

The Son of Man Betrayed and Abandoned

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 14:43-52/ July 28, 2024

Introduction:

Did you ever hear phrases like these as a child or say them to you kids? “You can do anything you can put your mind to.” “You can be anything you want to be if you work hard enough.” It seems supportive at first, right? We want to encourage and empower kids to work hard and go after their dreams. But is this really helpful? Can we really do anything we put our minds to? Or be anything we want to be? I'm watching the Olympic swim meets the other day, and all the sudden, I think in my head, “I could have done that.” Really? I mean look at me compared to a guy like Michael Phelps. I need at least 6 more inches of wingspan to even come close and even then, I still don't think I really could. Why do we fool ourselves into thinking anything is possible if we simply try hard enough? That sentiment ultimately comes from pride that lives deep in the human heart. And here's the thing, I wonder how much that pride pervades our walks with Christ. Deep down, do we still think we can do something earn God's favor? Do we live like we can overcome our sin in our own strength? Family, the gospel is antithetical to that concept. The whole point of the gospel is Christ has done what we could never hope to do on our own. But we also need to discover is the gospel is greater than we think. The gospel says Christ Jesus continues to accomplish far more in us than we could on our own. Over the past several weeks, Mark has taken us through some of the final moments of Jesus' interactions with His disciples to expose our weakness and highlight the beauty of this gospel. Our passage today, in Mark 14:43-52, places the final punctuation mark on this theme as we see all the disciples fall away from Jesus, leaving us with one truth to cling to,

Jesus Christ is Our Only Hope

Mark's account of this moment is fascinating as the only characters named are Judas and Jesus. Yet, as we look closer at this story, we will discover that Judas is merely a blip on the screen and the focus of this story falls on Jesus in contrast to everyone around Him. Look at verse 43, “And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.” Note, first, how Mark connects this scene to what Jesus has just proclaimed to the disciples. After hearing Jesus speak of the weakness of the flesh and watching His battle with that weakness through prayer, we saw Him receive strength to face what lies ahead and call the disciples to rise because His betrayer was at hand. Mark records Judas immediately arriving on the scene, “while [Jesus] was still speaking.” When we recollect Jesus' prayer that the hour might pass from Him, we discover this is the beginning of that hour. Now, notice how Mark reminds us that Judas is “one of the twelve,” as though we don't know who he is. This should cause us to remember that it was one of the twelve who saw Jesus cast out demons, calm the storm, and heal the sick who betrayed Him. Think about this. At several points Judas had wondered, with the others, who Jesus was that He can do and say the things He was doing and saying. Yet, despite everything he had seen, the weakness of his flesh kept him from seeing what Christ truly had to offer. Notice also who comes with Judas, “a crowd with swords and clubs” sent by the religious ruling body of Israel. The Sanhedrin sends a mob to take Jesus by force as though He was a criminal. Interestingly, the word for “crowd” has been used for those who Jesus taught and fed all throughout this gospel. Before this, those classified by this term are never opposed to Jesus, but after this, they are always hostile to Him. Continue in verses 44-45, “Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.’ And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, ‘Rabbi!’ And he kissed him.” Mark shifts from naming Judas to calling him “the betrayer,” beginning to phase Judas out of the picture. He describes how Judas planned to identify Jesus so the crowd would know who to seize and focuses our attention on the words and actions of the betrayer. Judas referring to Jesus as “Rabbi,” meaning teacher or master, and using a kiss highlights the audacity of Jesus' betrayal. Judas is so deep in his sin that not only does he betray Jesus, but he does it using a term and act of false endearment.

Kent Hughes comments, “Judas’ infamous kiss showed how low a human heart can go.” Oddly, though, Mark leaves out Jesus’ response to Judas and never mentions Judas again after this. He serves as a supreme example of weakness but seemingly vanishes out of sight as the story shifts quickly to another climactic moment. Look at verses 46-49, “And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.’” These verses hold the climax and resolution of this story but curiously are far less detailed than other gospel accounts. Mark doesn’t record who drew his sword, where John identifies Peter. He doesn’t name the servant either. There is no mention of which ear was cut off, Jesus healing the severed ear, or Him rebuking Peter like we see in other gospels. Instead, he moves at once to Jesus engaging the crowd. The term for “robber” could refer to a revolutionary instead of a thief. But in either case, were they really coming after Jesus with swords and clubs as though He was a criminal? They could have easily arrested him at any point while he was teaching in the temple. Jesus’ response captures the absurdity of what was taking place. Everything is foolish when you consider all they had observed from His actions and teaching. Jesus, though, stops it all by reminding them that this is taking place to fulfill the scriptures. We will consider this more closely in a moment. For now, look at verses 50-52, “And they all left him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.” This story ends with a strong emphasis on Jesus being completely abandoned. James Edwards comments, “The ‘all’ in v. 50 is made emphatic in Greek by placing it at the end of the sentence: the betrayal of Judas is thus multiplied by the wholesale failure of the disciples; they all abandon Jesus and flee” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 440). Then, following this emphatic description of everyone fleeing, we find a strange scene included in Mark’s narrative. Mark details a young man following Jesus, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. This may have been someone from Simon’s house who left in haste to follow Jesus. His youth and clothing may also suggest a strength and boldness in him. Yet, after being seized himself and escaping their grip by the removal of his linen cloth, we see him run away into the night naked. This strange inclusion serves to magnify the complete abandonment of all who followed Jesus and possibly the shame and weakness associated with it. Everyone’s weakness has overwhelmed their hearts, and no one is left to stand with Jesus. We heard Jesus promise they all would fall away in Mark 14:27, and just as Zechariah prophesied, the sheep all scattered when they struck the shepherd. Church, as we look at every other character in this story, we should come to the end of any hope we place in ourselves. This scene provides an exclamation mark on the truth we have been observing over the past several weeks about our weakness. We are told God gives grace to the humble and humility will only spring forth from a recognition of that weakness. We won’t truly turn in our hearts towards Christ until we have recognized our weakness. The gospel tells us there is absolutely nothing within ourselves that we have to offer. If there is any part of your heart that still thinks you have done or can do anything for your salvation, you have not fully understood and embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this final moment with His disciples, Jesus is left alone so our gaze is set on Him alone. And as we set our gaze on Jesus, we find an emphasis on everything happening according to the definite plan and purpose of God. You may have noticed how this story is centered around this idea of being seized, as the term is repeated four times in verses 44, 46, 49, and 51, three that involve Jesus being seized. Look again at verses 48-49, “And Jesus said to them, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.’” The arrest of Jesus reaches its climax as the servant’s ear is severed. For a moment, it seems like there will be resistance, but the resolution comes as Jesus stops everything and shows that, even though this is all absurd, the Scriptures are fulfilled in this. What Scriptures are being fulfilled? In Isaiah 53:12, we hear that God’s suffering servant would be “numbered with the transgressors.”

He would be considered one of them and treated like them. Family, even the absurdity of the crowd coming to Jesus in this way was firmly within the sovereign plan of God. And this link back to Isaiah 53:12 signals the hope that all of this provides. Look at Isaiah 53:3-12 with me, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” Everything that Isaiah speaks of takes place in these final chapters of Mark’s narrative. Mark has already shown us Jesus was acquainted with grief, despised and rejected by men, and numbered with the transgressors. Moving forward, He will be esteemed as smitten by God, pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. We will see Jesus oppressed and afflicted, yet not open His mouth. He will be considered cut off from the land of the living. And they will make His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death. All of Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. Yet, notice why Isaiah tells us all of this took place. His chastisement brought us peace. His wounds brought our healing. The Lord willed to crush him to make an offering for our guilt. Because He bore our sin, His offering has made us accounted as righteous. And He makes intercession for us to this day. As Jesus stands alone in the garden, following the failure of everyone around Him, He stands as the only hope for our weakness. Family, Mark’s goal in spending so much time focusing on our weakness is not to leave us hopeless, but to ensure we run to the only source of hope. Anchor your hope deeply in the person of Jesus Christ. I love to dwell on Isaiah’s prophecies of Christ’s coming and what they all proclaim. My favorite is Isaiah 40. In Isaiah 40:10-11, we hear of good news to be shouted from the mountain tops, “Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” Oh, let that ring in your heart this morning. As our mighty Savior came, He came to tend to the needs of His weak flock. He came to gather you in His arms and gently lead you through this life. Isaiah then proclaims the might and majesty of the God for 26 verses and concludes in Isaiah 40:29-31, “He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Oh family, lean into where true hope and strength comes from. The Lord is the one who gives you strength. He keeps you from being weary. When you are weak, run to Him. Are you exhausted from your battle with temptations and sin? Lean on Christ. Are you weary from your continued ailments? Run to Christ for strength. Are you tired from difficulty in parenting or job pressures? Rest in the arms of Christ. Are you concerned about finances or other difficulties in life? Find wisdom and strength in Christ. Do you fear the future for your family or our country? Anchor your hope in Christ alone.

The further along I go in life, the more I am learning how much I need my God and Savior Jesus Christ. And church, I genuinely think the primary goal of God's Word is to constantly proclaim to our hearts "Look to Christ! Go to Him to satisfy your every need! He will give you strength! He will give you peace! Nothing else can provide what only He can supply." Jesus Christ is our only hope.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, the question for each of us this morning is whether Christ Jesus is our only hope. Judas was distracted by the cares of this world. The crowds were easily manipulated to turn against Jesus. The Sanhedrin couldn't see through their pride and ambition. And the disciples continued to lean on their own strength and failed to see their weakness. All of these responses to Jesus leave us short of receiving the full offering of what Christ provides. Family, Jesus didn't say, come to me all who are doing okay and have most of life figured out. He said come to me, all who weary and heavy laden. Our savior doesn't say come to me if you need a little extra in your life. He says come to me if you are hungry and thirsty. Christ calls all who recognize their weakness to find strength in Him. Place your hope in Jesus Christ and trust Him to supply your every need. The disciples who abandoned Jesus on this fateful night in Gethsemane eventually learned this and found strength in Him to face various trials in their lives. They eventually discovered Jesus Christ is our only hope. Trust that His death and resurrection is sufficient to provide your forgiveness and give you similar hope. Trust that He will walk with you through this life just as He has promised. And trust that He will lead you through this life by His grace until you depart to be with Him forever. As always, respond as the Lord leads. You can come down to kneel before him or receive prayer from our prayer team who you will find worshipping on the front row or bottom of the stairs in the back. You can also sit and reflect as long as you need or stand and sing of the goodness of God. Anchor your hope in Jesus Christ today and find out just how sufficient His grace is for you. Would you pray with me as we lean into God's grace together?