

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEBRUARY 7

MARK 12:13-17,28-34

THE BACKGROUND

Jesus had traveled from east of the Jordan River through Jericho to the vicinity of Jerusalem. Along the way, He again tried to prepare the Twelve for what lay ahead. In more detail than previously, He predicted His suffering, death, and resurrection (Mark 10:32-34). Amazingly, James and John approached Jesus with a request for prestigious positions in His kingdom. Their request and the other 10 disciples' resentment over being preempted demonstrated the rivalry among the Twelve and their failure to understand Jesus and the nature of His mission (10:35-41). Jesus used the occasion to teach them about greatness according to kingdom standards. He defined greatness among believers as following the model He provided in serving others (10:42-45).

As Jesus, His disciples, and the crowd with Him were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus—a blind beggar—repeatedly called out to Jesus, addressing Him as the Son of David and pleading for mercy. Jesus stopped the procession, called Bartimaeus to Him, asked what he wanted, and healed him (10:46-52). This healing miracle underscored the need for faith in order to gain the spiritual sight necessary to understand Jesus and His mission.

1. WHAT DO I OWE GOVERNMENT? (MARK 12:13-17)

In 12:1-11, Jesus taught by means of a parable that may have been based on Isaiah 5:1-7. A man carefully prepared a vineyard and “leased it to tenant farmers and went away” (12:1). When the vineyard bore fruit, the owner sent a slave to collect the owner’s share of the harvest. The tenant farmers, however, beat the slave and ran him off “empty-handed” (12:2-3). The owner sent a second slave, but the tenants struck him “and treated him shamefully” (12:4). The owner sent a third slave, whom the tenants killed. Many other slaves, sent to collect the owner’s share, were beaten or killed (12:5). Finally, the owner sent his son, whom he loved deeply, thinking the tenants would respect him. Instead, the tenants killed the son and threw his body outside the vineyard in a misguided and futile attempt to gain ownership of the vineyard (see 12:6-8). Likely, they assumed the owner was dead and if they killed the heir, they could be the first to claim ownerless property under current laws. Using a

rhetorical question, Jesus stressed the owner’s forceful response. He would come to the vineyard, destroy the tenants, and “give the vineyard to others” (12:9).

The thrust of Jesus’ parable was clear. Israel was God’s vineyard, expected to bear fruit in His redemptive purpose. The religious leaders were tenants responsible for nurturing God’s people and fulfilling the nation’s missionary responsibility. Through the centuries, the Israelites had mistreated and/or killed many prophets God had sent. Then God sent His Son, whom the religious leaders would reject and kill in their attempts to maintain control of the people and their religion. God, however, would judge the Jewish leaders, remove them from His redemptive purpose, and continue His work through a new people He would create in Jesus (see Matt. 21:43). Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22-23 to emphasize that the religious leaders had rejected Him, but God would vindicate Him.

The religious leaders were in the audience in the temple complex, heard Jesus’ parable, and knew it was directed toward them. They wanted to arrest Jesus, but because of His popularity with the people they feared the crowd, so they left (12:12).

Verse 13: *Then they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Him to trap Him by what He said.*

The religious leaders in charge of the temple dispatched some of the Pharisees and the Herodians [hih ROH dih uhns] to the temple complex to try to trap Jesus by what He said. The Pharisees wanted the Romans out of the Holy Land and Jewish rule restored. The Herodians favored Herod Antipas’s policies and thus supported Roman rule. Both groups were represented in the Sanhedrin. These two groups had formed an unlikely alliance against what they perceived as a common enemy (see 3:6). They approached Jesus with a trick question they thought would discredit Him in the people’s eyes. The Greek word translated *trap* was a hunting term that had the sense of catching prey in a net or snare.

Verse 14a: *When they came, they said to Him, “Teacher, we know You are truthful and defer to no one, for You don’t show partiality but teach truthfully the way of God.*

The delegation approached Jesus with flattery meant to set Him up for a question to which they were certain He could give no right answer and one He could not evade and save face. If He was who He appeared to be—forthright, impartial, and not afraid of what others would say about His response—He would answer their question. Ironically, their

glowing introductory words were absolutely correct. Indeed, Jesus was truthful. Not only did He consistently speak the truth, but He also was the truth (see John 14:6). Furthermore, Jesus really did not defer to anyone; He was not swayed by fear or awe of any person. Also, Jesus did not play favorites. He taught truthfully God’s revealed way of life.

Verses 14b-15: *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay, or should we not pay?” But knowing their hypocrisy, He said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.”*

Thinking they had Jesus trapped, the delegation asked whether God’s law permitted Jews’ paying taxes to the Romans (12:14b). The word taxes could be a general term or could refer particularly to a hated poll tax of one denarius (a laborer’s daily wage) Jews paid to the emperor. For emphasis, the delegation repeated the question rather sharply (12:15). If Jesus said God’s law allowed paying taxes to Caesar, the people would be incensed. If He said Jews should not pay the tax, He would be in trouble with the Romans.

Jesus saw through the questioners’ charade. He perceived their hypocrisy. The Greek word translated *hypocrisy* came from a term for playacting, of wearing masks to play roles. Jesus used it to convey the idea of appearing to be something a person was not. He first countered with a question about the reason the delegation was testing Him. The word *testing* likely had the sense of trying to catch Him off guard in order to discredit Him. Then Jesus called for a *denarius*, a commonly used Roman coin and a common laborer’s normal day’s pay.

Verse 16: *So they brought one. “Whose image and inscription is this?” He asked them. “Caesar’s,” they said.*

Holding the denarius, Jesus asked whose image and inscription it bore. The coin was stamped on one side with Emperor Tiberius’s image, his name, and the words “son of the divine Augustus” or “son of god.” On the other side was the inscription *Pontifex Maximus* (“high priest”). Religious Jews objected to the words and images, which to them represented idol worship. The hypocritical Herodians had no problem with paying the tax; the Pharisees also did so grudgingly. Probably with puzzled expressions, the delegation members gave the obvious answer to Jesus’ question: The coin bore Caesar’s image and inscription.

Verse 17: *Then Jesus told them, “Give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him.*

Jesus then said, “Give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” The word translated *give back* meant “pay as something owed on a debt.” No matter who had the denarius, it was considered Caesar’s property; thus, to return it to him was fitting. Also, to support the civil order under which they lived was proper. Jesus broadly stressed people’s obligation to the Roman government. In doing so, He separated Himself and His followers from the revolutionary Zealots, who actively opposed paying taxes.

Jesus emphasized that people had a prior and greater obligation: “*Give back . . . to God the things that are God’s.*” The Roman coins bore the emperor’s image and belonged to him. People are made in God’s image and belong to Him. All they have is His. Jesus’ answer amazed His questioners because of the ease with which He escaped their trap.

2. WHAT DO I OWE GOD? (MARK 12:28-30)

Verse 28: *One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked Him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”*

A scribe—an expert in interpreting, teaching, and applying the law—approached Jesus. He overheard Jesus and the Sadducees debating the reality of resurrection. The scribe perceived that Jesus had won the debate. Evidently, the scribe had no ax to grind; the tone of his conversation with Jesus was friendly, not hostile. He asked Jesus which commandment was the most important of all (ranked first). The scribes identified 613 commandments—365 negative and 248 positive. They commonly debated which were weightier commandments and which were lighter. The scribe asked Jesus the nature or classification of the number-one commandment.

Verses 29-30: *“This is the most important,” Jesus answered: Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*

Jesus refused to be caught up in the scribes’ debate. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the *Shema*, which every pious Jew recited three times a day. The first word of the commandment literally is “hear” and has the sense of acting on what was heard, of obeying. Israel’s God was One God. His people were to love Him with their total beings. The word *heart* referred to the center of being and especially to volition or will. The term *soul* conveyed the idea of one’s self or life. The

word *mind* referred to the intellect. The term *strength* could refer to spiritual fervor or actions of service. Jesus did not divide a person into four parts; He used the four words to indicate the whole self.

When asked about the most important commandment, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which teaches us to love God supremely. Because loving God supremely is the most important commandment, we are to give Him priority over all else.

3. WHAT DO I OWE OTHERS? (MARK 12:31-34)

Verse 31: *“The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

Jesus quickly added a second commandment as most important: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Most Jews interpreted *neighbor* to mean other Jews or Jewish proselytes. Jesus, however, broadened the meaning of *neighbor* to include all people an individual encounters (see Luke 10:25-37). He stressed that the two commandments are inseparable.

The phrase *as yourself* does not promote self-love as a goal but recognizes that normally people love themselves, and some do so to the extreme. They value themselves and look out for their own interests. Other people are to be the objects of that kind of love. Love of self must be shaped by love for God and translated into active love for others.

Verses 32-33: *Then the scribe said to Him, “You are right, Teacher! You have correctly said that He is One, and there is no one else except Him. And to love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

The scribe wholeheartedly agreed with Jesus’ assessment. Of course, he was not denying the sacrificial system’s importance at that time. Yet to him, wholehearted love for God ranked first, even above sacrifices and offerings.

Verse 34: *When Jesus saw that he answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And no one dared to question Him any longer.*

The scribe was on the right track. His response revealed openness and humility toward God. Thus, Jesus declared he was not far from God’s kingdom. The scribe’s understanding of God’s law and his acceptance of its demands prepared him for the next step: placing himself under God’s rule by faith in Jesus, who fulfilled the law. Jesus’ response

expressed appreciation, but it also was an invitation to the scribe to enter the kingdom, to follow through on his declarations in Mark 12:32-33. Jesus had answered the questions directed at Him so thoroughly and convincingly that no one dared to question Him any longer.

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEBRUARY 14

MARK 13:9-13,21-27,32-37

THE BACKGROUND

On Sunday of Passover week in A.D. 29 or 30, Jesus made His royal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey to indicate He came in peace to His people. After surveying the temple's outer courts, He and His disciples returned to Bethany, where they spent the nights during Passover week (Mark 11:1-11). On Monday, on the way to Jerusalem, Jesus pronounced a curse on a barren fig tree as an acted parable of God's judgment on His people. The Jewish nation with its religious leadership had made an outward show of being religious, but its burdensome legalistic system was barren. It had failed to produce the fruit of true godliness (11:12-14).

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He entered the temple and threw out the profiteers doing business in the court of the Gentiles. He charged that they had converted the temple from a house of prayer into a den of thieves. The religious leaders in charge of the temple were incensed and began deliberating how they could kill Him. Jesus and His disciples returned to Bethany (11:15-19).

On Tuesday morning, on the way to Jerusalem, Peter called Jesus' attention to the withered fig tree. Jesus seized the teachable moment to stress the effectiveness of praying with faith. He emphasized that forgiving others must precede prayer and is essential to receiving forgiveness (11:20-26). Jesus and the disciples entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. Some chief priests and scribes, who controlled the temple, challenged Jesus' authority to cleanse the temple the previous day. Jesus countered their questions with a question of His own, which the religious leaders declined to answer. Thus, Jesus refused to be put on the defensive concerning His actions (11:27-33).

In 12:1-12, Jesus told a parable about a vineyard owner who prepared his vineyard and leased it to tenants. The tenants refused to give him his share of the harvest, mistreated and killed servants he sent, and finally killed his son. Jesus declared the owner would respond in harsh judgment. The religious leaders knew the parable was directed at them and wanted to arrest Jesus, but they feared His popularity with the crowd.

Groups seeking to discredit Jesus posed questions designed to trip Him. Pharisees and Herodians asked whether

God's law allowed paying taxes to Caesar. If He said yes, many Jews would be angered. If He said no, the Romans would be upset. Jesus indicated that duties to government exist that do not run counter to God's demands (12:13-17). Then some Sadducees asked Jesus a trick question about resurrection, which doctrine they did not accept. He used their accepted Scriptures—the first five books of the Old Testament—to give a biblical basis for resurrection. In so doing, He exposed the Sadducees' erroneous interpretation of their Scriptures (12:18-27).

An evidently friendly scribe asked Jesus what commandment He ranked first. Jesus responded that two are first: We are to love God with our total beings, and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. The scribe agreed, and Jesus indicated he was close to entering God's kingdom (12:28-34).

Jesus used Psalm 110:1 to assert that as the Messiah, He was more than David's Son and was superior to David (12:35-37). Then He issued a scathing warning against the scribes' hypocrisy. In contrast to their self-serving greed, Jesus pointed to a destitute widow's giving her last two small coins into the temple treasury (12:38-44).

1. PREPARE BY TRUSTING THE SPIRIT (MARK 13:9-13)

Verse 9: *"But you, be on your guard! They will hand you over to sanhedrins, and you will be flogged in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings because of Me, as a witness to them.*

Jesus sought to narrow the disciples' focus to their continuing roles. He emphatically warned His disciples to brace themselves for difficulties they would face in continuing His ministry. The Greek word translated *be on your guard* is the same term rendered "watch out" in verse 5. It has the sense of weighing something carefully, of being alert or prepared and thus not being taken by surprise.

Jesus warned that the disciples would be handed over or delivered up in the course of persecution to sanhedrins [san HEE drihns] in Jewish towns. These *sanhedrins* were 23-member local councils or municipal courts modeled after the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. The disciples would be flogged in the synagogues—the local religious tribunals. The Greek term rendered *flogged* literally means "flayed or skinned" and came to mean "beaten." Public scourging was the synagogues' punishment for heretics.

Jesus said that as a result of the disciples' faithfulness to Him, they would stand before governors and kings—Gen-

tile rulers. The phrase *stand before* may have conveyed the sense of standing trial. The word *governors* referred to procurators, proconsuls, and perhaps magistrates. The term *kings* likely referred to a range of rulers from tetrarchs (rulers of a fourth), to Roman-appointed client-kings, to the emperor. In these settings, the disciples would give testimony about Jesus; they would declare the truth of the gospel to pagan authorities. The phrase *witness to them* could convey the idea of "witness against them"; that is, at the final judgment the authorities would have no excuse for rejecting the gospel, for the disciples had courageously proclaimed the good news to them.

Verse 10: *And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations.*

Jesus emphasized that the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. His followers' task would be to herald the message of salvation's availability to all people (see Matt. 28:19-20). The word *must* translates a Greek term that means "it is necessary" and presents the idea of moral or Divine necessity. The term *first* may mean "most important." Rather than becoming distracted by looking for signs of the end, the disciples were more importantly to be busy preaching the gospel. An alternate interpretation is that the word *first* conveys the sense of a valid sign of the consummation. If the latter view represents Jesus' meaning, to what extent must the gospel penetrate the nations? One suggestion is that when the gospel comes to ruling authorities' attention, a nation can be viewed as having received it.

Verse 11: *So when they arrest you and hand you over, don't worry beforehand what you will say. On the contrary, whatever is given to you in that hour—say it. For it isn't you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*

Jewish and pagan authorities would arrest Jesus' followers and put them on trial. The disciples were not to worry beforehand about what they would say in their defense. The Greek word translated *worry* has the idea of being anxiously preoccupied or distracted. Such consuming overanxiety would lessen the disciples' effectiveness as witnesses. Jesus assured the disciples that when they stood before tribunals, the Holy Spirit would speak through them. He would give them the words to say that would offer strong testimony for their Lord. They were to speak boldly and courageously what the Spirit supplied. Their responsibility would be to be aware of and open to the Spirit's working.

Verse 12: *Then brother will betray brother to death, and a*

father his child. Children will rise up against parents and put them to death.

The persecution of Jesus' faithful followers would include family members' betraying them. Because of intense hatred of the gospel, a desire to escape persecution or death, and/or an attempt to gain authorities' approval, close family members would turn on believers. Brothers would hand over brothers to be killed; fathers would betray children; and children would rebel against parents and kill them. Jesus probably did not mean such suffering was a sign the end of the world was near. Most likely, He sought to prepare His disciples for persecution that was sure to come.

Verse 13: *And you will be hated by everyone because of My name. But the one who endures to the end will be delivered.*

Because of the disciples' identification with Jesus, people would hate them. Many would be intensely hostile to Jesus' followers. The phrase *My name* has the sense of "Me" (see 13:9). Because of the disciples' faithfulness to Jesus and their proclamation of the gospel, they would incur people's deep animosity.

Jesus promised that the follower who persevered to the end would be delivered. The Greek term rendered *endures* means "to remain under," as in continuing to bear a load. The phrase *to the end* conveys the sense of unwavering perseverance, complete steadfastness, not of the consummation of history. The Greek word translated *delivered* can mean "rescued" (from danger) or "saved" (spiritually). The history of the Christian movement shows that believers sometimes were not delivered from persecution. Thus, Jesus likely had in mind the completion of salvation in God's presence—ultimate salvation. Believers were saved when they placed their faith in Christ. At that moment of new birth, they became eternally secure in Him. When they encountered and endured persecution, even if they were martyred for their faith, they would experience life in God's immediate presence—the completion or fulfillment of their salvation (glorification).

2. PREPARE BY STAYING WITH THE TRUTH (MARK 13:21-23)

Verses 21-22: *"Then if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Messiah! Look—there!' do not believe it! For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and will perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect.*

In 13:5-6, Jesus had warned His disciples false messiahs would arise. As in the case of those verses, interpret-

ers have applied 13:21-22 to Jerusalem's destruction and/or to the end times. If Jesus had Jerusalem's destruction in mind, His urging the disciples not to believe any claim the Messiah had come was a warning not to delay their escape from the Roman armies approaching Jerusalem out of a false belief that someone had arisen to deliver them. Later, false messiahs would arise, cause the Jews to rebel, and make false promises of rescue. If Jesus was speaking of the end times, He was indicating false messiahs would come on the scene. The false messiahs and false prophets would be able to perform persuasive signs and wonders in unsuccessful attempts to lead astray . . . the elect (believers, 13:22). The words *if possible* seem to indicate genuine believers would not follow the false messiahs and prophets.

Verse 23: *And you must watch! I have told you everything in advance.*

Jesus repeated His admonition that the disciples *watch* (see 13:5,9). The statement, "I have told you everything in advance," probably does not mean Jesus had given them a detailed blueprint of the future but that He had prepared them adequately.

In the course of working on this lesson, I have seen various television news reports concerning polygamous cults where rapt disciples follow a leader who pretends to be a messiah. The repeated question to experts on cults concerns the reason or reasons some people continue to believe claims of messiahship and become devoted followers of false messiahs. Whatever the direct application of Jesus' warning in Mark 13:21-23, Christians well-versed in the Scriptures can be ready to counter false messiahs' claims and can point people—believers and unbelievers as well—to the genuine Messiah and His promise to return.

3. PREPARE BY REJOICING (MARK 13:24-27)

Verses 24-25: *"But in those days, after that tribulation: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will be falling from the sky, and the celestial powers will be shaken.*

Interpreters generally agree that 13:24-37 address Jesus' second coming and the consummation of history. The phrases *in those days* and *after that tribulation* (13:24a) refer to the end of history. Some commentators have taken the word *tribulation* to refer to the great tribulation in the end times. Others believe it refers particularly to Jerusalem's destruction (see 13:19) and generally to believers' suffering through

the centuries. In any event, Jesus pointed to a time in the future after His followers experience pressure and distress.

In 13:24b-25, Jesus likely paraphrased Joel 2:10, a prophecy concerning the coming Day of the Lord. The words emphasize a cataclysmic event of cosmic proportions. Jesus' return will be of great cosmic significance (see 2 Pet. 3:10).

Verse 26: *Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*

The word *then* refers to the event of Christ's return and the end of time. For the first time, Jesus made the explicit connection of His favorite title for Himself, the Son of Man, with Daniel 7:13. This designation expressed His Deity and humanity. His coming in clouds stressed His Deity. In the Old Testament, God was portrayed as "making the clouds His chariot" (Ps. 104:3) and riding "on a swift cloud" (Isa. 19:1). Daniel 7:13 refers to "One like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven." The same Jesus who taught, ministered, suffered, died, arose, and ascended will return in the great power and glory of Deity.

Verse 27: *He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.*

The returning Christ will send out the angels to gather His elect. The phrase *His elect* designates people who have placed their faith in Christ, His faithful followers who belong to Him (see Mark 13:20,22). The words *the four winds* refer to the compass's directions: north, south, east, and west. The angels will gather believers from all the places they are scattered. The phrase *from the end of the earth to the end of the sky* means "everywhere."

4. PREPARE BY REMAINING FAITHFUL (MARK 13:32-37)

Verse 32: *"Now concerning that day or hour no one knows—neither the angels in heaven nor the Son—except the Father.*

Verses 32-37 clearly address Christ's second coming and the end of the world. Old Testament prophets used the phrase *that day* for the time of God's appearing—the Day of the Lord. The word *hour* refers to a more precise unit of time. Jesus emphasized no one knows the exact time of His return, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son. The phrase *nor the Son* does not ascribe any ignorance to Jesus as Deity and fully God, which He is. His not knowing was part of His humanity; limited knowledge was part of His being a real human being.

Verse 33: *Watch! Be alert! For you don't know when the*

time is coming.

Because the disciples did not know the exact time of Jesus' return and the end of the world, they were to *watch* and *be alert*. Both words convey the idea of being ready or prepared. The disciples were to live in the creative tension of expecting Jesus' return at any moment. Today, we are to live with the same expectant readiness, for we don't know when the time is coming.

Verse 34: *It is like a man on a journey, who left his house, gave authority to his slaves, gave each one his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to be alert.*

Jesus used a familiar situation to stress the need for alertness. He told a parable of a man who went on a journey. He gave each of his slaves a specific task and the authority to perform it. He charged the doorkeeper to be alert. The *doorkeeper* was the guard at the gate or door who controlled access to the house or estate. He was *to be alert*—again emphasizing readiness or preparedness.

Verses 35-36: *Therefore be alert, since you don't know when the master of the house is coming—whether in the evening or at midnight or at the crowing of the rooster or early in the morning. Otherwise, he might come suddenly and find you sleeping.*

Jesus repeated His admonition that the disciples be alert (13:35). They were to stay awake and be watchful. They did not know when the master of the house (Jesus) would come. Thus, they were to be in a constant state of readiness. Jesus used the four watches of the night in the Roman system to indicate He could come back at any moment. If they did not remain on guard, the Master (Jesus) might come suddenly and find them sleeping at their posts (13:36).

Verse 37: *And what I say to you, I say to everyone: Be alert!"*

Jesus' disciples were to live each day with the awareness He could return at any time. They were to serve faithfully all the time in all God gave them to do. Every Christian has a task to perform in service for Christ, and we are to be diligent in carrying it out. In the course of our service, we may face times that threaten to overwhelm us. Nevertheless, we are to keep on serving God faithfully. Our preparedness for Jesus' return consists in His finding us serving Him faithfully when God chooses His time to draw the curtain on history.

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEBRUARY 21

MARK 14:32-39,41-50

THE BACKGROUND

Tuesday preceding Passover, A.D. 29 or 30, was a long, busy, and eventful day for Jesus. In the morning, on the way from Bethany where He and the disciples lodged, Jesus used the fig tree He had earlier caused to wither as an acted parable to indicate God's judgment on the barrenness of the religious leaders' burdensome legalistic system—it lacked the power to change people's lives redemptively (Mark 11:20-26). In rapid-fire succession, Jesus countered a challenge to His authority over the temple (11:27-33) and told the story of a vineyard owner and his wicked tenants as a transparent indictment of the religious leaders (12:1-12). Then He successfully dealt with two delegations' loaded questions designed to discredit Him in the people's eyes (12:13-27). Close on the heels of besting the two delegations, Jesus commended a scribe who had witnessed the debates. Evidently with no hidden agenda, the scribe asked Jesus' opinion concerning the highest-ranking commandment and wholeheartedly agreed with Jesus' answer (12:28-34).

In the temple setting, Jesus took the offensive and asserted that the Messiah was more than David's son and was superior to him (12:35-37). Then He issued a scathing warning against the scribes' hypocrisy and greed (12:38-40). He pointed to a poor widow's sacrificial generosity as a sharp contrast to the scribes' greed (12:41-44).

As He and the disciples were leaving the temple complex, Jesus predicted the temple's destruction. This prophecy probably disturbed and alarmed the disciples. They could not conceive of the world continuing without the temple. As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, four disciples approached Him and asked about Jerusalem's destruction and the end of the world (13:1-4). In Jesus' longest discourse in Mark's Gospel, the Lord addressed the questions. He warned against false messiahs, foretold that the disciples would face persecution, predicted Jerusalem's siege and destruction, and described His coming again and the consummation of history (13:5-37). He made clear that Jerusalem's destruction would not signal the end of the world but would be a time of great distress. He emphasized that no one, including Himself, knew the precise time of His return. He repeatedly admonished His followers to be alert and ready.

They were to be faithful in performing their assigned tasks. On Tuesday evening Jesus and His disciples returned to Bethany. There He spent some time resting and fortifying Himself for what lay ahead.

1. PRAY ABOUT THE DECISION (MARK 14:32-35)

Verse 32: *Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and He told His disciples, "Sit here while I pray."*

The disciples may have assumed they were going to Bethany, their lodging place. Yet when they reached a place named Gethsemane ("olive press") on the Mount of Olives, likely a walled olive grove that Jesus and the disciples frequented, Jesus halted the procession and told eight of the disciples to remain there while He prayed. Approaching the ultimate crisis of His life and ministry, Jesus felt the need to commune with His Father.

Verse 33: *He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and horrified.*

Jesus left the eight disciples and went on a short distance, taking Peter, James, and John with Him. One view is that the two groups of disciples formed an outer and inner guard to protect Jesus until He had finished praying. Whether that was His intention, He likely wanted the inner circle of the disciples to offer support at this crucial time. In addition, He likely also wanted them to be able to later recount His agony and triumph in the garden.

Mark wrote that Jesus began to be deeply distressed and horrified. The Greek word translated *deeply distressed* also means "amazed" or "terrified." The Greek term rendered *horrified* also means "filled with anguish." Together, the two words express Jesus' being struck with horror at what lay ahead for Him. He was deeply troubled and agitated as the cross loomed before Him.

Verse 34: *Then He said to them, "My soul is swallowed up in sorrow—to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake."*

In His anguish and distress, Jesus confided in Peter, James and John that He was swallowed up in sorrow. The phrase *My soul* is equivalent to "I." Literally, He felt surrounded by grief—so much so that His grief was crushing the life out of Him. The prospect of suffering and dying almost overwhelmed Him. He told the three disciples to stop and remain where they were. He admonished them to stay awake—to watch and be alert. He well may have warned them against indifference in the face of looming crisis.

Verse 35: *Then He went a little farther, fell to the ground,*

and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.

Jesus distanced Himself from the three disciples, fell on the ground, and began to pray. The form of the verb translated *pray* could also convey the idea that He kept on praying to the Father. Jesus asked that if . . . possible, He might be spared suffering and death. The expression *the hour* refers to Jesus' arrest, trial, suffering, and execution. To be sure, His human dread of death lay behind His petition; but in my view, another element may have been present. What He would endure would expose the depths of human sin; His wrongful death would demonstrate how far evil would go in an attempt to destroy absolute good. Jesus shrank from the horrendous injustice and agony that forever would show the cruelty, deceit, and abject wrong of which human beings are capable. Furthermore, Jesus would be bearing the weight of the sin of the world as He suffered and died for humanity (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus faced temptations to adopt a messianic role that did not involve suffering and death (see Matt. 4:1-11). He chose to be the Suffering Servant who would offer Himself willingly for the forgiveness of people's sins. The temptation, however, surfaced again during His ministry (see Mark 8:31-33). In Gethsemane, He again faced the same temptation. He wrestled with the difficult decision about whether to stay the course. He began to deal with the decision by praying to His Father. Today, the best way we can begin to cope with a difficult decision is in prayer.

2. IDENTIFY GOD'S WILL (MARK 14:36-39)

Verse 36: *And He said, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."*

Jesus began His prayer by addressing God as Abba, Father. The Aramaic word *Abba* is a warm, intimate term that means "Daddy" or "Papa." *Father* translates the Greek term for father. Some Bible scholars view the repetition as Mark's giving the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic term; others contend the words were Jesus' deliberate combination that expressed His burden of anguish.

Jesus acknowledged that God is all-powerful. He can do what He wills. Jesus asked the Father to remove the cup placed before Him. As in 10:38-39, the word *cup* referred to Jesus' suffering and death and was a synonym for "hour" in 14:35. The term was used of a person's lot in life—either joy or

suffering, good or difficult—and of God’s wrath against sin. In Mark 14:36, the cup was the excruciating, atoning self-giving that would be God’s way of dealing with people’s sin problem by providing a means of forgiveness and salvation by grace.

We easily can read Jesus’ next words in His prayer without grasping their full significance. People’s salvation hung in the balance. Everything hung on Jesus’ decision to press forward in the face of horrific suffering and an excruciating death or to back away. We forever can be grateful for the courageous nevertheless that followed immediately on Jesus’ human desire to avoid death. As He had done consistently, Jesus bowed to God’s will rather than choose His own will.

Verse 37: *Then He came and found them sleeping. “Simon, are you sleeping?” He asked Peter. “Couldn’t you stay awake one hour?”*

Jesus arose from praying and went back to the three disciples. He found them sleeping. His discovery emphasized His facing crisis alone. Perhaps because Simon had adamantly insisted he would stand with Jesus, Jesus addressed him. Some commentators have viewed Jesus’ use of *Simon* to indicate that at this point he had not become the rock he eventually would be. Could not Simon—and the other two—stay awake and alert for one hour?

Verse 38: *Stay awake and pray so that you won’t enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

Jesus admonished Simon (and the other two disciples) to stay awake—to be watchful and alert. He exhorted them to pray in order to avoid being tempted. The word *temptation* could refer to inner, spiritual weakness that could issue in outward sinful actions during the coming crisis. The disciples’ loyalty would be severely tested, and they would face the pull to be untrue to Him. They needed to pray for strength. Peter and the others were sincere in their pledge to stand with Jesus; they had the will (spirit) to do so (see Ps. 51:12). Yet they lacked the strength to follow through. The three disciples’ falling asleep at their post was evidence of their weakness. An alternate view is that the word *spirit* refers to the Holy Spirit, who willed them to faithfulness. Their human nature, however, was weak.

Verse 39: *Once again He went away and prayed, saying the same thing.*

Jesus again moved some distance from the three disciples and prayed for the second time. In essence, He repeated His earlier prayer that if some other way was open for God to provide salvation for people, He would allow Jesus to forego the

terrible suffering of execution by crucifixion. Again Jesus emphasized He was committed to doing God’s will.

3. COMMIT TO DO GOD’S WILL (MARK 14:41-44)

After praying a second time, Jesus returned to the three disciples “and found them sleeping” (Mark 14:40). Mark stated: “They could not keep their eyes open”—literally, “their eyes were weighed down.” The day had been long, the hour was late, and the disciples were physically and emotionally exhausted. Jesus, however, expected them to stay alert a little longer. The disciples were at a loss for words when Jesus awakened them.

Verse 41: *Then He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The time has come. Look, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.”*

Jesus left the disciples and again prayed. For a third time, He returned to find them sleeping. The Greek word translated *enough* conveys the idea of payment in full. Interpreters have offered various views of Jesus’ use of the term. Most likely, Jesus meant the time of agonized prayer was over; He was ready for what lay ahead. The phrase *the time has come* literally is “the hour has come.” The term “hour” referred to Jesus’ arrest, suffering, and death (see 14:35). Jesus, the Son of Man (Deity in human flesh), was in the process of being delivered up (handed over for trial) to sinners. The word *sinners* could refer to Gentiles (the Romans), but most likely it designated the religious leaders who were orchestrating Jesus’ death—His opponents or enemies.

Verse 42: *Get up; let’s go! See—My betrayer is near.”*

Rather than waiting for the arresting party or trying to run, Jesus courageously walked to meet the mob. Judas—the betrayer—was approaching. At great cost to Himself, Jesus determined to do God’s will. The best decision we can make in any difficult situation is to choose God’s will.

Verse 43: *While He was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. With him was a mob, with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.*

Before Jesus finished speaking to the three disciples, Judas suddenly arrived. The phrase *one of the Twelve* threw Judas’s betrayal in bold relief. A trusted member of Jesus’ select band had turned on the Lord. Judas led an armed mob (“crowd”) sent to arrest Jesus. The group was composed of a detachment of Roman soldiers and members of the temple police (see John 18:3).

Verse 44: *His betrayer had given them a signal. “The One I kiss,” he said, “He’s the One; arrest Him and take Him away under guard.”*

Although the mob had lanterns and torches to dispel some of Gethsemane’s darkness (see John 18:3), Judas had given a prearranged signal that would indicate the One the mob was to arrest. The kiss most likely was to be placed on Jesus’ hand, for this was the usual way a student greeted his rabbi.

4. KEEP THE COMMITMENT (MARK 14:45-50)

Verse 45: *So when he came, he went right up to Him and said, “Rabbi!”—and kissed Him.*

When Judas reached Jesus and the three disciples, he immediately went to Jesus, greeted Him, and kissed Him. Judas acknowledged Jesus as Teacher (Rabbi), and evidently he considered Him to be nothing more.

Verses 46-47: *Then they took hold of Him and arrested Him. And one of those who stood by drew his sword, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his ear.*

The mob seized Jesus and took Him into custody. Someone standing with Jesus drew his sword, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his ear. John identified the defender as Peter and the injured *slave* as Malchus (see John 18:10). Luke reported Jesus healed the man (see Luke 22:51).

Verses 48-50: *But Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs, as though I were a criminal, to capture Me? Every day I was among you, teaching in the temple complex, and you didn’t arrest Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” Then they all deserted Him and ran away.*

Jesus did not resist the men who seized Him, but He did ask a question that indicted them. Was their show of force really necessary, as though He were a criminal? The Greek term rendered *criminal* also means “bandit.” Jesus may have used the word in the sense of a revolutionary. If His teachings were revolutionary, the authorities could have arrested Him on any one of many occasions He taught in the temple complex. Openly and often, Jesus had demonstrated He had nothing to hide; He was not a subversive and was no threat to Rome.

Jesus declared that the mob’s arresting Him was a fulfillment of the Scriptures. Possible Scriptures that have been suggested include Isaiah 53:12; Psalm 41:9; and Zechariah 13:7. In the case of Zechariah 13:7, the fulfillment is in the statement: They all deserted Him and ran away.

BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR FEBRUARY 28

MARK 15:15-20,29-32,37-39; 16:5-7

THE BACKGROUND

Because of Judas's willingness to betray Jesus, the religious leaders were able to seize Him away from the crowds that thronged Jerusalem to observe the Passover. Jesus and His disciples had eaten the Passover meal, and He had instituted a new meal for His followers (Mark 14:17-25). After singing psalms, Jesus and 11 of the disciples went to a walled garden on the Mount of Olives—a site Judas knew well because Jesus and the Twelve went there often. On the way, Jesus predicted the 11 disciples would forsake Him in the upcoming crisis, and Peter would deny Him three times. All the disciples adamantly declared their loyalty (14:26-31).

Jesus posted two groups of disciples at intervals in Gethsemane and went on alone to pray. Three times He agonized over the suffering and excruciating death awaiting Him. He arose from His third anguished prayer resolutely committed to His Father's will (14:32-42). As He returned to Peter, James, and John, Judas arrived with an armed mob. Judas gave the prearranged signal, kissing Jesus as a student normally did in greeting his teacher, and the arresting party seized Jesus. All the disciples ran. One unidentified young man left his linen covering in the hands of would-be captors and ran away naked (14:43-52).

The arresting mob first took Jesus to the high priest and a meeting of the Sanhedrin. False witnesses against Jesus were unable to get their stories straight, and He remained silent in the face of their fabrications. Finally the high priest asked Jesus whether He was the Messiah. Jesus declared firmly He was, whereupon the high priest accused Jesus of blasphemy. The Sanhedrin members agreed that He deserved to be executed. Some people present began to insult Jesus and to physically abuse Him (14:53-65).

While the Sanhedrin tried and unjustly condemned Jesus, Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest's house. Three times he was identified as Jesus' follower, and three times he denied the charge. On the third occasion, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. When a rooster crowed for the second time, Peter remembered Jesus' prediction and burst into tears (14:66-72).

1. WE MAY BE ABUSED (MARK 15:15-20)

Verse 15: *Then, willing to gratify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. And after having Jesus flogged, he handed Him over to be crucified.*

Pilate probably feared the crowd might riot, so to placate the people he released Barabbas to them. The Greek term rendered *gratify* (literally, “to do the sufficient thing”) had the sense of making the crowd content, of satisfying the throng. Then Pilate had Jesus flogged, a usual procedure in the crucifixion process. It may have been designed to hasten death. In fact, such flogging was so severe that some condemned men died; others were driven mad. The flogging was done with a Roman scourge—a long leather strip (or strips) embedded with pieces of lead or bone. The condemned man's back was exposed so the whip severely lacerated his body. Then Pilate handed Jesus over to a detachment of Roman soldiers.

Verse 16: *Then the soldiers led Him away into the courtyard (that is, headquarters) and called the whole company together.*

The soldiers took Jesus into the courtyard (that is, headquarters). The Greek term translated *headquarters* means “palace,” the provincial governor's residence. The detachment of soldiers summoned the whole company. The Greek term rendered *company* referred to a band of soldiers, the Roman cohort consisting of 600 men. Most likely, however, the phrase *the whole company* referred to the rest of the soldiers stationed there at the time.

Verse 17: *They dressed Him in a purple robe, twisted together a crown of thorns, and put it on Him.*

As Jesus had predicted, the soldiers began to mock Him (see 10:33-34). The purple robe probably was a soldier's scarlet cloak. The crown of thorns was woven from branches of thorn bushes growing in the courtyard. It resembled a victor's garland but probably represented a diadem. The crown signified royalty and was the soldiers' idea of a joke. The robe covered Jesus' lacerated body. The crown woven of thorns was a painful caricature of a king's symbol of rule. The Roman soldiers' adornments expressed their assessment of Jesus. To them, He was a pathetic King of the Jews.

Verses 18-19: *And they began to salute Him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They kept hitting Him on the head with a reed and spitting on Him. Getting down on their knees, they were paying Him homage.*

The soldiers heaped insults on Jesus. They mockingly sa-

luted Him with the usual Greek word for greeting and sarcastically addressed Him as King of the Jews. Their words dripped with irony and scorn. The reed likely mockingly represented a kingly scepter. The soldiers took it and repeatedly struck Jesus in the head with it. As expressions of disdain, they repeatedly spit on Him. Then in an expression of sadistic humor, they knelt before Jesus and paid homage to Him. The soldiers varied their abuse and in doing so stressed their utter contempt for Jesus.

Verse 20: *When they had mocked Him, they stripped Him of the purple robe, put His clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.*

When the soldiers had finished mocking Jesus, they took off the soldier's cloak and put His clothes on Him. Normally, the condemned man was stripped naked and flogged on the way to the crucifixion site. Because Jesus already had been scourged, He was given His clothes. A detachment of four soldiers commanded by a centurion (commander of 100 soldiers) led Jesus away to crucify Him (see John 19:23). Although Jesus deserved none of what He endured, He was abused physically and verbally; yet He exhibited self-control and remained faithful to God.

2. WE MAY BE MOCKED (MARK 15:29-32)

Verse 29: *Those who passed by were yelling insults at Him, shaking their heads, and saying, “Ha! The One who would demolish the sanctuary and build it in three days,*

The sarcastic reference to the charge brought against Jesus at His trial before the Sanhedrin suggests these mockers may have been either Sanhedrin members or others present at the court's proceedings (see Mark 14:57-58). The Greek word translated *were yelling insults* literally is “were blaspheming”—slandering or reviling Jesus. Their shaking their heads expressed contempt. The Greek term rendered *Ha* conveyed insult and derision. It was an expression of gloating over an enemy's downfall. The mockers repeated the false charge presented earlier to the Sanhedrin. In John 2:18, the religious leaders asked what sign Jesus would show them to prove His authority for cleansing the temple. He replied, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days” (John 2:19). They thought He referred to the temple, but He meant “the sanctuary of His body” (2:21). Thus, during Jesus' trial and as He hung on the cross, people twisted His words to suit their purposes.

Verse 30: *save Yourself by coming down from the cross!”*

All the gestures of contempt for Jesus expressed the scorners' rejection of Him: the shouted insults; the head-shaking; the derisive, gloating "ha"; and the sneering reference to His claim of power were designed to humiliate Him. In what the jeerers thought was a crowning expression of contempt, they challenged Jesus to stop the crucifixion proceedings by coming down from the cross to give evidence beyond refuting that He was the Messiah.

Verse 31: *In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking Him to one another and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself!"*

The religious leaders also ridiculed Jesus. The phrase *in the same way* has the idea of gloating over Jesus' seeming powerlessness as the other mockers were doing. Evidently the chief priests and the scribes were present to celebrate their victory over their enemy. They felt they had been successful in eliminating a serious threat to them and their religion. Thus they congratulated one another on their success.

With incredible irony, the religious leaders mocked Jesus among themselves with the charge: "He saved others; He cannot save Himself!" Their saying *He saved others* may have referred to His healing miracles and possibly to His raising the dead. The religious leaders said infinitely more than they knew. In truth, Jesus could not save Himself and at the same time save others from their sins. He gave His life voluntarily and vicariously to provide atonement that would be available for everyone, even the people who mocked Him.

Verse 32: *Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him were taunting Him.*

With biting sarcasm, the religious leaders referred to Jesus as the Messiah, the King of Israel. Not for one second did they view Him as God's promised and long-awaited Deliverer. Their words reflect gloating over perceived triumph.

The two robbers being crucified with Jesus also were taunting Him. Luke wrote that one thief had a change of heart as he observed Jesus' demeanor and rebuked the other for continuing to insult Jesus (see Luke 23:39-43).

Jesus' crucifixion began at 9:00 a.m. (see Mark 15:25). At 12:00 noon, it became dark and continued to be so until 3:00 p.m. (15:33). At 3:00 p.m., Jesus shouted the opening words of Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (Mark 15:34). Some interpreters view the cry as God's abandoning Jesus because Jesus had assumed the world's sin and God cannot look on sin. Others believe Jesus meant

the quote to refer to the entire psalm, which expresses trust in God and ends on a note of triumph.

Some bystanders understood Jesus' term "Eloi" (15:34) to be the name *Elijah* (15:35). A bystander quickly soaked a sponge with the cheap wine and extended the wine to Jesus' lips (15:36). The purpose was to keep Jesus alive to see whether Elijah would rescue Him. Likely, this was a gracious, merciful act, though some commentators view it as another expression of mockery.

3. WE MAY FACE AN UNTIMELY DEATH (MARK 15:37-39)

Verse 37: *But Jesus let out a loud cry and breathed His last.*

Luke reported that near death, Jesus shouted, "Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit" (Luke 23:46). John wrote that the Lord's last words were: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). With a prayer of faith and a shout of triumph, Jesus breathed His last. He voluntarily died a cruel and undeserved death.

Verse 38: *Then the curtain of the sanctuary was split in two from top to bottom.*

At the moment Jesus died, the curtain of the sanctuary—the veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place in the temple—was split in two from top to bottom. It was about two to three inches thick. The direction of the tear indicated God tore the veil. God's act had a message: Through Jesus' sacrificial, atoning self-giving on the cross, all people have access to God by sheer grace. In the Jews' sacrificial system, only the high priest could enter the holy of holies—especially associated with God's presence. Jesus' voluntary death to provide redemption made possible all people's approaching God.

Verse 39: *When the centurion, who was standing opposite Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "This man really was God's Son!"*

The centurion was in charge of the crucifixion detail. He had witnessed everything Jesus had suffered. The way Jesus died impressed him. Jesus died with a prayer of faith and a shout of triumph, not with curses directed at His executioners. Jesus' remarkably different death drew the centurion's praise: "This man really was God's Son!" Interpreters disagree concerning what the centurion meant. Possibly, he meant Jesus was a divine hero. If so, he complimented Jesus' greatness. A different view is that the centurion meant Jesus was who He claimed to be: God's unique Son. In any case, we know the centurion's words proclaim Christian truth, regardless of what he intended by them.

Jesus' death differed from that of others, such as us. He died willingly and on our behalf; He died to open the way of grace for the forgiveness of our sins. We can face our deaths, even when they seem unfair or are untimely, with faith in God.

Faithful women watched Jesus' crucifixion (15:40-41). Mark indicated they were disciples who supported Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Many other women also had followed Him from Galilee to Jerusalem.

Friday almost was over and Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, was about to begin. Friday was "preparation day" for the Sabbath (15:42). Because people could not work on the Sabbath, provision had to be made beforehand. Burials could not take place on the Sabbath, so Jesus had to be buried quickly.

Courageously, Joseph of Arimathea, "a prominent member of the Sanhedrin" (15:43), approached Pilate and asked permission to bury Jesus' body. Matthew wrote that Joseph had become Jesus' disciple (Matt. 27:57). Joseph ran a tremendous risk in approaching Pilate. Anyone associated with Jesus was suspect and could be arrested. After determining Jesus indeed was dead, Pilate allowed Joseph to take Jesus' body (see Mark 15:44-45). Joseph placed the body in his family tomb and sealed the tomb by rolling a huge stone over the entrance (15:46). John recorded that Nicodemus, a Pharisee, helped prepare Jesus' body for burial (see John 19:39-40). Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus, two of the women who had witnessed Jesus' death, watched Joseph place Jesus' body in the tomb (see Mark 15:47).

4. WE WILL BE VINDICATED (MARK 16:5-7)

When it was light enough on Sunday morning, three women who had watched Jesus die went to His tomb. They brought spices to anoint the body (16:1-2). They were concerned about the huge stone disk blocking the tomb's entrance, but to their amazement the stone had been rolled away (16:3-4).

Verse 5: *When they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; they were amazed and alarmed.*

The three women entered the tomb to perform a last loving service for Jesus. Instead of seeing His body, they saw a young man dressed in a long white robe. The description indicates he was an angel, God's messenger. Understandably, the young man's presence amazed and alarmed the women.

Verse 6: *"Don't be alarmed," he told them. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has been*

resurrected! He is not here! See the place where they put Him.

The designation *the Nazarene* (from Nazareth) stressed Jesus was a real human being. The young man made a totally unexpected announcement. Jesus had declared He would be killed and would rise from the dead (see 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34), but none of the disciples were prepared for His resurrection.

Verse 7: *But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; you will see Him there just as He told you.'*"

The young man gave the women an assignment. Significantly, the first witnesses concerning the resurrection were faithful women disciples. Jesus was resurrected by the power of Almighty God, which provided absolute and eternal vindication of Jesus' life, ministry, and teachings.