

Week 19: Passion Week: Thursday Night, Continued

Hook



Main Point: Jesus was denied by His friend, rejected by the crowd, and mocked by His enemies.

In 1976, the first consumer VCR – the JVC HR-3300 VIDSTAR – hit the market and forever changed how people watched television and movies at home. For the first time, viewers could record their favorite programs and *fast-forward* through commercials, slow moments, or scenes that were simply too difficult to watch.ⁱ

Q: Is there a movie you truly enjoy but still fast-forward through a particularly sad, painful or anger-inducing scene?

Transition: In today's passage, we come to some of the most heart-wrenching moments in the story of redemption – Jesus abandoned, mocked, and beaten. These are scenes many of us would prefer to skip. Yet if we want to fully appreciate the depth of Christ's love and the weight of His sacrifice, we cannot fast-forward past His suffering. We must slow down, look closely, and let the reality of His pain deepen our understanding of the Gospel.

RECAP: In part 1 of Mark, the story moved quickly, showing the great power and urgency of Jesus' mission: His preparation for ministry (1:1–13), His ministry in Galilee (1:14–9:50), His journey to Jerusalem (10), and His ministry in Jerusalem (Mark 11–13). Now that we have come to the Passion Week, the story slows dramatically, showing us that this is where Jesus' ministry was leading all along.

In lesson 17, we saw the events of Tuesday through Thursday night – the plot to kill Jesus, His anointing at Bethany, Judas's betrayal, the Passover dinner, and Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial. In Lesson 18, we saw the events of later Thursday night, when Peter, James and John couldn't stay awake with Jesus in the garden, His betrayal

by Judas, His arrest, and His sham trial before the Sanhedrin, which was actually illegal by their own standards. In this lesson, we'll see more of what happened Thursday night, before the last two lessons about what happens on Friday and Sunday.

Now things really slow down as we see Jesus endure the Crucifixion. This is the climax of the story, the moment where all hope seems lost. Except we know He will rise again. Which is what the last lesson is about – Resurrection Sunday and the hope and mission we all find in it.

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Book

Main Point: Jesus was denied by His friend, rejected by the crowd, and mocked by His enemies.

Mark 14:66–72 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Even the most committed disciple can have moments of weakness.

Q: Why did Peter deny knowing Jesus after swearing he wouldn't?

Q: What is the significance of Peter's denying Jesus three times, not just once?

Q: Why do you think Peter lacked the confidence to stand up for Christ?

Very few stories are found in all four Gospels, but the story of Peter denying Jesus is one of them. It is a key moment, showing us that even the most devoted disciple of Jesus can be swayed by fear. Throughout the Gospels, Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples and acted as the leader of the group. He often answered Jesus' questions for the whole group and was the one to make the great confession that Jesus was the Christ (Matthew 16:16). Peter was the one who stepped out of the boat to walk on water to Jesus (Matthew 14:28–29). He was the one who drew his sword to stop Jesus' arrest (John 18:10). And he was the one who followed Jesus that night into the courtyard of the high priest (Mark 14:54). But he followed "at a distance."

Earlier that night, Jesus had said one of them would betray Him and they all pushed back, saying, "Is it I?" (Mark 14:18–20). Then He told them they would all fall away from Him (Mark 14:27). Peter was adamant that even if everyone else turned away from Jesus, he would never! Peter tended to be bold, and this time was no different. Yet Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him not once but three times that night, before the rooster crowed. Peter responded emphatically that he would never deny Jesus, even if he had to die with Him (v. 31).

Peter felt confident in the safety of the Upper Room at the Last Supper that he would never deny Jesus. But even a little later that night, his weakness started to show. In the garden, Jesus asked Peter, James and John to "keep watch" with Him, the language of the night watchmen whose job was to look out for danger. Yet they fell asleep, not just once but three times (v. 32–42), pointing ahead to what Peter would do later – deny Jesus three times.

When Paul described the spiritual battle we all face as Christians, he told believers to “stand firm,” using some variation of that phrase four times in six verses and closing by imploring us to pray at all times in the Spirit and to “keep alert” with perseverance (Ephesians 6:10–18). There is a connection between prayer and having the strength to stand firm in times of spiritual warfare.

When Jesus was arrested, Peter initially tried to fight it; he drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant. At that moment, he showed great courage! But Jesus told him to put the sword away, and when He was arrested, all the disciples fled (vv. 43–50). Peter went from courage to fear in an instant. Like the rest of the Jewish people of his day, Peter had initially believed Messiah would come to lead an uprising against Rome and take back the throne for Israel.ⁱⁱ But Jesus had told His disciples, three times in this account, He would go to Jerusalem and die (8:31–33; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). Peter had been ready to fight for Jesus, but now he just followed at a distance to see what would happen.

Peter heard the high priest ask Jesus, “Are you the Christ?” (v. 61), exactly what Peter had confessed he believed (Mark 8:27–30). But when Jesus answered yes and added that He was also the Son of Man, the divine figure from Daniel, the high priest called it blasphemy, and “the court” condemned Him to death.

Peter was scared. When the servant girl called him out, twice he denied it. The third time, he even invoked a curse on himself! He was so consumed with fear; he didn’t realize what he was doing until the rooster crowed.

Peter wept bitterly at his own failure to stay loyal to Jesus. It would have been a long dark night for him, rehearsing his failure over and over in his mind. No wonder he ran to the tomb when he heard about the Resurrection (Luke 24:12). When Jesus appeared to His disciples after He was raised, He pulled Peter aside and gave him three opportunities to declare his love for Him, the same number of times Peter had denied Him (John 21:15–17). Jesus was showing Peter grace, but He was also teaching him a lesson. The first two times, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you *agape* me?” and Peter responded, “You know I *phileo* you.” *Agape* is the unconditional God-type of love; *phileo* is just brotherly love. The third time, Jesus also switched to *phileo*. Peter admitted he was not capable of loving Jesus the way Jesus loved him.

The Peter who was so confident at the Last Supper was humbled by his denials, which is exactly the position Jesus needed him to be in to carry on the ministry to “feed my sheep.” Peter learned a valuable lesson. Later he would tell his churches to always “be

on the alert” because Satan is prowling around looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). We must always stay alert, being careful not to think we are above temptation. If we get too confident, thinking we’re standing firm, we’re much more likely to fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Q: How have you seen people deny Jesus by their words *or actions*. How could prayer and staying alert spiritually have helped prevent it?

Q: What spiritual practices, habits or disciplines can help keep you spiritually alert?

Mark 15:1–15 [Read]

Talking Point 2: The people did not understand who Jesus was and why He came.

Q: Why did the crowd want Pilate to release Barabbas over Jesus? What does this tell us about the crowd? What does it tell us about humanity in general?

Q: How do we relate to Barabbas?

Because the overnight “trial” they had was illegal, the religious leaders reconvened the next morning to bring Jesus before Pilate. The Jewish leaders were not allowed to execute people under Roman rule (John 18:31), so they had to take Jesus to the Roman governor and convince him to execute Him. Roman officials like Pilate would hear cases from dawn until about noon, so they wanted to get Him there as early as possible. Typically, Pilate held court in Caesarea, the political capital of Judea, but during the festivals, he stayed in Jerusalem because it was the religious capital and Jews made pilgrimages there from all over the world.

Pilate would not have cared about their *religious* concerns about Jesus, so they had to give him another reason. Saying Jesus claimed to be “King of the Jews” would have been a charge of sedition and treason against the emperor. When Pilate asked Him, Jesus only answered, “You have said so,” leaving His answer ambiguous. The chief priests accused Him of “many things,” hoping something would stick. Pilate asked Jesus whether he had a defense against their accusations, but He remained silent. Roman law did not consider silence to be an admission of guilt, but it was very unusual for someone accused of a crime to not to make any kind of defense.

Jesus remained silent to fulfill the prophecy – He did not open His mouth; “like a lamb led to slaughter and a sheep before its shearers” (Isaiah 53:7). This emphasized the injustice of what was happening to Him and the corruption of the religious leaders. It also emphasized His total submission to the Father’s will. He didn’t fight back; He didn’t

run away; He didn't call angels down to rescue Him. He didn't even give the brilliant defense He could have, which would have convinced Pilate to let Him go. He let it happen because He knew it was the Father's will for Him, and He knew what His death would accomplish.

To gain the people's favor, Pilate had instituted a custom of releasing one prisoner of the people's choosing during the festivals. Pilate had figured it was the religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead, not the general public, so he offered to release Jesus. But the religious leaders had riled up the crowd against Jesus, and they asked for Barabbas instead. Barabbas was a murderer, a political criminal, a revolutionary who had been involved in an insurrection against Rome.

There is a stark contrast between Jesus and Barabbas. Barabbas's name means "son of the father," but Jesus was the real Son of the heavenly Father. People believed Jesus had come to lead a revolt, but Barabbas actually was involved in a revolt. He had done what the people wanted Messiah to do, but his revolt had failed. Jesus came to lead a different kind of revolution, and His revolt succeeded. Barabbas's revolt put hope in the earthly kingdom of Israel, using violence and rebellion. Jesus was the king of the spiritual kingdom of God, using love and self-sacrifice. Barabbas fought with violence; Jesus taught non-violence and love of enemy. Barabbas took life; Jesus gives life. Barabbas was guilty and Jesus was innocent, yet Barabbas was freed while Jesus was condemned.

The crowd's choosing Barabbas shows us that the people did not understand who Jesus was and why He came. They were looking for Messiah to be like Barabbas, the leader of a violent political rebellion. It also paints a picture of the theological truth of what Jesus' death accomplished for all of us – the innocent man took the guilty man's place and died for us (1 Peter 3:18).

Q: What false expectations do people have of Jesus today? What kind of "savior" or leader do some people want Him to be that He is not?

Q: What misconceptions do people have about Christianity today?

Mark 15:16–20 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Many people mock Jesus and reject Him as king.

Q: Why did the soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews? What was ironic about that?

Q: What does this tell us about those who reject Jesus as king? Those who mock our faith?

The soldiers took Jesus away from the crowds to beat Him. They called together the entire battalion, 600 soldiers. Because they were treating Jesus as a revolutionary who had called Himself king, they beat and mocked Him to make an example for those who would try to revolt against Rome. Because Jesus was not a Roman citizen, He was not exempt from beatings, as Paul was later. Once Jesus was handed over to the soldiers, they had enormous freedom to do whatever they wanted with Him. Especially in Judea, which Rome considered a rebellious region, soldiers beat prisoners brutally. Most Roman soldiers were hostile toward Jews and prone to violence. This was not an unusual beating; it was normal for political prisoners.

What made it unusual was that the person they were mocking actually was King of the Jews. And not just King of the Jews but King of the whole universe. They just didn't know it. They put a purple robe on Him and gave Him a mock crown of thorns, mimicking the laurel wreaths worn by Hellenistic rulers, but they pressed it into His head to cause pain and bleeding. As they beat Him, they spat on Him – a sign of great dishonor – while they knelt in fake homage to Him. Remember this was a whole battalion. We don't know how many of them participated in the beating and how many watched, but it would have been intense. The whole scene was deliberate political mockery, a parody of the royal homage they paid to Caesar. To them, Jesus was a false "king," and humiliating Him reinforced Rome's dominance. They were squashing the Jews' hopes of liberation through their Messiah. They also enjoyed it; this was a form of sick entertainment for soldiers at the time.ⁱⁱⁱ

Their mockery holds a deep irony. They sarcastically honored Him, but He is the true king. They knelt in mockery, but one day every knee will bow (Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10–11). They put a crown of thorns on Him, but one day He will be crowned in glory and honor (Hebrews 2:9). They struck Him, but by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). Their mockery fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures about the Suffering Servant who did not resist mocking and spitting (Psalm 22:6–8; Isaiah 50:6; Isaiah 52:14; 53:3; Micah 5:1).

Theologically, the soldiers mocking Jesus ultimately reveals the world's rejection of the true King of the Universe. So many people over the centuries have mocked Jesus and those who claim Him as their Savior and King. Even today many of us have friends, family, coworkers and acquaintances who mock our faith in Jesus. Yet one day, they, too, will bow before Him whether they like it or not (Philippians 2:10–11). Those who mock God will reap what they sow (Galatians 6:7). It is our mission to show them the real Jesus so they will want to worship and follow Him before they are faced with that moment at the Judgment Day.

Q: How can we respond when people in our world mock Jesus and/or Christianity?

Q: How can we show them how good Jesus is and how He really is King of the Universe?

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Took

Main Point: Jesus was denied by His friend, rejected by the crowd, and mocked by His enemies.

In light of what Jesus endured on our behalf, apathy in praying for the lost feels almost unthinkable. The Cross confronts us with the tremendous cost Jesus paid to bring us to God. That reality should stir in us a deep, persistent and heartfelt burden for those still far from Him. British pastor and famed theologian Charles Spurgeon captured this urgency when he said:

"If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped about their knees, imploring them to stay ... Let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for."^{iv}

Teacher, challenge your LifeGroup to pray consistently and compassionately for the lost within their circle of influence. Encourage them to identify people who may have seemed hostile to Christ – people who, like those in today's passage, have rejected or even mocked Him. Instead of responding with frustration, lead your group to respond with Christlike compassion, praying for them with greater fervency.

Close your LifeGroup meeting by creating intentional space for members to lift up these names before God, praying that He would soften hearts, open eyes, and draw the lost to Himself.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on how the crowd and the soldiers felt the night they condemned and mocked Jesus. The soldiers thought they were on the right side, beating a dangerous rebel who was causing problems for Rome. The crowd thought they were on the right side, siding with the religious leaders over Jesus. How many people today think they are on the right side when they reject Jesus or even mock Him or our faith? How can you show them who Jesus really is in a way that they will be drawn to Him? How can you pray for them?

PRAY for God to help you be a light to the world, showing them how good Jesus is and how He is the true King of the Universe. Pray for the Church all over the world to be a light to the world, showing God's goodness and love and drawing people to know Him. Ask God to reveal Himself to the world in supernatural ways even beyond our witness.

Pray for the hearts of those who mock Jesus to be softened and open to hearing the Gospel.

ACT: Praise Jesus as king. Take extra time this week to praise Jesus as king. That can be through singing worship music, writing your own psalm (poem) of praise and adoration, just praising Him in prayer, or even publicly talking about Him as king to those who don't know Him. Focus this week on making your actions the opposite of the soldiers who mocked Jesus as king and the crowd who rejected Him.

ⁱ https://kodakdigitizing.com/blogs/news/when-was-the-vcr-popular?srsId=AfmBOormkJZPmo_8rLBeic2GR5JIZYbZwJHwrVLaDsD02jvocIE9IkIq

ⁱⁱ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), footnote for Acts 1:6

ⁱⁱⁱ Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998).

^{iv} <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/74181-if-sinners-be-damned-at-least-let-them-leap-to>