

Study Guide

Monday, April 6 - Read Mark 13:21-37 Beyond the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus gave his disciples some significant insights about his second coming and the end of the world. He said there would be nothing “secret” about his coming. “From the end of the earth to the end of heaven,” people would see it. He also told them that though signs might point toward time’s end, they would not pinpoint the exact day or hour of the end. “Only the Father knows” that—so “stay alert!” In verses 21-22, Jesus instructed his followers to beware of false, alarmist messages and claims about the end of the world. Sometimes, even from religious teachers with large followings, we hear outlooks about the end that differ greatly from one another. How can Jesus’ teaching help you to discern the true from the false, regardless of the source from which you hear or read it? Three times, in verses 33-37, Jesus repeated the same injunction: “Stay alert!” It was a call to faithful, steady spiritual preparation, not some last-day crash program. Jesus’ first followers didn’t know when he would return, and neither do we. Jesus simply taught them to always be prepared and never anxious. What spiritual practices have you built into your life which daily help you know Jesus better?

Tuesday, April 7 - Read Mark 14:1-26 Two suppers—one hosted by Simon, “who had a skin disease,” likely a man Jesus healed. A woman anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. Keenly aware that within 48 hours he would die, Jesus said she had anointed him in advance of his burial. Then a Passover supper, which Jesus redefined. We often take Judas’ betrayal for granted—but imagine how Jesus’ words stunned the disciples, who didn’t know the story in advance. Mark didn’t feel a need to give much detail about “songs of praise.” Psalm 118 was pretty much always the last hymn sung at the end of Passover. Some people criticized the woman’s extravagant anointing of Jesus. “Leave her alone,” Jesus told them. Her devotion touched his heart, and her anointing fit his sense that he was the messianic king. Are you ever tempted to be critical when someone else praises or serves God differently than you do? How can Jesus’ example help you move beyond a critical spirit to value the uniqueness of each giver and each gift? Passover worshippers sang, “The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me?” (Psalm 118:6) and “I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done” (Psalm 118:17). How might those words have held special meaning for Jesus as he sang them in the upper room hours before his crucifixion? How do they speak to any fear you carry in your heart? What can you proclaim about what the Lord has done for you?

Wednesday, April 8 - Mark 14:27-42 There are very old olive trees today in Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed. Despite Jesus’ recent urging of the importance of alertness (cf. Mark 13:33-37), his disciples couldn’t manage it for even one night as he prayed. One aspect of historic Christian belief about Jesus is that he was fully human and fully divine. His anguish and pleading with God gave one glimpse of what “fully human” meant. “Not what I want but what you want” are among the best known of all Jesus’ words. We often quote them about situations like the death of a loved one, in which we had no choice. But Jesus wasn’t dealing with an untreatable illness. His words of submission reflected his active choice to stay the course that led to the cross. In what ways do you have to choose, intentionally, to do God’s will rather than your own? When was the last time you were “deeply distressed and troubled”? Did others say (or did you tell yourself) that you should be stronger, and shouldn’t feel what you felt? Hebrews 4:15 said Jesus is not “a high priest who can’t sympathize with our weaknesses.” Can Jesus’ prayers before his crucifixion help you understand that grief and fear are not shameful? Do they help you to realize that at those times Jesus understands, weeps and walks through the feelings with you?

Thursday, April 9 - Mark 14:43-65 Jesus was not an innocuous storyteller. Scholar Craig Evans summed up what happened in Jesus’ trial: “The Jewish authorities sought to kill Jesus not because he was a good man but because Jesus was perceived as a very serious political threat....[he] entered Jerusalem as the anointed son of David, he assumed authority in the temple precincts as though possessed of messianic authority, he appealed to the purpose of the temple...in a way that implied him to be king, and he was in fact anointed by at least one follower....It is hardly surprising that...the Roman governor would place near the cross a placard that read, ‘This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.’” In Jesus’ culture, a kiss usually showed a disciple’s great regard and honor for his teacher. It was unusual that Judas chose a kiss as the betrayal signal. Adam Hamilton wrote that Judas’ kiss was “a sign perhaps... of a love for this man and yet a desire to be free of him, of a love for God’s kingdom and a desire for the kingdoms of this world.” In what ways do you find yourself torn between love for God and love for “the kingdoms of this world”? The “Sanhedrin,” the 71-member ruling Hebrew religious court, should have been the most fair-minded, reliable group Jesus could have faced. Verse 65 is sad: “Some began to spit on him. Some covered his face and hit him, saying, ‘Prophesy!’” These weren’t Roman soldiers, but religious leaders. Have you ever wanted to hurt someone in the name of a cause you believe is holy? How can you stand up for good without resorting to evil actions (see Romans 12:17-21)?

Friday, April 10 - Mark 4:66-15:15 The New Testament writers quoted or alluded to the words of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 about the suffering servant more than any other Old Testament passage. It was strongly in Mark’s mind as he wrote about Jesus’ trial, abuse and condemnation. Why would Mark (and all four gospels) tell the story of Peter denying Jesus? We’re used to a famous person’s rivals telling negative stories to damage that person. But “early Christian tradition claims that Mark wrote down the apostle Peter’s memories.” * It’s more likely that Peter told this story himself, offering his hearers (and all of us) the forgiveness and new hope he’d found in Jesus. Pontius Pilate asked, one last time, “What wrong has he done?” The crowd (stirred up by the chief priests) didn’t answer; they just snarled, “Crucify him!” In Mark 8:34-38, Jesus said his followers needed to “take up their cross.” He added that if his followers were ashamed of him, he would be ashamed of them when he came in glory. What are some ways in which you could be ashamed of Jesus in the pressures of your daily life? Is there a difference between being “ashamed” of Jesus and being tactful or tolerant toward those who do not share your faith?

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