

And so with the fateful hour drawing near, in Mark 14:26, Mark recounts that Jesus and his disciples sang a Hallel Psalm (Psalm 118) which brought the Passover celebration to an end, and then Jesus and his disciples went out from the city to the Garden of Gethsemane, which was located a short distance away on the Mount of Olives. Jesus knows he must drink the cup of God's wrath if he is to fulfill the father's will in this part of the plan of redemption. He will fulfill it in the cross event

In light of the fact that Jesus had just told them that one of them would betray him – and they all asked, “is it I?” including Judas – Jesus now speaks words which none of them wanted to hear. As we read in verse 27, “‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them. In these final chapters of Mark, it is simply amazing how many Old Testament prophecies are being fulfilled by Jesus, by Judas, his disciples, friends and the Sanhedrin. Almost all of Israel's prophets had foretold of this event in one way or another, which would mark the dawn of the messianic age, the New Covenant era. God had promised to visit his people with salvation and so save them from their sins. That time had finally come.

In verse 27, Jesus quotes from Zechariah 13:7-9. In Zechariah's prophecy—given over 500 years before the coming of Jesus—God commands that Israel's shepherd be stricken and the flock scattered. This will be the means through which God will both refine and create a new people who will declare “the Lord is our God.” In verse 1 of Zechariah 13, the prophet also refers to a cleansing fountain of blood directly linked to the house of David and the city of Jerusalem.

Even though God's sheep are scattered when the shepherd is stricken, God will use this scattering and re-gathering to accomplish his long-promised redemption. With the death of Jesus, the prophecy of Zechariah 13 will be fulfilled. This is very powerful evidence for the truth of the gospel—the death of Jesus was foretold 500 years before it happened—as well as an important sign that Jesus is the long anticipated Messiah. He fulfills Zechariah's prophecy, because when he dies on a Roman cross, a fountain of

blood will indeed be opened to David's people and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep who will be refined like silver and gold. They will call upon God's name and he will answer them.

It should be mentioned that Jesus' declaration in verse 27 that the disciples will all "fall away" does not refer to a permanent state—i.e., the loss of their salvation. Rather, the Greek text indicates that the disciples will be "stumbled" by the death of Jesus, and that they will fall into sin because of the tumultuous events about to transpire. In other words, the disciples still don't understand that Jesus must suffer and die, before being raised from the dead. What Jesus means by this warning will be all too apparent in the next few hours. But Jesus does not warn the disciples about their "stumbling" without telling them of the eventual outcome. Says Jesus in verse 28, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Jesus must be stricken only to rise again from the dead. His death is not the end, but the fulfillment of God's promised redemption and renewal of all things starting at the cross and until the final judgment.

Despite the fear and stress Jesus must be feeling, he is very candid with the disciples about his death and what it means—God will strike the shepherd for the purpose of saving his people. But Jesus also makes it perfectly clear that his impending death is not the end. Jesus explains that he will be stricken of God and his disciples will stumble, but then, he tells them, the scattered flock of which they are part, will be re-gathered in Galilee. Jesus is speaking of the birth of a new Israel (the "true Israel"). The means of accomplishing this re-gathering of God's flock is nothing less than Jesus' resurrection and victory over death and the grave. The location where this re-gathering will occur is in back in Galilee, the same place where Jesus' messianic ministry first began. In fact, this glorious news that Christ's death is not the end, is mentioned again to the disciples by an angel when they discover the empty tomb as recounted in Mark 16:7, making it abundantly clear that the means by which God will save his people is the suffering and dying of the shepherd, while his resurrection is the beginning of the re-gathering of God's people.

This means that Jesus' resurrection is the proof that Jesus' death upon the cross actually does what God had promised (provide the means by which sins can be forgiven), as well as the means through which the renewal of all things has begun (the re-gathering of the scattered sheep). Thus Jesus' death saves us from our sins and his resurrection marks the dawn of the new creation as well as the re-gathering of God's people. But at this point, the disciples' focus is on the talk of Jesus dying. They still don't grasp the promise of the resurrection. That will not happen until after it has occurred and then after Pentecost they will be able to undeniably preach that truth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Having heard Jesus expose Judas' treachery, and now having heard him declare that all the rest of the disciples will fall away, verse 29 says, "Peter declared, 'Even if all fall away, I will not.'" Peter means well. But Peter's desire to boldly affirm both his loyalty to Jesus— "I will not fall away"—as well as contrast his own loyalty toward Jesus with that of the other disciples—"even if all [others] fall away, I never will" proves false. Of course, Peter does not know what lies ahead—both for himself and for Jesus—and he has no idea that his own denial of even knowing Jesus will likewise reveal the depths of our Lord's humiliation. Knowing what was to happen, Jesus responds to Peter in verse 30, "'I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.'"

Although Peter is absolutely certain that he alone will stand firm even if all the others fall away, Jesus knows otherwise. In fact, before morning (it was now late evening) and the rooster crows twice (the sign that a new day has dawned), on three separate occasions Peter will do the very thing he now protests that he will not do—deny that he is one of Jesus' disciples. The fact that Peter will do it three times, means that his denial of Jesus is not accidental or incidental, but willful and with full-awareness of what he is doing. Even though Jesus tells him otherwise, Peter steadfastly refuses to believe Jesus. As we read in verse 31, "But Peter insisted emphatically, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'" Apparently, Peter succeeded in shaming the rest of

Such an account of sinful and faithless behavior on the part of the disciples is strong evidence for the accuracy of the history of the gospel account – the early Christians surely would not fabricate these things that made them look so bad. We are also beginning to get a sense of the depth of Jesus’ humiliation. Despite all the protests, within hours, three times Peter will deny that he is a disciple. Here is Jesus, rejected by his family, rejected by the religious leaders of Israel and soon he will be rejected by the nation of Israel. He will be rejected by the twelve disciples and even worse, while he suffers on the cross he will be rejected by his Father in heaven.

While on the Mount of Olives, Mark recounts what happened before Jesus was arrested. Jesus must now prepare himself for the rejection, humiliation, physical anguish, and suffering, he is about to undergo. Jesus must yet drink the full cup of God’s wrath.

According to verse 32, “They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’” With the agony of the cross just hours away, Jesus seeks a place to pray. Jesus will ask of the father that he be delivered from what was about to come. The answer will be “no.” At the time of Jesus, people did not pray privately, but aloud, so the disciples can accurately report the exact details of Christ’s prayer, because they heard him pray. His words must have upset them greatly. Gethsemane was a small garden on the foot of the Mount of Olives, containing an olive oil press. It was well known to Jesus and his disciples. This would have been the ideal place for Jesus and his disciples to have privacy and pray together. It was also the place where Judas would have expected them to go, making it easy for him to lead members of the Sanhedrin to Jesus’ location so that they might arrest him.

As we have seen throughout this gospel, at critical moments in his messianic mission (see, for example, Mark 5:37; 9:2), Jesus brings Peter, James and John along with him, leaving the rest behind. Perhaps, the reason why at this particular moment Jesus singles out Peter, James and John, may have to do with the fact that all three of

them have confidently claimed that they would be willing and able to share in Jesus' suffering. Peter had just solemnly sworn that he would not deny Jesus, even if all the others did. In Mark 10:38-40) James and John told Jesus that they too were worthy of drinking the cup from which Jesus must drink. To be part of Jesus' inner circle for these three years must have been a heady thing. They are confident and proud because of their association with Jesus. Peter, James and John, will soon realize the cost of following Jesus. Their pride and self-confidence must be crushed if they are to fulfill the mission Jesus has for them. And so, as his own humiliation intensifies, these three disciples must realize what it means to take up their cross in following Jesus. They must realize the gravity and the significance of what was about to transpire. They must recall the radical call to discipleship of the Sermon on the Mount. They will soon see how weak and sinful they truly are.

As Mark tells us in verse 33, [Jesus] "took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled." The Greek text indicates that Jesus was very much afraid. He was deeply troubled and filled with anguish.⁷ That cup of wine, "my blood of the covenant," was about to be realized in the shedding of real blood and in real suffering on a roman cross. Jesus now tells Peter, James and John in that "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." These are bold and powerful words. Jesus commands them to "Stay here and keep watch." These words echo Psalm 115:2, "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow." Jesus was so filled with dread, that he was almost overwhelmed. This is no mere human death. This is the Lamb of God taking upon Him the wrath of God for the world his people.

Mark's point is very simple. That critical moment has now come when Jesus will either do the father's will, or else walk away and give in to temptation. Jesus had done the father's will in the wilderness and was commended at his baptism. Jesus had done his father's will when he began the last journey to Jerusalem. But this was different. Jesus was not afraid of the pain. Jesus was not afraid of the suffering.

The guilt of our sins will be imputed to him, and he will become the object of his father's wrath and indignation. Jesus will take the wrath of God rightfully meant for us. The very thought of this rejection by his father nearly overwhelms him. This is a brief interlude in eternal existence that never had or ever would occur again. Christ, incarnate, the very creator experiencing the emotion and anticipation of the created.

He bore our sorrows and our grief. Just as He did at the Jordan River, He has come to fully identify with those who will be His by obedience unto death.

In fact, Jesus was so overwhelmed by the weight of this that we read in verse 35, "Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him." Collapsing not far from Peter, James and John, Jesus now prays to his father in the most intimate of terms, asking that the hour of trial and cup of wrath might pass from him. "Abba, Father," [Jesus] said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." These words perhaps echo Isaiah 51:22—"This is what your Sovereign LORD says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again." In Isaiah's prophecy, YHWH calls Israel to awaken from its drunken stupor so as to avoid the wrath of God. And yes the "cup of staggering" is taken away because God is merciful. But in this case, the cup will not be taken from Jesus. Jesus must go all the way unto death. He must drink the cup of God's wrath—every drop of it. And yet Jesus knows better than anyone who ever lived that God's will is absolutely perfect and altogether righteous and that God certainly has the power to bring to pass all that he promises. Since the cup will not be taken away, Jesus prays. "Not what I will, but what you will." With these words his fate is sealed, and our salvation is secured. While Jesus is going through this agony, his disciples meanwhile are nowhere to be seen.

As we read in verses 37-38, "Then [Jesus] returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is

willing, but the body is weak.” These men had been with Jesus from the beginning, and now when he needs them most, they are sound asleep. This is not only what Jesus had just foretold—that he’d be rejected in his hour of trial—but this shows more than anything else that the disciples still do not grasp the significance of what is about to happen.

And so Jesus commits himself again and again to the will of his father. “Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, `Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.’” Jesus has repeatedly warned the disciples to be vigilant. He knows that he is to be arrested.

He is worried about the welfare of the disciples. But instead of watching and preparing themselves, they are sound asleep. Soon they will be overwhelmed with fear and dread.

At long last, the Sanhedrin gets its wish. Judas now appears on the scene, leading an armed party to arrest Jesus. This sets in motion those events, which would lead to the sentence of death, to the hour of trial and the cup of wrath which Jesus prayed would pass from him. God’s mysterious plan of redemption—decreed from before time will now play out before their very eyes. Everything of which Jesus had foretold was now coming to pass.

As the disciples struggle to wake up, instantaneously events take on a life of their own. In verse 42, Jesus issues them a command—really a warning for them to prepare themselves for the inevitable. “Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” There was no turning back now. “Just as [Jesus] was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.” An arrest warrant had been issued. It was now the perfect time for the Sanhedrin to take Jesus into custody because the city and the pilgrims who packed Jerusalem were all sound asleep. By the

time people awakened on Friday morning, Jesus would already be standing before Pilate. Jesus would be Rome's problem and the Sanhedrin would be in the clear.

The level of Judas' duplicity in all of this now becomes tragically apparent. "Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.'" The implication is that Judas is afraid of Jesus, and only once Jesus is placed in custody, will Judas be safe. "Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him." This is the ultimate betrayal, Judas kissing Jesus on the cheek knowing full well what would happen to Jesus. Even though Jesus offered no resistance whatsoever, the volatility of the whole situation is very clear. "Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear." But Jesus will not allow any violence. Jesus must give himself up willingly " 'Am I leading a rebellion,' said Jesus, 'that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.'"

Once Jesus uttered the words, "the Scripture must be fulfilled," that was when "everyone deserted him and fled." Whether these words pricked the disciples' consciences or not, this was the exact moment that the disciples panicked and fled into the night. Just as Jesus had said, they all "fell away" including Peter.

Verses 51-52 have long been regarded as an eyewitness account. "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." That young man who ran naked into the dark leaving his nightshirt behind is commonly believed to be Mark himself. We do know from Acts 12:12, that Mark lived in Jerusalem at this time, and Christian tradition held from the beginning that Mark actually lived in the home where Jesus ate the Passover meal.

As a curious young man, Mark followed Jesus and the disciples out to Gethsemane. In any case, it was now clear that everyone had fled—including the naked Mark—leaving Jesus alone, and in the custody of armed guards. Soon, Jesus would be

placed on trial before Caiaphus, and by morning, Jesus' fate would be in the hands of a previously unknown Roman bureaucrat, Pontius Pilate.

What, then, should we take with from this section of Mark's gospel?

There are three main parties to these events. First, we have Judas and the Sanhedrin. In these men, unbelief is displayed for all to see. Judas has betrayed Jesus in the most despicable of ways. The men of the Sanhedrin—the religious leaders and scholars of Israel—are so blind to the truth that they cannot even recognize their own Messiah when he fulfills prophecy, performs miracles, and speaks as a prophet. Even though Jesus stood in their very midst, and even though they had repeatedly heard his words and witnessed his deeds they did not believe. In fact, they have devoted every ounce of their biblical learning and legal skill to finding a way to have Jesus arrested and killed. If this is not a graphic picture of the effects of sin upon the human heart, I don't know what is. The grim reality is that if left to ourselves—without God's grace restraining our sin and changing our hearts—we too would willfully reject Jesus. We too would seek to oppose him and destroy his kingdom should it ever come into our presence and threaten our self-righteousness. The only reason why we are not enemies of Christ and his kingdom is because God's grace has changed our hearts. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, there is only one reason—God has graciously changed your spiritual condition from death to life. Before, you were just like that of the members of the Sanhedrin. After, God changes your nature so that you truly “see” and “hear” the things of God, thereby enabling you to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance.

That brings us to the second party to these events, the disciples. We are no different than they. While Jesus is carrying the weight of the world's sins on his shoulders and the critical hour draws near, they still do not get it. When Jesus collapses under the burden he's about to bear, and when he cries out in anguish, they are sound asleep. Let a few armed men show up, they wake up and flee like cowards into the darkness because of fear for their own safety. We are just like the disciples. We may affirm a thousand times that we will never stumble or fall, but each one of us will do

The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is very weak. Even though we are justified sinners, we remain weak and sinful until we die or Christ comes back, whichever comes first. We are just like Peter, or James, or John. Jesus commands us to be diligent, and we fall sleep. Jesus speaks to us through his word, and our minds wander off into who knows were. Jesus communes with us through prayer, and we lose focus and we fall asleep. Never, ever, overestimate yourselves. What the twelve did, we would do and yet we will be all Christ has purposed for us to be by the work of The Holy Spirit in the day we stand before him complete.

And then there is Jesus. Even when rejected by his family, the Sanhedrin, the people of Israel, Judas, and even by the other disciples when he needed them the most, Jesus remained obedient. He drank the cup of wrath. He endured the hour of trial. And even though he nearly collapsed under the weight of what was to come, and even though he prayed for the cup of wrath to be taken from him, his only thought was “not what I will, but what you will.” The reason why we do not despair or give up hope despite our sin and our weakness is because our salvation does not depend upon our strength and our determination to do what is right. Rather, our salvation depends upon Jesus drinking the cup of wrath and enduring the rejection from his father while suffering upon the cross. If it depended upon us not to lose focus, not to let our minds wander, not to grow sleepy, then we have no hope of heaven whatsoever. But everything depended upon Jesus not walking away from his hour of trial. He did drink the cup. He did endure the shame of the cross. He bore the wrath of God. And that is why we have a sure faith and a certain hope.

Everything depends upon the obedience and suffering of Jesus! And the record of Mark’s Gospel is exactly that. The cup did not pass from our Lord’s hands. God did not take it away. Jesus must drink it, all of it! Through it all, Jesus did not get up and walk away to safety. No, he endured it all. He did the father’s will, perfectly. And that is why our salvation is forever.