

The Weekly Word
January 4-10, 2021

Greetings, Reading the Bible readers. I hope you are enjoying the New Year! Our reading will take us through Mark 13 & 14. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, January 4: Mark 13:1-31 NIV2011

¹ As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

² "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

⁵ Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

¹² "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ¹³ Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

¹⁴ "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation'^j standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. ¹⁶ Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. ¹⁷ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! ¹⁸ Pray that this will not take place in winter, ¹⁹ because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.

²⁰ "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. ²¹ At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

²⁴ "But in those days, following that distress,

*“the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’”*

²⁶ *“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.
²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.*

²⁸ *“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

This lengthy section is about the end times. Looking through the lens of the destruction of Jerusalem (verses 14-19&25) Jesus talks about the end when He will return (26-27).

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

There are some gems in this reading that connect to life everyday. Here are two that connect to God’s people in all times and places:

¹³ *Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

Following Jesus involves sacrifice and risk. Some people may turn their back on us when we say ‘Yes’ to following Jesus. Others may even do worse. I have never lived in a repressive regime, many sisters and brothers have, and the reality of being turned in as a Christ follower is all too real. Jesus’ words surely aided many in remaining faithful even under relentless pressure. To widely varying degrees all Christ followers feel the pressure to cave in; Jesus’ call to stand firm *to the end* is meant for all of us. This is a reminder of grave importance, especially if we are asked to live through persecuting times.

²³ *So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.*

Being watchful, being on our guard is an oft-repeated refrain by Jesus. In this case Jesus is warning up to beware false messiahs, people claiming to be Him. Don’t fall for the charlatans...cling to Jesus no matter what comes. He will be with you through the good and bad times.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Be watchful and stand firm with Jesus. Discipleship is not an easy road; the way of Jesus can be harsh, just remember the road Jesus walked. Stand with Him; stand for Him no matter what response you receive from others. Jesus is the Way. Never forget this!

Tuesday, January 5: Mark 13:32-37 NIV2011

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

After teaching about end times, Jesus wraps up as He often does by bringing the point directly to His listeners. No one knows the day or hour so be on guard! Be alert! Keep watch... Watch!

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

End times theology can get us all wrapped up in knots... we spend all our time wondering when Jesus is returning, trying to pinpoint the day and the hour. This, however, misses Jesus’ important point. No one knows when it will happen. Instead of worrying when, make sure you are living faithfully as you should now. Jesus says this in at least 4 different phrases

Be on guard!

Be alert!

Keep watch...

Watch!

It is not difficult to understand the point Jesus is making... pick any of the 4 phrases.

This is a message the church in every location and every age needs to hear. BE ON GUARD... live faithfully because His return is coming. Keep watch, so you will be ready.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

God is calling out to me to keep my eyes on Him so that I can be found ready, waiting and busy for Him. It may be that I am alive when Jesus returns. It may be that God chooses to bring me to Himself through earthly death. I do not know which is God’s plan for me and I do not know when God’s timing will be. What I can do is live faithfully so that I am ready!!!

This is the Spirit’s word to me today... AMEN.

Wednesday, January 6: Mark 14:1-26 NIV2011

¹ Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ² “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?

⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And

they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. ¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

¹² On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴ Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

¹⁶ The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

¹⁹ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

²⁰ “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

²³ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

²⁴ “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. ²⁵ “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

With chapter 14 we enter the climax and point of Mark’s gospel. Mark begins weaving this retelling of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Like a good writer, Mark sets the various elements of the scene.

He begins by setting the time and the fact that the chief priests and teachers of the law have had enough with Jesus and are scheming to kill Him but not in a way that will disrupt the Passover festival or rile the people.

Next we find Jesus at a friend’s house for dinner when an unnamed woman comes in and pours expensive perfume on Jesus’ head. People murmur why the waste of expensive perfume, it was worth a year’s wage. Jesus rebukes them and offers another important element of building story; ...you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on

my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. How long would the scent of the perfume last, a couple of days? A week? I cannot say but Jesus gives a clue that what He has said about His coming death is soon upon them.

Next comes a third scene shift, Judas conspiring with the Jewish leaders to deliver Jesus to them.

The first day of the festival of unleavened bread is here and Jesus sends disciples to find the man with whom He has already made arrangements. His disciples are to make sure everything is as it should be. When evening arrives Jesus and the Twelve arrive for the meal.

As they share a normal Passover meal Jesus injects that one of the twelve will betray Him. It is worthy to note that all twelve were saddened and all wondered, *“Surely you don’t mean me?”* I take from this that they weren’t quite sure what Jesus was saying and each had a wondering if he was the culprit about whom Jesus was talking.

The fate of the betrayer is grave.

In a twist to a normal Passover meal Jesus institutes what we now refer to as the Lord’s Supper or Communion or the Eucharist. For Christians the Passover meal is now about Jesus’ body and His blood of the covenant. I can only wonder how the heads and hearts of the disciples must have been spinning with Jesus’ words about His body and blood.

The final line by Jesus adds yet another element of the story. *“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”* The kingdom of God, about which Jesus has been preaching is coming! Previously the kingdom of God was ‘near.’ Now the next time Jesus drinks wine the kingdom of God will be present. I doubt they understood but the Spirit will remind them of this when it is necessary.

A hymn finishes the celebration.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

I don’t know how to answer this. There is so much and certainly more than one teaching in this rich passage. I choose to focus on the Lord’s Supper...

Jesus is the Passover sacrifice for the people of God. The bread is His body and the wine His blood of the covenant. This will become more easily understandable as the cross occurs. Jesus will become, for all who believe, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (see John 1:29 & 1:36)

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

As I think over this portion of the gospel, I see Jesus masterminding all the details. Choosing what and when to tell His disciples, the arrangements He has made and the meaning of everything... What the Spirit is speaking to me through all this is that God has my life in His hands as well. And like the disciples I might not always understand what He is doing in my life and around me, I trust that God knows. And He is leading me like He led the disciples.

In this I take heart as the world and I continue to walk through the strange and different times brought on by the Coronavirus. Thank you, Lord, for being in control...

Thursday, January 7: Mark 14:27-42 NIV2011

²⁷ “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written:

“ ‘I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.’ ”

²⁸ *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”*

²⁹ Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

³⁰ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The Passover celebration has ended; Jesus and His crew are on their way to their quiet spot at the Garden of Gethsemane. Surely the saying of Jesus during the meal and the alterations to the Passover celebration must be ringing in the disciples’ ears and tumbling in their thoughts.

Jesus begins telling them they will fall away. Throughout His ministry Jesus has warned the disciples about things to come. The disciples have no idea what will play out the rest of this evening. I love the hope-filled line by Jesus, *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.*” Jesus knows the Father has a hold of them and will not let them go.

Peter, the mouth of the group, speaks up proclaiming his allegiance, even to the point of death. They all agree.

As they arrive at Gethsemane, Jesus grabs Peter, James and John and He confides in them that His heart is heavy and He asks them to keep watch. Were they to watch for Judas or watch as in prayer? The text is unclear. Jesus goes a little further on and falls in prayer, agonizing over what is to come and pleading with the Father to allow the cup to pass. Jesus doesn’t end His prayer with that thought but goes on to pledge allegiance to the Father saying, *Yet not what I will, but what you will.*

He returns to the trio and finds them asleep. He scolds Peter and then bids him to *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.*

Jesus returns to prayer and when he comes back they are asleep again. A third time Jesus goes to prayer and again returns to the sleeping trio. At this point the time had come and the betrayer was arriving.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

It is far easier to boast about one's faith than to hold onto faith when tired, stressed or confronted. Jesus warns the disciples that a fall is coming, but they do not listen. And in the case of Peter, when Jesus bids him to pray for strength; Peter falls prey to his humanity instead of praying he falls asleep exhausted. Jesus is warning us all that we are weak and likewise should pray that we don't fall into temptation and sin.

Also, through His prayer Jesus is modeling for us that God's will is preeminent, not comfort or ease. Jesus is also telling us that God's will could involve suffering... if Jesus suffered and God did not remove the coming pain we, too, might be called on to suffer for kingdom reasons.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

Watch... keep alert... keep my eyes open and my ears listening to the beckoning of the Father or the approach of the enemy. If it is the enemy I need to be armored through prayer to be able to stand his onslaughts or if it is the beckoning of the father, then I should be armored through prayer to have courage to follow.

Friday, January 8, 2021: Mark 14:43-65 NIV2011

⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him.

⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸ "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?" ⁴⁹ Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. ⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

⁵⁷ Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" ⁵⁹ Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer?"

What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?"⁶¹ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

⁶² "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

The horror of Jesus' arrest, crucifixion and death begins in earnest in today's reading with a kiss. How ironic that Jesus' sacrifice begins with a kiss, an action of human friendship and affection.

Judas arrives leading a mob sent from the Jewish leaders. There are some guards in the bunch but the description feels much more mob-like carrying *swords and clubs*. In the melee someone cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant (other gospels fill in this incident, with Peter as the perpetrator and Jesus subsequently healing the servant's ear).

At this point everyone deserts Jesus (His prophecy from the meal is fulfilled)... Jesus is left alone with His captors. Some commentators have speculated that the boy who fled naked was Mark, the author of the gospel. This cannot be corroborated from biblical or extra-biblical evidence.

The mob leads Jesus away and Peter follows *at a distance*. Commentators note that the 'at a distance' comments could be a small fact that connects well with the intended audience of believers in Rome during a time of persecution. In the church there are those who are following Jesus and others who seem to 'follow Jesus from a distance' and the church needed to wrestle with how to treat and welcome people who followed Jesus at a distance... Again this fits the narrative well, as does the rest of Peter's story, which will unfold in the coming readings.

The chief priest and Jewish leaders bring in people with trumped up testimonies. No clear accusable action results. To the direct question, *"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"* Jesus answers, *"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

The Jews have what they sought, blasphemy is declared. Beating and mocking commences...

Studies of the 'trial' before the chief priests revealed that this was a sham, a kangaroo court that broke numerous Jewish legal conventions, from happening at night to contradictory witness and so forth. It was merely a show to give the pretense of legal action.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

This passage is part of the larger crucifixion narrative, which is the focus of Mark's gospel and God's redeeming act for the salvation of humankind.

In terms of meaning as a follower of Jesus I marvel as what He endured to purchase my pardon. God's wrath and righteous judgment of sin is great.

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

I sit with the text open on my lap on Christmas eve, the juxtaposition of Jesus' incarnation and opening act in His atoning sacrifice remind me that this is why Jesus came to live among us for a while. His was not a joyous stroll among humanity. He came to fulfill a specific purpose. Every moment from Jesus' conception in Mary to His final breath was an act of love to save me and all who put their faith and trust in Him, who follow Him, not at a distance but closely and devotedly.

The Spirit is calling me to devoted following of Jesus...

Saturday, January 9: Mark 14:66-72 NIV2011

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by.

⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

⁶⁸ But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." ⁷⁰ Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

⁷¹ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

What does the passage say? (What is this passage about?)

Mark records Peter's denial story. Three times he denies knowing Jesus. With each successive denial the adamancy grows. As soon as the last syllable of denial crosses his lips, a rooster crows triggering the memory of Jesus' word to him earlier that evening, "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." At that point the weight of his denial crushes him to tears.

What does the passage mean for all Christians? (The meaning of the passage needs to fit believers everywhere in the world.)

Boasts can flow so easily from our mouths... boasts are notorious for getting us in trouble.

If commentators are correct that Mark is largely writing down the stories he heard from Peter, which means that Peter is the origin of this story. This means that this story was part of Peter's gospel witness. In other words failure was part of his story.

Who of us hasn't sinned greatly? I know I have. And seeing Peter in the throws of sin actually gives me courage. If Jesus will forgive this GREAT a sin, then Jesus can forgive my sins.

If Peter can rise from this sin to become one of the greats in church history, then I can rise from my sins and by God's grace be used by the Lord!

There is an important message in the fact that Jesus uses mere mortals to advance His kingdom. Failure need not be the final word. Redemption comes even to the redeemed who fall. This is gospel truth!

What is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this passage?

God's word to me...'Come follow Me, imperfect as you are Bill, come follow Me'. When you fall I will pick you up and dust you off and send you out again...

Today's reading is a message of hope and God's triumphant love and mercy!!!

Sunday, January 10, 2021 - Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for an audio link to my sermons, <https://livinghopect.org/resources/audio-sermons>. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days. We also livestream our full services which are up on our YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKURRsbX92qqIFgDF1iRWA>