

**Section Five:**  
**Mark 14-16**

*Will you see  
and believe?*

# Mark 14:1-25 *Supreme Value*

## Before you start...

There are lots of tools we could use to help us understand this passage! How do the **Structure Tool** and the **Copycat Tool** help us discover what Mark wants to teach us about Jesus' death, and how we should respond?

## ➔ What is Mark's purpose?

### Value Jesus' death as our ransom

Chapter 14 begins the final section in Mark's Gospel, which zooms in on Jesus' death. The theme of his death grows more and more prominent as we read through Mark, and as the book reaches its climax Jesus' death comes to the foreground.

This chapter begins with another sandwich structure: the chief priests are seeking a way to kill Jesus in verses 1-2, then Judas joins their plot in verses 10-11. In the middle of the sandwich is a somewhat bizarre episode where a woman pours extremely valuable perfume over Jesus' head. Jesus tells us how to interpret this episode in verses 6-9: the woman's extravagant action is right, because Jesus is about to die. Jesus' death is supremely precious, therefore what the woman does is "beautiful" (verse 6), not a "waste" (verse 4). The sandwich structure emphasises the contrast between this woman and Judas: the woman recognises Jesus' value and so pours out her most precious possession for him, while Judas is happy to send Jesus to his death for the sake of money (verse 11).

But *why* is Jesus' death so valuable? Verses 22-25 give us the answer. Every year the Jewish people celebrated the Passover to remember the Exodus when God's anger passed over the Jews, falling on a substitute instead: the Passover lamb (see Exodus 11-12). Jesus here identifies himself with the Passover meal, which is a shocking claim! He says that this ancient Jewish festival is actually all about himself and his death. *He* is the one who will die as a substitute, his blood "poured out for many", to rescue people from God's anger. His death establishes a "covenant" (verse 24), i.e. a new relationship between God and people.

Throughout this passage, it is clear that Jesus is in control of the events leading up to his death. Even the chief priests don't yet know how they will find a way to arrest and kill Jesus - but Jesus knows. These are all reasons for us to respond like the woman, deeply valuing Jesus and his ransoming death.

## ➔ Communicating Mark's purpose

### *Getting into the passage:*

To introduce the response of valuing Jesus, you could ask a starter question like:

- **What do people value most in life?**

As you go through the different episodes in the passage, you could tie them together with a Big Question:

- **What does this passage teach us about Jesus' death?**

Groups who are not so familiar with the Old Testament will need help to clearly understand the significance of the Passover as an event where God's anger falls on a substitute. It is also useful to see how this passage builds on the idea of Jesus' death as a ransom, introduced in 10:45.

Mark draws the reader into the narrative through the use of different characters. The woman is a model response, acting in an extravagant way that demonstrates the extreme value she places on Jesus and his death. In contrast, we should be horrified by Judas who betrays Jesus for money. But throughout Mark, we as the reader identify ourselves with the disciples - and Judas is one of them, as emphasised in verses 10, 18, 20, 43. With the disciples in verse 19 we ask ourselves "Is it I?" Could I also have betrayed Jesus? This reminds us of our own deep need for Jesus to die as our substitute. Try to use these different characters to help your group engage with the events of this passage.

### *Engaging with presuppositions:*

The notes on Mark 8:27-9:1 mentioned that many Chinese people are attracted to Christianity as a philosophy that will help them have a more fulfilling life. This reflects a pragmatic way of thinking: do what works and gets results.

The example of the woman in this passage challenges such an attitude: she certainly gained no tangible benefit from pouring her expensive perfume all over Jesus! Many of us sympathise with the attitude of those watching who thought it was a "waste". You could engage with this by asking:

- **What might we have said if we'd been there in verse 5?**

*For example, "The money could have been given to our children's education!" "The money could have been used to buy a bigger house!" "The money could have been given to the poor!"*

- **Do you really believe that Jesus' death is more important than these things? Why/ why not?**

## ➔ Responding to the passage

The questions above begin to engage with our value systems. To consider why Jesus' death is more valuable than the things that give us tangible benefit, you could ask:

- **How does this passage make you personally value Jesus' death?**

*There are lots of possible reasons! Jesus died for us; he died to redeem us from slavery to sin; he died to establish a new covenant between us and God; his death was part of God's plan...*

This passage could be applied to a number of different areas of life, asking the questions:

**a) What would our lives look like (in this area) if we truly valued Jesus' death?**

**b) How might our family think this is a 'waste' (v4)?**

**c) When are we tempted to think it's a waste?**

**d) How does this passage help in these times?**

For example, you could discuss application to our **use of money**. If we truly valued Jesus' death, we would joyfully use our money to support gospel ministry that proclaims Jesus' death to people who need to hear about it. If our family members are not Christians they will almost certainly think this is a waste! We might think it's a waste too - we would often prefer to enjoy nice possessions, food, holidays etc now than to invest our money in ministry whose results we may never see. But when we see the supreme value of Jesus' death, we start to long for people to hear of his ransoming death more than we long for that car, or those shoes!

Another example of an area to discuss is **serving at church back in China**. If we truly valued Jesus' death we would make sure to find a church that proclaims Jesus' death, and would be sacrificially committed to serving the people at that church. This might seem like a waste to our family members, who would prefer us to spend time with them on Sundays, or to spend the time advancing in our careers. It could feel like a waste to us as well: returnees might miss the teaching and support they received at church overseas, and find it hard to settle into a Chinese church. But when we remember the value of Jesus' death, we will see that all the hard work of setting aside time for church, learning to love a new group of people and proactively serving that church is not a waste - we do these things for the sake of Jesus who died to save us.

These are just examples; you can think of ones that are appropriate for your group.

# Mark 14:26-72 *Strength and Shame*

## Before you start...

Using the **Tone and Feel Tool** consider...

- How does this passage make you feel about Peter and the disciples?
- How does it make you feel about Jesus?

## ➔ What is Mark's purpose?

*Humbly marvel at King Jesus who died for faithless disciples*

At the start of Mark's Gospel the narrative moved quickly from day to day, place to place. But now the pace slows right down, focussing in on the night before Jesus' death. Mark is drawing the reader into his narrative, helping us to vividly feel the importance of these events as they unfold.

This chapter weaves together two main themes. Firstly we see Jesus facing his death, resolutely in control of the horrific ordeal that awaits him, unflinching in the face of opposition. Secondly, we see the disciples (especially Peter) who are full of self-confidence in verses 29-31, but they quickly fall apart and by the end of the passage they have utterly abandoned Jesus.

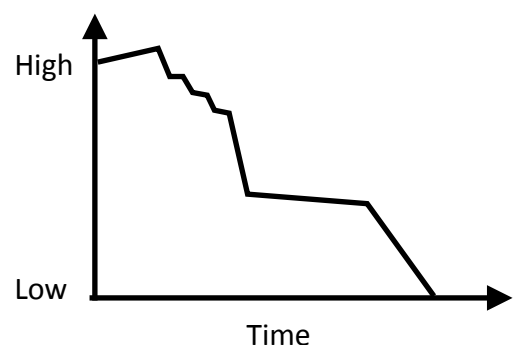
Mark deliberately creates this contrast between Jesus and the disciples to highlight that Jesus must die *because* the disciples are so faithless. He dies as their substitute, as the one who was faithful where they were faithless, confident where they were ashamed, strong where they were weak. He drinks the cup of God's anger (verse 36) instead of them.

This passage does not introduce major new ideas about Jesus or his death. Rather it is intended to make us feel how much we (as the disciples) need Jesus' death, and to fill us with wonder at King Jesus who willingly died in our place.

## ➔ Communicating Mark's purpose

### *Getting into the passage:*

You could get into the passage by drawing a graph of the disciples' emotions: they start off riding high on self-confidence and bravado, and end up in fear and the shame of failure, climaxing in verse 72 where Peter "broke down and wept."



A study on this passage could ask these two questions about each episode:

- a) **What do we learn about the disciples?**
- b) **What do we learn about Jesus' death?**

***Engaging with presuppositions:***

This passage reinforces some of the challenges we have already encountered in Mark:

- Mark 6:53-7:23 taught us that **people are basically bad**, not basically good, challenging an optimistic view of human nature. Despite the disciples' confident boasting in verses 29 and 31, they cannot even obey Jesus' request to stay awake with him for one hour. When he is arrested, they abandon him, and Peter swears three times that he does not know Jesus. They are a picture of us all: even our best intentions to follow Jesus end in failure, revealing hearts that are full of selfishness, fear and weakness.
- Mark 8:11-30 challenged the mantra "**I believe in myself**". This passage underlines the futility of trusting ourselves, showing us that we are weak, just like the disciples. It also teaches us that we need to depend on Jesus who is both strong and good. Despite his anguish, he submits to God's will, willingly taking God's anger in our place (verse 36). He does not shrink from facing death (48-49). He boldly declares his identity as the Christ, confident that he will be vindicated (61-62). In this passage there is only one hero: Jesus. He is our only hope; if we trust in ourselves we are fools.

➔ **Responding to the passage**

Our response should involve grief and repentance at our own faithlessness, and grateful wonder at Jesus. You could ask this directly through questions like:

- **When are we like Peter and the disciples?**
- **How does this passage increase your wonder at Jesus' death?**

You could also consider how this might apply to a returnee:

- **For someone who has just returned to China, how could they value Jesus' death daily?**  
*Daily confession of sin, mourning over sin, and gratitude that Jesus' death paid the price for sin. Getting into a good routine of regular prayer and Bible reading.*

You could use a case study such as this one:

Rita became a Christian in the UK and returned to China one year later, excited about sharing the gospel with her family and friends back home. However, after three months she emails you in distress: her friends think she's strange for becoming a Christian, and she's stopped mentioning Jesus to them because she's worried they'll laugh at her. She struggles to concentrate when she prays, and feels far away from God. Her parents are giving her pressure to join the Communist Party, which will involve declaring that she has no religious belief.

**What would you say to Rita from this passage?**

# Mark 15:1-39 *See and Believe*

## Before you start...

Using the **Context Tool** consider...

- How do events in this passage fulfil predictions made earlier in Mark's Gospel?

## ➔ What is Mark's purpose?

See and believe King Jesus died to deal with sin.

Here we arrive at the climax of Mark's Gospel. Mark has already shown us that Jesus must die to bear God's wrath in the place of many - but as we read this account of Jesus' death we realise just how momentous his death is. How inconceivable: the Christ, the King of Israel and Judge of the earth, is mocked, beaten, stripped and killed by people. How horrifying: Jesus cries out in anguish, facing the shame of human rejection, the agony of crucifixion, and above all the torment of God's anger, directed in full force at the Son of God. How wonderful: by his death Jesus breaks the grip of sin which has dominated all of human history, opening a way for God to be reconciled to people from all nations.

Right from Mark 1:1 the issue of Jesus' identity has been a key theme. By 8:29-33, Peter has understood that Jesus is the Christ, but failed to grasp that the Christ must die - after all, dying does not seem like a very kingly thing to do! So as Mark describes Jesus' death he emphasises repeatedly that Jesus is the Christ, the King of the Jews (verses 2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32), showing us that it is in his *death* that Jesus is most clearly seen to be King. Verse 39 confirms this: it is when the Roman centurion sees Jesus die that he makes a clear statement about Jesus' identity: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" If we remember Mark 1:1, we will be cheering at this point! In fact, it is only as Jesus dies that the centurion *can* believe he is the Son of God - in chapter 10 we saw that we are helplessly unable to trust in Jesus without his death as our ransom.

As well as paying the ransom price for sinners, Jesus' death also achieves judgement on fruitless Old Israel. We see this in verse 38, fulfilling 11:12-25 and 13:2: God tears the temple curtain in two, announcing that this old way of relating to God is defunct. By his death, Jesus replaces the temple's function, and thereby announces judgement on those who continue to trust in the temple and their own religious works.

## ➔ Communicating Mark's purpose

### *Getting into the passage:*

To get into the feel of the passage you could ask:

- **If we were organising a drama of this incident, what different actors would we need? In their audition, how should they make us feel?**

This passage contains many key details which point to the significance of Jesus' death:

- 6-15: Jesus is condemned to death and Barabbas, a traitor and murderer, is released instead. This helps us understand that Jesus dies as an innocent substitute for sinners.
- 31-32: The chief priests' words are full of irony. "He saved others; he cannot save himself" is true, but not in the way they intend! The only way for Jesus to save others is to refuse to save himself. Verse 32 highlights the issue of seeing and believing: they claim that they will believe in Jesus as the King if he comes down from the cross, but we know that it is only through Jesus' death that anyone can believe in him (this is illustrated the centurion in verse 39, see comments above).
- 33: Darkness covers the land from noon to 3pm. In the Old Testament, darkness was a manifestation of God's anger - but the shock here is that God's anger is being directed at Jesus.
- 34: Jesus cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" quoting Psalm 22:1. This confirms that God is indeed punishing Jesus. Psalm 22 is also alluded to in verses 24 and 29. This Psalm is a prayer of King David in the midst of suffering, crying out to God and celebrating the fact that God will ultimately vindicate him, resulting in the whole earth turning to God.
- 38: The temple curtain is torn in two (see comments above).

### *Engaging with presuppositions:*

Jesus' death on the cross ties together all the big ideas of Mark's Gospel, so this would be a good time to revisit any areas that group members have struggled to accept in previous passages. For example:

- 2:1-12 Did we find it hard to accept that sin is the biggest problem facing this world? Here we see that this problem is so huge it takes the death of King Jesus to deal with it.
- 6:31-52 Did we recoil at the idea of a King having authority over us? Here we see that the King dies an agonising death in our place. How do we feel about submitting to a King like this?
- 11:27-12:44 Did we dislike the idea of Jesus as the judge of his enemies? The torn temple curtain confirms his judgment, and the beauty of his substitutionary death reminds us what a terrible crime it is to oppose him.
- 14:1-25 Did we struggle to value Jesus' death above everything else? Here we see clearly how much his death cost him, and how much it achieved for us.



## ➔ Responding to the passage

Mark wants us to respond like the centurion in verse 39: to see Jesus' death, and thus believe that he is the Son of God, the mighty King. Considering the responses of different characters in this passage can prompt people to search their hearts about their own response, particularly those who have not yet turned to Jesus. After completing the table below, you could ask:

- Which character is your response to Jesus most like? Why?

Characters	Attitude to Jesus	How do people today respond to Jesus in a similar way?
Religious leaders Soldiers	Envy; hate Jesus; arrange his death. Mock him.	<i>Someone who actively opposes Christians or laughs at them.</i>
Pilate	Believes Jesus is innocent, but condemns him because he fears the crowd.	<i>Someone who thinks Jesus' claims make sense, but is afraid of what their family, colleagues etc will think, so decides not to become a Christian.</i>
Crowd	Influenced by others, they call for Jesus to be crucified (11-14).	<i>Someone who just believes the same as their family or friends without questioning it.</i>
Centurion	Recognises Jesus is the Son of God	<i>Someone who reads Mark's Gospel, sees how Jesus lived and died, and so believes that he is the Son of God and submits to him as King</i>

For Christians, the following questions help us meditate more deeply on Jesus' death:

- **How do we feel about having a King who was crucified?**

*We might be tempted to feel ashamed at the apparent weakness of his death - but rather we should delight in him.*

- **How should this passage help us when we fall in sin?**

*No matter where we are or what sins we commit, Jesus' death has already dealt with our sin. He took the punishment. We just need to keep believing in him. It is important for returnees to be clear on this, so that their faith is not shaken when they go home and face new temptations to sin and discover new weaknesses in themselves.*

# Mark 15:40-16:8 *He Has Risen!*

## Before you start...

### Using the **Copypcat Tool**:

- How does the women's response contrast with Joseph's response?
- How does Mark want the reader to respond?

## ➔ What is Mark's purpose?

Jesus Christ has risen: take courage and tell!

It seems like a strange way to end a book...

After reading about the horror of Jesus' death in chapter fifteen, the news in 16:6 is incredibly joyful: Jesus has risen, just as he predicted so many times. This shows his words to be true: he really is the Son of God! He really does have power to rescue from death! His death really did ransom sinners! The message in verse 7 is full of reassurance for the disciples: we last met them in chapter 14, fleeing in fear despite their brave assertions that they were willing to die for Jesus. Peter had even denied Jesus three times. Yet here Jesus sends them a message that he is going to meet them in Galilee, and mentions Peter specially by name. What wonderful news: Jesus offers forgiveness and reconciliation to those who let him down so spectacularly. We look forward to reading about their joyful reunion.

And yet the book ends abruptly at verse 8: the women "fled... and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."<sup>1</sup> For the reader of Mark's Gospel, their response is deeply depressing: fear is a classic bad response to Jesus (see 4:35-5:43), running away is what the disciples did in 14:50-52 because they were ashamed of Jesus, and the women disobey a clear command to tell the disciples this wonderful news. So frustrating! Why does the book end before anyone is told the good news?

Mark is a master storyteller and he intends to leave us in suspense. We are in the same position as the women; we have followed Jesus through Mark's Gospel, learnt that he is the Christ who dies to deal with sin, and we have heard the news that he has risen. So what will we do with this news? Will we follow the example of Joseph of Arimathea (verse 43) and "take courage" to tell this news to others who need to hear it? Or will we be overcome with fear like the women and run away

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest and most complete Bible manuscripts end Mark's Gospel at verse 8. A number of alternative endings have been discovered, but these seem to have been added later, perhaps because many were dissatisfied with the abruptness of ending at verse 8. These other endings are written in a different style to the rest of Mark's Gospel and do not seem coherent with the rest of the narrative. Hence these notes assume that Mark intended to end his book at verse 8.

without saying anything to anyone? (to see how Mark has pointed us to the theme of ‘telling the gospel’ throughout the book, see 1:1,14,17,38, 3:14, 4:14-20, 8:35,38, 9:9, 13:10, 14:9)

➔ **Communicating Mark’s purpose**

**Getting into the passage:**

Asking the group whether or not they think this is a satisfactory ending to the book can open up discussions about why Mark chose to end his Gospel in such an unusual way.

**Engaging with presuppositions:**

The idea of Jesus rising from the dead is a great stumbling block to many people. The Chinese education system teaches that science and reason are incompatible with miracles and religion - and this leads many to immediately dismiss the idea of resurrection as nothing more than a fairytale or myth. It is important to emphasise that Mark portrays this as a real event that happened in history - and he offers evidence to back up his case. You could present the evidence in a table such as the one below:

Main Claim	Evidence
Jesus really died	The women <i>saw</i> Jesus die, and <i>saw</i> his body buried (40,47) Jesus really died (43-45): ‘ <i>body... died... dead... corpse...</i> ’ He didn’t just faint on the cross and revive later!
Jesus really rose	The women <i>saw</i> where Jesus was buried, <i>saw</i> the stone rolled back, <i>saw</i> the young man, <i>saw</i> there was no body - this is eyewitness testimony! The women are named - people at the time could find them and ask them about it In the first century, the evidence of a woman was not counted valid in court. Therefore, if someone had made up this account they would have chosen more impressive witnesses! The big stone was moved away from the tomb (16:4) - who moved it?

With non-Christians, it is worth showing that believing Jesus rose from the dead is no blind leap of faith, but a rational response to historical facts. You could encourage group members to think of other possible explanations for the facts (Jesus didn’t really die? The disciples stole Jesus’ body and lied about it? The authorities stole Jesus’ body?) and consider which is most plausible. It is worth pointing out that Christians don’t believe that people rising from the dead is normal and easy to accept; Jesus’ resurrection is so marvellous because it is so unique! You could also send group members this Chinese article on Jesus’ resurrection to encourage them to think about the evidence in more detail:

<http://www.seaturtles.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/10/The-resurrection.pdf>

It is also good to have these discussions with Christians, equipping them to answer such questions when they come up.

## ➔ Responding to the passage

The following questions could be used:

- **What things make us afraid to tell the gospel to others?**
- **What additional factors might there be back in China?**

*Areas to discuss include: If someone has become a Christian overseas, it can be daunting to return home and explain to people that they have changed. They might fear being laughed at. They might fear family disapproval (or family who are happy for them to be a Christian by name, as long as they don't take it too seriously). They might fear aspects of the message being offensive or hard to accept, such as Jesus' exclusivity. They might fear difficult questions about the Bible or science from people who think Christianity is just a myth. They might fear their own inadequacy at sharing the message.*

- **How does this passage give us courage to tell the gospel?**

*Jesus' death and resurrection is such good news (remember the offer of forgiveness and inclusion to Peter in verse 7).*

*Jesus really has risen from the dead and is reigning as King: he is in control of people's reactions.*

*These events are historically true.*

*Jesus promises eternal life to those who make painful sacrifices for him now - so even if we are rejected for telling the gospel it's worth it! (Mark 8:35)*

- **How can you prepare yourself practically to share the gospel with others back home?**

*Consider how to share about your time overseas in a way that encourages discussion about Jesus.*

*Practice answering some of the questions you expect to be asked.*

*Select a few passages from Mark's Gospel that you could read with a friend to help them understand about Jesus (the one-to-one Bible study notes for seekers could help with this: download [here](#))*

For non-Christians, rather than talking about evangelism you could discuss reasons why they might be afraid to take the step to believe in Jesus, and think about why it might require courage to follow Jesus, for example: opposition from family, living for Jesus in the workplace, putting Jesus above their other desires and ambitions.