



This Sunday we looked at the events that occurred in the garden of Gethsemane: Jesus' interaction with his disciples and an intimate prayer to his Father (v32-42); and Judas' resolve to betray Jesus turning to action and setting in motion the event of the crucifixion, as he brings an armed crowd to arrest Jesus (v43-52).

Mark gives us two very contrasting pictures:

1 – the disciples: a picture of weakness

We begin with an embarrassing scene in which 3 times Jesus asks his 3 closest friends to keep watch and pray, and 3 times they fail (v33-42). Despite their weakness, Jesus bears with and is gentle with them. We move then to a scene of betrayal, in which Jesus is handed over to the armed crowd with a familiar greeting and a kiss (v45) by one of his closest friends (v43). We finish with the desertion of Jesus by all of his followers (despite “all” having drunk the cup, 14v23, and “all” having promised to stay with him, v31). And so Jesus finds himself completely alone as he faces his darkest hour.

We paused to note that we too, like these disciples, are weak. Some of us may be tempted to give up and walk out on Jesus. All of us are weak, letting our Lord down and failing to keep his commands more frequently than we would admit.

2 – Jesus: a picture of strength

We spent some time considering the extraordinary words and prayer of Jesus in v33-36. We see the extent of Jesus' anguish as he describes the depth of his distress and dread of what is to come to his disciples (v34) and falls to the ground

in prayer to his Father (v35-36). What an extraordinary pictures Mark gives us of the humanity of Jesus – his real, heartfelt human emotions. We also see in Jesus' prayer a little more of the *why* of his death. For, knowing God is sovereign, he asks if it possible for “this cup” (v36) to be taken from him. The cup in Old Testament prophecies, we learnt, usually refers to the cup of God's wrath (eg. Ezekiel 23v32-34, Isaiah 51v17-23, Jeremiah 25v15-18). At the cross, Jesus was enduring God's wrath against the sin of his people. We also see Jesus' astonishing trust in his Father as we see a glimpse of his inner battle as he struggles to submit to his Father's will. The scene closes with an extraordinary picture of Jesus' obedience, as, having resolved “not what I will, but what you will” (v36), he is completely calm as he is betrayed by a friend, arrested unfairly, and then deserted by his followers (v43-52).

We see little of the disciples' response to Jesus in these verses. But Mark does draw attention to their speechlessness: “They did not know what to say to him” (v40). Perhaps we have something to learn from this, living in a society where we're so quick to speak, so keen to be ‘heard’, and in which messages and notifications often feel as if they rule our lives. What renders these disciples speechless? What might render us speechless? Perhaps that our sin is more serious than we think, that we are less godly than we think, and that Jesus is stronger than we think. We don't have to be strong. Nothing depends on our obedience. Jesus has already done it all for us. We can stop and be speechless.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. What do v33-36 reveal to us? About Jesus' mission? About his mindset? About his humanity? About his heart? About his will? About the Trinity?
2. Why do you think the disciples were speechless in v40?
3. In what ways are we tempted to think that we are stronger than we are? Less likely to fall to temptation? More capable of godliness?
4. How is the contrast between what Jesus does in these verses and what the disciples do (and don't do) a great encouragement for weak, failing, sinful people like us?