

# MARK

## Week 6: Mark 13-16

### *How to Use This Discussion Guide with Your Group*

Start with a prayer and read the portion of the text from your Bible or an app (use whatever translation you're comfortable with, but we suggest the New Living Translation (NLT) or the English Standard Version (ESV)). Then read the summary paragraph(s) and talk through the questions for that section. You can work through this guide in one session or spread it out over several – whatever works for your group. As you read and discuss, consider how what you're reading applies to your life today. Don't forget to close with prayer!

## **14:12-26: THE LAST SUPPER**

As Jesus arranges his last meal with his disciples, we sense that he is in control. He knows about the room, just as he knew about the colt. He also knows who will betray him.

As Mark tells the story, this is a Passover meal. There is no mention of roast lamb or bitter herbs, but Jesus' thoughts are on the meaning of the festival.

The oldest account of the Last Supper is not in the Gospels at all, but in one of Paul's letters:

*The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:23–25).*

From earliest times, Christians have broken bread and shared wine to remember the death of Jesus. Sometimes this is called the Eucharist ('thanksgiving'); sometimes it is 'Holy Communion' or 'the Lord's Supper'. In breaking and pouring and sharing, the church looks back to the death of Jesus in much the same way as the Jews look back to the exodus from Egypt.

Even as he faces death, Jesus looks forward to new life in the kingdom of God. When he next drinks wine with his disciples, they will be celebrating God's victory and the dawn of the Messiah's reign.<sup>1</sup>

1. How does this meal relate to the Passover (see Exodus 12)?
2. How much do you think the disciples understood when Jesus spoke about His body and blood?
3. How would you have felt if you had been at that meal?
4. What is your focus when you partake of Communion? Why is Communion important to a body of believers?

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 464.

## 15:21-47: THE DEATH OF JESUS

Jesus is taken outside the city to be executed. He is so weak from the beatings that a passing African, Simon from Cyrene, is forced to carry the heavy crosspiece. The place for crucifixion is called Golgotha—the Aramaic word for ‘skull’.

Crucifixion is surely the most painful form of death ever devised. It gives us the word ‘excruciating’. The victims are stripped of all their clothes and nailed or roped naked to a wooden cross. There they hang day and night, in burning heat or bitter cold, until they die. Their friends may keep them alive with food and drink, or dull their pain with drugs. Eventually, they die of heart failure.

Jesus hangs on the cross for three hours—from midday until mid-afternoon. The world is plunged into darkness as the dreadful drama reaches its climax.

On the verge of death, Jesus cries in Aramaic, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’—the opening words of Psalm 22. He is totally desolate. As if it weren’t enough to be deserted by friends and tortured by enemies, Jesus now feels abandoned by God.

The onlookers think Jesus is calling for Elijah to rescue him. One of them gives Jesus a sip of cheap wine to try to keep him alive a little longer—to see if Elijah will come and save him. But Jesus utters one last loud cry, and dies.

As Jesus finally offers up his life, the curtain in the temple is torn from top to bottom. This is the curtain which separates the Most Holy Place (the ‘Holy of Holies’) from the Holy Place. Only the high priest is allowed past this curtain, for within is the utter presence of God. The high priest enters once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and only after sacrificing a bull for his sins. Now, through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the way into God’s presence is open to all.

The Roman officer in charge of the execution is deeply moved. He says, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’ Until now, only the voices of God and evil spirits have declared who Jesus really is. This moment of recognition by a Gentile who sees Jesus die is the summit of Mark’s Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

1. What ironies do you see here: In the places occupied by the robbers (see 10:37)? In the call for Jesus to save Himself by coming down from the cross? In the officially posted reason for Jesus’ death?
2. How are the cry of Jesus (v. 34, also Psalm 22:1), the tearing of the temple curtain (v. 38; see Matthew 27:51-53; Hebrews 10:19-22), and the faith of the centurion (v. 39) all related?
3. What is the riskiest thing you have ever done because of your faith in Jesus? Why did you do it?

## 16:1-8: AFTER SUNRISE

Once the sabbath rest is over, the two Marys and Salome set out to embalm Jesus’ body with fragrant spices (16:1–8). They know that there is a stone blocking the tomb—and that the body will already be starting to decay. But, when they arrive at the tomb, the stone has been rolled away and the body has gone!

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 466–467.

An angel tells them not to be terrified, because Jesus has risen from death. They must tell the other disciples, especially Peter. Jesus is going ahead, like the good shepherd he is, to meet up with them again in Galilee.

The women flee from the tomb in a state of shock. They are too frightened to tell anyone what has happened.

And there—quite suddenly—Mark’s Gospel ends. There are a few more verses in some Bibles, but these were probably written later by someone else.

We don’t know whether the last page of the Gospel has been lost in some way, or if Mark was interrupted and didn’t finish. Or did he mean to end abruptly, and leave his readers as amazed and bewildered as the women?

Even in this brief account of the first Easter morning, we see that death and the grave have not held Jesus. This good news is entrusted to three women. Their evidence would never be allowed in any Jewish court of law—but God chooses them as his witnesses. We are allowed to guess that Peter will be forgiven for his denials and restored to his place as the leading disciple. And Jesus will meet with his friends in Galilee—the unfashionable, half-pagan north country where the disciples were first called to follow him.<sup>3</sup>

1. Who did Jesus send to tell you He had risen? Did you have trouble believing that person? How were you finally convinced of Jesus’ resurrection?
2. To whom is Jesus sending you with this message?
3. What will you remember most from the Gospel of Mark to sharpen your focus of who Jesus really is?

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 467.