

HEALING INSIGHTS FROM *THE GOSPEL OF MARK*

LESSON 8 – CHAPTERS 15 AND 16

Overview: Final Hours, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Great Commission. As chapter 15 opens, Mark continues the account begun in chapter 14 of the closing hours of Jesus’ ministry. Some have said that “Jesus lived to die.” In view of the centrality of Jesus’ final hours—and the intimate connection between chapters 14 and 15, we begin by revisiting some of the themes of chapter 14 as we embark on our final lesson in the Gospel of Mark.

A. Agony in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42)

1. Why was Jesus “greatly distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33) in Gethsemane?
 - a. He Himself said: “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” (v.34)
 - b. Jesus finalized His decision to die for you and me.
2. Many fail to realize that the Bible teaches *eternal death* is the ultimate penalty of sin. Consequently, in Gethsemane Jesus was feeling the weight of the sins of the world, a weight that seemed to threaten to separate Him from the Father—and present Him with the prospect of death without resurrection. Consider carefully the following lines of evidence:
 - a. No unrepentant sinner has immortality
 - i. “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, ESV)
 - ii. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 6:23, KJV)
 - iii. Note how the context of mankind’s original sin in the Garden of Eden indicates God would not allow sinners to have immortality: “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. *And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever*’—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22–24, NKJV, italics supplied).
 - iv. Note also: even Satan does not possess immortality. The parabolic prophecies of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 make this very clear. Note how in Ezekiel 28:13-19, after beginning to describe Satan metaphorically as the King of Tyre, it becomes clear we are reading of the fallen angel who will ultimately be destroyed: “You were in Eden, the garden of God... You *were* the anointed

cherub who covers... You were on the holy mountain of God... You *were* perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you... You have become a horror, and *shall be* no more forever.” (NKJV)

- b. God alone is immortal. Immortality is thus a gift bestowed on those who accept Jesus as their Savior and are consequently accounted righteous by God.
 - i. Indeed, God is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light...” (1 Timothy 6:15–16, NKJV).
 - ii. Although eternal life is represented as something that believers in Christ possess, the Bible is clear that it comes to them as a gift from God (see John 4:14, 10:28; Romans 6:23).

B. Mark’s Account of Jesus’ “Judicial Trials.”

- 1. As we observed in our previous lesson, Mark is relatively terse in describing the process by which Jesus received the death sentence. Note the chronology of the so-called “trials” that lead to Jesus’ condemnation.
 - a. Jesus is first brought to the high priest with an apparent goal of finding charges that warrant death according to Jewish law (Mark 14:53).
Note: In addition to bringing Jesus to Caiaphas who was apparently the sitting High Priest, He was also brought to Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas (John 18:12-14) and had apparently previously served as High Priest (Luke 3:2). Thus by many Annas was also regarded as a “high priest” just as we still refer to a past President of the U.S. as “President” (see John 18:19, 22).
 - b. Jesus is then brought to the entire Jewish council, the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71).
 - c. Jesus is next brought twice before Pilate. Those two visits are separated by an appearance before Herod (see the chronology in Luke 23).
- 2. Why do you suppose Mark is so terse when it comes to these details?
 - a. Although Mark gives significant details of the trial before Caiaphas (Mark 14:53-65)...
 - b. He only briefly mentions the trial before the Sanhedrin or “Council” (Mark 15:1)
 - c. Mark gives the fewest particulars of any of the gospels regarding Jesus’ interaction with Pilate

- d. Is it possible Mark emphasizes two aspects of these trials: (1) essential details and (2) information that supports the saving, healing message of his gospel? Consider the following examples of what Mark does convey:
 - i. The two “court” appearances where Jesus testifies to His divinity (Mark 15:2) and places it squarely in the context of the book of Daniel (Mark 14:62). Remember: “the Son of Man... coming with the clouds of heaven” is a direct reference to Daniel 7:13.
 - ii. Significant aspects of the trial before Caiaphas—possibly because this was the setting for Peter’s denial (more on Peter following)

C. Some have called Mark’s gospel “the Gospel of Peter”

1. Remember that Mark and Peter were intimately associated in later years: Mark (or “Marcus”) is called “my son” by Peter (1 Peter 5:13).
2. Notice how the focus in Mark 14 - 16 is not just on Jesus but is heavily skewed toward Peter’s experience. While the other gospel accounts highlight additional aspects of the social drama, Mark leaves out many of these details. In essence, Mark’s lack of detail when it comes to some of the social dimensions of “Passion Week” calls greater attention to the things he does mention.
3. First, consider all that Mark does not mention:
 - a. Jesus asking Judas why he is betraying him with a kiss (included only in Luke 22:48)
 - b. Judas’ suicide (found in Matt. 27:3-6; Acts 1:16-20)
 - c. Pilate’s wife having a dream (Matthew 27:19), and Pilate’s desire on a social and spiritual level to free Jesus (we don’t really see Pilate’s social and emotional struggle in Mark as we do in Luke 23:20-22)
 - d. The friendship that developed between Herod and Pilate when Pilate sent Jesus to him for an extra trial before Pilate’s sentence (Luke 23:6-12)
 - e. Jesus’ prayer to forgive those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34)
 - f. The repentance of the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)
 - g. Jesus entrusting his mother to John (only in John 19:26-27)
 - h. The interaction between Jesus and the wailing women who apparently were not all converted (Luke 23:28-31). Note: Mk 15:40 refers to the faithful women

around the cross and picks up on their story in the following chapter. In reference to Luke's insights, consider this commentary from the book, *The Desire of Ages*, regarding the mourning women who attracted Jesus' attention while on His way to the cross: "Although full of suffering, while bearing the sins of the world, He [Jesus] was not indifferent to the expression of grief. He looked upon these women with tender compassion... He did not despise their sympathy, but it awakened in His heart a deeper sympathy for them. 'Daughters of Jerusalem,' He said, 'weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.' From the scene before Him, Christ looked forward to the time of Jerusalem's destruction. In that terrible scene, many of those who were now weeping for Him were to perish with their children" (page 743).

4. We have noted throughout our study that Mark was especially interested in social health. Why then does he omit so many seemingly relevant relational details?
 - a. Much of what Mark leaves out are social particulars that have nothing to do with how Jesus saves those who have made great mistakes or who are cut off from society. In other words, Mark omits many of the sadder dimensions of characters like Judas and Pilate, instead focusing on those who allowed Jesus to change their lives. Consequently, in Mark, we read about:
 - i. Jesus and His interaction with the widow and her two mites (Mark 12:41-44)
 - ii. Mary Magdalene (Mark 14:3-10, 16:9)
 - iii. Jesus' acceptance of Peter—despite his denying Him. Of all the gospels, only Mark (16:7) records Jesus reaching out to Peter through the angel who instructed Mary to "go tell His disciples *and Peter*"
 - iv. The centurion at the cross (Mark 15:39)
 - b. By contrast (as we have already observed), we hear little or nothing about the depth of the social drama involving those who were lost: Pilate, Herod, or Judas.
 - c. Rather than seeing the social pain of Judas or Pilate, those we see socially pained are:
 - i. Peter (following his betrayal of Jesus)
 - ii. the female followers of Jesus
 - iii. and, most of all, Jesus Himself
 - d. Mark does reveal the social agony of Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:34). Why would separation from the Father be so painful to Jesus? Consider the following:

- i. Jesus was one with the Father from eternity past. See, for example, John 10:30 and Genesis 1:26-27 (the plural pronoun “us” indicates both the Father and Son were involved creating the earth). For more on Jesus’ role in creation, see Colossians 1:14-17 and John 1:1-3.
 - ii. Jesus humbled Himself to become a man (see Philippians 2:5-11). Is it possible He *felt*—as a man—that cut off from the Father He might lose His eternal existence (recall 1 Timothy 6:13-16)?
- e. Because of this emphasis on the social aspects of only those who were saved, it leads greater weight to the following:
- i. The theory that Mark himself was the young man who fled naked from the scene of the betrayal (Mark 14:51-52).
 - ii. The brief description of Simon of Cyrene in Mark 15:21 suggests he too was one of those who were converted by the cross. Since he is identified as merely the father of two men who were apparently followers of Jesus, Alexander and Rufus (see Romans 16:13), the implication is that Simon himself was not a believer. The following commentary takes this position:

“At this time a stranger, Simon a Cyrenian, coming in from the country, meets the throng. He hears the taunts and ribaldry of the crowd; he hears the words contemptuously repeated, Make way for the King of the Jews! He stops in astonishment at the scene; and as he expresses his compassion, they seize him and place the cross upon his shoulders.

“Simon had heard of Jesus. His sons were believers in the Saviour, but he himself was not a disciple. The bearing of the cross to Calvary was a blessing to Simon, and he was ever after grateful for this providence. It led him to take upon himself the cross of Christ from choice, and ever cheerfully stand beneath its burden.” *Desire of Ages*, p. 742
 - iii. Notice the social contrasts in this vignette. Simon was a foreigner from Cyrene, in North Africa. He had no prior personal connection with Jesus. However, Jesus, unable to carry the cross, receives no help from the 12 disciples He has lovingly mentored for 3 ½ years. (They have all abandoned Him, see Mark 14:50.) Indeed, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows...” (Isaiah 53:3).

D. Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15:1-15)

1. The Roman governor, in essence, ratifies the death sentence of the Jewish Sanhedrin.
2. Pilate realized Jesus was innocent. (See, for example, Mark 15:10, 14 and Luke 23:4.) Consequently the various gospel accounts demonstrate Pilate’s attempts (albeit weak-willed) to free Christ. In Matthew’s account, (Matt. 27:15-18), Pilate seems to have come up with a human solution to his predicament. He will resort to his practice of

freeing a prisoner in honor of the Passover. In essence, Pilate is offering a “no contest” plea on behalf of Jesus. The governor’s actions seem to suggest his hope that the Jewish populace would prefer his freeing the innocent Jesus rather than the callous murderer, Barabbas. However, even this gambit does not win the crowd over to Pilate’s position.

3. In Mark’s more succinct description of Pilate and his Passover prisoner release tradition, the focus is on the crowd and their choice to free a murderer rather than Jesus. Comparison with Matthew’s account does not indicate an inconsistency, but rather a different focus.
 - a. The evidence suggests the appeal to this tradition was initiated by Pilate to extricate himself from a difficult situation.
 - b. Mark seems to place the initiative with the crowd; however, it is likely this emphasis reflects Mark’s desire to provide a broader perspective as opposed to merely dwelling on the dynamics affecting Pilate. Why might this be?
 - i. As we have already seen, Mark spends little time giving details of those who are lost. Therefore, we wouldn’t expect him to give the details Matthew or John did in discussing Pilate’s own struggles.
 - ii. On the other hand, Mark highlights the experience of those redeemed—as well as the Redeemer Himself. By emphasizing the crowd’s demands for Barabbas in Pilate’s judgment hall, Mark illustrates the relational pain of Jesus. As John later expressed, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11, ESV).
 - iii. Additionally, Mark is interested in the redemptive and relational aspects of Jesus’ ministry. Since the crowd seems to speak with one voice, this rejection of Jesus by His own people may serve another purpose in Mark. It provides the background for appreciating how many of those people who made such a terrible public decision—the disciples included—would be among the eternally redeemed.
 - iv. We have already noted Mark’s emphasis on the life of Peter. What transpires in Pilate’s judgment hall immediately after Peter’s denials is worth noting. Specifically, at a time when Peter’s voice was especially needed (when an option for Christ’s release was placed on the table), he had already retired from the conflict—having disassociated himself from his Savior.
 - Healing implications: if we don’t stand for right either in our personal testimony or in our lifestyle practices, is it possible that we can cause the death of innocent people?

- Think about this example. From a social standpoint who causes the most harm to society, a smoker who dies at 35 from lung cancer or a smoker who lives to 100 in apparently good health?
 - What is the influence of the centenarian? How many smokers will go to early (and potentially miserable) graves saying things like: “Why is this happening to me? Did I mistakenly take comfort in smoking knowing my smoking neighbor lived to 100?”
4. As we have already observed, Mark communicates little that reflects the spiritual struggle of Pilate. Mark’s most telling statement as to Pilate’s motivation occurs in Mark 15:15 “wishing to satisfy the crowd” (NASB).
- a. Are there lessons for us as we contemplate the reason Pilate handed Jesus over? Consider the following insights from *The Desire of Ages*:
- i. “If at the first Pilate had stood firm, refusing to condemn a man whom he found guiltless, he would have broken the fatal chain that was to bind him in remorse and guilt as long as he lived. Had he carried out his convictions of right, the Jews would not have presumed to dictate to him. Christ would have been put to death, but the guilt would not have rested upon Pilate. But Pilate had taken step after step in the violation of his conscience. He had excused himself from judging with justice and equity, and he now found himself almost helpless in the hands of the priests and rulers. His wavering and indecision proved his ruin” (page 731).
 - ii. “Pilate longed to deliver Jesus. But he saw that he could not do this, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. How many, to escape loss or suffering, in like manner sacrifice principle. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another. The current sets strongly in the wrong direction, and he who compromises with evil is swept away into the thick darkness of guilt” (page 738).
 - iii. *The Believer’s Bible Commentary* summarizes the conclusion of Christ’s encounters with Pilate: “And so the spineless **Pilate** did what they wanted—**he released Barabbas**, flogged Jesus and **delivered** Him over to the soldiers for crucifixion. It was a monstrous verdict of unrighteousness.”¹
- b. Pilate emerges as a politician, focused on pleasing the people rather than on judging with equity. As a result, he ultimately chooses to become nothing more than a pawn

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1361). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

in the hands of the Jewish leaders. Rather than standing for right, he is molded by circumstances. The governor's fear for his position and influence seals the fates of two men: his and Jesus'.

- c. How often are we molded by circumstances? Do we do things contrary to our own physical, emotional, or spiritual health because of peer pressure?
5. In essence, Jesus dies in place of Barabbas
- a. Barabbas' name is significant. Literally translated it means: "Son of [Bar] Daddy [Abba]"
 - i. Recall Jesus in Gethsemane: "And he said, 'Abba, Father'..." (Mark 14:36).
 - ii. Note Paul's words in Galatians 4:6.
 - b. Metaphorically, Jesus died for every son/daughter of a father. In other words, Jesus died for you and me individually—as well as for the whole human race collectively!

E. Jesus' Silence at His Trial—Health Implications

1. In Pilate's judgment hall, as well as in every other context throughout His "legal trials," Jesus made no attempts to justify Himself. The only times He provided decisive answers was when His divinity was questioned—and in those cases He attested He was the Son of God.
2. Jesus' silence calls to mind the prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53:7 – "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."
 - a. In that very same chapter we see an amazing health connection, made explicit by Matthew earlier in Jesus' ministry (Matthew 8:14-17, compare Mark 1:29-34).
 - i. In relating the story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law (and many others who came to her home), Matthew sees a prophetic fulfillment upon which Mark does not comment: "*This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES.'*" Matthew 8:17, NASB.
 - ii. This quotation comes from the very same chapter where Jesus is spoken of as the silent sufferer, Isaiah 53.
 - b. How is Jesus' suffering connected with our physical healing?

- i. By their description of a silent Jesus on trial, it seems that Mark and the other gospel writers wanted to draw our attention to Isaiah 53.
- ii. The language of Isaiah 53 is “sanctuary” language. In other words, it calls our minds back to the sacrificial services of the Old Testament wilderness sanctuary (see Exodus 25-27, etc.) and temple (1 Kings 6-8, etc.). At the heart of those services was a sinless substitute bearing the sins, guilt, and pain of the sinner.
- iii. The passage in Matthew 8 makes it clear that forgiveness, healing, and salvation are not things that cost God nothing. They are the most costly things in the universe.
- iv. Consider the words of the Christian classic, *Education* (pages 263-264):

“Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him. When there came upon Israel the calamities that were the sure result of separation from God,—subjugation by their enemies, cruelty, and death,—it is said that ‘His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel.’ ‘In all their affliction He was afflicted: . . . and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.’ Judges 10:16; Isaiah 63:9.

“His Spirit ‘maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.’ As the ‘whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together’ (Romans 8:26, 22), the heart of the infinite Father is pained in sympathy. Our world is a vast lazar house, a scene of misery that we dare not allow even our thoughts to dwell upon. Did we realize it as it is, the burden would be too terrible. Yet God feels it all. In order to destroy sin and its results He gave His best Beloved, and He has put it in our power, through co-operation with Him, to bring this scene of misery to an end. ‘This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.’ Matthew 24:14.

“ ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15), is Christ's command to His followers. Not that all are called to be ministers or missionaries in the ordinary sense of the term; but all may be workers with Him in giving the ‘glad tidings’ to their fellow men. To all, great or small, learned or ignorant, old or young, the command is given.

“In view of this command, can we educate our sons and daughters for a life of respectable conventionality, a life professedly Christian, but lacking His self-sacrifice, a life on which the verdict of Him who is truth must be, ‘I know you not?’”

F. Jesus Is Mocked and Abused (Mark 15:16-20)

1. Immediately after Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified, our Savior is cruelly treated by the Roman soldiers.
 - a. What kind of emotional pain do you think Jesus was suffering when He was mocked at the very hands of those He created and loved? (See John 1:11)
 - b. If we understand the connection between our healing and Jesus' suffering (recall Matthew 8:17 and Isaiah 53:3-5), then what does this incident reveal about Jesus' commitment to our own whole-person health?
2. Of additional healing significance is Jesus' powerful example of holding up psychologically and spiritually under abuse—either threatened or actual. (In contrast, realize it was only a short while earlier that Peter, fearing abuse and trial had caved in and denied his Lord.)
 - a. How do you feel when you are falsely accused?
 - b. Have you ever used false accusation or abuse as an excuse for your own misdeeds—or faulty attitudes?

G. Jesus Is Crucified (Mark 15:21-41)

Not only was Jesus mocked and scourged in multiple venues, He is now ushered out to His death. And it will be no ordinary death. Death by crucifixion was not only physically agonizing, it was a public spectacle. Beyond that, in the Jewish mind, crucifixion was associated with an irrevocable spiritual curse—one that precluded any afterlife: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

1. Note the mocking continues when Jesus is on the cross.
 - a. Does Jesus' absence of retaliation in all these contexts have any special applications for us?
 - b. In reality, Jesus was not only dealing with abuse, He was also dealing with betrayal and infidelity. As we have already noted, those who He created had rejected Him. What possible excuse could we have for retaliating when people mistreat us?
 - c. How can we allow Jesus to give us the healing grace of forbearance in our most difficult social relationships?
2. As terrible as the cross was, it provides an ongoing testimony to the divinity of Jesus. For Christ's experience at Calvary was fulfilling prophecy. Listen to the striking

parallels between Jesus' crucifixion and Psalm 22. It is as if David, the Psalm's author, was shown in vision the cross and was speaking the very words of Jesus:

“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.
O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;
And by night, but I have no rest.
Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
In You our fathers trusted;
They trusted and You delivered them.
To You they cried out and were delivered;
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.

“But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.
All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*,
'Commit *yourself* to the LORD; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.'

“Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb;
You made me trust *when* upon my mother's breasts.
Upon You I was cast from birth;
You have been my God from my mother's womb.

“Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.
Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled me.
They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.
I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.
I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;
They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.” (Psalm 22:1-18, NASB)

3. Bible prophecy, like this, has significant healing implications. Consider the following:
- a. The Psalmist, like Jesus on the cross is dealing with a faith-stressing conflict. He knows God is the Faithful Deliverer (v. 4-5). However, God does not seem to be offering deliverance in the present situation. The implied questions include: “Where is God?” and “Why is He not acting?” Both David and Jesus are dealing with one of faith’s great challenges; namely, uncertainty. Indeed, uncertainty is one of life’s greatest stressors.
 - i. For example, medical research indicates that feeling ill but not having a diagnosis may be more stressful than even a grave diagnosis with certainty
 - ii. A related example occurred years ago when early genetic testing became available for Huntington’s Disease. This inherited brain-wasting condition typically manifests in one’s 40s. The early tests were not perfect but they were offered to the children of Huntington’s patients. When the test results came back there were three groups:
 - Some children were confidently reassured by a conclusive test: they would not get the disease. Of course, they were relieved.
 - Other children were told with certainty they would get the disorder some years later. This, no doubt, was devastating news.
 - However, those who were the most stressed were those who were told the testing was too imprecise to know whether or not they would come down with Huntington’s.
 - b. Bible prophecy, by revealing the future, can provide certainty in the midst of confusion and hope in the midst of difficulty. Psalm 22 offers just this hope.
4. When we know God’s Word is certain, it can help sustain us through life’s most challenging chapters.
- a. It was this to what Jesus clung. Just as the words we have already looked at in Psalm 22 foretold the emotions of Jesus on the cross (words that expressly prefigured His mournful expression in Mark 15:34, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), so the conclusion of Psalm 22 prefigured Jesus final expression of faith on the cross:

“But You, O LORD, be not far off;
O You my help, hasten to my assistance.
Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only *life* from the power of the dog.
Save me from the lion’s mouth;
From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.

“I will tell of Your name to my brethren;

In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.
You who fear the LORD, praise Him;
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,
And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.
For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from him;
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.” (Psalm 22:19-24, NASB)

- b. It was prophecy like this, no doubt, that could allow Jesus—when feeling forsaken by His Father—nonetheless, to proclaim, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).
- i. Think about it: you can’t entrust yourself into the hands of someone who has abandoned or forsaken you.
 - ii. In other words, Jesus final words are an expression of profound faith. Although He does not *feel* that the Father is near Him, He will cling to faith. He will hold on to the revelations of the prophetic word, like those found in Psalm 22.
 - iii. What implications does this hold for us—and for our own healing?
 - If you are dealing with health issues and it feels God is far from you, can you cling to the reality that God is Deliverer—even if it feels like He has forgotten you?
 - Can you commend your soul, your perhaps seemingly hopeless case into the hands of the Father? By Jesus’ grace we can follow the example of our dying Savior.
 - iv. In reality here is where the battle lies:
 - In the midst of uncertainty and confusion as to God’s activity in our lives, we need to focus on what God’s faithfulness in the past.
 - When we are confused, we should hold onto what we do know—what we have seen of God when our vision was unimpaired.
 - Bible prophecy helps remind us of a God who is faithful to His Word—at least when the final chapters of any story are written. It is only because of our temporal myopia that we cannot see the bigger picture of God’s presence and intervention.

H. Jesus Gives Another Health Testimony on the Cross (Mark 15:23, 36)

While dying on the cross, Jesus provides another health testimony that appears to have special relevance today. Jesus refuses the wine He is offered on two occasions (apparently to numb His pain).

1. Why was Jesus so firm in His avoidance of alcoholic beverages on the cross?

- a. Realize He does this although for Him there would be no long-term physical health implications (i.e., Jesus would not have shortened His life by so doing).
 - b. Therefore Jesus' decision involved more than an understanding of the short- or long-term physical health risks of alcohol exposure.
 - c. Note: a multitude of such risks are associated with even moderate drinking. These include:
 - i. Increase in blood pressure
 - ii. Increased triglycerides
 - iii. Weight gain
 - iv. Potential migraine headache triggering
 - v. Increase in cancer risk.
 - Realize experts are in agreement that no level of alcohol is safe when it comes to cancer risk.
 - Consider the following: “‘Responsible drinking’ has become a 21st-century mantra for how most people view alcohol consumption. But when it comes to cancer, no amount of alcohol is safe. That is the conclusion of the 2014 World Cancer Report (WCR), issued by the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).”²
 - vi. Note furthermore, there are no cardiovascular benefits to moderate alcohol consumption among those who eat liberally of plant products. Presumably those on a phytochemically-depleted diet (i.e., fruit- and vegetable-deficient diet) may obtain some heart-healthy compounds they are lacking from alcoholic beverages—but at a huge price.
2. *Vine's Bible Dictionary* provides a compelling insight into Jesus' resolve, especially when one realizes another herb was combined with the wine (“they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received *it* not,” Mark 15:23): “*smurnizo* [the transliterated Greek word]... is used transitively in the NT, with the meaning ‘to mingle or drug with myrrh,’ Mark 15:23; the mixture was doubtless offered to deaden the pain (Matthew's word ‘gall’ suggests that ‘myrrh’ was not the only ingredient). Christ refused to partake of any such means of alleviation; He would retain all His mental power for the complete fulfillment of the Father's will.”³
 3. What insights does this provide into the debate over Jesus' ministry at the wedding in Cana (see John 2:1-12)? Scholars argue over whether the “wine” Jesus created on that occasion was fermented or not, since the same Greek word, *oinos*, can refer to either (see Mark 2:22). Do you think the same Jesus who would not becloud His own mind would

² Laura A. Stokowski, RN, MS. Medscape, April 30, 2014. Accessed 19 June 2014 at http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/824237_print

³ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: T. Nelson.

provide a beverage to becloud the mind of others? (On merely practical grounds do you think God would provide a beverage that could allow people to become drunk at a wedding?)

4. Could a critic argue that Jesus was not concerned about the moral effects of alcohol on His reasoning, but rather refused the wine so He would feel more pain? This hardly seems defensible. Although Jesus was clearly suffering on our behalf, there is no evidence there was more virtue in Him suffering more. Furthermore, Jesus indicated His own aversion to the suffering of the cross. After all, He prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36, ESV).

I. The Remedy for Spiritual Healing Provided at the Cross

1. The Bible presents a consistent picture of the human race after the fall (the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden) needing a Savior. It was this to which the Old Testament sacrificial system pointed. It was this to which the prophets testified.
2. The foundation for this great truth is articulated in Romans 6:23a: “For the wages of sin is death.” In other words, left to ourselves, our future holds only death, for “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23).
3. However, the Bible teaches that the death penalty could be addressed through “substitutionary atonement”. This means there was provision for someone to take the death penalty for another.
 - a. However, who could take the death sentence for the entire human race? Only One who was of more value than all of humanity combined—the very One who Created all mankind.
 - b. Furthermore, the only one who could bear the death penalty for sin is one who did not sin himself. Otherwise the only thing his death would accomplish was the payment of the penalty for his own sin.
 - c. Jesus met both of the above criteria to die in our place. As we have already seen in this series, the Bible reveals Him to be the active agent in creation (e.g., John 1:3,10). Jesus also never sinned (1 Peter 2:21-22).
4. As we have already mentioned, this truth of substitutionary atonement was at the heart of the sacrifices in the Old Testament. An example of this is seen in Leviticus 5. When a person sinned, he had to bring a sinless offering to the priest: “he shall confess that in which he has sinned. He shall also bring his guilt offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin.” (Leviticus 5:5-6, NASB).
 - a. That Christ was the fulfillment of all these Old Testament sacrifices is clear.

- i. Jesus was even the One to which the Passover Lamb pointed. As the Apostle Paul expressed it: “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).
 - ii. Another telling connection between Jesus and the Old Testament sacrificial system is found in Mark. There we are told, upon Jesus’ death, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Mark 15:37-38). This rending of the temple veil indicated that the Jewish sacrificial system had come to an end. This was foretold in the book of Daniel: “the Messiah will be cut off and... he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (Dan 9:26-27).
 - b. However, the very word “atonement” has to do with more than freeing us from the death penalty—it speaks to restoring a broken relationship.
 - i. “Atonement” actually comes from three words: “at-one-ment.”
 - ii. Sin puts us in the camp of the enemy, in opposition to God. Ephesians 2:1-2 puts it this way: “you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”
 - iii. However, Christ’s sacrifice brings us back into an intimate relationship with God. In Ephesians 2:13 we read: “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (ESV).
 - iv. Paul encapsulated the results of the atonement in transitioning us from enemies to friends, even children, in these words: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” (Romans 5:8-10.)
 - c. Indeed, we see Jesus paying the price to restore our broken relationship on the cross—we are brought near by His death, but He experiences separation from the Father. Recall Jesus’ words on the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)
5. What we see transpiring on the cross (and in Gethsemane for that matter) is Jesus bearing the sins of the whole world. He is paying the penalty for all the sins of all time. Listen again to the words of Paul: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-19, NIV)
 6. Now look again at a verse we quoted in part earlier: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Indeed,

Jesus took the death penalty that we deserved, and gave us the gift of eternal life that He deserved. The words of Paul again make this plain: “He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB).

7. Jesus provided the solution to my sin problem—and yours. As the oft-cited Bible text puts it this way: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). By virtue of Jesus’ death, each of us is offered the option of eternal life. All we need to do is to “believe”; i.e., to trust or depend on God’s free gift.
8. The great truth of the atonement provides the foundation for mental, spiritual and emotional health. No matter what is transpiring in your life, you have been bought with a price—ransomed—and are of infinite value to God. He gave His own Son for you!
9. Not only did Jesus work for our healing and reconciliation/atonement at the cross, He still works on our behalf in heaven. Jesus alluded to this great truth in Mark 14 when He said to the High Priest: “you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power” (Mar 14:62, compare Daniel 7:13). You see, the Bible pictures the resurrected Jesus as now sitting at God’s right hand interceding on our behalf: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:14-16)
10. The life changing power of the cross is seen immediately in Mark. No sooner does Jesus die than a heathen man, a Roman centurion, exclaim, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39, NASB).

J. More Insights into Christ on the Cross

In this series we have often referred to the classic Christian devotional-commentary, *The Desire of Ages*. Many aspects of the cross of Christ are synthesized in that work. Consider the following quotation from pages 25-26:

As the high priest laid aside his gorgeous pontifical robes, and officiated in the white linen dress of the common priest, so Christ took the form of a servant, and offered sacrifice, Himself the priest, Himself the victim. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him." Isaiah 53:5.

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed."

By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan's purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." John 3:16. He gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice; He gave Him to the fallen race. To assure us of His immutable counsel of peace, God gave His only-begotten Son to become one of the human family, forever to retain His human nature. This is the pledge that God will fulfill His word. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder." God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the "Son of man" who shares the throne of the universe. It is the "Son of man" whose name shall be called, "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6. The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both. He who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," is not ashamed to call us brethren. Hebrews 7:26; 2:11. In Christ the family of earth and the family of heaven are bound together. Christ glorified is our brother. Heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love.

The same book brings Christ's death into even sharper focus on pages 755-756:

The spotless Son of God hung upon the cross, His flesh lacerated with stripes; those hands so often reached out in blessing, nailed to the wooden bars; those feet so tireless on ministries of love, spiked to the tree; that royal head pierced by the crown of thorns; those quivering lips shaped to the cry of woe. And all that He endured--the blood drops that flowed from His head, His hands, His feet, the agony that racked His frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled His soul at the hiding of His Father's face--speaks to each child of humanity, declaring, It is for thee that the Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt; for thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise. He who stilled the angry waves and walked the foam-capped billows, who made devils tremble and disease flee, who opened blind eyes and called forth the dead to life,--offers Himself upon the cross as a sacrifice, and this from love to thee. He, the Sin Bearer, endures the wrath of divine justice, and for thy sake becomes sin itself.

K. Jesus Is Buried (Mark 15:42 – 47)

1. For those who have tried to dismiss the resurrection, alleging Jesus was not really dead, what does the account reveal that shows the certainty of the Jesus' death? (Compare John 19:31-34 with Mark 15:44-45)
 - a. There is absolutely no question as to Jesus' death in any of the four gospel accounts.

- b. Furthermore, simple logic argues against claims of critics that Jesus was not dead.
 - i. The Romans had condemned Jesus to an ignominious death. They had every reason to ensure that He was dead before taking His body off the cross.
 - ii. Beyond this, both Pilate and the Jewish leaders had a vested interest in ensuring Jesus was dead. Although the disciples lost sight of it, the Jewish intelligentsia had no question that Jesus had prophesied His own resurrection (see Matthew 27:62-66). These individuals would not have allowed a live body to be taken down from the cross.
 - iii. The anxiety over burial preparations testifies that all His friends knew He was dead.
2. Note an important social dimension to Mark's account of Jesus' burial. He identifies Joseph of Arimathaea (Mark 15:43-46) as one of the heroes in this section of his gospel.
 - a. Many scholars believe that Mark's reference to him as "an honorable counsellor" indicates he was a member of the Sanhedrin or Jewish Council, a group of which we have heard virtually nothing good about throughout the entire book of Mark (including as recently as Mark 15:1).
 - b. This connection with him serving on the Jewish council is bolstered by several lines of evidence.
 - i. John makes it clear that Nicodemus, another Sanhedrin member, collaborated with Joseph in caring for the body of Jesus. (John 7:32,45-53 provides evidence that Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council.)
 - ii. Luke takes pains to make it clear that Joseph of Arimathaea did not share in the work of the Jewish council in condemning Jesus (Luke 23:51). This observation would be unnecessary if he were not a member of the Sanhedrin.
 - c. What lessons are there in this vignette for us?
 - i. Do we sometimes write people off because of characteristics like:
 - their position in life (Joseph was very wealthy, see Matthew 27:57)
 - who they work for
 - who they seem to keep company with
 - ii. How does Joseph's story help to temper the human reflex to look down on someone who is a leader in a church/movement/business that seems to be opposing Christ or His principles?

- iii. In what ways would it be better for all of us to be like Joseph of Arimathaea? Are we willing—in every situation—to publicly stake our reputations, employment, and finances for Christ?
3. There are others who are concerned about the burial besides Joseph and Nicodemus.
- i. We also see the women at the cross—even at the very end. What social lessons are here for us?
 - Women were looked down on in that culture
 - But while most of the disciples fled (John alone apparently came back to the cross, see John 19:26-27), the women stayed by.
 - Note: By the time Jesus had died these women were some distance from the cross, watching from “afar” (Mark 15:40). However while Jesus was alive and suffering on that instrument of torture a number of these women were right there at the cross (see John 19:25).
 - ii. Although stereotypes often label women as less brave than the male gender, do you see a more courageous stand on the part of these women than the male disciples?
 - iii. Do women emerge as spiritual leaders at the cross? Even if you think not, is there not a powerful example that these ladies provide?

L. Jesus Is Resurrected (Mark 16:1 – 8)

1. Perhaps not surprisingly, Mark’s gospel, with its social focus, reveals the truth of the resurrection in a dramatic human context.
 - a. After honoring the Bible Sabbath (from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday), three of the women who pressed close to Jesus prepare to honor Him a final time. They are identified by name: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.
 - b. Again the power of the examples shines through
 - i. Although Jesus has just been unjustly crucified, raising grave concerns for the future of any who might be identified with Him, these three women are not afraid to be counted among His followers.
 - ii. The two Marys and Salome are motivated more by their love for their Lord than any human considerations. Can the same be said of us?
2. Indeed, one remarkable aspect to the opening of Mark 16 is the very real social drama of these three women.

- a. These devoted believers have done all they could do in preparing to anoint the body of Jesus. However, they are faced with a vexing question: “who will roll away the stone?”
- b. It appears these three ladies are driven primarily by their relationship to Jesus. They are focused on Him, not on what difficulties may await them. Yes, they ask practical questions, but they move forward as if confident that the same God that laid a spiritual burden on their hearts will address any obstacles they may encounter.
- c. Again their example speaks to us. Are we willing to move forward in our acts of devotion and service to God even if we think insurmountable barriers await us? Are we holding back from following God all the way, fearing difficulties beyond our control? Oh, that we might each fully comprehend and act on the example of the women on resurrection day—moving forward even if it seems only obstacles face us.
- d. Do you see any parallels between the behavior of these three women and the children of Israel at the Red Sea (see Exodus 14)? Listen to the application from the following devotional-commentary: |

God in His providence brought the Hebrews into the mountain fastnesses before the sea, that He might manifest His power in their deliverance and signally humble the pride of their oppressors. He might have saved them in any other way, but He chose this method in order to test their faith and strengthen their trust in Him. The people were weary and terrified, yet if they had held back when Moses bade them advance, God would never have opened the path for them. It was "by faith" that "they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land." Hebrews 11:29. In marching down to the very water, they showed that they believed the word of God as spoken by Moses. They did all that was in their power to do, and then the Mighty One of Israel divided the sea to make a path for their feet.

The great lesson here taught is for all time. Often the Christian life is beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly, "Go forward." We should obey this command, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness, and we feel the cold waves about our feet. The obstacles that hinder our progress will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit. Those who defer obedience till every shadow of uncertainty disappears and there remains no risk of failure or defeat, will never obey at all. Unbelief whispers, "Let us wait till the obstructions are removed, and we can see our way clearly;" but faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things.

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- e. Just as God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites of old, so God had addressed the great need of the women—the stone was already rolled away.

- f. After all, isn't that our great need as well? The resurrection tells us that Jesus is not irrelevant at the present time. He is not Someone who only acted in the past. He is a risen Savior who longs to be active in our lives as well.
3. The drama of the three women provides a fitting backdrop for an unspoken question in Mark's gospel. Namely, how could Christ die for the sins of the world and yet be resurrected?
4. Think about it. Just like the women had to make a choice whether or not to act on their devotion to Jesus in the face of unanswered questions, so we often face difficult theological questions that could undermine our devotion.
 - a. Although we won't attempt to fully answer the questions begged by how a living Savior could die for all, consider the following insights from *The Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Volume 5, p. 1113:

Was the human nature of the Son of Mary changed into the divine nature of the Son of God? No; the two natures were mysteriously blended in one person--the man Christ Jesus. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible. Christ, the sinless One, will save every son and daughter of Adam who accepts the salvation proffered them, consenting to become the children of God. The Saviour has purchased the fallen race with His own blood.

This is a great mystery, a mystery that will not be fully, completely understood in all its greatness until the translation of the redeemed shall take place. Then the power and greatness and efficacy of the gift of God to man will be understood. But the enemy is determined that this gift shall be so mystified that it will become as nothingness.

- b. This strikes me as a fitting commentary. Following the example of the two Marys and Salome, I am encouraged to move forward in my spiritual walk despite questions whose answers I have yet to fathom.
5. At the tomb, anxiety gives way to fear, then to comfort and joy.
 - a. The women's anxiety as to who should move away the stone is replaced by another emotion when they enter the tomb.
 - b. The fact that they "feared" indicates that they realized they were in the presence of a heavenly personage.
 - i. When humans come into contact with God or one of His messengers, they are typically overwhelmed with their own sinfulness by contrast. The Bible gives

many examples of this; e.g., Isaiah 6:1-5; Judges 13:13-23; Joshua 5:13-15; compare Luke 5:5-8.

- ii. God's primary motive in revealing Himself is not to scare us, but to minister to us. After all, as we have been seeing on our journey through Mark, He is a relational God.
 - c. The angel's words, "He is risen," were designed to comfort and encourage those three believers. Jesus was not dead. They were not left alone.
 - i. The angel invites them to look at the evidence of the empty tomb.
 - ii. Note: faith does not mean we eschew evidence. God is happy to provide evidence that bolsters our confidence in Him. However, there will also always be room for doubt.
 - iii. Think about it. The empty tomb did not prove Jesus was resurrected, it only evidenced that He was not there.
 - d. The angel continues his ministry in commissioning the women to be the first ones to herald Christ's resurrection.
 - i. In God's mercy they are not only instructed to "tell the disciples" (v. 7), but they are explicitly instructed to tell Peter.
 - What does the phrase indicate, "tell the disciples and Peter"?
 - At least on some level Peter was no longer considered a disciple. Perhaps it was based on his own self-judgment following his repeated denials of Jesus.
 - However, the angel messenger classes Peter with the disciples in the sense that the women are especially committed to bear the glad tidings of the resurrection to him along with the other ten.
 - ii. What encouragement does this provide you? Have you ever felt you let God down? The Christian classic, *Steps to Christ*, suggests that God's concern for Peter reflects the very same concern He has for you: "The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son." (p. 100)
6. We have looked at these three ladies as examples of faithfulness. However, this section concludes with their unspoken response to that grand commission, "go... tell." We read, "they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8, NASB).
- a. How is it with me, with you? As we'll see in the conclusion to Mark's gospel, we—like those women—have been given a grand commission to "go and tell." However,

how often do I shrink from fully proclaiming God's message for fear it will not be received?

- i. Granted, as the story plays out, if their fear stemmed from rejection it was warranted.
 - ii. Or do you think their fear was of a totally different order? Do you think they were humanly overcome by all that happened and incapable of initially doing anything more than trying to make sense of the events of that day?
- b. However, although the Bible does not condemn these three noble women, do you think the luster of their example is marred by their failure to break through their fears and immediately tell the good news?
- i. Regardless of the cause of their fears, do you find any personal solace in this vignette?
 - ii. Does it give you any hope in light of your faithlessness in witnessing to realize these women who heretofore set an example of faithfulness, wavered in their own faith and failed to "tell" as they were commanded?
 - Of interest, Luke mentions nothing of this potential shortcoming of these three ladies. (See Luke 24:6-10)
 - Why do you suppose Mark includes this information? Does it somehow give us a greater glimpse into the humanity of even the Bible's heroes?

M. Jesus' Post Resurrection Appearances (Mark 16:9 – 13)

1. If we were tempted to think critically of Mary Magdalene a verse before, once she sees Jesus, Mary does indeed go tell the disciples of her resurrected Savior.
2. Mark 16:12-13 refers briefly to a story that Luke tells in much greater detail.
 - a. The walk of the two disciples on the Emmaus road took place after they had received the women's testimony of the resurrection. Listen to their words: "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive." (Luke 24:22-23, NASB)
 - b. Again, the picture is of followers who will not be convinced by the testimony of others until they see Jesus for themselves.

3. Are you surprised by what Mark records when Jesus finally appears to the eleven (His twelve disciples minus Judas)? Namely, He first rebukes the disciples “for their unbelief and hardness of heart” (v. 14).
 - a. After all, it seems that none of Christ’s contemporaries initially believed oral testimony the resurrection until they literally saw Jesus.
 - b. The gospel of John highlights the story of Thomas. (See John 20:24-29.) We often add the adjective “doubting” to Thomas’ name, but was his response really any different than the three women or the other disciples?
 - c. How does the initial faith of the women—moving forward without knowing who would roll away the stone—contrast with the lack of faith of all the disciples who initially would not believe the witnesses of the resurrection. (See Mark 16:11, 13)
4. Think about it. Is it possible that Mark’s own experience caused him to especially resonate with these stories?
 - a. Remember it was John Mark’s own faith that apparently failed when he was with Paul on his first missionary journey—and ultimately sowed seeds of discord between Barnabas and Paul (see Acts 13:5, 13; 15:36-41).
 - b. Now, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Mark is writing about the wavering faith of the very ones upon whom Christ established His New Testament church.
 - c. Realize it is these same struggling disciples whose names are immortalized on the foundations of the New Jerusalem. (See Revelation Rev 21:14.)
 - i. Do you see the good news here? My lack of faith in the past does not disqualify me from being one of God’s champions today.
 - ii. However, there is a danger that we use these stories as an excuse for present faithlessness. Realize just because God is willing to overlook and forgive our past shortcoming does not mean He tolerates our continuing in those patterns.
 - Do you see Jesus’ words to the woman caught in the act of adultery as supporting this contention: “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more”?
 - How do the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, chapters 2-3 underscore this balance between forgiveness for the past—and a call to faithfulness in the present?
 - Notice, in spite of problems in most of those churches, God calls each one to be overcomers. A consistent statement in each letter is “to him that overcometh...” (e.g., Rev 2:7, 11).

N. The Great Commission (Mark 16:14 – 20)

1. Most Christians are familiar with Christ's "Great Commission" as recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. However we find another rendition of Jesus' final parting charge in Mark 16.
2. Note that the Great Commission in Matthew 28 took place in a totally different context than that of Mark 16. In the latter situation, it is an intimate supper gathering with the eleven. The former took place on a mountain in Galilee.
3. Could this suggest that Jesus may have offered this Great Commission in multiple contexts after His resurrection?
 - a. Is it possible that this was the great burden on our Lord's heart as He was preparing to depart from earth?
 - b. If so, how seriously should we take these words?
4. Both Mark 16 and Matthew 28 teach the importance of sharing the good news of the gospel. What other common denominators do you find?
5. What is different about the Great Commissions in these two accounts?
 - a. What is the significance of Mark 16:18 where the disciples are called to be involved in healing ministry?
 - b. Do you realize that when Mark 16 is placed alongside Matthew 28, it makes clear that every commissioning service in which Jesus officiated, He called His followers to not only preach and teach but also to heal? (Compare Matthew 10 where Jesus sent out the twelve disciples during His ministry and Luke 10 where He sent out seventy others.)
 - c. What do you think? Does this mean that on some level, all believers are called to be involved in some form of health ministry?
6. As we close our study, have we seen evidence that Mark's gospel highlighted the healing power of Christ? Doesn't it only make sense that this gospel would end with a desire to have that same healing power continued in us, the ambassadors of the Great Physician (see 2 Corinthians 5:20)?
7. We have seen many parallels between the gospel of Mark and the book of Daniel. Did you know that the book of Daniel begins with God's followers giving a powerful testimony for healthful living?
 - a. In essence that great prophetic book starts with a story of God's physical healing power.
 - b. If you've never studied the book of Daniel in the light of the gospel, why not see if some in your group would like to continue their journey into the Bible's healing insights by studying the book of Mark.