is because there is a lack of root, or maybe there is something wrong with the root? Maybe you're having problems just where you are? I don't know, God knows, maybe

you know, maybe you don't know - but I'll tell you what the answer is.

Verse 21: 'Peter, remembering, said to Him, 'Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away'. So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them'. Now there are many applications here and lessons that we don't have time to go into, but the context would teach us that what the Lord is saying here is: faith can remove obstacles that cause unfruitfulness. Believing prayer can remove those mountains that are causing unfruitfulness in your life. There is a principle here: a life of Spirit-filled, believing prayer - when you surrender yourself completely to the Lord, and you get filled with the Holy Spirit and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and you pray persistently in faith - it will deliver you from death. It will! Dearth and deadness and fruitlessness! Do you have a life of Spirit-filled, believing prayer? Very few people have that life.

It's not easy. 'Does not doubt in his heart', verse 23 says - but here's something else, right, if you thought that was hard: is there an answer for this? Yes! But if you think believing faith is difficult, well there's a twofold answer, verse 24: 'Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them', and verse 25 then, 'And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses'. It's faith and forgiveness!

I'm going to tell you something - it might be an open secret, I don't know - but one of the greatest contributory factors to fruitlessness in the church and in the Christian life is unforgiveness. The writer to the Hebrews calls it 'the root of bitterness', he says in chapter 12 verse 15: 'looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled'. You see you don't sin unto yourself, you're not an island. If you have bitterness in your heart that rubs off on your family, and it rubs off on your church family too. Have you fruitlessness in your life? Is their bitterness? Is their bitterness against a believer? Is their bitterness against something that was done to you? Maybe you're legitimate in your hurt and your smarting because you were offended - but, my friend, do you understand, you need to get over that! For if you don't get over that, do you know what's going to happen? You're going to be the greater victim! You are! These people maybe who hurt you are running around scot-free enjoying themselves, don't have a conscience at all about it - but you have a curse on you, you have fruitlessness on you because of unforgiveness.

Is there an answer to this type of fruitlessness and deadness? Yes, there is: faith and forgiveness. The conditions of answered prayer, the conditions of fellowship - and if you want revival and renewal in your life, it's wonderful: take God's word. It's the New Age that teaches, by the way, that if you believe something it will come true - that's not what these verses say. Faith in the Christian sense is: 'We believe what is true'. We don't have faith in something to make it true, we have faith in something because it is true, God said it is true. You take God's word, claim it in your life. If you're not filled with the Holy Spirit, claim it! 'If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask'. Claim your right in Christ, come believingly in prayer - but if there is unforgiveness in your heart, do you know what's going to happen? This is talking about parental forgiveness, not being saved, it is talking about this:

you will not know fellowship with God in forgiveness in your vertical relationship with Him, if your horizontal relationship with your brothers and sisters and with other people is not right.

Let us pray. We are coming to the Table, I think, soon - and what a place, if you need to have dealings with God, to have dealings with God. I am interested in some revivals that have happened in the past, and it's amazing the revivals that took place around the Lord's Table in varied denominations - because we are meant to examine ourselves. When you read where the Lord Jesus or Apostles speak on the Lord's Table, there's always instruction, and it's usually exhortation to their own heart. I'll tell you, do you know what Jesus said? If you've anything against your brother, leave your offering, go and make it right. We get it all wrong, you see - if you missed the table, 'Oh boy!'. You know, there's a thousand men and women in this country should be missing the Table this morning. He doesn't want you to miss the Table, He wants you to get right and come to the Table - that's the point. He doesn't want you to walk away if you have burdens here today, He wants you to deal with them, He wants you to bring them to Him and confess them, and ask in faith, believing, and forgive from your heart those who may have wronged you - and have that fellowship that you ought to have, that God is looking for in your life. But don't be taking up room and bearing no fruit!

Father, we thank You for what we have learned this morning from the Servant King's short-lived welcome into Jerusalem. But the Lord, with those piercing eyes that we see Him now having, eyes of fire, He could see into their hearts and He knew: 'They honour me with their lips, but for many of them their hearts are far from me'. Lord, let that not be said of us, but let us be a people who worship You in spirit and in truth, and give our lives to You. May we not just give praise in the sense of the fruit of our lips but, Lord, our whole hearts. 'My son, give me your heart', that's what You're saying to us today, 'My child, give me your heart, give me your all'. As we come around the Table, and remember what our Lord Jesus did as He journeyed towards Jerusalem, where He was going and what He was going to do for us - may that make the difference, may that compound this effect of the word of God today upon us, to know what this was all for: His determination, that we may be able to bear fruit through the new covenant. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 2

"Question Time"

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It's good to be back with you tonight again, and we're turning to Mark's gospel chapter 11. If you weren't here this morning, it was the first instalment of the series that I hope to do, God willing, each week, indeed each morning and evening both, on the last week of the life of our Lord Jesus, the last week of His ministry here on earth. So tonight we're looking again at chapter 11, just the latter verses, and then the whole of chapter 12. Now, I know it might have been longer than some of you are used to this morning, I'm sorry about that, but that's about as long as I'm used to preaching - so hopefully the Lord is speaking and doing a work, and I do trust that the Lord is moving in your heart, and I believe He will if you are open to God.

Before we start let's pray again, and just ask the Lord's help. It's vital that we have God with us in what we're doing. I know that might seem redundant when we're in church, we would expect God to be there - but we saw this morning in the temple that He wasn't there, and that's why the Lord Jesus came in and cleansed it. He caused a lot of fuss, but the fact of the matter was that God didn't own a lot of what was going on in His name. It's the same today, there's no doubt about it in my mind and my heart. We so often are so guilty of being religious, going through the ritual, and maybe not meeting God. We want to meet God here, don't we? So let's open our hearts, all of us, just now open our hearts and say: 'Lord, what do You have to say to me? What do You have to say to me? Whatever You have to say, give me the strength and courage to do Your will'. So let us pray.

Father, Abba Father, we thank You in the name of our Lord Jesus for the record of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of our Lord Jesus. We thank You, Lord, that we have this book in our hand - and we are so guilty, Father, of abusing the privilege that we have. Lord, we are so responsible for being partakers of the life of Jesus, knowing what He did, knowing what He said, knowing how He lived, knowing what He commanded us, knowing what He expects of us, knowing what He promises us. Yet, Lord, it is a mirror, because when we look into it we see ourselves falling far short of what is expected. Yet, Lord, we don't want to be unnecessarily negative - because, though we confess our guilt, and though we confess our sins, we thank You that this life that has been given to us in Christ, everything that we need is in Him and there is no reason for us to be on a back foot, there is no reason for us to be living beneath the promises and the blessings that He purchased for us with His own shed blood. So, Lord, we pray that tonight, as we look into Your word, we will not just be going away feeling: 'Oh, I don't measure up', but we will be invigorated and excited about what we can be and what we can know. Lord, I pray for those here who maybe aren't Christians, maybe have never believed on the Lord Jesus, maybe asking many questions. I pray tonight, not so much that their questions would be answered because none of us have all our questions answered, but Lord that they would encounter the living Christ, that they would realise that Christ is the answer that they need to the questions, perhaps, that they are not asking. So, Father, we pray, we need the Holy Spirit. I can do nothing without Jesus' power in the Holy Spirit, and so I pray now, and we all pray, for the Holy Spirit to come into our midst in a very definite and even, indeed, manifest way and minister to us now. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Now the portion of Scripture we're starting with tonight, we're not going to read an initial reading, we're starting at verse 27 of chapter 11 of Mark's gospel. We've probably now entered Tuesday in the last week of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw this morning that Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews, the Triumphal Entry we know it as. Then we moved on to Monday and we saw this cursing of the fig tree, and then we saw the Lord Jesus enter into the temple, and He cleanses it, turns the tables up and He speaks here in verse 17 about the house of God is meant to be a house of prayer, but they have made it a den of thieves. Now, naturally, that caused a rumpus and a fuss - indeed an outrage - among the Jewish religious leaders. Their natural reaction was: 'Who does He think He is?'. You see, they were the guys in charge, if you like, of what went on religiously in Judaism, and particularly what went on in the precincts of the temple. He is coming in and He is assuming authority to go in and upend the tables, and to lambast them for what they're doing: buying and selling, and trading and making money in the name of God.

But worse than just being outraged, Jesus Christ was a threat to them. He was a threat to their little powerbase and so, as far as they were concerned, He must be dealt with. Serious stuff. In verse 18 we saw this, immediately after the cleansing of the temple, the scribes and the chief priests 'sought how they might destroy Him' - it's not watering it down, is it! They want to destroy Him, 'for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching'. You see, the reverence that they once knew was now being transferred in a far greater extent over to the person of Christ, and they were jealous. But I want you to know something that is incredible, astounding: this provocation by Jesus of the religious authorities was deliberate. I hope that has sunk in. His provocation of the religious authorities was deliberate, and Jesus was in complete control of what He was doing. It wasn't simply the case that He was sharing a few truths that were slightly controversial, and He knew deep down that He might offend some - He was actively going out of His way to offend. He was in control of the situation.

Now that answers a great question that theologians, philosophers, historians have debated for years: the question of 'Why was Jesus crucified?'. Some will say it was murder, He was murdered. The Jews, we see, the Jewish hierarchy wanted to destroy Him. Of course the Romans, they didn't want insurrection and rebellion and any civil unrest in this little conclave of their empire, and so they wanted to sort Him out ultimately. So this was a religious and a political murder. Others say, 'No, it was more than that, it was martyrdom'. Jesus was founding a religion and 'a good cause', if you like, and so He was dying as a martyr. Others will look at it from a legal point of view, and they will say: 'This was a miscarriage of justice', and we might look at some of the trials as we go through this last week of our Lord Jesus Christ - and there's no doubt about it, that this was the greatest miscarriage of justice that has ever been. Others will say that this was just a tragic mistake, Jesus was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I have to say to you a resounding emphatic 'No' to all those explanations of why Jesus was crucified. The reason why Jesus was crucified was divine motivation, divine motivation. The apostle put it like this when he preached at Pentecost, speaking to Jews: 'This Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan of God and His foreknowledge'. He turned to them and said: 'You crucified and killed Him by the hands of lawless men'. There we see, incidentally - and I'm not going to digress to this - but the balance between the sovereign plan of God and responsibility of men. This last week of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, as indeed all of His life was, was preordained of God. He was God's Eternal Son sent into the

world to be our Saviour, and He was going to die - that is why He came! Yet there is still responsibility on the behalf of those who crucified Him.

Now this was Mark's theme, as we saw this morning, that's why he dedicates six chapters at the end of his gospel - a disproportionate amount in comparison to the life of the Lord Jesus and what went on, to dedicate six chapters to one week. We saw that Mark is the gospel of the cross, how he dwells here - but also in Mark we see that the Lord Jesus continually tried to get this into the minds of the disciples, that this was the reason why He came.

Let me show you this, if you turn back to chapter 8 of Mark, verse 31: 'And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly'. Look at the reaction of the disciples to this: 'Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men''. The disciples had a great problem in getting this point, that Jesus had come - according to the determinate counsel of God - to go and die on the cross for men's sins, to be buried, and to rise again. Turn to chapter 9 verse 31, verse 30: 'Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, 'The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day'. But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him'. Just before the chapter that we're looking at tonight in chapter 10, He reminds them again, verse 33: 'Behold', they are on their way to Jerusalem, He's explaining why they're going there, 'we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again'. So He has all the instigators mentioned there: the Jewish hierarchy, the chief priests and the scribes; and the Gentiles, the Romans. He's being even more specific about why they're going to Jerusalem, that this is the grand finale, the great crescendo of His life and ministry on Earth: to go to the cross and bleed and die - this is the reason that He came into this world! This is the reason He was crucified: to die for me.

So it wasn't murder only, although it was an act of murder. It was martyrdom, it wasn't only a miscarriage of justice, and it certainly was no mistake. It was divine motivation that led Jesus Christ to the cross for me! I love to be able to say that tonight: for me. Can you say that? I mean, do you understand this great plan of the ages: that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life - for me! You see, it is personal. There are so many people, and they go to places of worship, and they're called Christian places of worship, and they can identify with this story in a sort of nebulous way - but they cannot make it personal because they have never been born-again, they have never trusted Christ as their personal Saviour and personal Lord. Why was Jesus crucified? For me. Say it: 'For me'. I love the old hymn, and one verse goes like this:

'Was it the nails, dear Saviour,
That held Thee to the tree?
Nay, 'twas Thine everlasting love,
Thy love for me, for me'.

Why was Jesus crucified? For love of me, for love of you. Now think about this: He is in Jerusalem at the Passover season to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

He is there to die. Incidentally, the last Passover that Jesus attended in Jerusalem was at the beginning of His ministry, when He cleansed the Temple the first time - and I mentioned that this morning, I think incorrectly, I said you could read about it in John 12, it's John 2 you can read about it. At the beginning of His three and a half years of ministry He cleansed the temple, and He was at the Passover season then - but He did not attend the intervening three Passovers in His ministry. You ask: 'Why was that?'. Simply because of the animosity of the Jewish rulers. He knew if He went into Jerusalem for the Passover they would get Him. He was waiting for His hour, God's ordained and appointed moment when He would go today. Now His hour has come, and I want you to see this again: He is provoking them, in fact He is inviting them to take Him and crucify Him according to the sovereign plan and determination of God. Isn't it wonderful?

Here in chapter 11 and the end verses in chapter 12, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious ruling body, questions Him. They scrutinise Him. The motivation is clear from verse 13 of chapter 12: 'They sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words'. They wanted to trap Him. Now, incidentally, at Passover every Jewish family, according to Exodus chapter 12, chose a lamb to be sacrificed. They chose the lamb on the tenth day of the month, and they were instructed by Moses to carefully examine the lamb until the fourteenth day of the month in order to make sure it was a lamb without blemish and without spot, a lamb without defects. Now during the last week of the ministry of our Lord Jesus, God's Lamb was being examined in various ways that we will look at over these next weeks - but He passed every single test! As Isaiah 53 tells us, neither was deceit or guile found in His mouth. They tried to trap Him in his words, but they couldn't!

Here the Sanhedrin questions Him: 'What right have You to assume the role of authority, to cleanse the temple? What right have You to make Yourself the Messiah of God's people? We alone have the authority to do these things and claim these things!'. So let's look at these questions, and there are four that come from the Sanhedrin, and then there is a fifth question in this passage that actually comes from the Lord Jesus. So let's look at question one, and it's a question of authority - verse 27 of chapter 11: 'Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him', here's question number one, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?'. But Jesus answered and said to them, 'I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John; was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me'. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'. But if we say, 'From men"; they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. So they answered and said to Jesus, 'We do not know'. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things'.

Now don't you just marvel at the masterful wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ in exposing their wicked, unbelieving hearts? You see, the leaders had not been honest with John the Baptist, and now they're not being honest with the Lord Jesus Christ in their questioning. You see what's happening here: John had come as a prophet, and the people recognised that. So Jesus turns the tables on them, and says: 'Right, if you want to know where My authority comes from, where did John's authority come from?'. They were afraid to say that it was only the authority of men, because the people recognised John as a prophet of God; and they were afraid to say his authority was from heaven, because they were the very ones - just as they are doing now to Jesus - who opposed the ministry of John the Baptist! So the Lord had them in a corner, and they said: 'We don't know'. Jesus said: 'Neither do I tell you where My authority comes from'.

Now there is a principle here that all of you need to come to terms with. It's a very simple principle, and the sooner in the Christian life you get a grip of this the better. It's this: obedience is the instrument of revelation. Obedience is the instrument of revelation. In other words, when we obey God, God teaches us more. Let me show you this from John 7 verse 17, if you care to turn to it, John 7 verse 17 - when we obey the word of God, God teaches us more. John 7:17, we saw how important the will is in the Christian life: 'If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority'. So what the Lord Jesus was saying to these folk was: 'Look, if you want to know where My authority comes from, if you want to know whether My doctrine is true, obey God's will. If you obey God's will, He will give you revelation, He will show you the truth'. The problem is, the converse of this is: if we disobey God, or if we fail to obey in some manner where He is telling us to do something and we are stalling and stopping and we're not doing it, God will close the door on revelation - He will cease showing us any more.

Have you ever learned this in the Christian life? Sometimes we wonder why we are at a standstill, and it may well be because at some point in our life God told us to do a thing, and we said either 'No', or we became passive and decided 'Well, I'll not do either thing - I'll not go against Him, but I'll not go with Him'. God says: 'Right, that's okay, until you learn that lesson, and until you take that step of obedience, I'm not going to show you anything else'. Is that why some of you are where you are tonight? I'm not telling you this to condemn you, I'm wanting to help you, and wanting you to learn how to go on. Obedience is the instrument of revelation. If you want to know more you have to obey! It's a bit like a glowworm. I'm led to believe that a glowworm shines ever only enough light for the next step - and, incidentally, it's not until he takes the next step that he gets light showing where he is to go further. Do you understand?

Another principle comes out of this and, indeed, this event - and that is: when we start to question Christ, His ways and His word, revelation ceases - when we start to question God. Now when I speak of questioning God, we've all got questions. I'm not speaking about just asking questions to understand, I'm talking about coming from a negative position of doubting questions, doubting God, doubting Christ and His word. Now the fig tree this morning, and I don't have time to go over it if you weren't with us, but it taught, didn't it, regarding the nation of Israel that were to be a witness for God and His glory to all the other Gentile nations of the world, that when they failed in their responsibility and did not bear fruit but only took up space, a curse came upon them - isn't that right? You see, the curse came to a crescendo in the life of the Lord Jesus when they rejected Him as Messiah - and that's why we see what is happening in this last week of our Lord Jesus Christ. They had questioned Christ, here they are doing it; and they were questioning the word of God. So a curse came upon them - sure, all we need to do is go back to the book of beginnings to find out this. Even before there was sin in our world, in the Garden the serpent suddenly came to Eve and said: 'Has God really said that when you eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that you will die? Has He really said?'. He was casting doubt on God's word.

Now this is vitally important. It's serious, really serious, to cast doubt on God's word. Sometimes as Christians we get ourselves into a state - and whether it's because we're being bombarded by a secular and godless society, through the media in particular, and if you're just saturated constantly in the media this is going to happen to you - you start to imbibe the worldview, you start to be pushed into the world's mould, and sometimes you start to question the Scriptures in a way that the world does. But you've got to understand - I'm not saying that you don't have understanding, we're to find out as much information as possible,

we're not to leave our brain at the door - but we've got to understand its got more to do than with just intellect, much more. This is a supernatural thing, it's a spiritual thing, and it involves faith. Whenever we start falling into the trap of casting doubt on the word of God, something terrible happens: a curse or a standstill.

Some of you may have heard of 'Biblical higher criticism' - have you heard of it? That's not what happens around the dinner table, by the way, after the preacher has given his sermon - sometimes there's a lot of criticism goes on then! Biblical higher criticism was really a movement that questioned the authenticity of the history as the Bible presented it. You know, 'Was there a crossing of the Red Sea?', and 'Did Moses help the Pharaoh in Egypt?', and all these things - and you see it on your news, usually around Christmas and Easter time they're questioning things to try and cause doubt in the minds of Christians. Now Biblical higher criticism had its rise in Germany - and, incidentally, Germany was the land of the Reformation, which was the rediscovery of Biblical truths. Yet, from about the mid 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, various scholars of the original documents - copies of course - of the Scriptures, started to critique them and pick holes in them in Germany. I was listening to a sermon of Derek Prince's not that long ago, and he pointed out this very fact: that from the same nation of Germany, a nation so blessed in the word of God, came two of the most evil monsters that the human race has ever known - Karl Marx and Adolf Hitler. Now, I can't say this was that, but there are consequences even for present-day nations, even for our United Kingdom. Whenever we cast doubt on the word of God, whenever society starts to suppress the knowledge of God, there are consequences. There are going to be consequences for the UK, for the way it's behaving, for the way the government is behaving and popular society.

Let me show you this in case you're not convinced, Romans chapter 1 please, verse 18. Paul was writing to the Roman church, and I believe he had the Roman Empire in view here: 'For the wrath of God', verse 18 of chapter 1, 'the wrath of God', His anger, 'is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness'. 'Suppress' simply means 'to hold down', that's what we're talking about here. When a society holds down or suppresses the truth, or tries to cast doubt on the truth, or water down the truth, God is angry! Verse 19: 'Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them', God has given us all enough to believe, 'For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made', creation, 'even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse' - everyone in the world has no excuse for not believing in God, because of the witness of the creation. Verse 21: 'Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and fourfooted animals and creeping things' - that's why people worship graven images. Now here's the consequence: 'Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge' - this is their sin, they don't want to retain God in their knowledge - 'God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness,

maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them'.

Now, what you have there is a society who suppresses truth and the knowledge of God, and there is a progressive decline in that society that is coming from God directly. Now you see the decline in our society: it is coming as a direct result of God withdrawing His gracious influence upon us. Here are the signs outlined for us in Romans chapter 1: first there will be idolatry, they will worship the creature rather than the Creator; then there will be rampant immorality, cite 1960s and following; and then there will be an enshrining of homosexuality, here we are. Men's and women's minds are becoming perverted that, even if they don't engage in these things, they take pleasure in those who do and even make laws allowing it to go on. But can I say to you tonight, if you're not a Christian, what can be applied to a nation here can be applied personally. If you suppress the knowledge of God in your life, if you hold down what God is trying to do in your life and try to keep it back and under wraps, and pour cold water every time you hear God speak to you, you're running the risk of - just like this nation - being given up, given up and given over to what you're choosing. That's a serious thing. You see, we all have this sort of silly idea that, you know, 'I'll get right with God when it suits me' - no, you'll not! Or, 'I'll get through the door when it's ajar, just before I pop my clogs' - no, you'll not! No you'll not!

'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near' - do you see if you suppress the truth, and the knowledge of the truth, there are consequences. There were for the Jews rejecting God's Son. In His replies to their questions on authority, it's very interesting, He gives a parable, a story. He reveals in this story who He is, and consequently who they were rejecting, and yet they would not accept the truth. Verse 1 of chapter 12: 'Then He began to speak to them in parables: 'A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it', Mark chapter 12, 'He dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now at vintage time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son'. But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours'. So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others''.

He is the Beloved Son, the only Son of the Father, sent by the Father. These Pharisees and religious leaders are the vinedressers, and they're protecting their own position in the establishment. Then Jesus goes on in verses 10 and 11 to quote Psalm 118, and to describe how He is, Jesus, 'The stone which the builders rejected', and He's going to 'become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in their eyes'. Now, let me press fast forward for a moment, past the death, the resurrection, the ascension of our Lord Jesus, and past the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, to an incident in the Acts of the Apostles - if you turn with me to chapter 4. Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray, and they healed a lame man, and they were arrested for healing this lame man because doing anything in the name of Jesus had been banned. So, because of this, they were questioned by

the Sanhedrin - does that sound familiar? In Acts chapter 4 we begin the reading and verse 7, they are standing before this Jewish ruling council, the same group: 'And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, 'By what power", or authority, "or by what name have you done this?'. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone'. Can you imagine being one of these men!? Hearing the same words that were spoken by the very lips of Christ repeated, and knowing that it has been fulfilled and Jesus has risen, and He's ascended, and these scaredy-custard disciples are now bold men of God turning the world upside down and performing healings in the name of Jesus of Nazareth - and hearing these broad fishermen telling them the same words: 'The stone that you rejected has become the chief cornerstone'.

More than that, verse 12, look at it: 'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby must be saved'. You see, they were rejecting Christ and they were rejecting life. They were trying to hurt Christ, and all they were doing was hurting themselves. Now, my friend, if you're running away from Jesus, that's all you're doing. You're hurting yourself, like Paul on the road to Damascus - Jesus said to him: 'Why do you keep kicking against the goads, the pricks?', like an animal is goaded along the road by a sharp instrument, the Spirit was goading Paul towards Jesus but he was kicking out. If you kick against a sharp instrument you're going to get hurt yourself, and when you kick out against the conviction of the Holy Spirit in your life, and God's revelation in your life, you're only going to hurt yourself. Thank God Paul was converted, but these Jewish people were not because they hardened their hearts more - and what did we say? Obedience is the instrument of revelation. If you won't obey, God will close the shutters and you'll get no more light! Now, if you're here tonight and you're not converted, that's every reason for you to be this very night here in this meeting.

We've got to move on. A question about authority, and then there's a question about taxes, verses 13 to 17 of chapter 12. Second question: 'Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians' - now this is very interesting, because the Pharisees and the Herodians were enemies of one another. The Pharisees were the strict sect of the Jews following the Torah Scriptures. The Herodians were very liberal, and they supported Herod who was, of course, in cahoots with the Roman rulers. So these two poles apart groups are now united to oppose Christ - interesting how enemies can come together against God! But this was a subtle ploy, you see they were asking a question about taxes to the Roman government - and no matter how Jesus answered, it wouldn't please either one of these two parties, the Herodians or the Pharisees. They start off by flattery in verse 14, the Pharisees and the Herodians come to catch Him in His words: 'When they had come, they said to Him, 'Teacher, we know that You are true', that was a lie, 'and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth' - and here's the sting - 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?'. '.

You see, Satan is quite happy using flattery to get his own ends - and can I tell you: he'll use anything to get his own ends. He'll use church, he'll use Christian things to get his own ends. For him the ends justify the means, and this question is given: 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?'. 'Oh, we've got Him again', that's what they think, they're trying to catch Him in His words, that's their motivation in verse 13. I'm not going to go into the ins and outs of this, save to say that this is a question about responsibility. You see, they knew that there had to

be responsibility to pay taxes, but they knew that they were paying taxes to the Roman power, the Gentile, unclean power. Let's just pause there for a moment, because there is a responsibility there for us as well - and if you want to know all about it read Romans chapter 13. Sometimes, over the last 40 years of problems in our province, I wonder how many times Romans 13 was preached on down through those years because it tells us that the powers that be are ordained of God. We are to obey them as far as they do not force us to transgress our confession of Christ in an ungodly way.

I wonder are you observing this principle? It's found in the answer that Jesus gave in verse 15: 'Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?'. But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, 'Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it'. So they brought it. And He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's'. And Jesus answered and said to them - wonder, wonder and marvel at His wisdom - 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'. And they marveled at Him'. What He was really saying is: 'You guys aren't rendering to God what you should render to Him'. But can I ask you: are you rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's? Let me be blunt: are you paying your taxes, or does the pen have a little slip when you're filling in the form? It's serious. We're told in the word of God to walk circumspectly, do you know what that means? Walk carefully before God and before men. I don't know whether you've ever heard of W.P. Nicholson, the great evangelist, and there was a revival through his ministry here in our land. He was taking a crusade, I think in Belfast, and he went to a tailor and was getting fitted, I think, for a suit. He asked the tailor would he come along to the mission, and the tailor says: 'I wouldn't be seen dead near your mission'. He was a bit taken aback, and he said: 'Why ever is that?', he says 'Because there are umpteen of the people flocking there every night, and they owe me money!'. Do you know what Nicholson did that night? Before he preached, he said: 'I was at the tailor's today, and he happened to tell me that some of you owe him money', and he says, 'He gave me all your names', and he says, 'If you haven't paid by this time tomorrow evening I'm going to read the list out' - and every bill was paid! Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.

Well, that's the principle, but look at His masterful answer - and even His enemies marvelled at Him. At the end of verse 17 when he said 'Render to Caesar...', 'And they marvelled at Him'. Listen unsaved friend here tonight, you can admire Jesus and at the self-same time reject Him! There's very few people would say a bad word about Jesus - I mean, really, when they examined His character and what He did in His life and ministry, most people, even other religions of the world, sort of revere Him in some shape or form. Yet they reject Him, they're still questioning Him, trying to get Him to fall.

A question of authority, a question of taxes, the third question is a question of resurrection. Verse 18: 'Then some Sadducees' - by the way, this is the only place in Mark's gospel that he mentions the Sadducees. Just to fill you in a wee bit about the Sadducees, they only believed in the Torah - that's the first five books of the Bible - they only believed in the writings of Moses and none of the rest of the Old Testament. They also did not believe in the soul, they did not believe in life after death, they didn't believe in a resurrection of the body, they didn't believe in judgement to come, neither did they believe in angels or demons. I learned at Religious Studies in school, that's why the Sadducees were sad, you see - did you learn that? Now this is a question of eternity - the Sadducees, 'who say there is no resurrection', verse 18, 'came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us', there they're emphasising Moses and his writings, "that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother' - that's called a Levirate marriage. "Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and

dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also". Here's the question: 'Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife'.

Now, I'm not going to go into the details of this story - in fact, I actually did it the last time I was here in one of the question evenings, so if you want to get that recording you may do so - but here's the point: the Sadducees thought they were clever, asking this question of the Lord Jesus. But Jesus shows them that all they're doing is showing their ignorance - look at verse 24: 'Jesus answered and said to them, 'Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?'. They were ignorant of two things: first, the power of God; and second, the Scriptures. What does He mean by the ignorance of the power of God? Verse 25: 'For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven'. In other words, Jesus and God, they are going to change life in the future - even our bodies are going to be changed, and we're not going to live life exactly the same way as we live down here. But they were ignorant of the power of God, they didn't believe in the resurrection - are you ignorant of the power of God? Are you all intellectual about faith, and you're not prepared to open up to the supernatural and allow God into your life to prove Himself to you? That's where these guys were.

But they were also ignorant of the scriptures, and incidentally: isn't it interesting who Jesus quotes to them in verse 26. 'But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage' - you should know that, Sadducees! - 'How God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken'. Powerful, isn't it? What He was saying to them is: 'Listen, you're questioning Me about whose wife this woman will be of the seven husbands she married, but you're not asking the important question: God is not the God of the dead, but of the living' - that means there is life after death, there is life for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and there will be life for you when you die... where will you be? That was the question. Jesus says: 'You're ignorant! You think you're clever, you think you're clever asking these questions' - is that you tonight? Do you think you're clever? Maybe you're trying to destroy the faith of other young Christians. You're not clever, you're a fool! I say that kindly to you, because - as Jesus said in Matthew 12 - if God would require your soul of you tonight, and He said it to a man: 'You fool, for tonight your soul will be required from you, and then whose will those things be that you have provided?'. Where will you be in eternity? Where will you be? That's the question! Is it not?

Then there's a fourth question, the question of the most important commandment in verse 28. 'Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together', this is all going on in the temple, I'd love to have been a fly on the wall! 'Perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?', or the greatest, foremost. 'Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one" - that's the Shema from Deuteronomy chapter 6, all Jews quote it - "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength'. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these".

Now, we haven't time to look at this, but these two commands are the sum total of the whole law of God - both our duty Godward and manward. Even if you look at the Ten Commandments you will see that both these commands sum the whole thing up - but this is a

question of priority of love. They want to know which is the greatest commandment, and Jesus is turning it on them and saying: 'This is the greatest: do you love, truly love, God'. Now I have to say to you tonight: it is utterly impossible for any man or woman just in the simple strength of their human flesh to love God the way it says here, with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind, and with all strength; and to love their neighbour as themselves. That's why we live in this messed up world, because men can't do it - they try to do it, that's called religion, but they can't do it. The only way you can do this is by grace, a free gift, through faith, that's what you accept the gift with, when the Holy Spirit comes into your life when you're born-again as a Christian, and the Lord God of heaven starts to live out the life of Jesus in you - that's the only way that can be done, through the law of the Spirit in the New Covenant, no other way.

Verse 32, this is the man's reaction: 'So the scribe said to Him, 'Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices''. Now mark this, verse 34: 'Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'' - you're not far from the kingdom of God. Can I tell you something: this man would remain near, but outside the kingdom of God, unless he ceases questioning and starts believing Christ - and that will be the same for you. You might be near to coming to Jesus, 'Oh, but I just have to get this little question, or that little question, or the other little question answered before I come'. I know you have to have legitimate questions, and you have to understand the Gospel before you believe, but you will never understand everything - you will never! Once you get one question answered, the devil will very readily give you another one to keep you going for another couple of months - and on, and on, and on, ad infinitum until you fall into hell! You will forever remain maybe near, but outside the kingdom until you - is this a word for someone here tonight? - until you stop questioning Christ and start believing Him!

Boy did that silence them! Look at the last statement in verse 34: 'But after that no one dared question Him'. Don't you love Him! Ah, but there's one more question - this time Jesus is asking it. He turns the tables on them. They've asked Him a question about authority, about taxes, about resurrection, about the most important commandment - and now He asks them a question in verses 35 and 36: 'Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, 'How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool'. Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?'. And the common people heard Him gladly'.

Let me just explain that. David, in the prophetic Psalm, there it is in Psalm 110 that He's quoting, He says: 'The LORD said to my Lord', and 'my Lord' there is speaking of the coming Messiah, and yet Messiah is known as the Son of David - He has to be in the lineage and line of David. So Jesus is saying: 'How does he call Him Lord? How does David call Him Lord if He is his son?'. It's a bit complicated, but the only way David's son could be David's Lord is if He's God. The only way David's son could be his Lord is if He's God, and He is. But this is the point of Jesus saying this: it's a question of identity - that's what Jesus' question is, a question of identity. He says, 'You're looking to get answers to all these foolish questions' - He knows they're trying to trip Him up, but He's trying to waken them up. These were guys who spend every day debating and questioning one another in the minutiae of the Old Testament law, every jot and tittle of Hebrew. He says, 'You're asking all these questions, but the most important question is: 'What do you think of Christ?'. David said He was Lord, and all your

political questions about taxes; all your hypothetical questions about a woman married so many times and whose wife will she be; they are nothing compared to the most important question: 'Is Jesus your Lord?' - that's what Jesus was saying. Like David, is Jesus your Lord? Is He? All the questions, oh, you can ask them, and it's your right - but what about the big one: is He your Lord, and do you love Him through the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Well, I love that phrase at the end of verse 37: 'the common people heard Him gladly'. That's not just a throwaway remark, the humble poor believed, the ordinary people. These highbrow - remember the Tefal ad, the boys with the big heads? - that's what they were like, religiously speaking: highbrow intellectuals, religious upper-class - they just questioned. But the humble poor believed! The common people, that's what Jesus said: 'I thank You, Father', Matthew 11, 'that You have not revealed these things to the wise and prudent, but You have revealed them to babes'. Matthew 18: 'Except you become like a little child and be converted, you will never enter the kingdom'. Isn't it wonderful? The reason why the humble poor believed was: they hadn't got the pride to overcome, they hadn't got the massive intellects and the position in their life that they were guarding, like the vinedressers. They hadn't to protect anything, they had nothing going for them and they needed a Saviour! So they didn't question Him, they believed in Him.

Let's close by looking at the soul that God values, in contrast to the pharisaic hypocrites. Verse 41 - and I think this is what this means in the context, it's a contrast with what has gone before with this questioning religious crowd. 'Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury', in the same Temple, 'And many who were rich put in much' - probably the Pharisees, and made a big show of it too. 'Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood' - that's the one God values: the simple soul that believes and gives all they have to Jesus.

I must question you: what is your answer to Him? Will you question Him, or will you believe Him? Let us pray.

Now I hate, well, you would gather that I hate rushing, but I hate rushing at the end of meetings - especially when there is a sense of the presence of God, and an awareness that God has been speaking. I don't know who He's been speaking to, maybe believers who needed to hear that obedience is the instrument of revelation. You're at a standstill and you want to go on, but you can't, and God's not going to let you until you do that thing that He asked you to do that you haven't done, or you stop doing that thing that He asked you to stop doing that you haven't stopped doing. Maybe there is an unbeliever, a great intellect, or just an inquisitive person curious to know every angle and every answer to every question - well, you aren't going to have it, for nobody has all the answers only God. So, when are you going to humble yourself and believe, and see God work in your life? Maybe even tonight, would you say: 'Lord, I'm stopping all the questions and I'm stepping out in faith. I believe You, reveal Yourself to me' - and I believe He'll do it, I do believe He'll do it if you mean it.

Father, we thank You for this time. Lord, we don't grow tired of beholding the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We just love gazing on Him, what He says and what He does, and how He says and does it. We praise Him, He is wonderful! We love Him more and more every time we get a glimpse of Him! How He answered these men, and yet Father, He's answering us in many of the foibles and failures that we have in these areas. Lord, we pray

that You'll help us all to be obedient. We pray that any who are struggling and have not yet come to complete faith in Christ, that tonight they will cry out: 'I believe, help my unbelief' - and tonight they will settle the matter. It's not a leap into the dark, Lord, but a leap into the light - it's still a leap, but it's into the light and into the truth. It will be confirmed for them, we believe, Lord, when they come - and we pray that You will be quick to receive them and confirm it to them. We thank You for this evening, we thank You for this day, and we thank You for the refreshments provided for us now, and we pray that You will bless our time and our journey home. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 3

"Signs Of The Second Coming"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to Mark's gospel chapter 13, and we'll not read the portion for the sake of time - what we will do is, we'll go through it verse-by-verse as we come to each part. If you wanted a title for what we are going to study this morning - and it is more of a Bible study, tonight will be a challenge and a devotional thought or two, but this morning is quite an in-depth Bible study on the 'Signs of the Second Coming' of the Lord Jesus. We are taking these weeks a series on the final 'Countdown To Calvary' - in other words, what Mark does in these last chapters of his gospel, from chapter 11 right to chapter 16, is: he gives us a breakdown in the last week of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Quite disproportionate in the sense that it is only a week of His life, and yet Mark gives so much time in his gospel to it - but it's vital to his theme, because Mark is, of course, the gospel of the cross.

Now, last Sunday morning we started on the Sunday of this last week, as Jesus rode - it's called the 'Triumphal Entry' - rode on a donkey into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews. Then we moved on, still on Sunday morning past in our time, we moved on to Monday as far as Jesus was concerned, where He cursed a fig tree, and then He went into the Temple and He cleansed the Temple of the thieves and those who were dealing there. He told them: 'My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves and robbers'. Then we saw last Sunday evening that the Lord Jesus, probably on Tuesday, was questioned by the Sanhedrin. We saw four questions that Jesus had to answer about various subjects - they were trying to catch Him in His words. Then we saw that the fifth question in the passage was from Jesus, as He turned the tables on the Pharisees and Scribes and asked them the most important question of all - and that was: what they really thought of Him. That is the most important question of all, what we think of Christ.

Now, I'm not dogmatic about these events being on particular days of the week, but it's more than likely that what we're going to read and study this morning took place on Wednesday of the last week of the Lord Jesus. Mark's gospel chapter 13 encompasses for us the teaching of the Lord Jesus concerning His second coming, which has come to be known as 'The Olivet Discourse'. Of course He taught on the Mount of Olivet, and you can also read it in a more elongated form in Matthew's Gospel chapters 24 and 25, and also in Luke's Gospel chapter 21 - but we will be sticking really to Mark's record of it in chapter 13.

Now, if you were with us you will remember that the Lord Jesus has spent some time in the vicinity of the Temple area, and that's where the Sanhedrin were questioning Him. In that context, moving out of the Temple and out to the Mount of Olivet, verse 1 of chapter 13: 'As He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!'. This particular disciple, we don't know who he was, just was awestruck at the magnificent architecture and structure of this Temple. Now, I'm not going to go into a detailed description of what it was like, but just to let you know that it still had not been finished at this point in history. The building of this Temple, which is known as Herod's Temple, which was based on Zerubbabel's Temple, was not finished until A.D. 64 - so there are 30-odd years still left of the building of the Temple, and yet at this point it was so

magnificent in its structure that it drew from this disciple awe and wonder. We're told by Josephus, the Jewish historian, that there was gold plating on this Temple on every side - so much so that when the sun rose in the morning and you looked at the Temple, you could get blinded by the reflection! It was also made of limestone bricks, and it is recorded that strangers approaching the holy city of Jerusalem, as they looked and saw the Temple, thought it looked like a snowcapped mountain. So you can imagine the wonder and magnificence of this sight, and this disciple is turning the attention of the Lord Jesus to the Temple.

So in verse 2, the Lord Jesus - in relation to the Temple - makes a prediction: 'Jesus answered and said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down'. The Lord Jesus says: 'No matter how magnificent and wonderful this Temple is that you're looking at, I am predicting that it is going to be destroyed'. Now, if you know your history, you will know that in A.D. 70 the Romans came in with all their armies and destroyed this very Temple, indeed the whole city of Jerusalem. Now, may I remind you of some of the thoughts that we pondered last Lord's Day morning in particular: empty religion is worthless to God. Remember that's what the sign was of the Lord Jesus going into the Temple and driving out the thieves and the businessmen. He was signifying also when He cursed the fig tree - it was taking up room but bearing no fruit, just like the children of Israel - that empty religion is worthless to Him. This is the final death knell to Judaism, at this point at least, when He predicts the destruction of the Temple. These are the consequences for suppressing the truth of God.

Now this was literally fulfilled, as I said, in A.D. 70 - but it wasn't just literally fulfilled by the destruction of the Temple, but Jesus actually prophesied in verse 2 that 'not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down'. It was literally fulfilled to the very jot and tittle, the exact details of this prophecy. The reason why that is: we know from historical records that Titus, the Roman general who was given the job of going in and destroying Jerusalem, he apparently wished to salvage the Temple - most likely because there was much gold there. There was gold in not only the edifice, but in the furniture and even the decor inside and outside. But unfortunately the Roman soldiers beat him to it, and they set the Temple alight and burned it to the ground. What happened to the gold then? Well, the gold melted, and it ran down the edifice of the Temple and into every nook and cranny, into the joins and the cracks of the bricks. So the general, Titus, gave the order to take the remains apart - brick by brick - to salvage the gold. The Lord Jesus' prophecy fulfilled to the exact minutiae: not one stone would be left upon another.

Now, the only remaining wall of that Temple is the foundation wall that some of you who have been to Jerusalem will have seen - but, apart from that, not one brick was left upon another. Now we learn from that that we have got to take prophetic Scripture seriously, and we've got to look in detail at every specific thing that is said in the word of God. Not to just fudge it or spiritualise it but, if we can, to try to isolate specific details to understand what God is saying - but let me also say to you, maybe you're not a believer here this morning: prophecy is how God authenticates His message. Some unbelievers will say: 'How can we know that God is there? How can we know that Jesus Christ is His Son? How can we know that what He said was true? That what is said in the Bible really is the case, that He died for sins, rose again, and is coming again? How do we know?'. Prophecy is God's stamp of authenticity on His message. We can know that the Bible is true, we know Jesus is true, we know the message of the Gospel is true, because prophecy has proven it to be such. In other words, God fulfilling His word shows His authenticity in the message. You can believe God's word, and incidentally: Jesus, when He came the first time, fulfilled over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures that were made hundreds of years before He was born - but there are eight times

more prophecies in the word of God concerning His second advent, His second coming, than there were of His first. So you can be eight times more sure that He's coming again, and that He will fulfil to every jot and tittle what has been prophesied concerning that great event.

Now, that prediction about the Temple moved them on in verses 3 and 4 to more questions from the disciples: 'Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?'. Now, as I said at the beginning, this discourse is also recorded in Matthew and Luke, and we know from their record that the disciples actually asked more than simply when the Temple would be destroyed. Matthew 24 verse 3 says: 'Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'. So they're not just asking Him when the Temple would be destroyed, but they are asking Him about His return: when it will be and what the signs will be of His coming.

Now, it seems to me at least, that in the minds of the disciples the destruction of the Temple coincided with the end of the age and His return. Therefore the verses that follow in Jesus' answer, answer both these questions: one, when the Temple would be destroyed; and two, when Jesus would return and what the signs of His coming would be. Let me say, before we delve into it, as you read this portion of Scripture you will see that some of these predictions obviously referred to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 - there's no doubt about that. Yet, as you read, what is equally obvious is that these prophecies go farther into the future, and indeed right to the events preceding the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Now, a few tips for you in interpreting prophetic Scripture. One is that you always must harmonise what you read in any prophetic passage with other prophetic Scriptures in the word of God, they have all got to fit together. We will see this morning, if you turn to verse 14, that Jesus refers there: 'when you see the 'abomination of desolation', spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not' (let the reader understand), 'then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains'. Now, He is appealing to Daniel's prophecy in the Old Testament. You've got to remember also that Mark, writing his gospel, was writing to Roman Gentiles - so he wanted them to understand, without the Jewish background, that biblical prophecy and specifically the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is rooted in depth in the Hebrew prophecies of the Old Testament. So, in order to understand these great future events that are going to happen, you've got to put all prophetic Scripture together and don't take any in isolation.

That's the first tip, you've got to harmonise biblical prophecies. The second is: you've got to understand that, specifically in chapter 13 of Mark in the Olivet Discourse, these are questions asked by Jews - the disciples were Jews - of, essentially, a Rabbi, Jesus, who was a Jewish Teacher. So the environment, the climate of these prophecies and their fulfilment is essentially Jewish. They involve inherently Jewish issues and we ought not to forget that. A third thing to remember in interpreting Bible prophecy is: there always must be practical application. Now, if you look at verse 5 you will see that Jesus says: 'Take heed'. If you look down again at verse 23, He says: 'Take heed'. In verse 33 He says: 'Take heed'. In verse 7 He says: 'Do not be troubled'. In verse 13 He says: 'Endure'. In verses 18 and 33 He says: 'Pray'. In verse 9, verse 33, verse 35, and verse 37 He says: 'Watch'. There is a practical application to prophecy - and I'm sad to say that in many evangelical circles today, much study on these matters is simply idle speculation, or selfish gratification of the knowledge of the future. Often this preoccupation and selfish gratification leaves lives unchanged. People

are full of prophetic head knowledge, but their life remains the same. That was never the Holy Spirit's intention in giving us prophetic truth, it was always with a practical application. It was not given to gratify and satisfy our curiosity, it was given to engender holiness of life and watchfulness - as we do not look around us for signs, but we look for the Saviour who will come for those who believe in Him. I'm reminded of that hymn that refers to the Lord's Table by C.H. Spurgeon - and I'm taking it completely out of context, but you'll understand what I mean when I recite it to you - he said, concerning the Lord's Supper:

'If now, with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him,
O may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face!'

Now, applying that to the second coming doesn't lose any of its meaning. If we see the signs, but do not see Him, there is a problem - because there has to always be a practical application to these truths.

Now, to get a complete picture of this Olivet Discourse and the predictions, all three Gospels must be studied. We haven't got time for that this morning - you'll be glad to know! - but we may add some information from the other gospel writers as we go through here. Now, before Jesus answers what they actually asked He gives them some characteristics of the present age in which they were living, and in which we are living to a certain extent, and He tells them of things that are not signs of the end of the age and of His return. Verses 6 and 7: 'For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet'. Now, the Lord Jesus just wanted these Jews to know that every time some false Christ or false Messiah arises, or there is a war somewhere, they are not to conclude that that is the end of time and that Jesus will come soon.

Now, history bears this out, for as far as I am aware, historically, Jesus was the first to claim to be Messiah - but, after that claim, His life, death, and resurrection, many arose - Jews and Gentiles - who claimed to be the Christ. What Jesus was warning these disciples of is: 'This is going to happen. It's going to happen more and more, but don't conclude that this is the end and that I'm coming soon. This is going to happen in your time' - and it's happening in our time. But also He mentioned wars and rumours of wars, and what He was telling them is: there will be local wars, and when local wars arise, even in the Middle East, it is not necessarily significant and not necessarily pointing to the fact that it is the end. Now note verse 7, and this is clearly what He's saying at the end: 'Do not be troubled; for such things must happen' - what things? false christs and local wars, but the end is not yet.

What will the signs be of the end? Well, verse 8, I think, gives us the clue: 'For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows'. Now you can check this out yourself, but all three Gospels, Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, give what Mark here mentions as the sign at the end of the age as being: 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom... Earthquakes, famines, troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows' - that could be translated, 'These are the beginnings of travail'. Your margin might read, 'These are the beginnings of the birth pangs'. Now, you women in the meeting this morning who have been through labour will know that it starts with a sharp pain - you would think I knew what I was talking about here! I do know what a sharp pain is, mind you, after the delivery! - but you will know that the birth labour pangs, the contractions,

increase just before the delivery. What Jesus is saying here is that 'This is the beginning of the birth pangs, it's the start of the process of the end of the age which will bring My return'. The first pang, if you like, the first labour pain and contraction is verse 8, the beginning: 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom'.

Now, if you ask questions of the Scripture rightfully you will be wondering now: 'Well, what is the difference between the beginning of verse 8 and what Jesus said about wars and rumours of wars in verse 7?'. If He said not to get all excited about wars and rumours of wars, what's the difference between that that does not signify His coming, and nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, which is a sign of the beginning of the birth pangs? Well, I think it may be obvious enough that verse 7 is speaking of local wars. Jesus is saying that there will always be local wars in humanity right across this globe, but verse 8 seems to be more encompassing than that: nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom - in other words, many believe this to be an idiom in the Hebrew language, or in the Hebrew mind at least, of a world war. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. So verse 7 may be referring to local wars - we're not to get worried about that, that will happen - but when we see world wars taking place, it may well be that they are birth pangs of the end of the age, and a signal that the second coming of Jesus is soon. The end has begun when world wars begin.

Now, I'll not test you if you can remember the first one - I'm not looking at anyone in particular! - World War I, 1914-1918, was the first world war ever. It may well have been the fulfilment of this first birth pang. There are many who believe that World War II, 1939-1945, was essentially a continuation of World War I. It's very interesting to note that both these world wars had significant impact on the Jewish history. World War I gave impetus to the growth of the Zionist movement, and World War II led to the re-establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. Now, some interpret - and I have sympathy with this - World War I, the first-ever worldwide conflict, to be the beginning of the birth pangs, testifying that the end of the age has begun.

He also says in verse 8 that there will be earthquakes in various places. Dr Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, a Jewish Christian and Bible scholar, says that according to the Encyclopaedia Americana, between the years 63 and 1896, there are only 26 recorded earthquakes. Now, obviously, the records weren't as extensive as we have today - nevertheless, it's interesting to note. The US geological survey says that most of the world's earthquakes with 1000+ deaths began since the year 1900. Now, obviously our ability to detect earthquakes has increased, but nevertheless it does appear that there is an increasing trend - that earthquakes are increasing. In the first thousand years after Jesus, there were approximately 5 recorded major earthquakes - now, as we said, there were certainly others in more remote areas that were not recorded. But watch the pattern: the 14th century, 157 major earthquakes; the 15th century, 174; the 16th century, 253; the 17th century, 278; the 18th century, 640; the 19th century, a massive jump, 2119 - what of the 20th century? Nearly 900,000 earthquakes! That works out at approximately 1 per hour! Over the period of a month recently, just December, on the 2nd of December there was an earthquake of 6.9 magnitude in New Guinea; on the 17th of December an earthquake of 7.2 on the California-Mexican border; December the 20th, 5.6 in El Salvador, December the 21st, 6.2 in Sumatra and 7.4 in Japan on the same day; on December the 25th, 7.6 in Fiji; and on January 5th, this month, 6.6 in Vanuatu in the South Pacific - and 10 minutes later there was another earthquake in the same place of 5.5.

Now, you interpret that as you like, but I think the evidence signifies that earthquakes are increasing - incidentally, round about the same time as the First World War! Jesus said these

would be signs of the end of the age and of His second coming - and, of course, we'll spend no time on famines, pestilences, and troubles! We're looking on our news every day and seeing climate catastrophes and so on and so forth that seem to be on an accelerated scale that we have never known before.

Verse 9 appears now for Jesus to be turning His attention to the present time again, that means His present time with the disciples. He starts to address in verse 9: 'Watch out for yourselves', He starts to address the experiences that the Apostles could expect. Now Luke actually makes it more clear when he says: 'Before all these things', before these signs of the ends of the age will occur, Apostles, you need to be careful and watch because there are things that you're going to experience that you need to be ready for. He gives a list of the things in verses 9 through to 13: 'Watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved'.

Now, we'll not go into the details here, but all you need to do is read the Acts of the Apostles and you will see that all of this was fulfilled in the life of the Apostles in the early church. I believe the Lord was interjecting here, preparing the Apostles for what they must expect, to teach them not to expect the end of the age too soon, not to expect the Tribulation too soon, and the second coming to the Mount of Olives too soon. Now, verse 14 then, Jesus now turns, I believe, to answer the question that they have asked about the end of the age. In verses 14 to 23 He speaks about what we know as the Great Tribulation that will lead up to His second coming. When I speak of His second coming, I'm not talking about the rapture of the church which many believe will take away believers, faithful Christians, to be with the Lord before this period of time. You can read about it in 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15, and John 14 and several other Scriptures. What we're talking about is the Lord Jesus coming to the Mount of Olives to judge the world and reign from Jerusalem for a thousand years - and I call that His second coming.

We're going to read here in verses 14 to 23 about what Old Testament prophets called 'Jacob's Trouble'. Now, birth pangs, travail, would equate well with that description, 'Jacob' being Israel, the people of God, the chosen generation in the Old Testament, it's their time of trouble or tribulation. It's also described as a time of wrath, unprecedented indignation and punishment upon this world. In Daniel 9 it is spoken of as 'Daniel's 70th week'. I don't want to get too technical on Sunday morning, but prophetic weeks are made up of weeks of years - our week is made up of a week of days, 24-hour days; prophetic weeks are made up of weeks of years. In other words, one day is as a year, and so one week of prophetic weeks, seven days, will be seven years. We believe that 'Daniel's 70th week' means that this period, this Tribulation period on the earth, just before Jesus comes to the earth, will last seven years - and Revelation also bears that out, but we'll not go into that this morning.

Jesus gives, from verse 14 on, an overview of this period - mainly, in Mark's gospel, its the second half, in other words the last three and a half years; Matthew and Luke give the whole overview of this seven year period. So verse 14 really is the halfway mark of the seven year time, so three and a half years into this Tribulation period we read that this is what will happen, this actually will mark the three and a half years: 'When you see the 'abomination of

desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not' (let the reader understand), 'then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains'. Now, what is the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel? Well, it refers to an idolatrous pollution of the Jewish temple by the Gentiles. They will come into the Temple, that holy, sacred place of God's people, and they will desecrate it. Now the Temple was defiled in 167 BC by the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes - but the fact of the matter is: what Jesus is speaking of is future to that. This is after that event, and in fact Mark says here in verse 14, for the benefit of his Roman Gentile readers, not Jesus' listeners now but the Gentile readers: 'let the reader understand'. So this is future in time.

Of course the Temple was defiled in A.D. 70 when the Romans came in and destroyed it, but Jesus here is clearly referring to a future abomination of desolation, still to be even in our time. Now this is referred to - this is how we know this is future - it's referred to in other scriptures. Turn with me to 2 Thessalonians, please, chapter 2 and verse 3: 'Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin', that's the Antichrist, 'is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?'. Now that is a future abomination of desolation, where the Antichrist will come into the Temple of God - and by the way, that necessitates that it will have to be rebuilt after its destruction in A.D. 70. What sits on Mount Zion is not a Temple, it's a mosque, and somehow there is going to have to be a Temple built there, either on top of it or, as I suspect, probably beside it in some new peace agreement that the Antichrist will bring into the Middle East. Nevertheless, this abomination halfway down through the seven years is going to be Antichrist setting himself up in the Jewish temple to be God, and to be worshipped as God.

Now, if you're interested in the rebuilding of the Temple, you might like to know the plans have already started. If you go to Jerusalem - some of you, I know, have been there recently - you will visit down a little street a place called 'The Temple Institute'. You don't have to go to Jerusalem to find out about it, you can go online, Google 'The Temple Institute', go to 'About Us', and you will find that this is what they say: 'Our short-term goal is to rekindle the flame of the Holy Temple in the hearts of mankind through education. Our long-term goal is to do all in our limited power to bring about the building of the Holy Temple in our time'. They have already made much of the furniture for the Temple.

Now this is also prophesied in Daniel 12:11 - don't turn to it - this 'abomination of desolation', but to show you that this is future turn with me to Revelation chapter 13, speaking of the same event. Verse 14 of Revelation 13: 'He deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast', that's the Antichrist, 'telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast', the Antichrist, 'who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed'. Now this completely corresponds with 2 Thessalonians chapter 2: there is going to be an image of the beast, the Antichrist, set up in the Temple of God. The false prophet is, by supernatural power, going to give that image the appearance of life - and he will demand to be worshipped. That's what Jesus is talking about, is it not? The act of the desolation of the Temple.

He goes on in verse 15 of chapter 13 of Mark, please, the abomination of desolation halfway through this seven year period will signal for the Jews to flee Jerusalem. We read here in

verse 15 back in Mark 13: 'Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter', for obvious reasons, for pregnant women wintertime will not be the most satisfying time to flee Jerusalem, so pray that it's not winter, 'For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be'.

Now this flight of the Jews, if you go back to Revelation, this time chapter 12, Revelation chapter 12, you will find it's also prophesied there. This is future, not just referring to A.D. 70, but future - Revelation 12 and verse 13: 'Now when the dragon', that is Satan, 'saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman', I believe that's Israel, 'who gave birth to the male Child', that is Christ, 'But the woman was given two wings', Israel was given two wings, 'of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent' - three and a half years. So this is a signal, the abomination of desolation, this is a sign that Jesus is coming soon. It's a sign for the Jews to flee, and the elect Jews in verse 20 - I believe that's who the elect are here in this passage - 'And unless the Lord had shortened those days', back to Mark 13, 'Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect'. We've seen that, the false prophet will do signs and wonders that will cause the whole world to marvel. But Jesus is saying to the chosen people, Israel, they are not to believe during this period that any Messiah has arisen secretly. Many will come to the Jews and say: 'O, here is Messiah, there is Messiah' - Jesus is saying, 'At that point I will not come secretly, but when I come', Revelation 1 verse 5 says, 'Behold, every eye will see Me' - every eye will see Me!

Even if signs and wonders accompany such false christs, they are not to believe. Incidentally, if you were to read 2 Thessalonians again and chapter 2 and verse 7, we read that the mystery of this lawlessness, this lawlessness of Antichrist, is already at work. What that simply means is that, I believe, as we come closer to the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ there will be miraculous deeds done in the name of false christs and false religion that will deceive even the very elect of God. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying here, I believe in miracles, I believe in the supernatural, I believe that the Holy Spirit is the same as He was in the Acts of the Apostles - but when the miraculous is divorced from biblical truth, we're not to believe it, for there is coming a day when someone will do signs and wonders that have been unsurpassed in reference to what the world has already seen, apart from Christ. But when miracles are divorced from the truth of God we have to take heed and flee. Let me be more specific: some of you have got religious television, and cable television, and satellite television that bombard you with 'evangelical' trash - another way of putting it, an effluence of wickedness, doctrines of devils. They are doing things, supernatural things, in the name of Christ or a christ, but their demeanour, their language, their way of life - Jesus said of false prophets: 'By their fruit you will know them'. I don't care what miracles are being done - and I believe in miracles - but I don't care who's doing miracles, if their life and their teaching is divorced from this book it's not of the Holy Spirit but of a false spirit.

Now a sign of Jesus' return is found in verses 24 to 27: 'In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory'. Now, after the Tribulation and after these seven years of

wrath being poured out on the Earth, there will be a solar blackout - lights out. We read that the light of the moon and the stars also will deplete, will be blocked, and indeed the very forces that keep stellar bodies in their orbit since creation will be shaken. There will be utter blackness. Now, why is there utter blackness? The utter blackness is to be a backdrop for Jesus returning, verse 26: 'Then you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and great glory'. The great glory that He's coming with is the Shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the Tabernacle, the Temple, and at Pentecost and on various other occasions - that Shekinah light of God's presence will precede Jesus coming, that will be the sign that Jesus is just at the threshold of the door - and the backdrop will be this solar blackout. Think about it, it's wonderful, isn't it? We read about it in Zechariah 12, we'll not look at it - but He did tell the Jews that He would not come again until they asked for Him. We read in Zechariah 12 and Zechariah 14 that Jerusalem will be surrounded at this last point in the Tribulation period by the armies of the world, and they will be almost obliterated, and they will cry out to their Messiah that they rejected and He will come.

Now, the Lord Jesus at this point in the Olivet Discourse didn't want His disciples to be taken up with the signs and not live up to the responsibilities - and that's not the result He wants either for us this morning. I know I have bombarded you with a lot of information, but this is what the Lord felt fit to give His disciples on the last week of His life, and I think it bodes well for us to take attention and time in looking at it. But in order that they don't make this mistake of getting taken up with the future and doing nothing in their lives presently toward holiness and godliness, He ends with two parables. Now Matthew records three more parables than Mark does, but we'll just deal with Mark's this morning.

The first is the parable of the fig tree, verse 28: 'Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near; at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away'. Now we know that the fig tree represents Israel, we saw that last week - but here I don't think that's the specific point, because Luke also says that the fig tree and other trees bring forth leaves. I think it's just an illustration to say that, just as you know summer is coming when spring comes and the leaves start to sprout on fig trees and all sorts of trees, when you see these signs taking place you know that the return of Jesus is near.

Now, remember He's talking in the context of the Tribulation. The sign that He gave in verse 14 is that midway in the Tribulation this abomination of desolation will happen, and those who are there who have believed during this period, when they see this happen in Jerusalem, are not only to flee but they are to count down from that moment three and a half years to know that Jesus isn't very far away. That will give them help to endure, we read that in verse 13, there's no doubt about that - but look at what Jesus says, and this has caused many to scratch their head, in verse 30: 'Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place'. Now, what generation is He talking about? Surely it's not the generation of the people He was speaking to, for they are all dead! I believe it's the generation who see this abomination of desolation in verse 14, the generation that sees this will be 3.5 years away from the coming of Jesus Christ. But, incidentally, you've got to remember that this abomination of desolation performed by the antichrist is in order to exterminate the Jewish race - and we know that Mark has actually used this word 'generation' of the Jews in his gospel, and Jesus used it of the Jewish people. So it could mean the ethnicity of the Jewish race, and what Jesus is saying is that they will survive despite the attempts of antichrist, the false prophet, and Satan to eradicate them from this Earth - they

will survive, as a testament to what? As a testament to God and His promises, that when God makes a covenant as He did with Israel in the Old Testament, when God makes a promise with you, my friend, He keeps it! Through hell and high water He keeps it!

Verse 31 is testament to this: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away' - 'I will fulfil my words'. You see, we as believers do not depend upon signs, we depend upon the unchanging word of God, 'a more sure word of prophecy', that's what Peter said. Jesus will fulfil His word. Now, whilst this fig tree parable appears to apply to the Tribulation, the next parable, the parable of the porter in verses 32 to the end of the chapter could apply directly to us, and everyone in any age. Look at it, verse 32: 'But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming; in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!'

He urges watchfulness. Three times in this small parable at the end of the chapter He uses the word 'Watch'. He is saying: 'Be ready!'. Are you ready? Are you ready for the rapture, believer? We don't look for signs, for it could happen at any moment. Are you ready if the Lord should take you home? Are you ready spiritually, are you the way that you would like to be when Jesus comes? Is your life in order, for He could come at any moment for His people? It's urging watchfulness. Are things right with others in your life? Are your affairs right? Is your business right? Is your marriage right? Is your relationship with your children, and your parents, and your neighbours, and your work colleagues, your brothers and sisters in Christ in your fellowship - is it right, that when the Saviour comes you're watching, because you're watching yourself because you're watching for Him? John says: 'Whoever has this hope within him purifies himself, even as Christ is pure'. You see, if you're looking for Jesus coming, and you're watching and you're ready, it will bring holiness into your heart. We are to be watching, and we're to be labouring - not sitting about just waiting, we're to be up and doing because the day is far spent. We are to redeem the time and make the most of what we have.

Now, I know verse 32 causes a bit of consternation and debate, for here the Lord Jesus says 'of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven' - well, we can live with that - 'nor the Son, but only the Father'. People say: 'Well, this is proof that Jesus was not divine' - no it's not! Neither does it show that Jesus set aside His divine attributes when He came to the Earth, what it speaks of is His servanthood. Mark's gospel is the gospel of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, and if you look at Philippians 2 you will see that whilst Christ is divine, and in coming to earth remained divine, He took the form of a Servant, and thought it not something to be grasped at to walk around proving Himself to be God. He was God, but He didn't grasp at the use of His own divine attributes which were rightfully His. So, in other words, for the Son of God as the Servant of Jehovah at this point in time, this knowledge was only given to the Father. In fact, in Acts chapter 1 the Lord Jesus said to His disciples again: 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority'. This is something the Father knows. The point is: you don't know, and I don't know. The terrible fact is: most of us live as if it were a fairy-tale. Most Christians in the 21st-century West are living as if Jesus was never going to come. We are practical atheists. We need to watch.

Jesus said in this discourse that you need to take heed that you're not deceived. Many Christians are being deceived by false prophets and false teaching on every hand. That will

increase and wax worse and worse as we come near the return of the Lord. Take heed that you do not be discouraged and quit, that's what the Lord says: 'Endure, keep going'. So many Christians have just thrown in the towel. It's not easy, it was never easy being a Christian - how would you like to be fed to lions like the Apostles and early Christians were? - but it's not getting any easier, in our generation it's getting harder. It's caused many a one to just say: 'That's it, I can't handle it any more, I'm giving up'. Jesus says: 'Look, if you're watching for Me, if you believe I'm coming, you will endure to the end. Keep persevering, take heed that you don't get discouraged and quit'. Then He says in these final verses: 'Take heed that you watch and pray'. Are you watching and praying?

Do you know that Mark wrote his gospel for Gentile Romans who very soon - and we know this from 1 Peter 4 - they were going to face the worst persecutions that Christians have ever known? It must have brought them comfort to know that the greatest tribulation that would ever be, that has never been seen since the creation of the universe, that Christ is able to make people endure even through that - those who believe in Him during that period of time. So, if He's able to strengthen them through the Great Tribulation, surely He will strengthen His saints through any fiery trial that may come upon them? There is an encouragement there for you today, for some of you are going through fiery trials, aren't you? You're in the crucible, you're in the furnace! You feel consumed, you feel at the end of your tether! Be encouraged: Jesus is able to keep these dear people in the midst of all wrath being poured out on the earth, He is able to keep them unto the end without stumbling, and present them faultless unto their Father in heaven.

Did Jesus say all of us would face some trial or tribulation or another? In John 16:33 He said: 'In the world you will suffer persecution', in the world you will have tribulation, 'but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'. Hallelujah! I love that statement, I know it's a bit of a cliché, but: 'I've read the back of the book, and we win!'. There's a lot between now and then, mind you - but it doesn't change the outcome. The Christian reading this may be encouraged to look up, for their redemption draws near. I'm not dogmatic on any of these things, but I believe we are coming very close to the return of our Lord - but for unbelievers, that's you here if you've never trusted Christ and been born-again, repented of your sins and believed the Gospel, for you: you're going to have to face all this if you don't come to Jesus. You don't know when He will come, so you must come to Him now!

Let us pray. Now, I know this teaching has been in-depth - but I hope that you have gleaned something from it, and I hope it has reached your heart not just your head. As we come to the Lord's Table, we do this only till He come. Jesus, when He instituted this Supper, as we will see next week probably, He told them that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He did in His kingdom. Now this is all relevant to what we're going to do now in the Breaking of Bread. It looks back to Calvary, it looks inward to yourself, asking yourself 'Are you right with God?' - and it looks forward to His return when we shall sit at the table with Him. Now, look, there's no better place to get your life right before God than round the Table of the Lord. Examine yourselves. Why not even do it now, just before we come to this point in our worship - come to the Lord and say: 'Lord, here I am, I didn't realise it was as late in the day as it is'. Sure you can see, if you have two eyeballs in your head, that things are getting very bad in our world? Say: 'Lord, You have my life, for whatever's left, whether You call me, or whether You come, You've got it all'.

Father, we thank You for the bluntness of our Saviour - full of grace, and yet full of truth. Lord, we know that there has been a lot of truth this morning, and we pray that You would help us not to tread where angels fear to in saying this is that - but, Lord, we certainly have

got the message that we don't know the day or the hour. We all must be ready, and may every soul in this place - young and old, saved and unsaved - may they get ready, and may we look forward now as we even break bread, as we remember Calvary, may we look forward to the day when we will see the Lamb slain in the midst of the Throne, when we will see the One who died for us and worship Him in person. We will throw our crowns at His feet - if we have any - and we will worship the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world. We will sing praise unto Him, who alone is worthy of our honour. May that risen, exalted, glorified Jesus, who once was slain, be revealed to us now in the Breaking of Bread as He was to the two on the Road to Emmaus. For His glory we pray, and our good, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 4

"A Miserable Betrayer And An Extravagant Worshipper"

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Now we're looking at chapter 14 of Mark's gospel, and we're beginning to read at verse 1: *"After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him", that is, Jesus, "by trickery and put Him to death. But they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people'. And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor'. And they criticized her sharply. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her'. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him".*

Let us all pray. As all of our heads are bowed, I would ask you to come to the Lord now in prayer - and, whatever your need is, that you might ask Him to meet your need. If you're here tonight and are not a believer in the Lord Jesus - I mean by that that you're not born-again, you're not converted - that you would even open your heart to the Lord. What have you got to lose? Open your heart to the Lord, and say: 'Lord, if You have anything to say to me, speak to me now' - and I believe He will answer that prayer, I really do. But there are many believers, and they haven't heard the voice of God for a long time, maybe they haven't been able to hear it - well, why not bring yourself, before we even preach tonight, why not bring yourself initially to that point of saying: 'Lord, I just want now to be ready to hear from You'.

Father, we thank You for the wonder of the Lord Jesus. He truly is Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We are lost in wonder, love and praise when we gaze upon Him. Lord, we know that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to come and to testify, to take of the things of Christ and show them to us. Lord, I pray now that the Holy Spirit of God, who has been given to His church, that, Lord, He will come and He will minister Christ to every heart. Lord, we would see Jesus, we thank You for your word - but beyond the sacred page, we seek Thee Lord. Our spirits pant for Thee, the Living Word. We don't want to go away, Lord, knowing a little bit more about You; we want to go away knowing You more, personally and intimately. I bring before You tonight the needs of this congregation. You know them, Lord, I don't - but we pray that the Spirit who is the Lord, who searches the hearts, will uncover the secret things and minister to every soul gathered here tonight. Lord, there are needy people, there are unbelieving people, there are hard-hearted people perhaps, there are

discouraged people. Lord, we bring these needs to You, and we pray that in the name of the Lord Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that You will meet every need in this place. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

If this is your first occasion with this, I started last week here in Ards Evangelical, last Sunday morning, a series which I have really entitled 'The Final Countdown to Calvary'. What we're looking at is the final week in the life and ministry of Jesus. We have covered some ground already, last Sunday morning we looked at the Sunday of that week, which was Palm Sunday, the Triumphal Entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem - as the King of the Jews He presents Himself to them in fulfilment of prophecy. Then we saw that on Monday, the next day in Jesus' week, He cursed a fig tree - which was significant because it spoke of the nation of Israel who were God's chosen vessel to bear fruit and to witness to the world. He cursed this tree, signifying - because it had no fruit and it was taking up room but wasn't serving any purpose - just like the nation at that particular time. Then He went into the Temple that same day, Monday, and He cleansed the Temple of those who were buying and selling, and using what should have been a house of prayer unto God as a den, a hiding place, for thieves and robbers. Then on Tuesday, we saw last Sunday night, that on the Tuesday of the final week of Jesus He was questioned by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious council, in the precincts of the Temple. This morning we saw that it's probably about Wednesday in the week, we can't be too dogmatic about it, but He gives what we know as the 'Olivet Discourse', and we read that in chapter 13 and studied it in some detail.

Now, verses 1 and 2 are speaking of the 'Feast of Unleavened Bread', the Passover, and the chief priests and the scribes seeking how they might take Jesus by trickery and put Him to death - this is probably still Wednesday of the week. By the time we get down to verses 10 and 11, where Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, goes to the chief priests to betray Jesus, it is most likely the early hours of Thursday morning. So, we're following the Lord Jesus along this week. Now, there's a bit of a discussion about verses 3 to 9, this anointing of the head and feet of Jesus by Mary of Bethany - there's a bit of discussion about when this actually took place. Although it is placed here by Mark and other gospel writers, Matthew, at this juncture; we know from John, in John chapter 12 and verse 1, in his account of this incident, he says this took place six days before Passover. So we're going out of chronological sequence a little in Mark's gospel - so this is more than likely Saturday night, the night before Sunday, the Palm Sunday, the Triumphal Entry. So we're going back in time a little.

Now, you might ask: 'Well, why do Matthew and Mark place it here?' - well, probably for thematic reasons. It says here, of course, in verse 8 that Jesus confesses that Mary has anointed Him beforehand, anointed His body specifically, for His burial. It certainly fits in with this gospel of the cross of Mark's. But I think there's more to it than that: what Mark, and I believe the Holy Spirit behind Mark, wants to do is contrast Mary's devotion with Judas' betrayal - that's why it's here. He wants to contrast what I have called 'A Miserable Betrayer', Judas, with 'An Extravagant Worshipper', Mary of Bethany.

So, let's look at both these characters in order. Now we see that Judas solves the problem of the chief priests and scribes in verses 1 and 2. They want to kill the Lord Jesus, but they don't want to do it during this religious feast and festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread - verse 2 gives the reason: 'Lest there be an uproar of the people'. You see, the Lord Jesus was popular among the common people, and there were so many Jewish people - as we saw last week - coming into the holy city during Passover time that it was a tinderbox for trouble. They didn't want in any way to court some kind of unrest. But we see that Judas solves their problem, because in verses 10 and 11 he agrees to secretly hand Jesus over to the

authorities. He goes to the chief priests, 'And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him'.

Now let's look at Judas. I want you to understand something: to betray someone is not the same as being their enemy. Now, think about that for a moment: to betray someone is not the same as being their enemy. You see, the essence of betrayal, even to death, is that you have to show affection towards the one that you are betraying. Betrayal comes from the hand of a friend. If you like, a betrayer is one who embraces you with one arm, and stabs you in the back with the other. Here we have Judas, the greatest betrayer of all time, who was the friend to the greatest Man of all time. Now please note this, because it's vital, and may well be even essential to your eternal well-being that you realise that the betrayer of Christ professed to be one of His greatest friends. He was one of the twelve disciples that followed Jesus for three and a half years of His ministry. Incidentally, the greatest betrayers of Christ today are still those who profess to be His friends. You see, you can be affectionate towards Jesus, but ultimately be betraying Him. I wonder is that anyone here tonight?

Let me be more specific: perhaps you would call yourself a 'Christian'. Perhaps you go to a Christian place of worship, your religious creed is one that belongs to Christendom. You pray, perhaps, to Jesus. Perhaps you have been baptised as an infant in the name of Jesus. Perhaps you have done things in His name - but that does not make you a Christian. Even if you are affectionate towards Him - and I would vouch to say that, though the whole world is not Christian, most people have some kind of a reverence for the character and person of Jesus, most people do - but just because you have an affection towards Him does not mean that you belong to Him, and you could even, ultimately, be betraying Him even though you feel predisposed toward Him. Now, that's frightening - because it was someone exactly like this who betrayed the Lord Jesus to death for the price of a slave.

I want you to consider tonight, before we look at Mary, looking at this miserable betrayer: first, to see the privileges that this man had. One of the great privileges he enjoyed was that he heard Christ's words. Please think about this for a moment: Judas was there on the Mount when Jesus gave His famous Sermon, we read it in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and the Beatitudes - 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', 'Blessed are the meek', 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled'. He heard Jesus say the first time: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto yourself', the 'golden rule' as they call it. Judas heard the first time: 'Turn the other cheek. Love them that hate you and despitefully use you'. Judas was there when the Lord Jesus Christ taught the parable of the Good Samaritan - the whole world knows about it, but he was there when He first taught it. He was there when He told the greatest story in the English language, it has been called by Charles Dickens - we know better than him that it's the greatest story, because we have experienced it in our lives - the story of the Prodigal Son. Judas was there when it was first told. Judas was there when Jesus said to His questioning disciples: 'Pray therefore in this manner: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...' - and you know the rest. Judas was there the first time that was ever recited.

He sat on the edge of the crowd when Jesus taught the multitudes, and he also was in the private teaching school in the waysides at the twilight hours when the disciples were being instructed in the deeper things and mysteries of God's kingdom. He was there, and yet he never truly believed. That's staggering. He knew Christ intimately, but he did not know Christ by faith. He knew Christ personally, but he did not know Christ savingly - and that can happen. I'm telling you, it's happening this very day, the Lord's Day, right across Ulster, right across the United Kingdom. I know church attendances are depleting, but nevertheless there

are people who have been in Christian places of worship today, and they know Christ in a sense, they have an affection towards Christ, but though they know Him in some personal way - who He is, what He did - and they appreciate it, they do not know Him savingly, they do not know Him by faith. They have never repented of their sins, had a conversion experience, and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation - have you?

Now this is vital: not only did he hear the words of Christ, he saw the miracles of Christ. This is remarkable. He was there when Jesus fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish. He was there when He fed the 4000 as well. He was on the boat when the storm arose, when Jesus stood and said: 'Be muzzled', and the storm was stayed - he was there and he saw it. I could go on and on and on. He saw great miracles: people who were blind given their eyesight; people who were lame given ability to move, and to walk, and to leap; people who had withered, atrophied arms, he saw them grow and take on muscle and be restored before his very eyes. He saw Jesus walk on water and raise dead people - this is a man that saw Christ's miracles, yet he never experienced the greatest miracle of all in his heart, he was never born-again! Now, I believe there are people and they have seen miracles, even experienced miracles in their own life - and maybe you're one of them. Sometimes, when our backs are against the wall, even the atheists among us pray and ask God's help, and sometimes God comes through. Now I know there's a question mark, and you think: 'Was that God or was that chance, or what was it?' - but you have been there, and maybe have seen something that is indisputable happen in your life in answer to coming in prayer to God. You have maybe experienced a miracle, or know someone who has, and it's irrefutable - and yet you yourself have never allowed God to birth the miracle of salvation in your own heart.

He saw Christ's miracles as well as hearing Christ's teaching - something else: he saw Christ save other people. Judas was there when Jesus took a detour to Samaria to meet one woman at a well at 12 noon, the hottest point of the day, and they were all bamboozled about why Jesus was going this route that no-one ever went, and why He spoke to this woman (which wasn't the done thing in the middle of the day, and especially a Samaritan woman, for the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans). He saw the barriers that Jesus went over in order to reach one woman, who was an immoral woman, who was married five times and was living with a guy - and Judas saw this woman converted at a well, having been given living water by Jesus so that she would never thirst again. Judas saw her go into her hometown in Samaria, and Judas heard about how the whole town had been converted to Jesus, he saw them all converted and yet he was never saved. It's remarkable.

He saw the wee man Zacchaeus come down from his tree, and Jesus said: 'Salvation must come to your house today'. He went to the house along with the rest of them, and he heard the repentance, confessing from the mouth of Zacchaeus when he said: 'I will repay fourfold all that I have stolen, and half my goods I will give to the poor'. He saw it, yet he never repented. He was there on the hills of Gadara, among the tombs, where there was a demoniac possessed with a legion of devils - which could be anything over a thousand devils. He saw this madman running around naked, wailing and cutting himself, he was possessed - and then he fell at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus delivered him and sent the demons into swine, and the swine went headlong into the water. Here was this madman that no one could tame, sitting at the feet of Jesus clothed and in his right mind - and yet Judas remained unchanged.

I wonder have you seen people's lives changed by Jesus, but He hasn't changed you yet because you won't let Him? He was a very privileged man, wasn't he? Hearing the teaching of Christ, seeing the miracles of Christ, seeing Christ save other people - but something else, and this is the most terrifying of all to me: he did the work of Christ. Yes, he did! In Luke's

Gospel chapter 10 we read that he was sent out by Jesus to spread the word of the Gospel of the kingdom. The Lord divided 70 of His disciples into twos, and they went out preaching the kingdom - and when they returned, do you know what they said? You can read it yourself, they said: 'Even the demons are subject to us in Your name'. Now, do you know what that means? Judas was casting out devils in Jesus' name. Judas was doing mighty works, we might call them miracles, in the name of Jesus - yet Judas rejected God's work in his own heart. He was engaged in a work in Christ's name, and a work of Christ had never been done in his heart!

How many ministers have been in pulpits of our land this day believing they are doing the work of Christ, and a work of grace has never been done in their hearts? How many Sunday School teachers have gathered a little brood of children around them, teaching them the Bible, doing the work of God, they think? We could go on and on, couldn't we? You can be a member in this church and not be saved. You can be, you know! I want you to look into your heart and ask yourself: are you truly born-again? I'm not asking you do you tick the little box of assent to 'He was born of the virgin, He was the Son of God, He died under Pontius Pilate and was buried and rose again the third day, and is ascended to heaven, and is coming' - I'm not asking do you intellectually assent to those things. I'm asking you: have you had the supernatural miracle of the new birth in your heart?

John Wesley went in 1735 as a missionary to Georgia, a colony in the United States, and after two years of work as a missionary among them, he said: 'I went out to convert the Indians, but, O God, who shall convert me?'. He went out to convert the Indians, and he wasn't saved himself - and he knew it! Do you know it? Do you know, there is an evangelical problem, a serious problem, and that is false profession. People who have been told they are saved, they may believe they are saved, and they are not saved. There is general agreement right across denominational divides and theological dispositions that this is a serious problem. Let me give you examples: Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ says 'Many who call themselves Christians are not really biblical Christians at all. Although they may be religious people who attend church regularly, they have never experienced the new birth and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ'. Dr Rod Bell, the president of the Fundamentalist Baptist Fellowship of America, believes that 50% of people that go to church are lost. The evangelist, Luis Palau, said that of 80% of Americans who claim to be Christians, few live any differently from pagans or atheists, as though God has no claim on their lives. Dr James Dobson of Focus on the Family admitted: 'The majority of Americans are dabbling in religious expression that has no substance'. A.W. Tozer said: 'Probably less than 1 out of 10 evangelicals knows anything experientially about the new birth'.

Are you born-again? I'm not asking you did you utter some prayer, like 'abracadabra', that meant nothing to you and probably meant nothing to God. I'm asking you: have you got the assurance in your heart, given by the Spirit of God, that you are a son or a daughter of God? Are you born-again, and do you know that you're born-again?

Now, I know that Judas was ordained to this role, and I'm not going to get into this big debate tonight. God was sovereign in the way, and this was prophesied, but one thing I am sure of: I believe in no form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility. Let me repeat that: I believe in no view of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility. What I mean by that is: Judas was guilty, and Judas was complicit in the betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was responsible. He made choices in his life - and I don't believe for one moment that he woke up one day and he decided: 'I'm going to betray Jesus Christ'. I believe that it happened in a process of decline, an inward decline in his life. Added to that, he was acquiring a taste

for a secret sin - do you know what that was? Covetousness. We know this from the scriptures. He was given the job right at the beginning of being the treasurer of the twelve, he was in charge of the kitty. We read from the start that he had his hand in the bag, from the beginning he was a thief - and that's why he objects (now it doesn't say specifically Judas, it says some among them objected) to this very expensive ointment being broken and poured out upon Jesus. They're saying: 'This could have been sold and the money given to the poor' - but we know from the other Gospel writers that Judas was the ringleader of this objection. He wasn't worried about the poor, he was worried about the money - he had his hand in the bag, and that was money he could have had.

But what I want you to see tonight is that it was his secret sin that caused him to eventually betray the Lord. Many people are not saved because they cannot, are not willing to, let go of their secret sin. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying: you cannot overcome sin without the power of God. Repentance is not cleaning yourself up and then coming to Jesus, no! Repentance is a change of mind about your sin, which means you understand the damage it is doing to you and you're willing to be changed by the power of God. But one thing is certain: you cannot put one hand out to God, and hold tightly your sin with the other hand! Maybe some of you have been trying to do that: eventually your secret sin will cause you to betray the Lord. Believers, that applies to you as well: if you're dabbling in secret sin, it eventually will completely cut you off from God. I'm not saying you'll be lost forever, all I'm saying is: you will be at a point of almost no return if you don't cease and repent. What is your secret sin? J.C. Ryle, the Bishop of Liverpool, said many years ago: 'Open sin has killed its thousands, but secret sin its tens of thousands'.

Hence we read in verse 11: 'When they heard it', that he was willing to betray Jesus for money, 'they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him'. How are you conveniently betraying Him? It's convenient for you because of your sin. But let me ask you a question: what is the memory that we have of Judas? Well, his name has become synonymous with betrayal, the miserable betrayer.

Now, in contrast to Judas, the Holy Spirit comes and reveals a woman whose name we have come to know as synonymous with devotion and worship. Now she is unnamed here, but in John chapter 12 we read that it was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus who Jesus raised from the dead. It's very, very instructive to know that three times in the gospel records we find Mary of Bethany at the feet of Jesus. That is beautiful. First of all when Martha, her sister, is cumbered about with much serving in the kitchen, Mary is at the school of Christ, at the Saviour's feet learning from Him. Then we find that when her brother dies, Lazarus, and Jesus delays in coming that He might raise him from the dead to glorify God, she falls at His feet and pleads for the life of her brother - there she is at His feet again. Here we see her again at Jesus' feet, this time anointing His feet with this very expensive ointment.

Now, this account should not be confused with Luke chapter 7, and it often is. In Luke chapter 7 we read of a sinner woman who anointed the feet of Jesus in Simon the Pharisee's house - but this is not Simon the Pharisee's house, this is Simon the leper's house. Here Mary is, John 12 testifies, Mary anoints both the head and the feet of Jesus. We see the reason why in verse 8, Jesus says: 'She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial'. Now this is sweet. When you read the gospel record and come to the end, after Jesus has been crucified and buried, we find that other women came to the tomb - and we read that the reason why they came was to anoint the body of Jesus after His burial. But here was a woman so devoted to Christ, whose spirit was so surrendered and in touch with the Spirit of God, that she knew - when the disciples did not understand, and you remember I showed you last week that time

and time again in Mark's gospel He tried to show them that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinners, and be crucified, and be buried - do you remember? They just did not see it, they couldn't get it. Yet here was a woman - and can I say to you women, often the women got it before the men did! That's the same today, I believe - it is! She saw that He was going to die. She didn't wait until after He was buried to anoint Him, she did it before.

Now, you say: 'Well, why did she do it before?'. So that He would be encouraged by her love, and He was. This was precious to Jesus. What worship! Now, David, the Old Testament King of Israel, was one of the greatest worshippers in the Bible. In fact, he is called 'a man after God's own heart'. I know he committed adultery and he murdered, and he did many other things, but nevertheless God looks at a contrite heart and a broken spirit - and David had that. He knew what it was to worship the Lord, and he knew what it was to give sacrificially in worship to the Lord. There is an occasion, I'll not go into all the details, you find it in 2 Samuel 24, where he is going to purchase a field. That field is going to be a place where sacrificial offerings would be made, and eventually the Temple would be built there as well. The man who owned the field was going to give it to him for nothing, because he's the King and he wants it for God. David spoke these words for time immemorial, that illustrate sacrificial offering - he said: 'I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which cost me nothing'. This is something precious in the sight of God, when He receives from our hearts costly, devoted, sacrificial worship.

Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying: I'm not saying you can buy your way to heaven. Salvation is by grace, through faith - it's a free gift, you just accept it by simple faith for the taking. But what I am saying is: when we understand and know and love God, there is nothing that delights His heart more than when we give Him what Hebrews talks about as 'The sacrifice of praise'. Do you know that believers are required to give sacrifices and offerings in this present dispensation? Not lambs or goats, but the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving from our hearts - that's what Hebrews 13 and 15 says: 'Therefore by Him', by Christ, 'let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name'.

Now Mary certainly did not offer to the Lord that which cost her nothing. She offered a very expensive offering. Look at the verse, verse 4, verse 3 first of all: 'A woman', this is Mary of Bethany again, 'came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard', or 'pure nard', the margin might say, 'Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head'. Now this spikenard was imported from India, and that was no mean feat in these days in which Jesus lived. We know from this context that a whole jar that she poured over Jesus' feet was worth one year's salary for a common labourer, because 300 denarii - that's the price that Judas and his objectors say could have been accrued through the selling of this ointment - that's a year's salary for the average man. What's your year's salary?

She was not inhibited in showing her love to the Lord openly. She did not just do it lovingly, but she did it lavishly. It was costly, it was extravagant - and do you know what John records in John 12, in his account? He says that the fragrance filled the whole house - that's what happens when you worship Christ like this! That's what happens when you give costly, sacrificial devotion to the Son of God - it fills the whole house! But not only was there a positive reaction, there was also a negative one - and can I say to you tonight: there always will be a negative reaction from some people when there is open, extravagant, loving and lavish devotion to Jesus in worship. The act of her devotion brought joy from the heart of Jesus, but equally drew malice from the heart of Judas and the others, whoever they were, who were objecting to this expensive sacrifice.

We see in verse 4, Judas and some viewed this as waste: 'Why was this fragrant oil wasted?'. They didn't see it as worship, they saw it as a waste! In verse 5: 'It might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor'. And they criticized her sharply', and my margin says 'they scolded her sharply'. Imagine, in the presence of Christ, these guys rose up and scolded her! Can I say something to you: the flesh and carnal people, even carnal believers, cannot appreciate what is done only for the love of Jesus. Let me turn the tables on you: do you think it would be a waste to spend one year's salary on Jesus? Or, put it another way, do you think it would be a waste to spend one year on Jesus? I wonder is God calling some of you to spend a year for Jesus somewhere? To take a year out from your studies or from your career? Maybe there is a little voice niggling at the back of your consciousness, saying: 'But, it's a bit of a waste you know. I could get to where I need to be all the quicker if I didn't take that year, if I didn't give it to God' - but can I say something to you? Jesus wants more than a year, He wants your life. If you think it's a waste to give Him a year, a year's worth of money, or a year's worth of time, what's the chance then of you giving your life to Him?

Great demonstrations of worship are often misunderstood. Now don't misunderstand me here, I'm not talking about self-centred ostentatious pretension that we often see sometimes in churches, where people just get on in a way that just portrays, 'Look at me!' - that's not what we're talking about. You might say: 'Well then, how do you tell the difference between someone who is really openly, lovingly, and lavishly worshipping the Lord, and someone who's just doing it for self-centred reasons? How can you tell the difference?'. Well, the answer is: you can't! The difference is down here in the heart, and the only One who can tell the difference is God. So it's not for you to judge, it's for God to see and accept that which is true. But one thing I am sure of is that even when you are exercising exuberant, extravagant worship, openly, lovingly, and lavishly towards Jesus, even in a way that to others might seem embarrassing, if it is in spirit and in truth you lose self-consciousness somewhere. What I mean by that is: you couldn't care less what anybody thinks!

David, the great worshipper, is an example of this. He was misunderstood for it in 2 Samuel chapter 6, David danced, we read, before the Ark half naked - and his wife, Michal, looked out of her window and she saw him parading himself before the Ark. It says he was leaping and whirling before the Ark, and as Michal looked down upon this scene she despised him, the Bible says, from her heart - and later, when she got the opportunity, she mocked him sarcastically for his behaviour. Yet what he did, he said he did it unto God. Now, can I ask you: are you inhibited in your praise towards the Lord? Sometimes it's to do with our backgrounds and the way we believe we ought to behave ourselves - and, believe me, I'm not in favour of chaotic behaviour in the presence of God. There is a need, at times, for silence and sanctity, and a hush of holiness in our gatherings - but often we are inhibited in our praise, and all it is is fear of others. Fear of people like Judas and these naysayers, their scorn, their sarcastic remarks, that they are looking at us and what are they going to think of us? What does it matter! Maybe what you need to do here this evening, some of you who feel this in your heart, you have a devotion and a love towards the Lord just wanting to bubble up, but you suppress it because of what others will think of you - or maybe even a self-consciousness in yourself, do you know what you need to do? You need to break the alabaster box! In other words you need to break whatever is confining your praise and your worship, you need to shatter it and let it out!

The Lord quickly comes to the defence of His extravagant worshipper, He loves them. In verse 6 Jesus said to these people: 'Let her alone', I love that. Is that a word for someone here

tonight? 'Leave her alone', 'Leave him alone', 'Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me'. Now if you mark your Bible, that would be a good two words to ring, 'for Me'. 'It was for Me, Judas. It was for Me, disciples' - here's something we continually need to ask ourselves: is what we're doing for Christ, truly for Him, is it for Him? What are you engaged in in the work of God, in church or whatever, I don't know - but is it for Him? Now listen, no matter what anyone thinks of us, no matter what anyone says of us, the only thing that matters is: is it for Him? Are we pleasing Him? Wait till I tell you: if I'm doing it for Him, and I'm pleasing Him, I don't care who I'm displeasing, I don't care! Sometimes it may annoy me a little bit when people are annoyed with me, and I don't like going out of my way to offend people of course, and I like to have friends and not enemies - but at the end of the day, if it is for Him, what else does anything matter?

You see, the most important thing for God is worship. God desires worshippers. In verse 7 Jesus makes this plain, He said about this issue of selling it and giving the money to the poor: 'You have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always'. The most important thing is worship, all else is secondary. It's not that we're not meant to give to the poor, it's not that we're not meant to preach the Gospel, it's not that we're not meant to do the things that we do that Christians do - but we're meant to realise the order of priority, the most important thing is devotion and worship to Jesus! That's the most important thing! Now have you ever discovered that? I know Christians who are running around like the proverbial bluebottle, for want of a better statement, and they're not in touch with God! They're doing things for God, and they're doing things from a heart of affection and devotion towards Him, and they're sincere - but they're not worshippers, they're not intimates, they're not people who have been in the Holiest Place of All and know what it is to gaze on the face of Christ in the spirit. If you're that person, you have missed the first and elementary lesson that Jesus taught these disciples.

Turn back with me to Mark 3 please, and this is important, verse 14 of chapter 3 - now watch this please, verse 13: 'He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted'. So He's calling the twelve Apostles, 'And they came to Him'. Now watch this verse, mark it if you can: 'Then He appointed twelve', why did He appoint them? 'That they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach'. The first thing that He called them to be was 'with Him' - do you understand? - and then to go out and preach. The order is: we need to spend time with Christ, worshipping Christ, and then move out to others. The tragedy is: if we're not dependent on Him, and we're not intimate with Him, we will be no use in going out to others!

Judas wasn't interested in the poor, as we said, he wanted what was given to Jesus, the price of the ointment. Now, here we come down to the crux of the matter: sometimes our problem is we want what should be given to Jesus. We want the time, we want that half hour in the morning or in the evening, rather than giving it to God, or whatever time. We want the money, we want the selfish things, the delights, the passions, the pleasures, the sins, or the besetting things that maybe are not sins but they drag us down and keep us from God. Unless we surrender self, and allow it to be crucified, we're never going to have victory. Judas wanted what was given to Jesus, and it was betrayed in a bitter, begrudging spirit. You know, bitter, begrudging people cannot worship Christ. Stingy people, people who are stingy with money, their heart is not right with God - do you believe that? Now I know I'm causing some of you husbands a real headache now - but seriously speaking: miserliness is a sign of a bitter and stunted spirit - it is, and I can prove that to you from the word of God - but extravagance is a sign of a free spirit liberated by the grace of God.

Now let me ask you on verse 8, Jesus said: 'She has done what she could' - could that be said of you? Now, please, I'm not saying have you done what you could in the Sunday School, I'm not asking you have you done what you could in setting out the chairs, doing the door-to-door work - I'm not asking you that. I'm asking in the realm of worship, that's the context we are in now: have you done what you could? Even when you come into the church, this morning around the Table, this evening as you sing the songs - have you done what you could as you sing them, or are you just singing them? As we pray, as we offer up thanks and praise to God, are we doing what we could or are we just passing the time? As we give of our substance to God, are we doing what we could, are we giving sacrificially until it hurts a little bit, or are we just ticking the boxes?

It was fitting that Jesus should be anointed in this place, Bethany, it was His retreat, it was where He resorted to rest among His friends - because Jesus felt at home in Bethany, and because He felt at home in Bethany He abode there. You see, when He feels at home in your heart, when there is fragrant, sacrificial, extravagant, costly worship, He will abide with you.

There's something else that I want to leave you with here, and the Lord taught me this this week and it has been a blessing to me. It says in verse 9: 'Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her'. Now, do you know what that means? When you bless the heart of Jesus, you will bless the whole world. I sincerely believe this! If you can get intimate with Jesus in the secret place, in prayer and devotion and extravagant worship, you can change the world! I believe that! Whether as an intercessor, or in whatever capacity God has called you - because this fragrance didn't just fill the whole house, what Jesus is now telling us is that it filled the whole world, it filled the whole of history from this moment right to this very day!

Do you want blessings from God? Well, who doesn't? Well, the greatest blessings you can get from God are when you give the greatest blessings to God! Mary in this room in Bethany started a wave of blessing that has been memorialised, Jesus said that wherever the Gospel would be preached, her name and this story would be recounted - and we know that from Matthew, and from Mark, and from John. It's memorialised in the Gospels. This is really what I'm getting at: churches today are banging their heads together, brainstorming as to how we can most impact the world for Christ on the mission field and in our locality. How can we reach our neighbours and friends and our work colleagues? They decide: 'Well, we need more of this, and we need more of that, and we need this type of programme, and this type of regime' - listen to what I'm saying, God revealed this to me, I believe, from this verse this week: a devotional intimacy with Jesus will give you a universally powerful and impacting Gospel witness.

Let me repeat that: a devotional intimacy with Jesus will give you a universally powerful and impacting Gospel witness, because that's what it did for Mary of Bethany! That's what He'll do for you, dear, in your prayer closet, if you give your heart sacrificially to Him. He'll change the world through you, or some part of the world! What legacy are you going to leave? Judas' legacy, the miserable betrayer; or one like Mary of Bethany, the extravagant worshipper? Will it be said of you - I hope it's said of me at my funeral, if the Lord doesn't come before, I hope it's said: 'He did what he could in worship'.

Let us pray. Now in the quietness - and, by the way, one way that you can discern the presence of God in a gathering is quietness. I know I've been encouraging exuberant praise, and there is a place for that, but often what happens when the presence of God falls upon a gathering, and the power of God is evident in the preaching of the word, is that there is an

unusual stillness. I believe that that stillness is here, it's a sign of His presence. It's important, I believe - and you know I don't rush at any point - but it's important now not to rush when God is here. Just be still for a moment in His presence. He has been saying something to some of you, hasn't He? May I remind you that at the beginning you prayed for God to speak to you, I hope you didn't do it in a matter-of-fact way - and now He has said something to you, and you're going to try and plug your ears. You asked Him to speak to you and He has.

Unbeliever, He has spoken to you. You're going to be in danger of committing the mistake Judas did, and you will go to your own place as he did - he was lost forever in despair and regret and torment for what he had done - and you will be also, my friend, if you do not repent and believe in Christ. Will you be saved tonight? Young person, older person, will you, tonight, say - maybe someone who is under some illusion that they are a Christian, it doesn't matter if you hold a position in this church, who cares if your eternal soul is in jeopardy! - will you say tonight: 'I will be saved, and I will make sure I am saved'. If you're not sure, make sure!

But all of us believers have a debt to God - not our salvation, we could never repay that - but we have a debt of thanks, of gratitude and praise that He is worthy of for what He has done in our lives. How are we paying Him? Is there an alabaster box that needs to be smashed tonight? We all worship God in our own way, according to our own temperament and personality, we can't do it the same way as everybody else - but we need to be free. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty - are you free in your worship of God? You need to be, He wants you to be - not just in corporate gatherings like this, but intimately in the closet. Let me say to you: you have no idea the impact that your worship in the secret place will have openly to the world if you do what Mary did.

Now, I'm going to close in prayer, and I'm not going to say 'Don't talk', but just be aware that some people might be dealing with God, and aware that some people might be enjoying the sense of God. Don't take that away from them. If you want to talk, certainly talk, but just keep in mind, please, that some people might be really dealing with God.

Father, we thank You that there is a sense of the fragrance tonight of what that worship meant to Jesus just as He was going to Calvary - that there should be one heart that really understood, one heart that really wanted to say 'I love You Lord, for what You're about to do'. Lord, we often say of our loved ones down here, why don't we tell them we love them more while we have them with us - but this is on a different scale altogether. We pray that while we are in our bodies, and while we're living to praise You, that we will do it with all our might Lord - in our homes as well as in church. Let us not parade ourselves in public, but be dead at home. O God, if we do not praise You, the stones will cry out - so help us to learn even from the stones, but let us not be stones Lord, help us and teach us to be worshippers in spirit and in truth. We know that if we are true worshippers, we will present our bodies living sacrifices, wholly acceptable unto God, which is our expected worship. We will not be conformed to this world, but we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may be able to do what is that good, perfect, and acceptable will of God. Give grace, Lord, tonight, for the needy, for the unsaved, for the backslider, for the struggling Christian, for the person who is in the balance tonight. Let the transaction be enacted tonight, for the glory of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 5

"The Sop And The Supper"

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Well good morning to you all, it's good to be back with you again for the third week here at Ards. It's hard to believe how the time goes in, isn't it? After today just one more week with you. I've really enjoyed fellowship with you all, and I trust that the Lord has been blessing and speaking, and doing the work that only He can do. Thank you for the encouragement that some of you have been giving. Having said that... what's coming next!? The first week I was here there was one glass of water. The next week there were two glasses - which I thought was a message, because I preached that long - and this week there is no water! So the message is coming loud and clear: you want me to dry up, don't you!? Someone has just gone to get me a glass, which I appreciate.

Now, we're turning to Mark 14. Now, if you haven't been with us any of these weeks, we're doing what could be entitled 'The Final Countdown to Calvary' - the last week in the life of the Lord Jesus' ministry. On Sunday, the first day of that week, we looked - here it comes, if you give a glass of water in His name you'll not lose your reward! Thank you. Palm Sunday, the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem in fulfilment of prophecy as the promised King of the Jews, the Messiah of Israel. Then we saw on Monday, the next day of that week, that the Lord Jesus cursed the fig tree, which was symbolic of the nation of Israel - how they were taking up space. They were intended by God to be a fruit-bearing people that would witness to the Gentile nations, but though they were taking up space they were fruitless, they were not living for the purpose for which God chose them. Then that same day, Monday, He went into the Temple and cleansed it - which was equally symbolic of the same truth: that God had finished, at that particular time, with their empty religious ritual without truth and meaning.

Then on Tuesday, we saw that the Lord Jesus in the Temple precinct was questioned by the Sanhedrin. We saw four questions in particular that they put His direction. Then, probably - we say probably because we can't be too dogmatic about each of these days - but probably on Wednesday, we looked last Sunday morning at how the Lord gave the Olivet Discourse, which you can also read in Matthew 24 and 25 and Luke 21. We read about it here, the signs of the times, the signs of the end of the age and those things that will precede the second coming of the Lord Jesus. We saw last Sunday night, the anointing of Bethany seems, in the chronological order of this passage, to come on Wednesday - but we saw, according to John chapter 12 and verse 1, this actually happened six days before Passover. So, I'm trying not to confuse you, but that means it was probably Saturday, the night before Palm Sunday. Yet it would appear to be Wednesday here in Mark's gospel, but we saw that this is a thematic thing that Mark is doing, and other gospel writers have placed this just where Judas is about to betray the Lord in order to contrast the heart of Judas - his wicked, miserable, betraying heart - with the devoted worshipping heart of extravagant love of Mary of Bethany as she anoints the head and the feet of the Lord Jesus in preparation for His burial.

Now, we saw verses 10 and 11 of chapter 14 were probably the early hours of Thursday morning when Judas goes out to meet the chief priests and tells them that he's going to betray Christ. Then we see that the verses we're considering today, verse 12, the Last Supper essentially, is also Thursday of that final week of the life of the Lord Jesus. So we will read

from verse 12 then, and we are reading through to verse 26: *"Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, 'Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?'. And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, 'Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'. Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us'. So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me'. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, 'Is it I?'. And another said, 'Is it I?'. He answered and said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born'. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body'. Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God'. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives".*

Perhaps we could pray for a moment. I have invited you on previous occasions to come to the Lord with your need. I hope there is no one here that thinks they don't have any need, it's a terrible predicament to be in. The Laodicean church in the Bible was a church that was rich, and felt they had need of nothing, but didn't realise that they were poor, wretched, blind and miserable. So it's a great thing to know your need, and as you come to the Lord now with your need, whatever it is, ask Him to speak to you. Now, we've been having a lot of practical ministry over these weeks, and it has been challenging as has been reported to you - this morning we will also, I'm sure, have challenges, but primarily what you're going to see this morning and this evening is Jesus. I'm not going to do much more this morning and this evening other than present to you the Lord Jesus. Your reaction to that is whatever it will be, I can't do anything about that - but I pray that as you have Christ revealed to you, you pray now, that you will have Him minister to you personally in your life. So let us pray to that end - whatever your need is, whether you're a Christian or not, or you're not walking right with God, ask Him to minister Christ to you in a very living and real way.

Father, Abba Father, we come to You in the name of the Lord Jesus, and we need You. I need You, I feel my great need of You this morning. O God, we thank You that for this we have Jesus. We thank You that You have promised: 'My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus' - and there can be no greater measure of riches than Christ. We thank You, Lord, that in Him we are immeasurably rich; without Him we are immeasurably poor - but Lord, we thank You that those of us who have trusted in Jesus, repented of our sins and believe the gospel, that we have Christ and we have everything. But Lord, so often we are not living in the wealth of our riches, so often we're not seeing Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. So often, Lord, a bit like the fog that has been these last couple of days, we can't see Him because things have clouded Him out and got in the way. So, Lord, I pray now by the power of the Holy Spirit that You will breathe a fresh breath of the wind of Your Spirit and clear the fog, clear the cloud. Whatever barriers there might be between us and seeing Christ in all of His wonder and glory and splendour and majesty, and all of His beauty, Lord may we see Him now on this Thursday of the final week of His life, as He gives us this supper, and as

we later on eat of that supper may we know the presence of Christ in such a fullness as we have never known before that we are overwhelmed. Lord, we want to be overwhelmed with Jesus. Hear us we pray, in His wonderful name, Amen.

Verse 12 tells us that this was the first day of Unleavened Bread when they killed the Passover lamb. Little did the disciples realise that this Passover that the Lord Jesus was about to instruct them to go and find a room in which to celebrate would be the Passover of all Passovers. This would be the fulfilment and the climax to all Passovers that had ever been celebrated, because this Passover would bring the Lamb that would take away the sins of the world to the ultimate sacrifice, one sacrifice for sins forever that would never have to be repeated. Is it any wonder that the theme of heaven at this very moment is: 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and has redeemed us to God by His blood out of every tribe, tongue and people and nation' - and that will forever be the theme of heaven. There is a Lamb, as if freshly slain, in the midst of the throne, and all the throngs of glory around the glassy sea, the blood-bought redeemed, are singing praise unto this Lamb - and this is what we're seeing now in time on this final week, the Lamb being delivered to be slain at the final Passover of significance.

Now, again in verse 13, just as a bit of a digression - those of you who were here in our first study will see that there are lessons to be learned about how the Lord directs His disciples, and equally how He directs us in our lives as Christians. We see Him again directing the disciples on an errand, verse 13, He sends out two disciples and says to them: 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him'. You remember in chapter 11, if you weren't here with us let me just fill you in, chapter 11 and verse 2 - just before the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday of this week - the Lord Jesus said to them in verse 2: 'Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it'. You remember that they had to follow the Lord through in all this, believing Him that what He said was true. There was a great risk in this, because they could have been construed as being thieves. But in the same sense we see that the Lord is operating here and giving all knowledge to the disciples - how else could He have known that this was going to happen, that they would go into the city, chapter 14:13, and they would find a man carrying a pitcher of water?

There is the lesson again for us: when we are seeking direction from God we ought to know that He is the all-knowing sovereign Lord, and we can trust Him. Whatever He says to us, we can trust it. Often what He says to us is in specified detail - if you look at this, it really is fascinating. Verse 14 as well: 'Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, 'Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'. Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us'. It's all specified in intricate detail! So the disciples had to have faith in the word of Jesus that He wasn't sending them down a blind alley.

Do you ever feel, when you're being directed to do certain things by God, that He's sending you down a blind alley? Or at least the fear is there: 'What if it is? What if I hit a cul-de-sac?'. You need not fear! Though sometimes He asks us to do things that are unusual - we saw that the last time when He was guiding them to go and get the colt tied up, and it was owned by someone, it was a very strange thing to do - but equally so this is strange, because ordinarily only women carried water on their head, but the Lord directed them that a man would meet them carrying a pitcher of water: 'Follow him'. Now, they took bold faith, they stood upon the word of God, and they exercised obedience. Look at verse 16, just to encourage your heart if you're being asked to do something for God that might seem to be unusual: 'So His disciples

went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them' - and that will always be the case. You will find that whatever the Lord is directing you to do, if you do it, and you're obedient, and you trust His word, that you will find it exactly as He has said it to you.

Here's the reason why, look at chapter 13 and verse 31: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away'. This is the sovereign Lord who is giving us direction - I want you to grasp this, please, because I'm conscious that many of us are looking for guidance and direction in our lives for various situations. You can trust the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ with your life! You can trust Him. You can trust Him with your decisions, you can trust Him with your plans! He's even sovereign over beasts - an ass, a donkey. He's even sovereign over property - He tells them: 'There is a house, and you're going to go to the Upper Room, and there is a specific room that is prepared and just ideal for the Passover'. He's sovereign over property - maybe you're in a property situation at the moment, many people are. Well, He's sovereign. Do you know He's sovereign over economics? He's sovereign, He's in control, don't you worry, the Lord knows all about it, for He is Lord! But the great question is this: does He have the key to every room of your property, your house?

This man, whoever he was, some people think he was John Mark, the author's, father - I don't know, but whoever he was he surrendered this room to Lord. The Lord asks us to surrender our rooms, our property, the things that we own, our possessions to the Lord - but more than that: the Lord wants more than simply houses or land, the Lord wants our hearts. As C.T. Studd once asked F.B. Meyer: does God have the key to every room of your heart? Every room? Can I say to you this morning: you will never know God's direction in your life until He possesses all the keys. If there is a part of your life, a compartment where you say: 'No, Lord, that's my territory and I'll look after that, I don't want You fiddling in those affairs', you will never know the direction of God in your life. You've got to give it over completely.

Now, between verse 17 and verse 18 - and I'm just filling you in on the context - we read in verse 17: 'In the evening He came with the twelve', and then in between this and verse 18, 'Now as they sat to eat', John teaches us that it was at that point that Jesus washed the disciples feet, before the Lord's Supper. That, of course, was a lesson in humility and service. He was teaching them that He was about to serve them, just as He had served them washing their feet, He was about to serve them by dying on the cross to wash them completely of their sins. Now after this, it says in verse 18, 'they sat and ate, Jesus said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me''. He becomes downcast and sad as He announces that one of them whose feet He has just washed, who He is now eating with, one of them is going to betray Him.

Now we looked at Judas last Sunday night, but I want to emphasise again: what the Lord was doing here by announcing this was giving Judas an opportunity, another opportunity to confess his sin. That shows us that Judas was responsible for what he did and, though his decision was, of course, prophesied even in the Old Testament, Judas made his choice. Can I challenge you here this morning: there are some people walking around, and I've heard of them, and they're unbelievers, they're non-Christians, and they've got sort of some kind of half-doctrine of God's sovereignty and predestination - they maybe don't even understand it all, but they think that you can only get saved if God zaps you. Now I know that salvation and the new birth is a supernatural thing, but I'll tell you this: you are responsible to repent of your sins and to believe the Gospel. Your side to get worried about is not God's sovereignty, the part you should get concerned about is your responsibility to repent of your sin and to

believe the Gospel.

Judas had choice, and I believe all the way through this the Lord was showing that He was giving him an opportunity, and anything he was going to do he was going to do of his own volition. Imagine the grace of the Lord Jesus. He says: 'There's one among you who is going to betray me', and a couple of seconds ago He had just washed the feet of His betrayer. He knew who he was. Imagine the depravity of Judas: he had just had his feet washed by his Lord, and yet we know - as we saw last week - that he was looking for an opportunity how he might conveniently betray the Lord Jesus. As Jesus spoke in verse 18, Judas knew he was the one, he knew he was the one.

Then in verse 19 we see the rest of the disciples were aghast: 'And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, 'Is it I?' And another said, 'Is it I?'. Now please note that it wasn't because they doubted themselves, and they were thinking: 'I wonder if it's me? I wonder if I'm the traitor?'. Remember it wasn't that long ago in chapter 10 that they were arguing with one another who was the greatest! These were guys who hadn't a problem with their self-image, their problem was: they had an ego trip often, and they wanted to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and sit at the right hand of the Lord Jesus. But now the Lord Jesus has dropped this bombshell on them, that one of these people was going to betray Him, and they're asking: 'Is it I?' - and the sense is, 'Surely not me, Lord! Surely it couldn't be me, not me!'. Was there ever a greater commentary on Jeremiah 17:20, that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? They didn't realise the depravity of their own heart, and how low any of them could go.

Then in verse 20 it says: 'He answered and said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish''. Now what that simply means is: all of them were dipping in the dish with sops of bread at the Passover, and the Lord was basically saying, 'Not only is it one of you, but it's one of you who is having fellowship with Me'. To break bread in the Middle East was a token of fellowship, it was a very deep pact of friendship, you were entering into a mutual trust and tryst with one who had become your friend. To break that fellowship was to be seen as the deepest, most wicked treachery. So the Lord is saying: 'Not only is it one of you, but one of you at this moment who I am now fellowshiping with in the most intimate friendship, you're going to betray Me'. Now, even this was a fulfilment of prophecy, for in Psalm 41 verse 9 we read: 'Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me'.

Now let's pause for a moment: imagine how those disciples felt. After three and a half years of discipleship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, and He says to them: 'One of you is going to betray Me to death'. But move on from that, and ask yourself: how did Jesus feel? We can never know that, but it's worth contemplating isn't it? How did He feel, that one of His friends would betray Him? Then we read in verse 21: 'The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born'. When Judas received the bread dipped in the bitter herbs, we read from John's Gospel that Satan entered into him, and then Judas left to notify the chief priests where Jesus could be found - setting off a chain of events that would eventually lead to the crucifixion of our Lord. Again showing that the Lord is in complete control here, He knows what He's doing - in fact, He is driving the matter on, He is forcing the matter in hand because He has come into this world to bleed and to die, to be our sacrifice. In fact, He said to Judas, we read in John 13: 'What you are doing, do it quickly'. What a wonderful Saviour!

Judas having left, the Lord now institutes the Supper with His disciples. Now you've got to understand that the Last Supper, the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper, was originally the Passover feast. They had met, hadn't they, to celebrate Passover? In Exodus chapter 12 we read that on the 9th of Nisan - that's around March or April - the Passover lamb would be selected, and then it would be slain on the 14th day of the month. The supper of the Passover had to be eaten in Jerusalem, it was a memorial of the Exodus where God delivered His people, Israel, from Egyptian bondage, and took them into the wilderness eventually to enter into the Promised Land. The original Passover consisted of a roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and a dish of bitter herbs. Now the lamb, of course, reminded them of the blood of the lamb that was shed and then applied to the door posts of their homes in Egypt, so that the death angel would pass over them and they would be delivered. The bread, if you read Exodus 12:39, the unleavened bread symbolised the haste at which they left Egypt - in other words, they hadn't time to leaven the bread because they were in a hurry. The bitter herbs, of course, speak very graphically of their suffering in Egypt as slaves under the iron hand of Pharaoh. Of course there are other things involved: there's saltwater which speaks of the tears of the people in Egyptian bondage. Now at some stage, we're not sure when, during the centuries from the original Exodus as they celebrated this Passover, the Jews introduced the drinking of four cups of wine to the Passover feast - these cups would be diluted with water.

So that's the Passover, and the Lord comes to celebrate the Passover with His disciples, and He uses certain elements of this Passover feast to institute His Supper: the feast not now in memorial of the Exodus from Egypt, but now in memorial of His death. How did He do it? Well, we know, we read that, verse 22: 'as they were eating, Jesus took bread', this unleavened bread, 'He blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body''. He takes one of the pieces of unleavened bread, He blesses it and He breaks it - and, incidentally, when you break unleavened bread there is a 'crack', you don't hear it when you break the bread that we have, but when you break unleavened bread there is a 'crack'. He broke it as a symbol of His body. Then He takes the Passover cup in verse 23: 'He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it'. He took the cup.

Now, you should now be asking the question - are you asking it? No? - which cup? How many cups did I say there were in the Passover feast? Four. Which cup did He take? Now there's a little clue about which cup it was given in Luke's Gospel, you don't need to turn to it - but it's found, if you want to look it up later, in Luke 22 verse 20. It says that it was 'the cup after supper' He took, 'saying, 'This is My blood''. Now 'the cup after supper', we know, was the third cup of the Passover feast, the third of the four Passover cups. The first cup that was taken is the cup of sanctification. The second cup is the cup of remembrance. Significantly, the third cup of the Passover is the cup of salvation, the cup of redemption. It was when He took up the cup of salvation and redemption that He said in verse 24: 'This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many'. So the Lord Jesus was entering in, in the institution of the Lord's Supper, to a new covenant with His disciples which was signified in this third cup.

Now let's look at this phrase 'new covenant' for a moment. The new covenant was represented in these earthly tokens, but what you've got to understand about biblical covenants: they weren't made - that's the language we use - a covenant, basically, is an agreement, and we say 'We have made a covenant', or 'We have made an agreement'. But in the Old Testament Hebrew language, to make a covenant actually explicitly means 'to cut a covenant'. You 'cut' a covenant in the Old Testament. Let me show you this, please, and it's important that we know this, and I believe it will really enhance our understanding of this new covenant, and indeed what we will do later on around the Lord's Table.

Turn with me to Genesis chapter 15, and here we have what is called 'The Abrahamic Covenant', where God makes a covenant with Abram - it's made in other places, Genesis 12 and even 17 - but here we read that the covenant was cut. Verse 18 of Genesis 15: 'On the same day the LORD made a covenant' - and literally in Hebrew the phrase is 'the LORD cut a covenant with Abram, saying'. Now even this cutting of the covenant is very significant, let's read how it was instigated. Verse 8 of chapter 15 of Genesis: 'Abram said, 'Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?' - Inherit what? Well, inherit the land is part of what is promised here, there are many other promises, but this is what he's talking about specifically. He's saying: 'How will I know that I will inherit it?'. 'So He said to him', the LORD said to him, "Bring Me a threeyearold heifer". Now this is significant, because what Abraham is saying is: 'Lord, I'm not sure' - now, he's not being as explicit as this, but he's basically saying 'I'm not sure I can trust You'. In other words, 'How can I know that this is going to happen?'. The LORD says: 'Right, here's how you'll know: take' - there it is in verse 9 - "Bring Me a threeyearold heifer, a threeyearold female goat, a threeyearold ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon'. Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two', there's the cutting, 'cut them in two down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram', God said to him, "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs", that's Egypt, "and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete'. And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces'.

Now, I don't want to go into the detail of this, but that was Shekinah glory, a visible manifestation of the invisible God walking between the pieces, signifying that this was a unilateral agreement that God was taking upon Himself. It had nothing to do with Abram, it had all to do with God: 'On the same day the LORD cut a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates; the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites". Now, this is the way agreements were made, I want you really to understand this, even secular agreements would have been made by cutting a covenant, even cutting beasts in two. Men who were having a deal with one another would have walked down a carriageway of riven carcasses, blood and gore, to say to one another - and this is what it meant - 'May what has been done to these beasts be done to me, if I do not keep my word', that's what they were saying! Do you understand?

Now, what was Abram asking God for in verse 8: 'How can I know? How can I know that this agreement You're entering into with me, I can trust and know that You're going to fulfil?' - and this is basically what the Lord is saying, 'Right, Abram, let's sign a contract today. Let's sign an agreement and settle this once and for all, and if I do not honour My word, may I be rent asunder just like these beasts'. Now, the animals in themselves were prophetic, look back at them please in verse 9 of chapter 15 of Genesis, God says: 'Bring Me', in other words the sacrifice is for God, it's for His benefit, and there are three animals that are named here - can I just draw your attention to the fact, if you think about it for a moment: they are all tame animals. So these were not animals that Abram had to go around chasing and catching,

but they are tame animals - in other words, willing servants of man, meeting his need.

Now, each of these animals foreshadows a distinctive aspect of Christ's person and Christ's work. There is a heifer here, a threeyearold heifer, and a heifer seems to indicate energy - this beast of burden and work. The Lord Jesus Christ was the Servant, we know this from Mark, from Isaiah, the Suffering Servant who came to do the Father's will. Then you're to take a threeyearold goat, the goat in the Old Testament is the sin offering, the Lord Jesus was coming to be a sin offering. Then they're to take a threeyearold ram, and the ram in the Levitical offerings was connected with consecration, and Jesus is coming and consecrating Himself, surrendering Himself to the Father's will, which meant the cross. Then there are these birds, 'a turtledove, and a young pigeon'. Now birds come from heaven, the first heaven, and I believe this is signifying the Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy One from heaven. Now, maybe you think this is pushing things, but let me ask you: how old were each of these animals, each of them? Three times it is repeated: 'three years old', and the Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself after three years of service as the Servant of the Lord.

Now in verse 11, we don't have time to go into this too much, but in verse 11 we see: 'When the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away'. Now that implies, to me at least, that Abram knew that this was a way of two men entering into an agreement with one another. What would happen was: once the carriageway of carcasses was made, the two signatories to the agreement would walk, arm in arm together, down the middle to say that they were agreeing with one another. Abram's waiting on God showing up, he's chasing the birds away from the carcasses, he's waiting on God turning up to walk down the middle with him - and what does God do? God comes in and puts him asleep, and what's that saying? 'Abram, this is going to have nothing to do with you, this is a unilateral, unconditional covenant that God is going to keep in spite of man's cooperation'. He's going to honour His word, and for that reason, when Abram was asleep probably, he saw this vision of the burning Shekinah light moving down on its own, God moving down the middle, saying 'I'm going to do this for Myself and for My glory'. I do think that perhaps Abram's sleep is significant when we think of the death and resurrection of the Lord, and you can see that picture even in Adam and Eve when God was taking Eve out of Adam - what did He do with Adam? He put Him asleep, and right throughout Scripture we see death and resurrection through covenants cut, there is death and resurrection - and what is it all signifying? It's all pointing forward to that great Passover Lamb. It's all telling us that, out of the greatest suffering imaginable, there is going to be the greatest salvation: the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, that's a prototype cutting of a covenant that's important biblically to understand the New Covenant that Jesus was cutting with His disciples. But the New Covenant is actually specifically mentioned in Jeremiah 31, so turn there with me to that please. Now this is vital, because we run around at times talking about ourselves as 'New Covenant Christians', and we don't have the first notion what the New Covenant is! Some people just think of the New Covenant as being New Testament - and I know they're the same word, but that is not everything that it means, just to be a New Testament Christian. For to the Jews, in Jeremiah's day, to the Jews God speaks by His Spirit, verse 31 of Jeremiah 31, concerning a new covenant - this is a promise: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt', that was the Mosaic covenant, which they broke, which is now null and void through the death of the Lord Jesus, 'My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their

hearts'. You see, the problem that the Jews had, and we all have, with law, is that we can't keep it because we are depraved in our hearts. But this new covenant would be different, because God would write it on our hearts so that we would be able to live righteously before God: 'And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more'.

Now there are many things promised in the New Covenant, not least the spiritual and national regeneration of Israel. They will be restored nationally to the land, the first stage of which has already happened in 1948, the birth of the nation of Israel; but they will be restored spiritually also - God will restore the Jews. There will be complete justification, verse 34, their sins and iniquities will be remembered no more; and there will be the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit indwelling - in other words, God would write His law on people's hearts, and they'll not need teachers to show them the way, the Holy Spirit Himself will show them the way.

Now, in Jeremiah 31 the New Covenant was being promised as a far prospect in the future. Now when we come to the Last Supper, back to Mark 14, we find that the New Covenant is now being promised as a near prospect. Remember the verse, 24? 'This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many'. The New Covenant - now stay with me please - is about to be cut, cut, where? At Calvary. Imagine Him pouring the wine into the cup - some believe they only had one cup but they poured it four times for the four cups of the Passover. Imagine Him pouring, it's graphic because, in the Temple sacrificial system, the blood of the animal would be poured out as a drink offering. All their Jewish psyche would be running ahead of themselves with all of this pictorial, graphic instruction concerning the voluntary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The symbolism is just incredible. Here is Jesus, and He's doing this for them, He is the benefactor of this covenant and He's going to be cut by a voluntary sacrifice. It's a unilateral covenant, in other words it's all of God - they don't have to agree to it necessarily, it's wholly established by the means of the obedience of the Lamb who, Philippians 2 says, humbled Himself, became a servant, even unto death, even the death of the cross. Remember, in a few moments the disciples are all going to flee and forsake Him anyway - they're not even entering into this covenant in the sense of a person who has the weight of responsibility of fulfilling what's being asked of them!

This is all of God and all of Jesus, and yet the beneficiaries are these disciples who are representative of the house of Israel and Judah - for this is a covenant made, Jeremiah 31, with the Jews - and yet we find out later that we, Romans 9, 10 and 11, as wild Gentile olive branches, are ingrafted into the vine of Israel. In other words, we have become partakers of these blessings of the New Covenant now through grace in the Lord Jesus. But what I want you to see is Jesus, when He says New Covenant - there's so much meaning in it! He's going to Calvary to be cut at Calvary as a Covenant. When you think of Genesis 15, and this Abrahamic Covenant, I believe what God was saying to Abraham as He promised that his children, not just his ethnic children of the Jews but his spiritual children, that they would be as many as the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore, that God was going to have to be the sacrifice, that the Son of God was going to have to be ripped apart, cut apart at Calvary, so that God might walk through His corpse to be reconciled with men. Is that not what the Bible means when Paul says: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' at the cross?

Are you seeing it? Is it all coming together? How does Isaiah put it? Literally the Hebrew reads: 'He was pierced through for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities'. The

New Covenant was being cut at Calvary. Jesus is enacting this Last Supper to point towards it. At the Abrahamic Covenant the animals were cut. At the Mosaic Covenant, do you remember what was cut then? What was cut then? Tablets of stone, and animals were cut, and the shedding of blood, and the blood was sprinkled on the people - but this New Covenant will not be engraved on tablets of stone, but will be engraved on men's and women's hearts. This is being cut with the shedding of the blood of the only Begotten Son of the Eternal God!

Now, if you're not marvelling in awe and wonder, maybe it's my fault I'm not getting it across - but please get to that point of realising what was going on at Calvary! God was cutting a covenant for you on the flesh of His own Son. That's why, in Isaiah 49, we read: 'I have inscribed you', cut you, 'on the palms of my hands'.

Turn to Hebrews 9 to see the New Testament commentary on these things please, Hebrews 9 verse 13: 'For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?'. I say 'Hallelujah!' for that! What the Mosaic Covenant could not do - it could not change the heart, it could not cleanse the conscience - the New Covenant has done by the shedding of the blood of Christ. Do you know you can have a clear and clean conscience? Have you? That is your blood-right in Jesus! Unserved person here today, tortured by skeletons in the cupboard that you're hiding from loved ones and from God, you think, you can be set free through the blood of Jesus! Cleanse your conscience, and not only cleansed from sin, but from dead works. Under the Mosaic Covenant the Jews were trying to earn 'tick' with God and favour with God by legalistically following rituals - and most Christians, I say it again, most Christians are trying to live the Christian life like that! They don't realise that's why Jesus died, to set us free from the dead works of the flesh, and to clear our conscience from knowing that we're not meeting the mark - because, no matter what your rule is, or your ethic is, you'll never meet it because we're all failures!

'For this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance'. One of the promises of that New Covenant is the Holy Spirit to live in your heart to enable you to live as you ought to live, a thing that the Old Testament Jew could never do! The blood of Messiah is the basis of salvation in the New Covenant. The blood ratified, signified and sealed the New Covenant - and if you want to read more about that, read all the way through from Hebrews 8 right to Hebrews 10. So this is what Jesus is going to do, this is the climax and pinnacle of His whole life: He is the Passover Lamb who will carry away the sins of the world forever, never needing another sacrifice again! He gives them this Supper to enter into this agreement with them.

Now, it's interesting how the Lord based the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper, on the Passover practice - but it's also equally interesting the things that He didn't use. You see He only used the unleavened bread and the third cup, which is the cup of salvation - but please, here's something I noticed for the first time: in all the gospel records of the institution of the Lord's Supper, there is no Paschal lamb mentioned. Was there a lamb there? I don't know, but certainly the disciples were not instructed to go and get the lamb, were they? There was no lamb there, and whether there was one and it's just not mentioned, or whether there wasn't one - surely the emphasis of the Holy Spirit in the gospel narratives is this: He is the Lamb! This is the Passover Lamb of God that all the other lambs, and all the other rivers of blood in the Old Testament economy pointed forward to. He is the Lamb! See Him! Do you see Him? Will you see Him this morning as we break the bread and drink the cup?

There's something else also that is left out, as far as we know the Lord appears not to have drunk the fourth cup of the Passover meal. Do you know what the fourth cup signifies? It is called the 'Hallel' cup, which means 'the cup of praise'. By the way, after the Jews drink this cup of Hallel, the cup of praise, do you know what they say to one another? 'Next year in Jerusalem', they celebrated this feast in Jerusalem, and they were saying: 'Next year in Jerusalem'. The Lord didn't drink this cup, instead He says to them in verse 25: 'Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God'. In other words, He wouldn't be there next year in Jerusalem, He was going out today - and the next time He would drink of the fruit of the vine would be in His kingdom, a future day that is yet to be.

Now we know that on His way to the Mount of Olives He taught them many truths that aren't recorded in Mark's gospel, and if you want to read them - and they're precious - read John 14: 'Let not your heart be troubled', John 15 about the vine, John 16 about the Holy Spirit, John 17, His great High Priestly prayer, all at this juncture. The final thing our Lord did with His disciples before leaving the Upper Room and going to the Mount of Olives was to sing the traditional Passover hymn - that's what it says, isn't it? Verse 26: 'When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives'. Do you know what the Passover hymn was? It was based on the great Hallel, which is Psalm 113 through to Psalm 118. We don't have time to study it of course, but read it! Psalm 113 through to Psalm 118, they most likely would have taken excerpts from those Psalms - and it's a most wonderful commentary on Calvary!

Now I want you to picture this, please picture it - I'm almost finished - before we break bread please picture this: the Lord has enacted a ceremony agreeing to covenant and to cut Himself to be the instigator and the benefactor of the New Covenant. Now He stands and sings the great Hallel, listen to some of the verses: 'The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol', the grave, 'laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!' - that's Psalm 116. The same Psalm: 'For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD In the land of the living'. Psalm 116 again: 'I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints for where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator'. Psalm 117: 'Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!'. Psalm 118: 'You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation'. Psalm 118 as well: 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the LORD'. Another: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes'. One for the last, and there are many more, Psalm 118 again: 'God is the LORD, and He has given us light' - listen to this one! - 'Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You'.

Imagine our Lord singing these words, imagine Him even singing before the cross, and singing these words perhaps: 'Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You'. All I can say is:

'Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;

Sealed my pardon', and covenant, 'with His blood.
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!'.

Let us pray. Tonight we will be, God willing, following our Lord to the Garden of Gethsemane. Father, these things are too wonderful for me, and I apologise to You Lord and confess that I just can't do it, I can't make this the way it should be, so that people would really understand what Jesus was entering into with His disciples, the significance of it to their minds - and the anticipation of Calvary, what it meant for You, Father, to cut Your own Son, that it should please You to bruise Him, that You might give Your word in agreement to those who believe in it, You're covenanting to take them as Your children and never let them go. Lord, I pray, if there's any soul here this morning who has never entered into the good of the New Covenant by faith - it's not by anything we can do only taking it, receiving it at the giving by grace - we pray that this morning they would enter in, they would see by the Holy Spirit's power the magnitude of what Jesus has done. What we're about to do shows forth His death, and even if there are unbelievers in our midst we believe it is a graphic description of what He was to do, and what He has now done and finished. Lord, we pray for all of us as believers, O God, lift the scales from off our eyes, let us see Jesus in His passion for us, in His steadfast endurance to go to the cross. As this wine is taken by us, and this bread is broken, let us not lose the symbolism. We know, Lord, that this is not just bread and wine in the sense that it symbolises something more, but we know, Father, that we must, by faith, eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. We pray that, Lord, we would know what it is to feed on Christ, who is our life; and that we will truly meet the Lord now as we meet around this board, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 6

"The Agony Of Gethsemane"

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It's good to be back with you, and welcome to those of you who are new - there are some faces I haven't seen before over the last couple of weeks, and we really do welcome you. We trust that you enjoy our time tonight, and are challenged through the word of God, and encouraged as we seek to just gaze upon the Lord Jesus in this last week of His earthly life and ministry.

We're turning to Mark's gospel chapter 14, we've been there for a while now - last Sunday evening in particular, and this morning. Just to fill you in, those of you who are here for the first time, and to recollect for those who have been before: we're looking at 'The Final Countdown to Calvary', the last week in the life of Jesus as He makes His way towards the cross. We started a couple of weeks ago on Sunday morning looking at Palm Sunday, which was the Sunday of that final week, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the promised Messiah, the King of the Jews. Then we moved to Monday where He cursed the fig tree which represented Israel, who were taking up space but not bearing fruit for God. Then, attached to that, He then, on the same day, Monday, went into the Temple, and you know that He cleansed it, He turned the tables of the moneychangers upside down, and that was His pronouncement of judgement on the place - that it was no longer fit for purpose: it was meant to be a house of prayer, God had said, but it had now become a hiding place for thieves and robbers.

Then we moved to Tuesday, and Tuesday was the time when Jesus, in the temple courts and precincts, was questioned by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body. Then, probably on Wednesday, He spoke of signs to come concerning His second coming, how we could know that He was going to come soon, and He was teaching His disciples about that on Wednesday. Then last Sunday evening we looked at the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany, and we saw that chronologically that actually didn't fit in there, but John tells us this happened six days before Passover, which would put it on Saturday evening just before Palm Sunday. But we know that for thematic reasons, Mark put it in here because he wanted to contrast Judas, the miserable betrayer, with Mary of Bethany, her heart which was that of an extravagant worshipper. This morning we looked at the Last Supper, which was Thursday evening of this final week; and now we're going to look at Jesus resorting to the Garden of Gethsemane - which is late Thursday evening - and we're also going to move into His betrayal in that garden, Judas bringing the guards of the Temple along to hand Him over, and betraying Him with a kiss, and that's probably the early hours of Friday morning.

So what we're looking at now is late Thursday evening and the early hours of Friday morning, and we're going to begin reading at verse 27, and we are reading right down to verse 52: *"Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble', fall away, 'because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered'. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee'. Peter said to Him, 'Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be'. Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times'. But he spoke more vehemently, 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And they all said likewise. Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, 'Sit here*

while I pray'. And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch'. He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'. Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'. Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. Then He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand'. And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely'. As soon as He had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, 'Rabbi, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him. And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled'. Then they all forsook Him and fled. Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked".

Let's pray together and, as I've said before, as I come now and pray, really you ought to be praying with me. Those of you who know the Lord, and desire to know Him more, why don't you come now and say: 'Lord, I want You to really open my heart and make me receptive to the word. I want to be receptive to the word, I want to hear from You'. Are you here tonight and you've real longing in your heart to hear from God? I hope you have, and I believe if you have, and you come to Him, that He will meet you through the word. Maybe you're not even a Christian, or maybe you're a long way from God, not as close as you used to be, well why not even say to the Lord: 'Lord, I want You to draw near to me now, and I want You to reveal Yourself'. Pray that to God now as we come to Him.

Father, we use the term our Lord Jesus used to You, 'Abba'. We know that all things are possible for You. Lord, we come to You, and we really do feel that we ought to take our shoes off our feet, for we're standing on holy ground as we see the Lord Jesus in the agony of Gethsemane. We really don't know hardly what to say, or what to think, 'tis mystery all. Yet, Lord, we have been given Your word, and these things are imparted to us for our benefit, and all Scripture is profitable. We pray, Lord, that You will take these words and these deep, eternal truths and make them profitable to every mind and heart in this place tonight, irrespective of their circumstances. Lord, we need You, we need the Holy Spirit who was promised to testify of the things of Christ, to take of His things and witness them to us. Lord, there are unsaved people here tonight, young people, middle aged people, older people who need to have Christ witnessed to them - and yet the Holy Spirit has also been sent that Christ may be conformed in us. Lord, we pray that we would have that happen as we see Jesus in the Garden. Lord Jesus, we would even address You, and reverence You at this moment for what You saw in the Garden. Lord, we don't have a clue, but we pray that You will help us tonight to understand a little bit more, Lord, of what You did for us. Lord Jesus, open our minds and open our hearts to You this evening, that our love for You, and our surrender to You would be greater than ever after this evening as we listen to Your voice. In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Now, after instituting the Lord's Supper - and we saw that this morning - they sang a hymn and they went out towards the Mount of Olives. I told you that the teaching that we find in John is not in any of the other synoptics, Matthew, Mark and Luke - you can read John 14 through to 17, and somewhere around here is when the Lord imparted these wonderful truths: 'Let not your heart be troubled', about going to prepare dwellingplaces for us in heaven, about being the Vine, about the Holy Spirit coming in His ministry and how it was needful that He would come, and then His great High Priestly prayer to His Father. But Mark, of course, is going at breakneck speed to get through this week, and he brings us from the Upper Room, the Last Supper, straight to Gethsemane. But before that, on the way, the Lord warns the disciples that they would all forsake Him - verse 27: 'All of you will be made to stumble', fall away, 'because of Me this night, for it is written' - and He quotes from Zechariah 13 verse 7, the Old Testament prophet - "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered".

Now, it has been hard enough for them, if you were with us this morning, for them to take in that one of them who was with Him fellowshiping around the table would betray Him - but now He is imparting to them that all of them would forsake Him, and it would be a fulfilment of Zechariah 13:7. But essentially this quotation of this Old Testament prophet was not in order to condemn the disciples for forsaking Him, it was rather to demonstrate - as we have seen right throughout this whole last week of the Lord's life - Jesus was showing that He was in complete and absolute control of what was happening here. This was no accident, things were not spinning out of control, but the Lord Jesus step-by-step - and we have seen Him do it, and we will see Him do it again and again - is fulfilling hundreds-year-old prophecies with His life, and particularly this last week of His ministry. He's in control of the situation, and that's encouraging - and I know that every other situation pales into insignificance in comparison with this last week, but let me tell you tonight, wherever you are and whatever you're going through, He's in control of your situation. You might feel that you're in chaos, the world is crumbling around you and the roof falling around your ears, but He is in control - trust Him, believe that He is behind the scenes, even if you can't see Him.

The disciples found it very hard to believe, especially when He was telling them that they were going to fall away. But then in verse 28, just to show He's in control He actually talks about meeting them after the resurrection! Staggering, isn't it? Verse 28: 'After I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee'. It shows that He's already looking beyond the cross - what faith is that! In fact, we read in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2 that we are to look 'unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross' - that's how He got through the agony of Gethsemane and the sacrifice of Calvary: He was looking beyond it! He had an eternal perspective, the joy that was set before Him - and you were part of that joy - to have a redeemed people purchased by His own precious blood, and to have an eternal future with His church. It's marvellous, isn't it?

There's something very personal that He was also saying to the disciples when He was saying, 'Look, after I've been raised, I will go before you into Galilee'. He had just told them that they were all going to fall away and forsake Him. So effectively what He was saying was: 'Though you disown Me, I will not disown you' - is that a word from the Lord directly to someone here tonight? You've been disowning Christ. You once knew Him, and you once loved Him, but His message to you is just like these fickle disciples: 'Though you disown Me, I will not disown you, I will be there for you, I'm waiting for you'. Paul said it to Timothy: 'Though we are faithless and unbelieving, He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself'. Isn't He wonderful?

All of us have to confess how unfaithful we are to Him so much of the time.

Now, of course, on previous occasions the Lord Jesus spoke of His resurrection. Didn't I show you? Chapter 8 and verse 31, He tells them the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinners, be slain, and three days later rise again. He tells them in chapter 9 and verse 31, He tells them it again in chapter 10 and verse 32, He's been talking non-stop about it - and yet still they don't understand, even here when He says to them: 'I'm going to be raised, and I will go before you into Galilee'. Three days later after He said this, they were doubting reports of His resurrection! Do you see how hard their heads were? It just wouldn't go through.

Now verse 29 shows us that Peter was indignant about this suggestion and prediction that they would all fall away and stumble: 'Peter said to Him, 'Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be''. In other words, he says: 'The rest might desert You, but not me, never!'. William MacDonald, the Bible commentator, says that very quickly Jesus turned that 'never' into a 'soon'. Jesus maybe didn't let him down too gently, but faced him with the fact in verse 30: 'Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times'. Three times, Peter! Yet still, verse 31, Peter protests, he says the more vehemently: 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' - and they all said likewise. Peter was saying: 'That's preposterous, I would rather die than deny You, Lord! Do You not know that?'

We're so hard on Peter, aren't we? I think I'm going to have to apologise many many times to Peter when I get to heaven! A lot of preachers are! I believe Peter is one of the most humble and meekest of men. He had to be, for the Lord to put so much bad stuff in the Bible about him. By the way, we believe that Peter fed Mark the information about this gospel, we believe that. He was a self-effacing man, and yet he wasn't alone in his brashness of saying that 'I'll go to die for You' - look at the end of verse 31: 'They all said likewise'. Now, what does that show us? I'll tell you what it shows us: Peter and the others were not aware of their weakness, they were not aware of their Achilles heel. Peter's self-apparent strength was his courage and his boldness, but he didn't realise that his self-apparent strength was actually his greatest weakness. There is a lesson, if ever there was one, for any of us: so much so that in a few hours this man, around a campfire, would be intimidated by a mere slave girl. Bold Peter who wanted to die for Him, would deny that he even knew Him with oaths and curses.

Now Peter and the rest of them made two mistakes, and we are in great danger of making them if we're not careful. The first is: we overestimate ourselves, as he did. When we overestimate ourselves we set ourselves up for a great fall - what does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 12: 'Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall'. Do not overestimate yourself spiritually! Now let me diagnose whether or not you are over estimating yourself. A question: do you think you are beyond the reach of certain sins? Do you? Or do you believe the depravity, even if it be hidden secret depravity, of your heart, if the circumstances were right, you could delve down to any depth imaginatively known to men? That's what I believe. Never overestimate yourself, because if you do you're in for a big surprise!

Not only did Peter and the rest overestimate themselves, they underestimated the Lord's knowledge of them. In other words, He knew them better than they knew themselves. He was in control of the situation, He was able to predict to them what was going to happen, but they wouldn't listen to Him! 'Oh, no! No! We're not going to do that, we would never do that! We will go to our deaths after You! We will never deny, no, no! That's preposterous!' - this is the

Lord talking to them. The only way that we will not overestimate ourselves or underestimate His knowledge of us is if we listen to Him, listen to what He teaches in the word about the heart, about our susceptibility to sin and temptation, and be realistic. The best of men and women are those who know their weaknesses, face their weaknesses, and know their Achilles heel, and know the chink in the armour that the devil can capitalise on, and deal with it before God.

You see the Lord, remember in verse 27 He quoted Zechariah 13 verse 7 to them: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'. Now, the reason why He quoted that was not only to show that this was a fulfilment of prophetic Scripture, but He was showing them what they ought to do when the Shepherd was struck. When the Shepherd is struck, what is meant to happen to the sheep? They will be scattered. Now, had they listened to that prophecy and heeded what the Lord Jesus was saying, had they believed it, they would have saved themselves from a great deal of anxiety - and, who knows, Peter may not have denied the Lord. Now in John chapter 18, in his account of this event in the Garden, we see that when the soldiers come to take Jesus away, Jesus said: 'Let these disciples go their way' - and that was tantamount to the Lord saying, 'Boys, run! Now is your time to scatter'.

Warren Weirsbe says on this very point: 'I have read many eloquent sermons blaming Peter for following afar off' - you've heard them as well - 'but they completely miss the point. He was not supposed to follow at all. Had he obeyed the Lord, he would not have attacked a man with his sword, or denied the Lord three times'. Now you may debate with me on that one, but nevertheless the fact remains that the sheep were to scatter, they were meant to scatter because the Lord knew their weakness! He knew Peter's weakness - but they didn't listen to the Lord. Would you listen to the Lord! If you don't want to overestimate yourself or underestimate His knowledge of you, He knows you better than you know yourself, so listen to Him!

But, you see, if you're going to listen to Him, that requires the brokenness of the will. You see, Peter had to be converted on that score - and through betraying the Lord he was broken. Are you broken here tonight? Have you finally got broken, because you realise that you're not what you thought you were? None of us are. You've overestimated yourself, and it has just set you up time after time after time again for a fall. Maybe other people have overestimated you, and you haven't really listened to what God says in His word? Well, brokenness of the will is the secret to going on with God. It's not people who think they're all that, it's people who know that they are nothing without God, and nothing without Christ - and if they go for a moment without His dependence and His fellowship, they are in big trouble.

We often quote Romans 12 verses 1 and 2, but if you read verses 1, 2 and 3 you will read this: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God'. Listen to verse 3: 'For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith'. You can't be the sacrifice you need to be for God if you think too highly of yourself. It's a constant battle for all of us, because many of us have an inflated opinion of self, and God has to deal with that.

Now in verse 32 they have now arrived at Gethsemane. Now, if you've never been to Jerusalem, you need to know that Gethsemane is just east of the Temple Mount area in

Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. So you go out of Jerusalem, down the Kidron Valley, and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives, and just at the beginning of the slope of the Mount of Olives is this Garden filled with ancient olive trees. It's a mighty sight if you've ever been there. But 'Gethsemane' means 'oil press', it was the place where the olives were crushed for oil - and now we're going to see the Son of God being crushed here with the weight of the anticipation of Calvary before Him.

Now in verse 33, at the beginning, verse 32: 'They came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I pray'. And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed'. Now, it was perfectly human of the Lord to desire this - and you know, He was perfectly human, He was 100% man though He was 100% God. He was everything it was to be a man, except sinful. We, as human beings, desire company, especially in our most tragic hours. Here He faces His greatest challenge, and He takes the disciples - eight of them stay around the gate area, and then He takes three along with him, Peter, James and John, the intimate inner circle. Now it's very interesting, and Warren Weirsbe points this out, and I think it's beautiful: Peter, James and John were with Jesus when He went into Jairus' house to raise his only daughter. You know that story? The rest of the disciples were left outside, and Peter, James and John went in. Then He brought them up the Mount of Transfiguration, when He was transfigured and His Shekinah glory burst forth, His majestic divine majesty came out of Him there, they were there and they saw it! Witnesses of His majesty, Peter, James and John! Now here they are and they are given the privilege of being at Gethsemane.

In Philippians 3 and verse 10 we read this, Paul desired that he might know Him - those three got to know Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, who He really is. He's more than this miracle man, He is God's Son, He has the manifest glory of Divinity dwelling within Him, and it shot forth on that mountaintop. 'That I might know Him', that's the Mount of Transfiguration, 'the power of His resurrection', that's Jairus' house - He raised the little lamb, He said 'Little lamb, talithacum, little girl arise!'. They knew Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, they knew Him in the resurrection in Jairus' home - and how does the verse finish? 'That I might know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings' - and now the same three go into the Garden of Gethsemane to fellowship with Him in His sufferings.

Let us read about it again, verse 33: 'He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch'. He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'. Now, let me give you a warning here: we are on holy ground. We must be careful what we say about Gethsemane, and we must be careful what we say in many of the respects of Calvary. Ecclesiastes 5:2 would be wise to take note of: 'Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God'.

It says here that Jesus, verse 35, went a little farther. Now picture the scene, OK? He leaves the disciples around about somewhere near the gate or the entrance to the Garden. He takes the inner intimate three, Peter, James and John, in with Him - but then it implies that He leaves even them behind to watch and pray, and He goes a little farther. Do you know what that tells me? He goes to a place that He must go alone, and when He goes there He leaves us behind - that simply means that we cannot enter in to what He endured in the agony of Gethsemane and the wonder of Calvary. Now we can understand a lot of things about it, but

there is much where we are just left behind.

Yet we cannot avoid the greatest question of all here regarding Gethsemane, and it's this: if Jesus knew what the Father's will was, what was the agony for? Have you ever asked that question? He knew what the will of God was and He was resigned to it, the Bible says, from before He was born in Bethlehem - the Eternal Son came to do the will of the Father. Yet here we read, Luke testifies that He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. So, if He knew what God's will was, what was the agony for? And also, why did He pray as He did pray in verses 35 and 36, that if it were possible the hour might pass and that this cup would pass from Him?

Now this is a very valid question. Listen to some scriptures that outline the fact that Jesus knew what He was heading for, and He had resigned His will to it. Luke chapter 9 and verse 51: 'It came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem'. There were no qualms about this journey to Mount Calvary. Luke chapter 9 and verse 62, Jesus Himself said: 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'. Now, how could He say that if He was now looking back from the will of God? Hebrews 10 and verse 38, the writer to the Hebrews says: 'Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him' - so if Jesus was drawing back from the will of God, how could it be? Then we read in John 18, in his account of Gethsemane, after this agony, and the soldiers come and Peter draws his sword, Jesus said: 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?'

Now let me just say categorically: I cannot accept, as some teach, that the Lord was having second thoughts about the will of God. I cannot accept that. The cross was the Father's will, and the cross was the reason why Jesus came into the world - but note please, you might think this is hairsplitting, but it's not on the holy ground where we are: it was not the Father's will that Jesus was wrestling with in the Garden of Gethsemane, but rather what He was wrestling with was what the Father's will would entail. Let me repeat that: it was not the Father's will per se, it was not being obedient to God that He was wrestling with, it was what the Father's will would entail. What would the will of God entail?

Well, turn with me to Galatians 3 please and verse 13 quickly. We read there: 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')'. Now, that was the penalty for a rebellious son, to be hanged on a tree - in Deuteronomy we read that. To break the law of God, the holy law of God encapsulated in the Ten Commandments and the Torah, Moses' first five books of the Bible, was to be accursed of God. Jesus knew, and now He is contemplating in the hours before Calvary how He Himself, the holy, sinless, spotless Son, would be treated like a rebellious son. He had never broken a law, never sinned a sin in thought, word or deed, but He would be treated as if He was the greatest lawbreaker in the universe. That was the weight, surely, that was upon Him.

Another verse, 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21, it's important that you look at these verses - if you have a Bible, please turn to them. Second Corinthians 5 and verse 21, Paul says: 'For He', that is God, 'made Him', that is Jesus, 'who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him'. You see, Jesus, knowing what was ahead of Him - that's the very point, He knew what was ahead of Him. Now He's in the Garden, in the hours before Calvary, grappling with this: that His holy Soul would be made sin in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Now that doesn't mean He became sinful,

but He was treated as if He was a sinner - guilty of our sins - that we might go free. Now, we can never enter into what that would have been for Him, the abhorrence of the thought to become sin, to be made sin, to be dealt with as a sinner though He knew no sin.

Harry Ironside says: 'His holy Soul shrank from the awfulness of being made sin upon the tree. It was not death that He was shrinking from' - and I add to that, it was not the Father's will that He was shrinking from - 'but it was the Divine anger against sin' - God, His Father. It was the imputation to Him of all our iniquities, your iniquities, that filled His Soul with horror. There was no conflict of wills, but you've got to understand the cataclysmic collision here of two worlds: the holy Son of God, spotless, pure, divine in human flesh, now contemplating what it would be to take upon Him our wickedness as if it were His own, and be cursed from God for it.

Are you understanding a wee bit more about what this is about? It's not that He's shrinking from doing God will, He's just starting now to contemplate, in anticipation, what this would mean. It wasn't the Father's will, but the contemplation of being the sin offering, becoming the object of God's holy wrath - and remember, He knew what God's holy wrath was, He was God. It was the contemplation of being forsaken by God. In chapter 15 of this gospel, verse 34, we read that He cried from the cross: 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' - 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'

In Hebrews chapter 5 we get a commentary of this event, turn with me to it please, verse 7. It's speaking about how Jesus has a priesthood according to Melchizedek's - that means that it never ends, because He now lives in the power of an endless life, He has risen from the dead never to die again. In verse 7 it says: 'Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered'. Now you try and understand that: though He was the Son of God, in His humanity He learned obedience to the will of God through the things that He suffered. I believe verse 7 in particular is specifically referring to Gethsemane. He's coming as a human being who is God, but in His humanity He's grappling now with all that it means to go to Calvary, and He's surrendering His will completely to God. It's not saying here that He was saved from death, in other words that God saved Him from Calvary, or He was asking for that, but it literally means 'He was saved out of death'. In other words, after He died, was buried, God raised Him again and granted this request - now He can be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. Do you understand?

Back to Mark, He addresses God again, and He calls Him - and it's touching to hear Him address God - verse 36: 'Abba, Father'. That was a term, an Aramaic term, that was like 'Dada', then it evolved into a term more like our 'Daddy', and it became a respectful term but a very intimate term, and Jesus characteristically used it of His Father, and gave it to us in the Lord's prayer to use of our Heavenly Father. The relationship was intact, do you understand? He's going through all this agony, He's grappling with not the will of God but what the will of God would entail at Calvary, but His relationship with the Father was intact. Then in verse 36 He asks: 'All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'.

Now what is this cup that He's asking to be taken away from Him? Well, it's not the will of God, I think we've covered that. He's not asking for the will of God to be changed, in the sense of 'He's not going to do it'. The Old Testament gives us some clues as to what this cup is, turn with me to Psalm 75. Psalm 75, please, verse 8 reads: 'For in the hand of the LORD

there is a cup, and the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down'. What is in this cup? The wrath of God that the wicked deserve. Turn with me again to Isaiah 51 to show you that this is the case, Isaiah 51 please and verse 17: 'Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out'. The cup of God's fury, His anger towards sin. Turn with me again, just one more, to Jeremiah, just to prove this categorically to you - chapter 25 of Jeremiah and verse 15: 'For thus says the LORD God of Israel to me: 'Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it'.

What was in this cup? The wrath of God towards sin, something that was completely foreign to Christ's character and nature. He didn't know what sin was, and He certainly didn't know the anger of God toward Him because of sin - and yet this is what He's about to drink. Think of that for a moment. The hymn writer put it like this:

'Death and the curse were in the cup;
O Christ, 'twas full for thee!
But thou hast drained the last dark drop,
'Tis empty now for me;
That bitter cup, love drank it up,
Now blessings draw from Thee'.

You see, He drank a cup of wrath without mercy that we, as believers in the New Covenant, we were seeing that this morning, might drink a cup of mercy without wrath! But you're saying to me: 'But He's asking that God would take it away from Him'. Well, what He's asking, I think, is that if it was possible, seeing the horror of what Calvary would mean - for Him to be made sin, and cursed as sin, become the object of God's wrath and be forsaken of God - contemplating that, He's asking God if it's possible that He could righteously redeem and justify men any other way, that it would be done. But the heaven was silent, and He knew there was no other way. So He says: 'Not My will, but Thine be done'.

Can I tell you tonight, if you're not a Christian - and in this pluralistic, multicultural, religious fudge age - that there is salvation in none other, only Jesus Christ. God's Son said: 'If there is any other way...', and there was a silent heaven. You can't be saved through Buddha, you can't be saved through Mohammed, you can't be saved through Joseph Smith, you can't be saved through the Virgin Mary, you can't be saved through Saint Patrick, you can't be saved through King Billy, you can only be saved through Jesus Christ, God's Son, and His sacrifice on the cross - it's the only way! If it wasn't the only way, do you think God would have sent Jesus through Gethsemane and on to Calvary?

Three times Jesus prays about the matter. Twice we read He prayed the same words. Sometimes we hear it said that it's bad to say the same prayers over again - well, sometimes it is, if it's ad nauseam, particularly in the prayer meeting - but it's not wrong to keep praying the same things to the Lord, our Lord did it. In verses 37 through to 42 the disciples who, a while ago, were confessing that they would die for Jesus, couldn't even keep awake for an hour. Look at it, verse 37, 'He came and found them sleeping' - imagine how He felt. The hour of His greatest need, and His disciples are sleeping. He said to Peter, 'Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'.

Again He went away, and He came back again and found them, verse 40, asleep again - their

eyes heavy, they didn't know what to answer Him. Then in verse 41 He comes again the third time, and they're still sleeping - now what is that telling us? In His greatest hour of need, He must go alone. We know that, He said it, didn't He in Zechariah? 'The sheep will be scattered', He must face this hour alone. What a warning He gives to the disciples in verse 38: 'Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'. Be alert! Be in prayer, disciples! Because we have an enemy, and if you don't watch and pray the likelihood is that you will be overcome by the evil one, irrespective of the best wishes that you might have!

Peter: 'I'll go and die for You'. All of them said: 'We'll go and die with You'. They go into the garden, Jesus needed them, and they fall asleep. Jesus says: 'Look, if you can't even watch and pray, your chances of overcoming the evil one are nil'. Maybe you're here, a professing Christian, maybe not walking with God too much, and you wonder why you're continually overcome by evil. Listen to the words of Jesus: 'Watch and pray' - are you watching? Are you alert about what's coming into your life? Where you're going, what you're doing? Are you alert about your lifestyle? Are you alert about your habits? Are you praying about everything, spreading everything before God? Are you drawing from God in prayer and fellowship? Because the spirit is willing - oh, you want it, don't you? You want to be right with God, you want to go on with God! You want to do your best, you want to excel and you want to be like some of those Christians you know! But the flesh is weak, the flesh is weak - and the only way the flesh can be dealt with is by watching and praying.

Verses 41 and 42, at that moment Judas and the Temple guards arrived to arrest Jesus. In verses 43 to 46 we read it: 'Immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely'. As soon as He had come, immediately he went up to Him', imagine it, 'and said to Him, 'Rabbi, Rabbi!' and kissed Him' - and I'm led to believe that's emphatic, which means, perhaps, that he kept on kissing Him - 'Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him'.

In verse 47 here we have Peter again, we know this from the other gospels: 'One of those who stood by drew his sword' - what should he have done when the Shepherd was taken? Fled! But he took his sword, and he struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Now we know from John 18 and verse 10 that Jesus healed this man - it's just as well He did, or there might have been four crosses on Calvary, one of them Peter's! Peter's reaction was natural, wasn't it? Many of us would have reacted in the same way, but it was not spiritual. What Peter was trying to do was use carnal weapons in a spiritual battle, and that's what a lot of Christians are trying to do today, that's what a lot of churches are trying to do today: using fleshly weapons to battle spiritual fights. Someone says he used the wrong weapon at the wrong time for the wrong purpose on the wrong motive.

Finally we read in verse 48 to the end: 'Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me?' - this proves that it was His time, He was in control. They could have taken Him at any time: 'I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled', that's why it's happening now, Jesus is saying! Here it is, verse 50: 'Then they all forsook Him and fled'. Finally the disciples forsook Him and fled, and so did this young man in verse 51 in a linen cloth, many believe it to be Mark himself - only Mark's Gospel contains that record. But this is the point, the word of verse 27 is fulfilled: the Shepherd has been struck, and the sheep have been scattered.

We have been to a very holy place tonight, haven't we? We have gazed upon a Saviour prostrate. He went a little farther and fell on His face on the ground. Gethsemane, the place of the olive press, the Son of God being crushed by the burden of the anticipation of our sin, and the judgement thereof. Does that mean anything to you? He hasn't even gone to Calvary, He hasn't done anything yet to take away our sins in the truest sense - but does it even mean anything to you that He was near the point of physically expiring, exceeding sorrowful even unto death? Unsaved one, does it not mean anything to you that the Son of God loved you in such a manner, and gave Himself for you in such a manner as this? Believer, maybe like these disciples you've forsaken Him? Well, you've been given a fresh glimpse of Him tonight, is it nothing to you that He went alone? Believer who is sleeping, would it not waken you up?

I read a beautiful poem about Gethsemane with which I will finish tonight, and it makes it very personal. Listen to it:

'Wake my soul, the hour is late,
Hour of darkness and of fate;
Jesus to the Garden goes,
There to taste sin's bitter woes;
Wake my soul, for 'tis for thee
Jesus seeks Gethsemane.

See the Saviour prostrate now,
Sweat of blood upon His brow!
Hear my soul the piercing cry,
Cleaving thrice the silent sky!
Sorer anguish cannot be
Than thy pains, Gethsemane.

Gaze, my soul, with wonder gaze,
'Tis thy Saviour weeps and prays!
Treads the winepress all alone,
Makes us sharers of His throne,
Boundless love, and all for me,
Wonderful Gethsemane!

None may tell, for none may know
Why the Saviour suffered so;
Depth of agony and pain
None can measure or explain;
But I know they were for me,
Sorrows of Gethsemane!

Lo the fight is fought and won!
'Not My will, but Thine be done',
And the angels swift of wing
To the garden sweep and sing.
Sing my soul, for 'tis for thee,
Dread, but dear Gethsemane!

Let us pray. As all heads are bowed, I am conscious of not rushing at this point while the

presence of God is so real. Let us ponder and just savour His presence with us. I believe the risen Lord Jesus, believe it with all my heart, because of the preciousness of this moment to Him in the garden, I believe He has drawn strangely near, and He is meeting with us. He is speaking to you, you know He is. There is something for you to do - what is that? What He did, say: 'Not my will, but Thine be done'. Now you will be saying it in a different sense than He, because He had no sin, He had no falling away. He was just in His final hours, coming to that place in time of complete and utter surrender to what was ahead of Him. But, my friend, Jesus asks you - and this is the dilution of the gospel that is now preached - Jesus asks you to follow Him. There's an old hymn that says: 'Though He leads me, I will follow', and one of the verses says 'Though He leads me through the Garden, I will follow, follow Him'.

Are there ones here tonight that need to pray - yes, in a different manner than He - need to pray: 'Not my will, but Thine be done'? A soul that needs saved? A backslider that needs restored? A Christian that needs revived and filled with the Holy Spirit? A person that needs a fresh start? A decision that you have been grappling with and struggling with against the will of God, and tonight you need to surrender? Deal with God in the quiet moments now, deal with Him now. While He is near, call upon Him, seek Him while He may be found. I'm just going to close in prayer, but I would ask you - and I know you want to chat and fellowship, and that's fine - but I would ask you please to just be aware, all of you, that folk are dealing with God. God is at work in this place, and just be conscious not to do anything that might quench or grieve the Spirit.

Abba Father, if ever we knew that there was no other way, we know it tonight, when Your Holy Son - willing to do whatever was in Your will for Him - His holy Soul contemplating being the sin offering and bearing Your wrath, Lord, when you caused Him in complete fellowship to know Your will, and He resigned to it, that it was the only way. Lord, may everyone here tonight know it, and may those who know it appreciate it - may I appreciate it. Yet we see that He has still to go to Calvary. Lord, I can't say much more, just deal with everyone here and my own heart - that all of us would be completely surrendered to Your will, whatever that might mean. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 7

"Trial And Denial"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles this morning to Mark 14 again, and we're looking this morning at the trial and Peter's denial of the Lord Jesus. Let me just say that, if you haven't been with us these last weeks, we've been really following 'The Final Countdown to Calvary', the last week in the life of our Lord Jesus. Probably it started for Him on Saturday, where Mary of Bethany anointed Him, His head and His feet, for burial - broke that alabaster box of spikenard ointment - although we came to that later on in the gospel record, but that's how the week started. Then the next day, Sunday, He entered Jerusalem as the King of the Jews, Palm Sunday we know it as, the Triumphal Entry. Then, Monday we saw He cursed a fig tree and cleansed the Temple, that was a picture of Israel and how they had lost their effectiveness as the chosen people of God. Then on Tuesday we saw Him questioned in the Temple precincts by the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious council of the Jews. Then on Wednesday, what some believe to be a silent day, I think on Wednesday He gave the Olivet Discourse about His second coming and the signs of when that will be. Then Thursday evening, we saw last Sunday morning, He celebrated the Passover and instituted the Lord's Supper. Then later on that evening He entered Gethsemane, we saw that last Sunday evening, and was in great agony as He anticipated drinking the cup of Calvary. Then, of course, from Gethsemane He was betrayed by Judas to the soldiers, and that is most likely the early hours of Friday morning.

We're still in the early hours of Friday morning for our reading here today, verse 53 of chapter 14 of Mark: *"And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands''. But not even then did their testimony agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?'. But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?'. Jesus said, 'I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven'. Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?'. And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!' And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands. Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus of Nazareth'. But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are saying'. And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, 'This is one of them'. But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, 'Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it'. Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know this Man of whom*

you speak!'. A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times'. And when he thought about it, he wept".

"Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate. Then Pilate asked Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'. He answered and said to him, 'It is as you say'. And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!'. But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled. Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them. But Pilate answered them, saying, 'Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?'. For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. Pilate answered and said to them again, 'What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?'. So they cried out again, 'Crucify Him!'. Then Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has He done?'. But they cried out all the more, 'Crucify Him!'. So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified. Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'. Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him".

Let us pray please. Now I said it last week and I'll say it again: all I'm going to do for you this morning and this evening is exposit the Scripture, and present to you what it says, and Jesus. Very elementary, but I believe that as I do that, verse by verse, you will encounter the living Christ. I want you now to be ready for that. I want you to be prepared to see Jesus in all of His ignominy and agony. So come now to the Lord and offer yourself, offer your heart to Him and ask Him to truly, by the eyes of your spirit, to reveal Himself to you.

Father, I feel so small and so inadequate now coming to this portion of Scripture. It is just insurmountable in its grandeur, and in the depth of its meaning it is unfathomable. Yet we know that we ourselves cannot embellish what is before us, but we know that the Holy Spirit can take of these great truths and make them live, and make them applicable to our lives, and do a work of eternal value and virtue in our souls through this truth. So that's what I'm asking Lord, I'm not going to say anything new, I'm not going to bring, I don't think, any great revelations to this so often spoken story - and yet I believe that something new, something lasting will take place this morning for just having gazed upon Christ as Your Suffering Servant. Lord Jesus, we would see You. Reveal Yourself to us now in all Your dying love, we pray, Amen.

I did say to you at the beginning of the studies that, in order to get the full grasp of everything that went on during this last week of the life of the Lord, we need to take all of the Gospels together. We haven't had time to do that, we've been dipping in a little bit to the other Gospels, but when we put them all together concerning the trials of the Lord Jesus you find that there are really six trials, or maybe better to say six stages to His trials. There were three stages to His trials before the Jewish religious authorities, and then there were three

stages of His trials before the Roman imperial authorities.

Let's just follow them through for your benefit. The first trial that He had really opened a preliminary hearing before Annas, who is described in John 18 as the High Priest, and yet it's a little bit confusing because then Caiaphas is later described as the High Priest. There was only one High Priest, and yet it appears that Annas was the former High Priest - he was Caiaphas' father-in-law - but just as a retired general can still be called 'General', or the President of the United States is still called 'the President', Annas still retained this title of 'High Priest'. So it appears that Jesus was there first before Annas, and then He moved to a full council to hear witnesses against Him. We do read this in our reading, verses 53 to 65: He stands before Caiaphas now, and these witnesses are brought as a testimony against Him. Then he moves from Caiaphas' hearing to an early morning session that we read of in chapter 15 and verse 1, where this ruling body of the Jews take a final vote of condemnation upon the Lord Jesus. Essentially this is His trial before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews.

Now it is from there that the Lord Jesus is then sent for His first hearing before Pontius Pilate, and we read of that in verses 1 to 5 of chapter 15, and in John 18 as well. Having had that first hearing before Pilate, Pilate then sent Him on to Herod - Herod Antipas. In Luke 23 you can read about that, and He stands before this tetrarch of the Empire, and this half-Jew who even the Jews despised. Then Herod, after mocking Him, sends Him back to Pilate, and we read about that in verses 6 through to 15, and He has His final hearing before Pilate - and from there Pilate consented to the cry of the crowd, and crucifies the Lord of glory. So you see six stages, three stages before the Jewish ruling religious body, and three stages before the Roman authority, the imperial power.

Now Mark breaks in at the scene where Annas, the former High Priest, has sent Jesus to Caiaphas, his son-in-law, the current High Priest. In verse 53, we read that He is before the Pharisees, the Scribes, and the elders of the people - that is the Sanhedrin: 'They led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes', and they are there to condemn Him. Now let me say categorically to you right away: this was absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt, an illegal trial. Now let me give you the reasons why this was an illegal trial: simply because the Jews disregarded their own rules under which they operated. There are at least five reasons why this was illegal: one, they weren't supposed to meet together as the Sanhedrin at night time, and here they were met at night; two, they were not to meet during any of the Jewish feasts, and you will remember that this was at the time of Passover; three, they were not permitted to bribe false witnesses to commit perjury, and we can see clearly from this record that that's exactly what they did do; four, a death verdict was not to be carried out until one night had elapsed from the judgement, and we can clearly see that one night had not elapsed since they had judged that Jesus was guilty of death; and five, unless they met in the hall of the hewn stone in the Temple area, it was said that all their verdicts, though they were the Sanhedrin, were not binding because they had not met in that place.

So you can see that in their eagerness to do away with Jesus, they broke their own laws. Now you remember this is the crowd that was continually looking at Jesus and scrutinising Him through His life and ministry for broken laws, for breaking their tradition - and yet now, in their venom and vitriol to put Him to death, they break practically all the laws of the book. It was an illegal trial, and yet they are trying to create a semblance of legality. In verse 55 we see that: 'the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none'. Now Deuteronomy 17 and verse 6 reads: 'Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to

death on the testimony of one witness'. So it was necessary to get at least two witnesses to pronounce Jesus guilty and condemn Him to death - but we see in verse 55 that they couldn't even get two - remarkable! So, in a frantic rush to devise fabricated and trumped up charges against Jesus, they assembled together false witnesses, people who were willing to lie, but even that didn't work out because the liars' testimonies would not agree! We see in verse 56: 'For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree'.

Then in verses 57 through to 59 we hear some of these testimonies: 'Some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, 'We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands'' - and they misquote Him. What Jesus actually said in John 2 and verse 19 was: 'Destroy this temple', speaking of His body, 'and in three days I will raise it up', He did not say 'Destroy this temple made with hands', as these liars accused Him of in verse 58. But we, in our day and age, don't really grasp the import of this accusation against Jesus. To put it in contemporary terms: they were accusing Him of terrorism - that's right! They were accusing Him of an attempt, or at least an intent, to destroy the Temple which meant so much to them as Jews. Throughout the Greco-Roman world, the destruction or desecration of places of worship was regarded as a capital offence worthy of death. So you can see how they're trying to get evidence that would condemn Jesus to death.

This is remarkable, look at verse 60 please and 61: 'The high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?'. But He kept silent and answered nothing'. Throughout all this false accusation, as they are firing lies at Him left right and centre, as they are misquoting Him, He says nothing in fulfilment of Isaiah 53:7: 'He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth'. How would you fare if a crowd was around you firing lies, blatant lies? Think for a moment: sometimes the mud sticks with us, doesn't it? Sometimes people have reason to accuse us - but imagine the evidence that the Lord Jesus could have cited in His own defence against these false accusations! My mind went immediately to what He told His disciples to tell John the Baptist when he was locked up in prison and he was starting to doubt whether or not Jesus was He who was promised to come, and what was the explanation Jesus gave to His identity? He said: 'Tell John: the blind see, the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me'. He could have said that, but He said nothing. He didn't open His mouth.

That's a lesson to us, it's a lesson to us of how we react when we are accused, when we are lied about, when we are tempted to run to our own defence. We're all the same. Turn with me quickly, and I'll not have an awful lot of application practically speaking this morning, but to 1 Peter please - because there is a great application that Peter gives of this very incident. First Peter chapter 2 and verse 21: 'For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps' - how? "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously'. How do you cope when people lie about you? When people accuse you to your face of things that are blatant untruths? Here's how Jesus coped: He committed everything - we say 'take it on the chin', He didn't take it on the chin and absorb it - He committed all those wrongs that were done to Him to His Heavenly Father who judges righteously. He knew what the Scripture teaches: 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay' - that's the only way to cope when you're accused of false accusations, when you're lied about, it's the only way to cope. I, like

the rest of you, am the best at running to my own defence when I hear a lie that has been told about me - but I remember years ago reading a little pamphlet by A.W. Tozer, I think it was called 'Five Steps to Spiritual Power', and it was really about how to maintain being filled with the Holy Spirit. One of those steps was: 'Never defend yourself'. It's worth thinking about, particularly in the light of our blessed Lord here.

But you might think there's a bit of a contradiction here in verse 61, the second half, it says: 'Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' - and then Jesus answered. Now, we have to bring in Matthew's Gospel here, because we know from his gospel, chapter 26 verse 33, that it was at this point that the High Priest, Caiaphas, put Jesus under oath. Just where it says there in verse 61, 'Again the high priest' - I have it circled in my Bible, and a little annotation saying, 'Here he puts Jesus under oath'. Now what that simply meant was: Jesus had no choice but to reply to the High Priest, or else He would have been breaking the Old Testament law. You see in Leviticus 5 and verse 1 we read there, and this is a paraphrase, 'If any of the people are called to testify', that simply means to testify under oath, 'about something they have witnessed, but they refuse to testify, they will be held responsible and be subject to punishment'. In other words, they will be sinning if they know about a matter, they are put under oath in a trial, and they don't answer. Jesus knew this, He could not sin, He could not break God's law, and so He answers. Caiaphas had to draw Him out under oath, which indicates that he didn't have enough evidence to convict Him - in fact, there wasn't any at all!

But he asks Jesus, if you look at verse 61, he asks Him: 'Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?'. Now, if you have any doubt about the identity of Jesus Christ - and I don't know if there's any doubters here or unbelievers - you need to hear it from His own mouth. Some people tell me: 'Oh, you can read all the Gospels and Jesus never claims to be God, or He never claims to be equal with God or the Son of God' - well, you look very carefully at what Jesus says. It clears it all up. Jesus said: 'I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven' - and that was a blatant claim to come with the power of God, and the High Priest understood, even if we don't understand, what He was meaning. The High Priest understood, and he knew that Jesus was claiming to be a manifestation of God, and that when He returned He would return as God to judge the world.

But actually what the Lord Jesus was saying, in a roundabout term, to Caiaphas was: 'Today you are standing in judgement of Me, but you're going to see the day when I will come to judge you'. I wonder does that apply to anyone here today? An unbeliever or a doubter, and you're judging Christ, you're judging this book, you're judging the authenticity of the gospel record, and its message, and its effectiveness in people's lives. Well, I want to say to you: hear the word of God, there is a day coming when this One whom you are judging is going to judge you! Caiaphas understood it, and in fact it wasn't Jesus under trial at all here, it was the nation of Israel under trial - what they would do with Jesus, who is called Christ. Caiaphas was under trial, Annas was under trial - but when He comes again, Jesus was saying, His identity will not be veiled, it would be clear to everyone who He was. He was claiming to be God in the flesh there and then, and He's saying: 'And you're going to know it for sure when I come back again to judge the world'.

Now this was blasphemy to the Jews, for a man to claim to be God and equal with God. So we see in verse 63: 'The high priest', at these words, 'tore his clothes and said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy!', verse 64, "'What do you think?' And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death'. Now it's interesting, because if

you were to read Leviticus chapter 10 and verse 6, you would see that for the High Priest to rend his garments made himself liable to death! In the heat of the moment, condemning Christ to death, the High Priest was condemning himself to death. We see that the entire Sanhedrin agreed and condemned Him to death. Now we don't think Nicodemus was here, he was probably a member of the Sanhedrin, nor Joseph of Arimathea - we'll see him later tonight - they probably weren't of the number at this time, because they were predisposed towards Jesus.

Then verse 65, and this is a remarkable verse: 'Some began', these religious men, 'to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, 'Prophecy!'. And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands'. Can I say to you: this is what the world does to God when given an opportunity. I don't for one minute believe that it would be any different today. Even religious people do this, even people who were waiting on Christ - that's what the Jews were doing, they were waiting on Christ - the true Christ, they beat, blindfolded, mocked, and spat upon. You might be a person that calls yourself 'Christian', but you're not prepared to face the true Christ - not the Christ of established Christendom, not the Christ of the cults, not the Christ of legalism, but the Christ of the word of God, the living Christ. You've got to face Him, or you're no different than these people! C.H. Spurgeon said: 'Be astonished, O heavens, and be horribly afraid. His face is the light of the universe, His person is the glory of heaven, and they 'began to spit on Him'. Alas, my God, that man should be so base!'. If anyone ever doubted the depravity of the human soul, all they need to do is read verse 65.

Now, as this abuse of the Son of God takes place, Peter is hiding in the courtyard below. Verse 66: 'Below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came'. Now, let me remind you that if he had listened to the Lord's warning in verse 27, that the Shepherd would be struck and the sheep would be scattered, he would be far away by now and he would not be denying the Lord Jesus three times. You remember what I shared with you, I think it was last Sunday morning: you need to make sure you don't, like Peter, overestimate yourself - he overestimated himself many, many times - because you'll set yourself up for a fall if you do that. Secondly you've also got to make sure you don't underestimate His knowledge of you: the Lord knew the weakness of the disciples, He knew that all of them, bar John, needed to disappear, and so He advised them to do that.

Now let me remind you that Mark was written for Roman Christians who were about to endure some of the fiercest persecution that the church has ever known then in the Roman Empire. What Mark through the Holy Spirit, and Peter, we believe, feeding Mark his information, what they are warning these Roman Christians to do is: be faithful to the Lord, but do not be foolish or foolhardy! Don't overestimate yourself, and don't underestimate God's knowledge of you. It's a worthy message, and Peter knew it well. Look at his denial, verse 67, warming himself, this little girl, or this young woman 'looked at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus of Nazareth'. But he denied it, saying, 'I neither know nor understand what you are saying''. He's warming himself by the world's fire, and more than that: some people believe that in verse 65, the word for 'officers' there, and the word for 'servants' in verse 54, in the courtyard that Peter is warming himself beside the fire in, that's the same ancient Greek word - and because that same word is used of both groups, many believe that Peter was sitting at the fire with the same characters that struck the Lord Jesus, spat upon Him, blindfolded Him, and mocked Him. In other words, he was associating with Christ-beaters! How have the mighty fallen.

In verse 68 this statement he speaks to the little girl: 'I neither know nor understand what

you are saying', the commentator William Lane says that that denial used the form that was common in rabbinical law for a formal legal denial. This would be commonly said in cases: 'I neither know nor understand what you are saying' - it was a formal, legal denial of Christ: 'I don't know this Man at all'. Then, he doesn't leave it there, we read that he begins to curse and swear and protest: 'I don't know this Man!'. The cock crows the second time, fulfilling the Lord's prophecy way back in verse 30. You remember what He said: 'Assuredly, I say to you', Peter, 'that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times'. In an instant, in an instant at the cock crowing, Peter realised what had happened and he broke down - and we read that he wept. Verse 72: 'A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times'. And when he thought about it, he wept' - but we learn from Matthew and Luke that he wept bitterly.

This is an occurrence that all four gospel writers record: Peter wept bitterly. Mark says: 'When he remembered the word of the Lord', but do you know what Luke tells us? It wasn't just the memory of Jesus' word, we read in Luke 22:61 that as Peter was at the fire, and as he has just finished denying the Lord with oaths and curses, that Jesus is brought out and He passes by Peter, and He looks toward Peter - and it stabs him to his very soul! Then he went out and he wept bitterly! Can you imagine what that look of Christ must have been like?

Well, how often do we deny the Lord? Come on now: I'll be honest, I've denied Him - perhaps not with my words, but with my actions, with my behaviour; with omission, things that I leave undone; and commission, things that I do that I ought not to do. I believe this look from the Lord Jesus that broke Peter was not a look of condemnation, nor a look of disappointment or disdain, I believe it was a look of love. I believe that, because if you look at John's gospel chapter 13 you see that the Lord tells them what's going to happen before He goes to Gethsemane. You see that He tells Peter that he's going to deny Him, and the next thing that Jesus says to Peter is found in John 14 verse 1 - and He says it to them all, I know - but this is what Peter would have heard after being told he would deny Jesus, he hears these words: 'Let not your heart be troubled'. You look at it, the chapter divisions have been put in by men: 'Let not your heart be troubled'. You remember Jesus told him: 'Simon Peter, Satan has desired to sift you, he wants to have you and sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you'. Oh, that has brought me so much encouragement many times in my life! I know my own weakness, I know my propensity to let the Lord down and deny Him and to disown Him - but to know that even though I might be in the darkest temptation and trial of life, that Jesus is praying for me!

Then he went on to say: 'Peter, when you're converted, when we've sorted this whole matter out, everything will be alright' - this is before he denied Him. Isn't He a wonderful Saviour? If you're here this morning and you have denied Him, you have let Him down, you need to see this look of love. If you could only see Him in His love toward you, even in your backslidden state, even in the sins that you're dabbling with - you're so far away, maybe as far away as Peter, cursing and swearing against Christ! It's hard to imagine a person could be saved, doing that, isn't it? But if you could only see His look of love, I believe it would melt you.

We're so hard on Peter sometimes. Warren Weirsbe says: 'Before we judge Peter too severely, we need to examine our own lives. Think of Peter, how many times have we denied the Lord, and lost opportunities to share the Gospel with others? Do we, like Peter, talk when we should listen? Do we argue when we should obey? Do we sleep when we should pray? Do we fight when we should submit?'. If Israel was on trial, and Annas was on trial, and Caiaphas was on trial, Peter was on trial as well! We're all on trial in relation to Christ, every one of us.

Unsaved people are on trial in relation to Christ rejection, but we as believers are on trial in relation to Christ denial. Peter appears to fail, doesn't he? You've got to think good of Peter for giving this information to Mark! He has bad PR, Peter, doesn't he? But he's a humble and meek man, that's the way God made him, and we know that from his epistles. You've got to admire his willingness to let this information go forth as it did - but notice: Peter's failure was not final, and I believe it's set in parallel in the Gospels with Judas and his denial, which was final, but Peter's wasn't.

Now listen this morning: there's a way back! Wherever you've been, whatever you've done - and I don't care what you've done - there is a way back! This Saviour still looks upon you in love. In fact, Peter was brought, after he was forgiven and converted and restored by grace, he was brought to an even greater place - that's marvellous! God's grace is like that: greater than all our sin.

But we've got to move on to this official morning meeting of the Sanhedrin, verse 1 of chapter 15, this was to validate what had been decided on the illegal night of trial - do you understand? This was the rubber stamp on it all, and from there we read: 'They bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate' - Pontius Pilate, the governor of Palestine. Now, up until now Jesus had been before religious leaders on the charge of blasphemy, that's clear, isn't it? But now, as He stands before the civil court, He is being tried for the charge of treason. Before the religious Jews the charge was blasphemy, now before the Romans it's treason - and the Jews knew that Pilate wasn't interested in religious matters. He despised the Jews, so he wouldn't be interested in their charge of blasphemy, so they had to feed Pilate with the fear that there was going to be a rebellion, led by this man Jesus, to overthrow the Roman Imperial power - treason!

So that's why, in verse 2, Pilate asked Jesus: 'Are You the King of the Jews?'. He wants to know is He setting himself up as a leader of the Jewish nation in competition to Caesar. Now the Jews took Him to Pilate, I believe, for this very reason: they believed that Pilate would quench and quash any rebellion very severely. They knew that he would take the charge of treason with great seriousness. But also the Jews had lost their authority to impose the death penalty, the Romans had taken it away from them. So if Jesus was going to be put to death, the Romans would have to give the say-so for it. Now the Jews, they thought this was a fait accompli, it was going to happen: 'This man hates insurrection, and we have got Him on the charge of treason!'.

You would think, knowing from secular history the character and personality of Pontius Pilate, that it was a fait accompli - because we're told that he was a cruel, ruthless man, and he was insensitive to the moral feelings of others - but the Jews classically underestimated Pilate. It appears, to me at least, that he shows suspicion towards the Jews. In other words, he realises they are up to something. The reason why I feel that is in verse 3, the chief priests accused Jesus of many things, but He answered nothing. This was after Pilate asked: 'Are You the King of the Jews?', Jesus says 'It is as you say' - and I can almost see a smirk on the face of Pilate as he looks towards the Jews, and thinks 'They're up to something!'. When they see the smirk, they all erupt and start throwing more dirt at the Lord Jesus because they feel: 'Hold on a minute, he's not swallowing this!'. Yet, in the midst of all this accusation, what is Jesus doing again? What is He doing? He's silent.

Verse 4: 'Pilate asked Him again, saying, 'Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!'. But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled'. Now remember who Jesus is before here, He's before a Governor, a Judge, who is used to men

grovelling like little children in tears at his feet, pleading for their lives. Yet here is a Man that even Pilate realises is falsely accused, and He stands with His head high as a Man, but answers not a word. This Man was different, even Pilate could see it. Now, we know from the other Gospels that Pilate, several times, even stated: 'I find no fault in this Man' - but Pilate, as the politician that he was, rather than doing what was right he did what he thought was politically expedient. Can I say to you: beware of politics in the church and outside of the church. I'm not saying Christians can't have an influence in politics, but politics is a thing of compromise - and Christians cannot compromise on their principles, that's why it's difficult, or it ought to be. But even in churches we engage in church politics, and we compromise for the sake of the crowd - beware!

But before he compromised, Pilate tried to pass the buck and he sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee. But after mocking Jesus, Herod sent Him back to Pilate - and then Pilate came up with another ingenious plan. At this time of year he was in the custom of releasing a prisoner, it was like a political sop to the Jews, particularly at Passover where all the national fervour was intense and they were looking and waiting for the Messiah, he would release a prisoner to them. So he offered to release this man called Barabbas - Barabbas was a murderer and a rebel - or he could release to them Jesus, the Preacher of peace and the worker of miracles. As far as Pilate was concerned, this was a no-brainer. Who would choose a wicked murderer over the Lord Jesus?

But it's at this point that Pilate underestimated the chief priests, look at verse 11 - you see, they had stirred up the crowd: 'so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. Pilate answered and said to them again, 'What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?'. So they cried out again, 'Crucify Him!'. Then Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has He done?'. But they cried out all the more, 'Crucify Him!'. It appears to me that the crowd was primed to cry for Jesus' blood. Now think of this for a moment: these Jews, who were bringing Jesus to Pilate with a charge of treason against Caesar hanging over Him, were now asking for the release of a man who actually was guilty of treason against Rome - but they didn't care, for they wanted Him dead at any cost, by any means.

We read in verse 15: 'Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified'. He conceded to the crowd, I say it again: beware of compromising to the cry of the crowd. It doesn't matter what the world is doing, it doesn't matter what most of the Christian church is doing, it doesn't matter if it's not what God's telling you to do! But you know, in the midst of all this betrayal and lies and filth, scheming and diabolical planning, there is a beautiful picture of our redemption: the guiltless One, Jesus, delivered to die in order that the guilty one, Barabbas, might go free. In the midst of all of this seeming moral chaos, God is working, God is shining a light of revelation. Even in the choice of a wicked crowd, a wicked governor, to release Barabbas - God is in control! Who knows what Barabbas thought of this in years to come?

It's assumed that in verse 14 Pilate used the conventional term for: 'You shall mount the cross', 'Ibis in crucem', or 'I consign You to the cross', 'Abi in crucem'. Then we read these tragic words, verse 16: 'Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison', they brought Jesus into the hall, that's Pilate the governor's residence, his great hall, and they assembled the whole Roman garrison to scourge Him. That scourging was to bring a person almost to the point of death, and then they staged a mock coronation - verse 17: 'They clothed Him with purple', other Gospels say scarlet, and it probably was purple and scarlet, the colours of royalty, 'and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'. Then they struck Him on

the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him'.

They bowed the knee, the normal homage paid to a member of royalty. They crowned Him with a crown of Jerusalem thorns, inches long. They gave Him a sceptre, a reed. Instead of kissing Him as royalty oft would be kissed, they spat on Him. In fact, the translation is better 'they kept spitting on Him'. Little did they know that the One they clothed with purple was the Son of God. The One they crowned with thorns was the Creator of the universe. Spurgeon says of this: 'See, above all, that crown upon His head. It has rubies in it, but the rubies are composed of His own blood, forced from His blessed temples by the cruel thorns. See, they pay Him homage; but the homage is their own filthy spittle which runs down His cheeks'.

I wonder is there anyone here this morning who is on trial concerning what you will do with this Man. The Sanhedrin, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Antipas, the crowd were all trying Him - but every single one of them were under trial concerning what they would do with Jesus, who is called Christ. What will you do, my friend? Will you wait until the day when He will come as Judge and He will try you, or will you be saved today and bow the knee to Him truly, and confess Him as Saviour and Lord? Believer, are you denying Him with your inaction, with your silence? When He stood for you, and opened not His mouth for you - it was for you! - and you won't take your stand for Him?

I want to finish by quoting to you an old hymn. I love the new hymns by the way, I really do, and I love the praise - but some of the old hymns are tremendous. There's one that goes like this, listen carefully:

'Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall,
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all;
Hearken! What meaneth the sudden call?
What will you do with Jesus?

Jesus is standing on trial still,
You can be false to Him if you will,
You can be faithful through good or ill:
What will you do with Jesus?

Will you evade Him as Pilate tried?
Or will you choose Him, whate'er betide?
Vainly you struggle from Him to hide:
What will you do with Jesus?

Will you, like Peter, your Lord deny?
Or will you scorn from His foes to fly,
Daring for Jesus to live or die?
What will you do with Jesus?'

Here's the chorus:

'What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be;
Some day your heart will be asking,
'What will He do with me?''.

Let us pray. Now let's take time, we're going to break bread soon. What has God been saying to you? Now come on. If there's one thing I get weary of, it's when we preach and it makes no difference. Now, I know I have to get used to that, because the prophets of old were told: 'Go you and tell them, and even if they don't listen, go and tell them, and I'm preparing you for the fact that they won't even listen' - so I have to try and grapple with that. But it is frustrating to present this crucified, loving, and now living Lord, and great truths like this just mean nothing - it's like water off a duck's back. Like a favourite tune that you know from your youth, you've heard it all before so many times, you can whistle it as well as me - but it doesn't impact your heart. I have stuck very close to Scripture, and I just wanted to bring Jesus to you that it might impact your heart, and for some of you it ain't - and it's tragic to me. How all the more tragic is it to Jesus?

Lord, I just pray - and I'm not setting myself up here, as You know me, as some kind of epitome of devotion and boldness for Christ: I am not. I ask You to forgive me for the times when I've been silent, when I have not taken my stand for Jesus, when I have not gone outside the camp bearing His reproach; where I have opened my mouth to defend myself, even when I was in the wrong. Lord, I pray that all of us here today, believer and unbeliever alike, will not do what Pilate did, will not do what Annas and Caiaphas did, and will not do what Peter did - but Lord that they will bow the knee truthfully, genuinely, and crown You, Lord Jesus, Lord of all. For Your glory we pray, Amen.

Countdown To Calvary - Chapter 8

"Golgotha"

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So Mark chapter 15, and we're beginning to read at verse 21, and we'll read down to the end of the chapter now: *"Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS. With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors'. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!'. Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe'. Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him. Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'. Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, 'Look, He is calling for Elijah!'. Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, 'Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down'. And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last. Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God!'. There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid"*.

Could we pray for a moment? I have been asking you on each occasion, as we bow in prayer before coming to the word of God, to bring your heart to the Lord - to come and ask Him to minister to your need, whatever that may be. I don't know, He knows and you know, or maybe you don't even know yourself - but you know you have need, and every one of us have some sort of a need. So why not come to the Lord now, and say: 'Lord, here I am' - why not pray this prayer? - 'I really want to see Jesus. I really want to have a revelation of His glory and His Majesty'. There's no better place to see that, really, than the cross and the

resurrection - for the Lord, even when He prayed to His Heavenly Father, before He went to the cross, He said: 'Glorify Me'. This was His glorious hour.

Father, Abba Father, we come to You now in that name which is above every name, the matchless name of Jesus, the Lord and the Christ. Lord, we have been so blessed walking with Him in His last week of life on earth. Lord, we pray that we will not for one second take for granted the sights that we have gazed at, the sounds we have listened to, the taste of the bread and the wine. Lord, give us spiritual eyes to see even deeper tonight, to really understand what went on at that centre cross on Golgotha's hill. I pray for any unbelievers in this place tonight, that this would be the night when they would have a revelation of Jesus to their soul, given by the Spirit. We ask that the Holy Spirit, who would take of the things of Christ and show them to us, would do His work now - glorifying Jesus, shining the spotlight on Jesus. As we gaze upon Him, may the Holy Dove come down, for His glory we pray, Amen.

Now maybe this is your first night - it's unfortunate you should come really at the last night, but we're glad to see you nevertheless - but we have been following 'The Final Countdown to Calvary', the last week in the life of our Lord Jesus. Now I'll not recap all the days, as I have been doing, save to say that: traditionally speaking we have reached Friday, we have known it as 'Good Friday'. But having said that, and I have left this to the last night just to shoot it across your bow, there is a great debate over this final week of the life of the Lord, over the days of the week - particularly understanding how there are three days, and what is often said 'three days and three nights', just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale, so would the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, the Scripture says. Scholars, for ages, have tried to work out how you get three days and three nights between Friday and Sunday. Now, I have deliberately avoided this: one, because I'm not sure myself; and two - I have my thoughts on it mind you, but I wouldn't be dogmatic on it just yet - but two, particularly because I think you really miss the wood for the trees if you get bogged down in all that detail. Therefore I felt it was more necessary to concentrate on the subject matter, rather than the chronology, rather than the timescale.

The subject matter of this last week could be best summarised in the words of Jesus in John 17 and verse 4, in His High Priestly prayer, as we have come to know it. He said to His Father: 'I have glorified You on the earth, I have finished the work which You have given me to do'. That's what this last week was all about, that's why Mark - Mark's gospel is the gospel of the cross - he uses this disproportionate amount of his gospel, in comparison to the life of the Lord Jesus, to describe His walk to Calvary, the last week of His life - why? Because this was the work the Servant of Jehovah had come into the world to do, this was the reason He came to this earth - and, praise God, we can triumphantly proclaim tonight: He finished the work that God gave Him to do! Can I ask you tonight, believer: will you be able to say that at the end of your days? Whether you're like David's friend, who is 96, or whether you go early in life, will you be able to say: 'I finished the work that God gave me to do on this earth'? There's not many people can say that, primarily because some of them don't even know, even believers, what the work is that God has them here for - do you? Well, find it out, and do it with all your might - that you can say: 'I have finished the work'.

Cecil Rhodes devoted his life to the British expansion in South Africa, and he also made his fortune out of diamonds. He was not yet 50 years of age when he died, and his last words were these: 'So little done, so much to do'. So little done, so much to do - will you say that? Will I? Isn't it wonderful that Jesus cried: 'Tetelestai! It is finished! I have finished the work that You give me to do!'.

So we're going to see this finished work tonight. Having been betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He is taken - we saw this morning - to face the Sanhedrin in trial. Then He moves from three trials, really, before the Jewish religious bodies, on to the Roman Imperial authorities. He faces Pilate, and then Pilate sends Him to Herod Antipas, and then Herod Antipas sends Him back to Pilate again, and Pilate sentences Him to crucifixion. We see Him in verse 20, we read it this morning, 'And they led Him out to crucify Him'. Now, traditionally, the victims of crucifixion had to bear the cross-bar of the cross. We have often seen the films and the portraits of Christ with the cross over His shoulder, but that may not be accurate. What they did was they put the cross-bar, that great beam of wood which was about 75-125 pounds, they strapped it and tied it with ropes to the arms of the victim. The upright of the cross, and all the uprights of crucifixion, were permanently fixed in the ground in visible places around the outside of the city walls of Jerusalem. Now this is a remarkable thought: it must have been the case, it just must have been, that many, many times Jesus passed those upright crosses - knowing in His heart that one day He would hang there.

In verses 20 and 21 we see that Jesus must have been very weak. This morning we saw Him being scourged, and the purpose of scourging was to weaken the victim in order that they would not last too long on the cross. However, the Romans wanted to keep the victim alive long enough for it to be a good advertisement for Roman justice. Any would-be rebels, as they walked by a cross and saw a man hanging on it, dying his last, what a warning not to transgress the Imperial laws! Now, for that reason, though Jesus must have been very weak, they implored Simon of Cyrene to take His cross. Cyrene was a Greek colony in the north of Africa. Some surmise that Simon may have been black, he might have been, he may have also been a Hellenistic Jew, he may have been Greek - certainly he was more than likely a Jew, being in Jerusalem at Passover. More than likely, coming from Cyrene in North Africa, he wouldn't have known who Jesus was - and all of a sudden he is accosted by a Roman soldier, and made to carry the cross-beam of this crucifix.

Now, I imagine Simon initially would have resisted and resented this humiliation. Yet I believe that in later life, I don't know how long, this would become one of the most precious moments for Simon of Cyrene in the whole of his life, when he eventually learned the significance of the cross of Jesus and the good news of the gospel story. Now, you say: 'You're reading a lot into Simon of Cyrene' - well, I'm not, look at verse 21: 'Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross'. The Holy Spirit does not put superfluous information into the word of God, He puts things in there for our attention. Why on earth would we be interested that this stranger to us, up until now, Simon of Cyrene, is the father of Alexander and Rufus - and who are they? Well, they certainly must have been known to the early church in Rome, to whom Mark was writing this gospel. In all likelihood, when you turn - you don't need to do it tonight - to Romans, the Epistle to the Roman Church, chapter 16 and verse 13, we read of a Rufus there - and more than likely this is the same Rufus. So it seems that initially here Simon the Cyrenian was compelled to take the cross of Jesus, but later in his life he chose - he chose - to take up the cross and follow Christ.

Probably his sons followed him in that direction, and they may well have become leaders in the early church of Rome - but it seems obvious that Simon became a well-known Christian. Maybe you're here tonight and the cross of Jesus means nothing to you. Maybe it is a source of humiliation to you, you resist it and you resent it - and preaching that you're hearing tonight even grates against your grain. But can I say to you tonight: if you could encounter the real Jesus Christ, and you could really understand in your mind and heart the wonderful good news of what He accomplished for us on that centre tree, your life would be changed

just like Simon's - transformed, revolutionised, and even your family would be turned upside down for Christ!

Well, while Simon Peter - we saw this this morning - who boasted that he would even go to his death following Jesus, while he had forsaken Him and was warming himself by the fires of the world with Christ-beaters, Simon of Cyrene, a stranger to Jesus who didn't even know Him, carried His cross. That must have been a rebuke to Peter, do you not think? But you know, Simon carrying the cross speaks to all of us of all of us. You see, Simon, really, is a representation of everyone. What I mean by that is simply that we are all guilty. Jesus was not guilty, He did no sin, He knew no sin, He was separate from sinners, He had no sin - but it's almost, as Jesus walks the Via Dolorosa, that we get a flash of reality here and the Holy Spirit breaks in and shows us: 'Look for a moment, this is the way it ought to have been, a sinner carrying the cross - not the spotless Saviour carrying the cross'. Let's be honest: all of us should have been carrying that cross.

In verse 22 we read: 'And they brought Him to the place Golgotha'. Now please note the difference, look at verse 20, it says first of all: 'They put His own clothes on Him', after scourging Him, 'and they led Him out to crucify Him' - they led Him out, He walked out of the Praetorium Himself. But now in verse 22: 'They brought Him'. It appears now that He can hardly walk, and they have to bear Him to Golgotha, the Place of a Skull. 'Golgotha' is an Aramaic word meaning 'Skull', the Latin name for this place is 'Calvary', and perhaps it was called 'The Place of a Skull' because of executions - some secular historians tell us that it was a place littered with the skulls of men. Some people believe it was called 'The Place of a Skull' because of the shape of the hill, and for that reason some think that Gordon's Calvary is the true Calvary - and there's a great debate about where that place actually is. But wherever the spot is, one thing is absolutely sure: it was a place outside the city walls, which spoke of a place of rejection. Hebrews testifies to this: 'Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach'.

Wherever the place was, Golgotha, there they took Him and they crucified Him. Verse 23 says: 'Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it'. Now tradition tells us that some respected women of Jerusalem provided a narcotic drink for people who were condemned to death by crucifixion. It was a sort of charitable, benevolent act. This was a drug to dull the pain, the excruciating pain of crucifixion. Now we have a precedent to this, at least in principle, in the book of Proverbs. We read there, Proverbs 31:6-7: 'Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more'. So this was given to the victim of crucifixion for anaesthetic purposes, but Jesus refused - look at the verse - He did not drink it. He refused a pain-dulling anaesthetic. Why? Now, please, this is remarkable, let it sink in: our Lord was determined, absolutely determined, to bear our sin in full consciousness. He wanted to feel it all. His faculties, hanging on that cross, must be unclouded. Someone put it like this: 'He refused the cup of sympathy, that He might drink the cup of iniquity'. He had to know everything that it was to bear our sins in His own body on the tree. That should mean something. It should mean everything.

When you think about it, and you understand what happened when He rose again and He ascended to heaven forty days later, and the book of Hebrews tells us all about His High Priestly ministry, that He has been made a perfect and merciful High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities because He was tested in all points as we are, apart from sin - how could He be a perfect, merciful High Priest if He shirked the sufferings of Calvary by

taking anaesthetic? No! He bore it all! Wonderful!

In verse 24 we read that: 'They divided His garments', in fulfilment of Psalm 22 and verse 18, 'casting lots for them to determine what every man should take' - and He was naked. Perhaps, being sensitive to Jewish sensibilities, they allowed Him a loincloth, we don't know - but imagine, the One who clothed the universe stripped bare and hanging on a cross. In verse 25 they said it was the third hour when they crucified Him. What does it mean to be crucified? Well, this was a method of execution that wasn't invented by the Romans, but it was popularised by them as a method of putting criminals to death. There was the scourging - Isaiah says His back was like a ploughed field. There were the nails, square, rusty Roman nails hammered through, most likely, the wrists - we read in Psalm 22: 'They pierced my hands and my feet'. Then, as those nails went in, the nerves were severed and there was a searing pain that went throughout the whole body. As the victim hung on the cross, bones were disjointed. The victim could die of various effects of crucifixion: massive blood loss, acute shock, dehydration in the Mediterranean sun, and even suffocation as they have to keep heaving themselves, pushing themselves against the nails in their feet, to get a breath. All of those could cause death. What a death crucifixion was. We get our English word 'excruciating' from the Roman term 'out of the cross'.

Mark's readers were familiar with crucifixion, that's why he doesn't go into an awful lot of detail here, they would have seen it on a regular basis. But I believe there is another reason why Mark, and indeed all the gospel writers, do not go into too much grotesque deaths in describing this most heinous and horrific of deaths. Simply because the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit who inspired these pages, was not concerned in giving us a blow-by-blow analysis of the death of the Lord Jesus, what He wanted to do was cause us to look beyond the physical and see the spiritual significance of why Jesus died this death. But let me say in passing, understanding a little bit of what crucifixion means, how heinous sin must be in God's eyes to require such a sacrifice of His Son.

In verse 25 we read that it was the third hour, that's nine o'clock our time, and in verse 26 we read that, as was the practice - victims often wore placards around their necks, perhaps indicating the crime for which they were paying - well, Pilate himself, or at least he gave the order for the sign to be written and placed on the cross above Jesus' head: 'THE KING OF THE JEWS'. Now, Mark does not give us the full quotation, we read it from the other Gospels: 'This is Jesus of Nazareth, THE KING OF THE JEWS' - and it was written, we are told, in Hebrew, and in Latin, and in Greek.

Then in verses 27 through to 32 He is ridiculed again, let's read it: 'With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors" - a fulfilment of Isaiah 53 and verse 12, associated with criminals in His death. Then we read: 'Those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!'. Now I want you to notice that term in verse 29, 'those who passed by'. Passers-by in Jerusalem at Passover season were more than likely Jews who had come from all over the empire to worship the Lord at Passover season in the holy city. Here they are in the holy city to slay the lamb, to celebrate God's deliverance, and they are passing by mocking God's Paschal Lamb, the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. In verse 29, again they misquote Him saying that He claimed He would destroy the Temple and build it in three days - He didn't, He was talking about His body, and we saw that this morning from John chapter 2 and verse 19. But what is most staggering to me is verse 31: 'Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among

themselves with the scribes, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe'. Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him'.

It says in verse 31 that the chief priests and the scribes, they mocked Him. Now understand the import of this: they were not just satisfied in driving Him to His death through an illegal trial, breaking all their own laws to do it, getting a traitor and an insurrectionist, Barabbas, released in the place of the Prince of Peace - that did not satisfy them. They had to follow Him all the way to Golgotha, how they must have hated Him! Not content just to drive Him to His death, they went out to Golgotha to mock Him! They mocked Him as prophet, verse 29, 'You said You'd destroy the Temple, and in three days You'd raise it again' - they mocked Him as prophet. They mocked Him as Saviour, verse 31; 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save'. They mocked Him as King in verse 32: 'Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross'. But as Christians, we believe that it's precisely because He did not descend from the cross that we have believed in Him, we have trusted Him, we have staked all upon Him because He didn't come down! He could have come down. He could have called 10,000 angels to destroy the world and set Him free, but He didn't come down because He loved us - but He did something far greater than coming down: He died and He rose again!

In one sense, the statement in verse 31 of the chief priests and the scribes was true: 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save'. He couldn't have saved anybody if He had saved Himself. That's not how they meant it, but it's a lovely way for us, who are saved now, because of His death and resurrection, to look upon it. If He had saved Himself, we could never have been saved. We read at the end of verse 32 that even the thieves who were crucified with Him reviled Him. But you know, it's wonderful - and Psalm 76 verse 10 tells us this - that God is able to make even the wrath of men to praise Him! And He did, because you know from the other Gospels, don't you, that one of these thieves who was mocking Him repented and believed, and Jesus turned to Him in His great grace and said: 'Today you will be with Me in Paradise'.

But more than even that, we read in Acts chapter 6 and verse 7, listen to this - the early church, after the ascension of the resurrected Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we read: 'The word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith'. A great many of the priests, these priests, believed in Jesus! I wonder were any of them those who vocally mocked Him - I don't know, but isn't God's grace great, isn't it? To save a thief who ridiculed the dying Lamb of God, to save religious hypocrites who were party to the crucifixion of His own Son, God is so great in His mercy and His grace, His lovingkindness. There is nothing like the grace of God, it is greater, insurmountably, eternally greater than all our sin - and what an example of this grace these characters are! A thief, and chief priests, mocking Jesus: 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save' - and that means this: you're not too hard for God tonight. Your sin is not too great for Him to forgive. Praise God, Jesus says: 'All manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven of men' - all! I love that word 'all'! We know now that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. I say to you tonight - I might never preach to you again, I might never meet you on this earth again - I say to you, whatever your sin is, get it cleansed in the blood of Christ this very evening, for it can cleanse you!

Verse 33: 'When the sixth hour had come', the sixth hour in our time is twelve noon, 'there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour', that's three in the afternoon. A darkness shrouded the whole land, it was just like a shroud for the dying Son of God. Ancient

historians record an eclipse of the sun, several of them do, at this very time - but this was not a mere eclipse, this was a miracle. Here's the reason why we know this: because at Passover there was a full moon, and an eclipse of the sun is impossible when there is a full moon. This was God darkening out the sun, and I'm sure it reminded some of these religious Jews of the first Passover they were celebrating at this Passover season. During the ninth plague there was a three-day darkness that came upon all the land of Egypt - and do you know what followed that three-day darkness? The last plague: the death of the firstborn. God was shrouding the land in darkness, because His Firstborn Son, the Paschal, Passover Lamb of God, was giving up His life for sinners. The earth became black in mourning for her Creator's suffering. In those three hours of darkness, between noon and three in the afternoon, Jesus was bearing the full judgement of God against our sin.

Do you know that that's what the cross is? He was drinking the cup, we saw last Sunday night in Gethsemane what that cup was - it was the wrath of God against our sin, and no mortal mind can understand what happened when He was made sin for us. We read here in verse 34: 'And at the ninth hour', after those three hours of a divine transaction between God and Jesus, 'Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'. Now those words are Aramaic, the spoken language of the Jews during Jesus' day. Now Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22 and verse 1, showing that He was fulfilling this prophetic Psalm in all of its minutiae. You read that Psalm, Psalm 22, the agony of Calvary and even the triumph of it.

We know from the other gospel writers that there were seven cries from the cross in total, but Jesus, we read in Mark, cried this out: 'Why have You forsaken Me?'. He had suffered so much mentally, emotionally, physically, but now what we are touching on in these three hours of darkness makes those other sufferings pale into insignificance: this was the spiritual suffering of Jesus. Now I want to just slow down here for a moment, lest anyone not be aware that we are on the holiest ground of all here when we witness Christ crying: 'Why have You forsaken Me?' - 'tis mystery all. I don't believe that you can fully understand this cry, I certainly can't. I have to say I have heard some disturbing and inadequate explanations of what went on when Jesus was forsaken. I'll just warn you, and I warn myself in saying this: we do well to say what Scripture says and say nothing more and nothing less. Some of the greatest names that have ever been have been completely bamboozled with this statement. Luther, who was no mean intellect, said: 'God forsaking God, who can understand it?'

It doesn't require our speculation, what it requires is our wonder and our worship. What we do know is that for our sakes, Christ in some way was forsaken of God that we might never be forsaken of God. That, surely, is enough: that during those three hours He was bearing our sin. We read it last week in 2 Corinthians 5:21: He was being made sin for us, He was being treated as if He were the sinner. Galatians chapter 3:13: He was being made a curse for us, because of the broken law we incurred a curse, but He was taking our place and taking the curse for us. It was in those senses that He was forsaken of God in that - being made sin, being cursed - in that He was being forsaken of God by bearing God's wrath. Isaiah prophesied it hundreds of years before the event: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The punishment for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; but the LORD', Jehovah, 'laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You made His soul an offering for sin' - there it is! He's the sin offering, He's exhausting and enduring the wrath of the eternal God in our place. He's assuming the place of the sin bearer before the Holy Judge of heaven.

Maybe you're not understanding what this means, but let me explain it this way, and surely this should make sense. Stay with me now: whatever it means for every soul that has ever lived to suffer an eternal hell of God's wrath, that was compressed into three hours of darkness at Golgotha and laid upon Jesus. He was paying the penalty for identifying with you and identifying with me. That's why He was baptised, you know, not because He had any sin, but He wanted to identify with our sin - and He had a baptism at the cross in the wrath of God that He had to be baptised with, and that's why He went to Calvary.

Yet again, as He cries 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?', they misunderstand Him as crying out for Elijah. Then in verse 37 we read: 'Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last'. Can I say to you: Jesus was not murdered. Well, on a human level murder was involved, but Jesus was not killed - oh yes, they put Him to death, the Bible even describes men as having slew Him - but what you've got to see is past all the physical realm of crucifixion to understand that Jesus was the willing Lamb of God, that's why He come into the world. He went there Himself. We read a sign of this in verse 37: 'He cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last'. Luke put it like this in Luke 23: 'When Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit'. Having said this, He breathed His last'. He committed His Spirit to God first, and then He breathed His last. John, in John 19:30, put it like this: 'When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!'. And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit'. He cried out with a loud voice: 'Tetelestai! It is finished!', which literally means in ancient Greek 'Paid in full!' - the cry of a winner!

But note: when any of us die, we will die and then we will bow our head - isn't that right? We will die, the life will go from us, and then our head will fall - but He bowed his head, in absolute control, and gave up the ghost. There was no involuntary collapse here, do you understand? We've seen this in the whole last week of the life of the Lord: He is orchestrating it, He is moving, God is in this, for God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself! God is doing all this, it's for God to be reconciled to us - and Calvary, though it is for us, it is primarily for God so that He can turn round to sinners with open arms and say: 'Be reconciled to Me, for I am I reconciled to you!'. Oh, it's wonderful!

He had done what He came to do, and I love this bit: when He cried, 'Finished!', He did not hang on on the cross needlessly. It was time to go! He did what He came to do. Augustine said: 'He give up His life because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it'. Jesus said: 'No man takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, and I take it again'. Now two remarkable things happened when He died. We read in Matthew 27 that there was a great earthquake, Mark doesn't record that, but he does record in verse 38: 'The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom'. Now that's significant, it wasn't torn from the bottom to the top - this wasn't man's doing - it was from the top to the bottom. This was a curtain that ordinary men couldn't have torn, it was so strong - but God tore it, and showed it was Him by tearing it from the top right to the bottom, to show that there is now a new and living way via the blood of Jesus into the Holiest Place of All, where we can have intimate fellowship face-to-face with the living God through the living Christ because of Calvary. There was a new era of nearness to God that had never ever been, and will never be surpassed. If you want to read more about that, read Hebrews 10.

Then in verse 39, a wonderful testimony - and wouldn't this have meant so much to Romans reading this epistle? Incidentally, if you look at centurions in the word of God they are often, if not always, seen in a positive light - noble men. Verse 39: 'When the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God!' - that would have put him against the Romans, and it would have put

him against the Jews, but this man who had seen perhaps hundreds and even thousands of men die of crucifixion saw that this Man was different. This Man was unique, this Man was the Son of the Living God! Do you see Him as different tonight? Oh, I hope you do.

Verses 40 and 41, women be encouraged tonight for the women often outshine the men: 'There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem'. When the men were scared for their safety - where were they? Apart from John? They had all disappeared in fear! - the women risked all they had, even their lives, in devotion to Christ. You know it's the same today that's why, I still believe, today that most missionaries are women - and by the way, do you see going around meetings in the last couple of years? I find that the people with the most inquisitive spiritual questions - and, I have to say, spiritual thirst - are women, not the men but the women. It's lovely to think that women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb.

In verses 42 to 47 we read of the burial of Jesus. Now we'll not go into this in detail, but let me say this: if the Spirit of God had not led Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to do this with Jesus' body, to take it from Pilate and to bury it in the hewn tomb - probably Joseph's own tomb, for it seemed to be the tomb of a rich man - what they used to do with bodies of criminals, having been executed, is they would have dumped them on rubbish tips. God wouldn't have that, because God would not let His Holy Son see corruption.

Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, we don't read an awful lot about them in the scriptures. They are often called 'secret disciples' - I don't know whether it's a correct and accurate description of them or not, but there were many things that these two men did not do for the Lord Jesus Christ, but be encouraged: they served the Lord here in a way that no one else did. Isn't that lovely? You may not be able to do everything that everyone else does for the Lord, but they were able to do something that no one else did or could do.

But we cannot end there, can we? It's Friday, but Sunday is coming! Chapter 16, let's just read verses please, verse 1: *"Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?'. But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away; for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples" - and I love this - "and Peter" - problematic Peter, the Lord wanted to single him out, that He wanted Peter to know that He was risen. Tell the disciples and Peter, and here's what He told them and it wouldn't sink in - you remember a couple of Sundays ago we were studying it: *"That He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you"* - they had forgot about it! *"So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid"*.*

Do you know something? A dead Saviour can't save anyone - but He lives! He is alive now in the power of an endless life. The resurrection of Jesus is as much a part of the Gospel as the cross. If we didn't have the resurrection the cross would be worthless - but both are the historical basis of our Christian message. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15: 'I delivered to you first

of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures'. The resurrection proves Christ is who He claimed to be - Romans 1 and verse 4: 'God declared Jesus to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'. The resurrection was God's full stop, God's period, to the cross! That's why we see in the Acts of the Apostles that, as the early church went out to preach, they give primary place to the preaching of the resurrection: He's alive!

I hope you have seen Him, have you? If you haven't seen Him, if you haven't met Him in a fresh way in these meetings - do you know what? I've failed and wasted my time - now I know only God can truly make you see Him, only God can. You know, all this week I couldn't get a hymn out of my mind. I know I've shared several old hymns with you lately, but here's another one, and it's beautiful. It was written by a German man, Paul Gerhardt, and he translated it from someone else - we don't know who it was. It encapsulates everything that Christ has done for us, and everything He should mean to us. Listen carefully, even close your eyes please, there's only three verses and with this I close. Listen now, and with your mind's eye try to view Golgotha:

'O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How doth Thy visage languish which once was bright as morn!

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Saviour! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favour, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for Thee'.

Let us pray. If you have never trusted Christ, it's time you did tonight. If you're far away from Him, it's time to get right close up to Him. Peter is an encouragement to you, and the resurrected Christ speaks to you and says: 'Tell' - put your name there - 'Tell... I'm risen, and if they meet Me at Galilee' - in other words, if they meet Me after their failure - 'I'll meet them' - but you've got to meet Him. I think you've met Him tonight. Deal with Him.

Father, Lord Jesus, what language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend, for this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end? Lord, we have a debt that we're not expected to pay back, except in thanks, in wonder and worship, in gratitude, in adoration and praise for what You have done. All You want us to do is accept it, and lavish in it, and enjoy it, and share it with others, and live it out. Oh God, it seems at times we can't even do that! We've been given the most unspeakable, immeasurable gift, and we thank You, Lord Jesus - Lord Jesus, I thank You for dying for me! I thank You for rising for me, and living for me, and ascending for me, and sending the Holy Spirit for me, and one day You're going to come for me! We can all say that: we thank You that we can make it personal, and we can say 'Twas for me, yes all for me'. Lord, if anybody here tonight can't say 'It was for me', may this be the evening, may this be the moment. Lord, if there are Your children here tonight who have lost the personableness of it, the intimacy of it all - may seeing the Lamb freshly slain tonight and

risen, now exalted and seated at Your right hand, Father, given a place that is higher than any other place in heaven; may they bow the knee tonight and say, like the doubter: 'My Lord and my God!'. Lord, we thank You for dwelling with us these days, and we thank You for drawing near again tonight. May the fragrance of Your sweet presence not leave us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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