



MARK

THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER



Small Groups

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The cross is a central theme in Mark's story. He insists that we see Jesus in a particular way, as the King, who was crucified for us. And he insists that we understand our discipleship in a particular way, as people who follow Jesus in the way of the cross.

Mark is an inspired literary artist, and he gives us a picture to help us see all this. Not coincidentally, he tells us about people who were finally able to see clearly for the first time. Mark has placed critically important material about Jesus between the healings of two blind men. In Mark 8:22–26, Jesus heals a blind man, but incompletely at first. He sees, but he needs Jesus to act again so that he may see “everything clearly.” Then, in Mark 10:46–52, Jesus heals another blind man named Bartimaeus. By this point in the story, his sight becomes clear right away. “Immediately received his sight” (Mark 11:52).

In between these two eye-opening stories, Jesus teaches with new and unflinching clarity about the coming suffering and death. He gives three of these “passion predictions” in Mark 8:31–32, 9:30–32, and 10:32–34. And following each prediction of his own cross, he applies the teaching to his disciples, explaining that they will “take up their cross and follow” (8:34), that the “first must be the very last” (9:35), and that “whoever wants to be great among you, must be your servant” (10:43).

In our worship together during the season of Lent, we will reflect on the ugliness, beauty, weakness, and power of the cross of Jesus. And we will learn to walk in the way of cross-shaped love for one another.

HOW TO USE THE FACILITATOR GUIDE

This is meant to be a resource to help you guide your group through a Bible-based discussion and into your prayer response time. You'll begin with a brief introduction to the topic, followed by a warmup question, often somewhat related to the topic of the study ahead. From there you'll read Scripture together, explore questions in an open conversation (remembering to practice good listening and encourage dialogue), and close with a time of prayer with one another. We end with prayer prompts that may help you tie these passages to the needs or desires of your group, and to bless what the Lord has done in your time together.

There are likely more questions and, at times, Scripture, than your group will have time to cover. This is by design. We would rather you have more questions than you need than too few. We advise that the facilitator review the lesson ahead of the meeting and choose a few questions they'd most like to ask, so that you can skip over some questions for the sake of time. Remember, you're meeting routinely, so there will be time to circle back on these conversations again.

Please allot appropriate time for prayer at the end of your meeting. Prayer is an essential and irreplaceable part of small group. We'd rather you abbreviate the discussion and move on to prayer rather than have a long discussion and speed through prayer. That doesn't mean you can't pray efficiently (Mat 6:7), but we believe that God hears and responds to our prayers, and that we are knitted together when we pray with each other.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Dan Kidd at dkidd@ualc.org. For more small group resources, including facilitator training, visit ualc.org/smallgroups

Special thanks to our authors: Becki Bork, Brian Chandler, Elaine Pierce, Kathy Carr, and Katie Borden.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS CROSS

Mark 8:27-9:1

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 6

A quick note about week numbering. Though this is the first discussion in our Lenten series, this is a continuation of our reading through the Gospel of Mark. The previous guide ended with a “bonus” passage/discussion beyond the series journal, also numbered “week 6.” We’ve opted to number the first discussion here as “week 6” to align with how they appear in our [Mark series journal](#).

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today’s reading is another action-packed passage in Mark. Mark does not pull any punches as he describes the interaction between Jesus and his disciples, especially Peter. Three times in this short passage, Mark uses the Greek equivalent of “shut up” to describe the exchange between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus tells the disciples to “shut up” and not tell anyone that he is the Messiah. Peter then tells Jesus to “shut up” after he predicts his own death and is then quickly told by Jesus to “shut up” because Peter does not understand. As you read this passage, think about why Mark might be using such direct language to describe these encounters.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Was there a time when you heard about news or an event that you did not believe was true? Did the information turn out to be true or false?
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OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord, we thank you for helping us to make time in our week to gather together to minister to one another and meditate on your word. We pray for those that were not able to join us this week. May your Spirit guide our conversation to give us ears to hear and eyes to see. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Mark 8:27-9:1. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- After listening to this passage, what immediate questions come to mind? Are there things in the passage that are hard to hear?
 - Receive all answers. For many, Jesus referring to Peter as Satan may be alarming. Others may not understand why Jesus tells the disciples not to tell other about him.
- Why might Jesus tell the disciples to not tell anyone that he is the Messiah once they realize that he is?
 - Although the disciples have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, their understanding of what type of Messiah Jesus is, is most likely still not clear. Most of the crowds, and the disciples included, had all kinds of ideas about what the Messiah would be or do: many thought he would be a political, military leader. Jesus does not want this misinterpretation to spread.
 - The verses that follow when he describes how he must suffer are evidence that the disciples are unclear on what type of Messiah Jesus is.

When Jesus describes how he must suffer, be rejected, will die and rise again, Mark says that Jesus “spoke plainly” about this.

- Why do you think Mark described it this way?
 - Jesus’ teaching and preaching to this point had been measured and at times opaque, and it was certainly misunderstood by his hearers, including the disciples. But now, Jesus will begin making himself, his mission, and the path to the cross explicitly clear to his disciples.
 - Mark emphasizes the importance of these “passion predictions” by putting them in between two separate healings of blind men. In the first healing, the man’s sight is not fully healed initially. He sees, but he needs Jesus to act again so that he may see “everything clearly.” Then, in Mark 10:46–52, Jesus heals another blind man named Bartimaeus. By this point in the story, his sight becomes clear right away. These healings bookend Jesus revealing himself and his mission plainly.

One of the hardest things about understanding this passage is reading it when you already know the end of the story. Imagine you were the disciples hearing what Jesus had to say about this impending death. Try to imagine reading the Gospel of Mark for the first time and knowing nothing about Jesus.

- What would be your reaction to this revelation from Jesus? If you walked into a library and picked up this book called “Mark” and began to read knowing nothing about the story, what would your reaction be if the main protagonist predicted his own death and resurrection?
 - Receive all answers here. Perhaps be prepared to share your own thoughts on this. I often think about what it would be like to hear the story of Jesus for the first time since I heard it from an early age and do not remember my first encounter with this idea that Jesus knew he would die.
 - Perhaps someone in your group first heard the story of Jesus later in life and does recall their reaction when they first heard the shocking news that the Messiah must die.

For many the hardest part of this passage is the word Jesus speaks to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan” especially since Peter’s reaction seems so normal. After all, his friend and teacher has just told him he is going to die.

- Why do you think Jesus reacts so strongly? Do you think his words are harsh? Justified?
 - Receive all answers.

Although Mark does not give a detailed account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, in Matthew’s recounting of the story he uses the phrase “Away from me, Satan!” (Matt 4:10), essentially the same phrase Jesus uses here when rebuking Peter.

- Why might Jesus use the same phrasing in these two situations?
 - The Hebrew word *satan* is literally translated “adversary” and “obstructor.” When Peter is questioning that Jesus should suffer and die, he is acting like Satan in the wilderness by tempting Jesus to not fulfill his father’s will. It is clear than in this instance, Peter is not on the side of God but of men—and accuser against Christ’s true mission.
 - In Matthew’s version of the story (16:23), he includes the phrase “You are a stumbling block to me.”
- What about Peter’s response make him a stumbling block to Jesus?
 - First, you might note that Peter means rock. There is most likely an intentional pun here. A rock can serve multiple purposes. It can be a sturdy foundation, and it can be a tripping hazard that gets in the way. Jesus knew that Peter had the potential be the rock on which the church was to be built but he also predicted Peter’s denial. Perhaps this is why Jesus used such “harsh” language when rebuking Peter.
- We are not unlike Peter, are we? How do we misunderstand what the title of Messiah means? How do our expectations of who Jesus is not align with God’s?
 - Receive all answers.

In v. 34, Jesus calls the crowd back and speaks to them in addition to his disciples. Imagine you are in the crowd, you have not just heard the interaction Jesus has had with his disciples about him having to suffer and die, and now you are hearing what Jesus has to say in vv. 34-38.

- How might you react to this teaching?
 - Receive all answers. It may be worth pointing out that most likely this message was not well received. If ever there was a passage in which the hearers need “ears to hear” this would be it. Again, we read this passage very differently 2,000 years later than the original hearers and with the end of the story in mind.
 - Also consider those reading and hearing the Gospel of Mark for the first time in ancient Rome. These verses would have been very encouraging to Christians that were undergoing great persecution under the emperor Nero.

In these last verses of chapter 8, Jesus has invited the entire crowd to be his disciples.

- What does Jesus ask of those that want to be his disciples?
 - In what ways does Jesus call us to be his disciples today? How have you been called to be a disciple of Jesus?
 - Self-denial and cross-bearing describe what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus calls us to separate ourselves from what we have chosen to define us and be defined instead by our connection to him.
 - Jesus' portrait of discipleship here is anything but attractive or easy. Those who follow Jesus, associating with this vividly rejected Christ, take on an identity and a way of living that pose threats to the world's corrosive ideologies and idolatries
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PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

This week's passage is filled with a lot of strong emotions and hard phrases. Some things might be hard to understand, and others might be hard to hear.

Use the last question from the discussion questions above (What areas in your life are you allowing to define you, rather than allowing your discipleship with Jesus to define you? to help guide you in what you need prayer for?

Share with each other and pray about these things for one another.

THE FIRST & THE LAST

Mark 10:17-31

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 7

This discussion concludes with two questions meant to help us reflect on what this passage might mean for us as Christians today. Consider skipping some questions to land the plane with these final questions.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we're continuing on in our journey through the Gospel of Mark, the good news about anointed One, Christ Jesus, the Son of God. In today's passage we will hear the story of a wealthy young man who asked Jesus how he might inherit eternal life, and how Jesus' instructions caused an unexpected dilemma.

OPENING QUESTION:

- If you were awarded 10 million dollars with no strings attached, what would you do with it?
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OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord, as we prepare our hearts to hear your Word, we pray that you would meet us in this story. Use this passage and our time together to grow us in trust and joy in your Gospel. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Mark 10:17-31. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- How does the passages describe the man addressing Jesus? What is he asking of Jesus?
 - Notice that the man *ran* to Jesus [urgency]
 - He *fell on his knees* before Jesus [honor, reverence, need].
 - He addresses Jesus as *good teacher* [deference, inquisitive/curious]
 - He asks what he *must do to inherit eternal life* [he's looking for a directive on his actions, he is seeking to live forever, and he views this as an inheritance]

- Why do you think Jesus begins by challenging the man on calling him good? What might Jesus be intending to do there?
 - What is likely not evident to this man at the time is that Jesus is good because Jesus is God. Might Jesus have been subtly stating that he is in fact good because he is in fact God?
 - Jesus may also have preemptively undermined this man's self-righteousness by setting the standard of "good" to mean Godly perfection. Then, when the man declared that he'd kept all the commandments Jesus listed, it should be self-evident that this is not an accurate or honest declaration.
- Why do you think Jesus responds to this man's question about inheriting eternal life by listing 6 of the 10 Commandments? If this man *had* in fact kept these 6 commandments since childhood, would he have earned himself eternal life?
 - It's interesting that Jesus meets the man in his own premise, even though it is misguided from the beginning. We can be certain that this man was not in fact sinless in these commandments, nor the remaining 4, because "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*" (1 John 1:8)
 - Moreover, it is not our righteousness (by any measure) which saves us. Only Christ can give us eternal life.

One of the most interesting and, perhaps easily overlooked, parts of this story is Mark's description of Jesus after the man declares "all of these [commandments] I have kept since I was a boy." "Jesus looked at him and loved him."

- What does this tell us about Jesus?
 - That Jesus met someone where he was, in his misguided ideas and his own self-righteous delusion, and Jesus looked at him and loved him. Christ's love for this man, and for us, is not predicated on our righteousness or theological accuracy. Jesus loved us even when we were his enemies.
 - Which means that what follows was not Jesus' attempt to disqualify this man, but an invitation to free himself of the shackles of his possessions in favor of Kingdomly wealth beyond imagination.
- Why do you think Jesus instructs the man to "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor?" Is this a standard requirement for all of us who seek to follow Jesus or inherit eternal life?
 - It is safe to say that selling all of our possessions and giving them to the poor is not a prerequisite for us to be disciples of Jesus or to inherit eternal life. That said, when we follow the way of Jesus, when we are adopted into the family and house of God we will inevitably have to leave inferior, "worldly" things behind. Your group members probably aren't called to give away all that they own, but every once in a while, Christ calls people to just that.
 - In the case of this man, evidently his wealth was something he treasured deeply. So much so that Jesus responded to his question "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" by saying "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, *and you will have treasure in heaven.*" The man was dismayed because his wealth was a barrier, a shackle, preventing him from receiving an even greater treasure—one that he clearly felt he wanted enough to ask Jesus about.

- Why do you think the man went away sad, rather than going and doing what Jesus said he must do?
 - Receive all answers. Consider with your group reasons we might cling to the things we treasure rather than the heavenly treasures Jesus speaks about in a life lived in him.

After the man left, Jesus *“looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’”*

- Why is this the case? Why is it so difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?
 - The Bible consistently warns that wealth is a threat to the life of righteousness and the way of Jesus and condemns loving money. So often we are lured by the shimmer of worldly treasure or the false security of hoarded wealth. As a result, we neglect the gifts of generosity, practical love, and trusting in the Lord’s provision in exchange for seemingly more tangible, but finite securities.

Consider this proverb:

*Keep falsehood and lies far from me;
give me neither poverty nor riches,
but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonor the name of my God.*

- How might this proverb help guide us?

Clearly the disciples recognize the difficulty of this teaching. *“Even more amazed”* the disciples asked among themselves *“who then can be saved?”*

Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God: all things are possible with God.’”

- How might we respond to Jesus’ words here?
 - Hopefully this will remind us again that it is the Lord who makes our obedience, our transformation, our trust in him, and our eternal life possible. Our behavior cannot save us. Our wealth cannot purchase abundant or eternal life. Christ alone is our way.

The passage concludes with Jesus contrasting the treasures of “the present age” with the 1,000-times’ blessing of the coming age and the eternal life following that.

- What are some of the things we might treasure in “the present age” that are inferior to the things of the “coming age” of Christ’s kingship?
 - Consider the multitudes we receive by being part of Christ’s family together, even that though we may suffer, we can share our burdens with each other.
 - You might consider together the parable in Matthew 13:44

- How might Jesus' word "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" cause us to reconsider our pursuits of being first or best?
 - Might it be that in our efforts and striving to be the best, the first, the most _____ we might be forfeiting something in Kingdom economy?
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PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Take a few moments to prayerfully reflect on today's discussion. Invite the Lord to reveal anything that may distract you from the things God treasures. Conclude by asking the Lord to set your hearts on storing the treasures of the Kingdom of God, and that the Lord would remove any stumbling blocks that would prevent you from being all-in as you walk in the way of Jesus.

THE HEALING OF BARTIMAEUS

Mark 10:32-52

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 8

At the end of this study, there is a time for you to lead the group in quiet listening and imaginative prayer. For best preparation, read through the study so you can get a feel for the flow, and why the imaginative prayer section is written the way it is.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we will be hear several stories from Mark 10. We will begin with a third revelation from Jesus' about what lies ahead in his ministry, namely that he will be delivered over to the religious leaders, condemned and handed over to be tortured and killed, but that after three days the Son of Man will rise again. We will then hear of James and John seeking to take honored places at the left and right of Jesus' throne, and how Jesus responds to them. Finally, we will read of Jesus hearing the plea of a blind man named Bartimaeus.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- What was the best team you've ever been a part of? What made the team great?
- What is the most difficult part about being part of a team for you?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord Jesus, you are mighty to save. You came for us, became like us, and did miracles to bless that attest to who you are. You died on the cross for us, overcame death and resurrected to life for the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of a relationship and eternity with you. As we study your word, heal our blindness, and give us eyes to see, that we may behold wonderful things out of your word, to the praise of your glory. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Mark 10:32-52. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- In vv. 33-34, how is Jesus "leading the way"? What "teams" or group are you a part of? How would you respond if your leader said this to the group?

- What might cause Jesus' disciples to hesitate following him after this further revelation? Do you share these concerns?
- In vv. 35-45, what about the description of the disciples stands out to you? Do you find James and John relatable here?
- What does Jesus' response to James and John reveal about himself and his mission?
 - Jesus is not interested in finding favorites or delineating ranks. It is natural to us, in our sinful nature, to compete for favored positions, to be first in line, to be uniquely appreciated relative to others. But one of the key features of Jesus' ministry was humility.
 - Jesus himself, who had every right to be served and worshiped came as a servant to those around him.
- If you were in Jesus' position here, how might you have responded to the James and John?
- How does the humility and servant-heart of Jesus inform us about his will for us? How might we be people who protest the competitions of status or special positions?
 - In the very beginning of God's created world, God created humans to be in harmony and cooperation with one another—equally favored and without authority over one another. It wasn't until the curse of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad that humanity embraced status over one another. Jesus desires that his disciples operate in humility and harmony with each other, and that they not compete for special favor; he wants them to be servants and cooperators with one another, in unity.

Facilitator, consider re-reading vv.36-52 so the group can hear it again. Invite the group to listen for all the terms/phrases used to describe Bartimaeus and Jesus.

- How does the posture of Bartimaeus differ from the posture of James and John?
 - Rather than seeking personal honor or status from Jesus, Bartimaeus recognizes his need for Jesus' healing. He is entirely reliant upon Jesus and asks for Jesus to have mercy on him.
- When is your heart more like the disciples', and when it is more like Bartimaeus'? How does Jesus make the gospel evident to both?
 - The Gospel of Jesus invites us out of posturing for favored status and into the equality of the family of God. It frees us from comparison and envy. The Gospel likewise invites us into healing restoration.
- Does the crowd change in character over the course of the passage? How so?
 - At first they admonish and try to silence Bartimaeus. They then encourage Bartimaeus to go to Jesus.
- What might have caused the crowd to first admonish and try to silence Bartimaeus? What was the motivation for this?

- In what ways might we behavior like this crowd to a person seeking the attention and care of Jesus?
- How does Bartimaeus respond to Jesus? What does this tell us about Bartimaeus?

Imaginative prayer exercise:

Let's come back to focus on Bartimaeus. Close your eyes while I pray and read part of the passage again. Keep your eyes closed and enter into the scene prayerfully with imagination, allowing God to impress upon your heart what he has for us.

Read this prayer slowly.

A blind man, Bartimaeus, was sitting by the roadside begging. Bartimaeus, a blind man, was sitting by the roadside begging. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!!" Jesus stops and calls him. Jesus stops and says, "Call him. Call him. Come here Bartimaeus." Jesus calls Bartimaeus to himself. The crowd urges him on. "On your feet! Be of good cheer!" Throw your cloak aside and go to him. Jump to your feet and go to Jesus. Jesus says to him, "What do you want me to do for you, blind Bartimaeus, son of Timaetus? Tell me, what do you want me to do for you?" The blind man says, "Rabbi, I want to see. Rabbi, I want to see. Dear Rabbi, I want to see." (Pause for silence – at least one minute – longer if the Spirit leads.) Then say, Jesus says, "Go, your faith has healed you. Go, your faith has healed you. Go, your faith has healed you." Immediately Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Tell Jesus what you want him to do for you. Tell him now. (Pause for one minute – longer if the Spirit leads). Then say: Go, your faith has healed you. Follow Jesus along the road.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Invite your group to prayerfully answer these questions, either individually or aloud in a group of one or two others:

We will close in prayer now, by praying together in thanks and intercession for what God showed each of us, and is leading us to do. (Let them know that you will close the prayer at the end.)

Pray a closing like this.

Rabbi Jesus, thank you for calling us to yourself. Always keep our ears, hearts and desires sensitized to your call! We praise you that you call us, and care for us. Thank you that we can come to you and tell you how we need your help and healing, just as Bartimaeus did. In Jesus' name. Amen.

PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS

Mark 12:1-12

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 9

Today's discussion will have a number of questions related to the Song of the Vineyard from Isaiah. This prophetic song has profound similarities to Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants, and this discussion will help us see how they connect and how Jesus is using this familiar prophecy to make a pointed accusation at the religious leaders in the temple courts only days before they would initiate their plot to arrest and kill him.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

In today's passage from Mark 13, we will hear another parable from Jesus. This time Jesus used a familiar parable or song from Isaiah, a prophet from centuries before, to make a new prophecy over his enemies, in part predicting his own death that was drawing ever-nearer.

OPENING QUESTION:

- Do you have a favorite childhood story, a fairytale or fable, or maybe a nursery rhyme? What do you remember about it?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Lord God, we praise you for the glory of your holiness, grace, love, compassion and power. We are lost without you, and without you calling us to yourself, we never would have found you. Open the eyes of our hearts that we may behold wonderful things out of your word. We humbly place ourselves under your authority and teaching. As we open our hearts to you, grant us eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to believe. We thank you in advance. To God be the glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Mark 12:1-12. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- What prior events prompt Jesus to tell this parable? Where is Jesus and who is speaking to?
 - This encounter between Jesus and the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders occurs after Jesus had overturned the tables of the money changers and merchants in the temple courts and admonished them for making the house of prayer for all nations into a den of thieves.
 - Jesus has reentered the temple courts in Jerusalem when these leaders approach Jesus demanding that he reveal what authority he believes he is acting under. They are incensed, and Jesus knows this.

The parable Jesus tells the chief priests, teachers of the law, and the elders would likely have been familiar to them. Though this parable is original to Jesus, it is remarkably similar to a song from the prophet Isaiah.

Have someone read Isaiah 5:1-10

You might note for the group a little rhyming scheme that appears in the Hebrew:

*And he looked for justice (miš·pāṭ), but saw bloodshed (miš·pāḥ);
for righteousness (s·dā·qāh), but heard cries of distress (ṣə·'ā·qāh).*

- What does this parable tell us the “vineyard owner” expected of his vineyard and what actually happened?

In the middle of this parable (v.4), Isaiah asks a question of his audience. He invites them to speculate what would be right for this vineyard owner to do to this disappointing vineyard. He then goes on to tell them what they might have guessed would be the answer.

- What does the vineyard owner do with his failed vineyard?
 - *I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.*

Isaiah then tells us explicitly that the vineyard owner is, in fact, the Lord, and the vines “he delighted in” were Israel and Judah.

- How have Israel and Judah been like the vineyard full of bad (“stinky”) grapes?
 - God looked for justice (mis-pat), but saw bloodshed (mis-pah) / for righteousness (se-daqaḥ) but heard cries of distress (se-aqah). We can infer then that just as the vineyard owner set up the vineyard for success, Yahweh set up Israel and Judah to be people of justice and righteousness but they squandered these gifts for violence and exploitation.
- What are some of the kinds of injustices you think Israel and Judah might have been participating in? How were they being unjust?
 - The mention of bloodshed indicates that they are acting out violently against others; the cries of distress indicate there is oppression or harm being done; the building up of mansions and hoarding land estates reveal a greediness and exploitation. It is likely then, that those with influence in these

nations were using their resources to gain wealth, live in luxury, and do so cruelly and even violently.

- **What did Isaiah prophesy would be the fate of Israel and Judah?**
 - They will lose their wealth and luxuries and their enterprises will go from excess to scarcity. Both Israel and Judah were both eventually attacked, starved, defeated, and forced into captivity or exile. The few who remained in Israel faced were left with little more than rubble and barely productive land.

 - **What similarities do you hear between the Isaiah's song and Jesus' parable from Mark 12?**

 - **Who are the characters in this parable, and who do we think they represent?**
 - The landowner is God the Father; the son is Jesus. The servants sent to the tenants/farmers are likely the prophets, like Isaiah and John the Baptist. They were sent to tell Israel to be God's people and love God by loving each other and keeping his commandments. Instead, they ignored and even killed the prophets. Even after Israel returned from exile, they continued to fall short of the Lord's design for them.

 - **If you were one of the chief priests, the teachers of the law, or the elders, how do you imagine you would receive this parable? How would you respond?**
 - I think we all want to believe that we would be those who had ears to hear and that when Jesus told this parable to us, we would be brought to our senses and we would repent and follow Jesus. Certainly that happened for some of the priests and pharisees, who would eventually become Christians themselves. But in truth many of them did not.

 - **How does this parable come to be fulfilled?**
 - Jesus would be crucified by Rome at the request of the priests and pharisees. Jesus would become the cornerstone of the new temple (the community of disciples we call the capital C Church). And, in 70 CE, the second temple in Jerusalem, the physical representation of God's authority given to the priests and pharisees, was destroyed in the First Jewish-Roman War. Those who opposed Jesus and the Kingdom he was instituting lost their privilege to tend to God's people, and it was given to the Gentiles and Jesus-following Jews who became the Church.

 - **Why do you think Jesus told this parable to this group? What did he intend to do?**
 - Receive all answers. Perhaps Jesus wanted to make it clear to these leaders that the immanent destruction of the temple ahead was God's doing. Similarly, Jesus may have taken this opportunity to explicitly accuse these leaders of their sinfulness in the same way Isaiah had done generations before. Jesus may also have wanted to give those who "had ears to hear" to recognize their role in this and to repent and believe Jesus. He may also have intended to further instigate them, knowing his execution was drawing near.
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PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

In today's parable, we heard Jesus prophecy about what would come to be true, that those the Lord intended to entrust the vineyard to obfuscated their responsibility and then killed the Son. If we are honest with ourselves, there are almost certainly times we have failed to live up to the purposes and will for which God created us. But, the good news, the Gospel, is that Jesus has reconciled us with each other and with God's self.

Take time to prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to reveal instances where you failed to do what the Lord wanted. Times you missed the mark, or times you've rebelled against God. As those come to mind, allow the Lord to remind you that these are the very things he has forgiven, and the very things he has washed away so that you may be reconciled with him. At the end of your time of prayer, consider praying over your group "You are forgiven."

END OF THE AGE

Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 10

Because this passage has to do with Jesus' prophecies about things to come, these verses have been the source of a great deal of careful study, speculation, and disagreement. One of the things we will attempt to do in our discussion of this passage is to avoid speculation about *when* the end time will come, or where we are in this present age (in fact, some of our discussion will explore why that kind of guessing is not beneficial for us). Jesus is following a pattern of prophecies that came before him, where he would proclaim omens about near-coming, national events alongside cosmic or end-time events. For a brief primer on this pattern, consider watching [How to Read the 15 Prophetic Books in the Bible](#) by the Bible Project.

Our first discussion question asks about the details of the second temple in Jerusalem. It's unlikely many of your group members will know much from memory, so prepare to invite them to use Google to help them answer the question.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today's passages from Mark 13 are challenging. In fact, the whole chapter is challenging. Jesus is speaking prophetically to his disciples about events to come—omens. But, as we will see, Jesus seems to be blending short-term prophecies with end-time prophecies (much like Old Testament prophets did before him). Scholars and theologians focus much of their study on Jesus' statement in verse 30: "*Truly, I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*" Since all 'these things' have not happened, does that mean that Jesus was wrong? Or should we focus on 'this generation' and what he might mean by that. Perhaps he is talking about the Jewish people?

For us, today's focus on Chapter 13 isn't most about the timing of 'all these things,' but rather we are invited to consider what these prophecies tell us about Jesus, his mission, and the ongoing promises we've inherited as his disciples.

OPENING QUESTION:

- How do you respond to deadlines? Do you wait until the last minute and rush to get it done, or do you like to be ready early? Can you share an example?
-

OPENING PRAYER:

Ask God to help your group to focus on what is important, and to not get caught up on side issues. *Help us, Lord, to seek your face, and to be ready to give an answer for our faith. Help us to watch and pray, and to be ready for the day you are coming again. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone Mark 13:1-8. Thank them for reading.
(Note we'll read vv. 24-37 further into the discussion)

DISCUSSION:

- What details do you know or remember about the second temple in Jerusalem? Why might the disciples have been so enamored of it?
 - Note, there is very little said about the temple in the Bible, especially after Herod's major additions, completed in 63 AD. If you'd like, you can invite your group to Google "Herod's Second Temple" for more details that they can share out.
 - The Jewish historian Josephus records that some of the temple stones were as large as 50 feet wide, 25 feet tall, weighing as much as 628 tons – modern construction cranes would not be able to lift them. The temple was completed by Herod in 63 AD and destroyed only 7 years later. It was covered on the outside with gold plates so brilliant that when the sun shone it was blinding. Blocks of marble were of such pure white that from a distance strangers thought there was snow on the temple.
- What did Jesus think of the temple? Why did he highlight its destruction?
 - Jesus was prophesying the profound change that would come to the Jerusalem and the Hebrew religion when that very temple would be destroyed in 70 AD.
 - As is often the case in Old Testament prophecies, Jesus blends upcoming national events (like the fall of the temple) with cosmic or end-times prophecies.
 - You might point out to the group that in 13.2 Jesus begins a prophetic discourse that is paralleled in Mark 14-15, for instance,
 - Jesus predicts temple's destruction: Jesus is accused of threatening to destroy the temple (14:58)
 - The disciples are instructed to watch (13:5, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37): The disciples fail this instruction at Gethsemane (14:34, 37-38)
 - Jesus proclaims the Son of Man will be seen coming in clouds with great power (13:26): Jesus affirms the coming of the Son of Man to the Jewish council
- When would the signs in vv. 5-6 take place? What would they be a sign of? Have they happened yet? Are they still happening?
 - The Second Temple was completely destroyed in 70 AD. Some scholars see this and v. 30 as a 'double prophecy,' similar to those in the Old Testament that obscure national events and cosmic/end-times omens. Jesus is likely simultaneously prophesying about the events of 70 AD and

his triumphant return to earth.

Have someone read Mark 13:24-37. (You might consider beginning at v.14 if to add a bit more context for the passage)

- What stands out to you in Jesus' description of the events of "those day?" Were you a disciple in Jesus' company, how might you respond to this prophecy?
 - Receive all answers. You might recognize that the disciples' subsequent actions in this story ahead make it clear that they didn't entirely grasp what Jesus was telling them.
- What questions might you have for Jesus in response to this prophecy?
 - Certainly we have plenty of questions even today that we might like Jesus to clarify for us. You might consider resisting the urge to try to answer or speculate about these questions, but simply let them remain as questions.
- Who is the Son of Man? Why does Jesus use this title? How will he come?
 - You might have your group read together from Daniel 7: 13-18.
 - Son of man is a phrase used occasionally throughout the Old Testament, and in some cases is means to delineate between God and humanity (a human being a son of man). But, in the case of Daniel, the title is clearly given to one with sovereign power, authority, and glory over every nation and language, who approached the Ancient of Days with clouds from heaven. Jesus is describing himself, fully human, fully God and therein worthy of the honor and dominion given to him.
- What does Jesus mean when he instructs the disciples to "learn this lesson from the fig tree" (v. 28) What is this lesson?
 - Jesus may be referring back to his cursing of the fig tree as he entered Jerusalem (Mark 11:12-25). Notice that immediately following this Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out the money changers and merchants.
 - Those entrusted to be the God's image bearers and blessing to the nations had, again and again had failed this objective and it would be God's self in the person of Jesus that would take on the role of being the "fig tree" that failed to produce fruit as it was intended.
- What does Jesus mean when he prophesies that the heavens and earth will pass away? How do you imagine his hearers might have received that proclamation?
 - Jesus is repeating here a prophecy made long ago by Isaiah and later revealed to John the Revelator
 - *See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17)*
 - *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (Rev. 21:1-2)*

- This wouldn't have been a novel prophecy for those who knew Isaiah, but it is a major thing to consider, that the world and heavens we know will be replaced with something new, and the Word will endure.
- Why do you think God planned Jesus' second coming like this so no one would know the time?
 - Receive all answers. One potential reason is that God's mission to seek and save the lost is not yet complete.

Several times in the Bible we are told that the Day of the Lord is not something we can know or presume to predict. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus follows *"heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"* with *"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father [...] Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*

Paul writes to the Thessalonians *"For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."* (1 Thes. 5:2)

- Despite these warnings, why do you think so many people are tempted to speculate about when the end will come? What might be the result of such speculation?
 - Perhaps for some who feel particularly pessimistic with the current age, believing the end is near is a comfort that "this too shall pass." Some may use "the end is nigh" language to scare straight those who are not Christian or who have wandered from their faith.
 - If we cannot know when the end will come, then we will live knowing what we should know anyhow—that the things of this world are temporary and will pass away eventually, and that we can have hope and faith in the new earth and heavens to come.
- What are we to make of this last parable? What should we be doing in preparation as we are waiting for Jesus' return? How are we to watch?
 - Consider referencing Matthew 25:14-30 for a longer version of this parable. Compare this to the blindness Jesus healed in prior passages.

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Spend time sharing prayer requests, asking God to help us in our present needs, and that the Lord will prepare us for the many things he has in store for us ahead.

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Mark 11:1-11

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 11

In today's reading, we follow Jesus and his disciples into Jerusalem. Jesus' entrance is more than simply a parade for notoriety or a dignitary; this is his royal entrance. But the declaration of his authority is not the kind of authority the crowd is expecting, or even hoping for. In fact, only days later the crowds will be disappointed because, unbeknownst to them, their hope is far too small.

This week's study will include discussion regarding how Jesus confounds expectations—both in the first century and today. Be prepared to lead your group through some honest discussion about our expectations of our God—both met and unmet.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we will read about the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. In this passage, Mark asserts Jesus' authority through several images that allude back into other books of Scripture. We're going to be flipping through several books of the Bible to discover what Mark 11 says about who Jesus is, as well as what expectations he set out to confound.

OPENING QUESTION:

- Has there ever been a time when you expected events to turn out one way and they went the complete opposite? Perhaps it was a vacation that went sour; perhaps it was an event that turned into a pleasant surprise (engagement, birthday party, etc.). If you're comfortable, share about that time?
- How did it affect you when events turned out surprisingly negatively?
- How did it affect you when events turned out surprisingly positively?

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *God, we know you are the one who is beyond all comprehension. As we open your word today, would you open our hearts by the work of your Holy Spirit so that we would receive the truth of who you are, beyond all we could ask or imagine. King of Kings and Lord of Lords, we ask you to guide our time and direct our interactions with one another and with you. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have one or two people read Mark 11:1-11. Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

- What do you think is the significance of Mark explaining how the disciples' procurement of the unriden colt (v.4-6) exactly mirrored Jesus' instructions to them (v.2-3)?
 - Mark is showing how Jesus' foreknowledge and authority demonstrate not only his identity as God, but also how he is in control of the situation. Rather than coming to the cross as an unsuspecting victim, Jesus is willingly preparing to lay down his life.

Have someone read Zechariah 9:9, and have another volunteer read Revelation 19:11-16. Thank them for reading.

- How are the passages from Zechariah and Revelation similar to Mark 11:7-10? What differences do you notice?
 - Receive all answers.
- What do vv. 7-10 reveal to us about Jesus' identity, character, and intentions?
 - Eugene Boring, in his work *Mark: A Commentary*, describes Jesus' entrance in this manner: "Pilgrims were expected to walk into the Holy City at Passover. Riding, whether donkey or horse, was not a mark of humility but of royal authority. Jesus, who elsewhere always goes on foot, here makes a symbolic claim." Jesus is the king as foretold in Zechariah. He is one who comes humbly, riding a colt, as opposed to coming on war on a horse (Zech 9:9). However, as Revelation 19:11-16 communicates, Jesus is also the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who does eventually come riding on a white horse, as the one who is victorious in the war on sin and death.

In Psalm 118:25-27 we hear,

*Lord, save us!
Lord, grant us success!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
From the house of the Lord we bless you.
The Lord is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up to the horns of the altar.*

Among other echoes of this Scripture passage, the word "Hosanna" is uttered by the crowds as Jesus enters Jerusalem. "Hosanna" means "save now."

- **What do you suppose the crowds might have meant by uttering this word in Jesus' direction?**
 - Historically, it is likely that the crowds were expecting Jesus to be more of a political savior, freeing the Jewish people from the rule of Rome. It's probable that the crowds were crying out for Jesus to save them from the heavy hand of Roman leaders.
 - **What do you suppose the crowds were expecting of Jesus?**
 - Similar to above, answers will vary, but some might have expected political leadership from Jesus, a restoration of Jewish leadership.
 - **What are some of the things we expect from Jesus? How does the kingship of Jesus differ from our experiences of leadership?**
 - Answers will vary. Be sure to encourage those who share by thanking them for their honesty and transparency.
 - **How did this confound the expectations of the crowd?**
 - Jesus' goal was much greater than the political, temporal salvation of the first century Jewish nation. In willingly subjecting himself to crucifixion, Jesus demonstrated his authority by choosing to lay it down and therefore subjugate the power of death itself. Jesus' salvation was a cosmic, eternal salvation—much greater than his contemporaries dared hope for.
 - **Have you ever experienced Jesus upending your expectations or your status quo? What was that like?**
 - Answers will vary. While it is often unhelpful to deny our emotions about unmet or upended expectations, it is possible to bring our honest selves before God and yet still believe in faith that it is possible that he is doing something far greater than we can imagine.
 - At the same time, it is helpful to remember that we also recognize we have not yet seen the full consummation of the kingdom of God, where all brokenness is restored and everything is as it ought to be. We can lament the things that are not as they should be while still looking forward in faith that Jesus is going to bring about a restoration and wholeness to the world—and, by extension, our own lives—far greater than anything we have yet seen or hoped for.
 - **In what ways did Jesus' triumphal entry set the stage for the events to come (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter)?**
 - Jesus has arrived at Jerusalem at the time of Passover, where his betrayal and crucifixion will take place. He's entering being greeted as a king, to shouts of "save now." He rode on a colt to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. This is a bold entrance that would only further the religious leaders' condemnations of Jesus.
 - It also emphasizes both the kingship of Jesus and the humility of God becoming a servant human.
-

PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

As we spend time in prayer and ministering to one another, invite the group to prayerfully reflect on the discussion we've had. Invite them to ask: Is there 'yeast' in my mind that I need to discard? Is my heart in any way hardened to the Lord? If so, how so?

Spend time praying in groups of two or three, asking God for wisdom, understanding, and a softened heart.

RESURRECTION

Mark 16:1-8

FACILITATORS:

WEEK 12

Our primary focus this week: Christ is risen! Alleluia! Through Christ's resurrection fear and freedom from the 'tombs' of life are gone, death is defeated, eternal life is available to all who believe.

INTRODUCTION FOR THE GROUP:

Today we will read about the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. In this passage, Mark asserts Jesus' authority through several images that allude back into other books of Scripture. We're going to be flipping through several books of the Bible to discover what Mark 11 says about who Jesus is, as well as what expectations he set out to confound.

OPENING QUESTION:

- Has there ever been a time when you expected events to turn out one way and they went the complete opposite? Perhaps it was a vacation that went sour; perhaps it was an event that turned into a pleasant surprise (engagement, birthday party, etc.). If you're comfortable, share about that time?
 - How did it affect you when events turned out surprisingly negatively?
 - How did it affect you when events turned out surprisingly positively?
-

OPENING PRAYER:

Pray something like: *Good and Gracious God, we thank you for this time to gather. We pray for your leading and guidance as we look more closely at your Word. And we rejoice at the hope and promise given through your Word. We pray all these things in your precious name. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE:

Have someone read Mark 16:1-8. Feel free to be creative and ask more than one person to read – a narrator (vs. 1-5), the man (angel) inside the tomb (vs. 6-7), narrator (vs. 8). Thank them for reading.

DISCUSSION:

Easter is about many things: Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed!), Jesus has defeated death! Eternal life is real! All who live and believe will never die! And there's more than this.

- What do you think caused the women in this story to attend to the body of Jesus at the tomb that so early that morning? What do you imagine might have been going through their minds?
 - " The women were going to the tomb to anoint their beloved friend's dead body. It would be their act of love for the one who had loved them so well.
 - According to the Mark, the only question they voiced to one another was "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb? Certainly we might wonder things like, would the guards at the tomb let them in? Would they be arrested for following Jesus? How will it feel to see Jesus' dead body, crucified, laying in a tomb? If they had such questions, they are not recorded. The only thing Mark tells us they were concerned about was how they would get the stone away from the entrance of the tomb.
- Have you ever had an experience or situation where you were hyper-focused on one element or component, perhaps missing the forest for the trees? What was that like?
 - Receive all answers.

Thinking about it a bit more: if the stone at the front of the tomb was in place, it would prevent them from getting to their Savior. It would be a huge obstacle that 3 women couldn't possibly move out of the way. And the thought of that stone keeping them out was a true matter of concern for them in that moment. But when they arrived, the stone had been rolled away (Note: this part of the story is recorded in all 4 of the Gospels)! The obstacle of their concern, keeping them from Jesus was, taken care of, not an obstacle at all.

- In what ways have you seen or experienced the Lord taking care of otherwise insurmountable obstacles? How has God moved the "huge stones" on your behalf?
 - Receive all answers.
- What are the challenges in your life that threaten to keep you from enjoying the presence of Jesus? Or the battles that have you paralyzed by fear or trapped, that are keeping you from fully living your new life in Christ?
- Knowing that the women were concerned they might not have access to Jesus, separated from him by a large stone, why do you think they went anyway, prepared to anoint him?
 - Receive all answers. It seems clear that they had courage and they had faith. Perhaps they were so moved by their love for Jesus that they came to him without knowing how things we turn out, but with sincere hopes that they would.
- In what ways might we be called to imitate these women who came to express their love for Jesus? What obstacles might threaten to prevent us from doing so?

- Why do you think the “young man dressed in a white robe” sitting in the tomb greeted the women by saying “Don’t be alarmed?”
 - Because they were alarmed, and understandably so. I am sure they were worried about what had happened to Jesus, perhaps assuming the worst given how violently and cruelly he had been executed, and how hated he had been among powerful people. They also must have been baffled by the presence of this young man sitting in a recently occupied tomb. They needed comfort!
 - In addition to that, notice how this encounter parallels Jesus’ birth announcement in Luke: There was an angel saying “Don’t be afraid! I bring you good news that shall cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” And here we are in the early morning hours of the third day and the women at the tomb are greeted by an angel saying “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.” What an incredible bookend this is!

Interestingly, the messenger’s words did seem to comfort them enough. The women at the tomb were instructed to let Jesus’ disciples and Peter know that Jesus had gone ahead of them and would meet them in Galilee. But how could that be? He was dead! The women were confused and afraid. So afraid that they “said nothing to anyone.”

- Can you remember a time when you were gripped by fear, or overwhelmed with alarm? What was that like for you? How did it impact others around you?
 - Receive all answers. Consider sharing an example for your group to set the tone for their answers.

Easter means so many things to us as Christians. There are so many things for us to celebrate about Jesus’ life, resurrection, and kingship.

- What are some of the things you are celebrating this Easter?
 - Easter is about the empty tomb. And about our risen Savior, it’s about him always being with us; about him rolling away the stones, the obstacles in our lives, it’s about God helping us to live without fear and live fully into being the people he created us to be; it’s about following our risen King wherever he leads us.
 - There is no tomb that God release us from, no stone that he can’t roll away, no fear he can’t free us from. We need not be afraid. We can trust that the stones will be rolled away, whatever the obstacles may be. We can step out in faith, believing that God offers us life in his presence. As the song says “Death is dead. Love has won. Christ has conquered!” And he has conquered death for us!
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PRAYER AND MINISTRY:

Today's conversation allows us to look at some hard realities amidst an incredibly joyous event. No one likes to admit that they are afraid, that there are obstacles keeping them in tombs, preventing them from being who and what God is calling them to be.

Give time and space for people to share about their fears, the obstacles blocking the entrances in their lives. Listen. Encourage them that they can come before their risen Savior and ask him to roll away their stones, free them from their fear, and lead them into new life with Christ. If they are open to it, spend some time praying alongside them for those very things to happen. If they're not quite ready to pray that prayer, pray a blessing over them, and continue to encourage them in the coming weeks to seek the Lord for this freedom.

In closing, consider praying the lyrics of the song "See What a Morning"

You might use this link to listen, pray, and sing along: https://youtu.be/18_PDY22Sck

*See, what a mornin', gloriously bright
With the dawnin' of hope in Jerusalem
Folded the grave clothes, tomb filled with light
As the Angels announce, "Christ is risen"*

*See God's salvation plan
Wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead*

*See Mary weepin', "Where is He laid?"
As in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb
Hears a voice speakin', callin' her name
"It's the Master, the Lord, raised to life again"*

*The voice that spans the years
Speakin' life, stirrin' hope, bringin' peace to us
Will sound 'til He appears
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead*

*One with the Father, Ancient of Days
Through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty
Honor and blessing, glory and praise
To the King crowned with power and authority*

*And we are raised with Him
Death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered
And we shall reign with Him
For He lives, Christ is risen from the dead*

WORDS AND MUSIC BY KEITH GETTY AND STUART TOWNEND
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