

practice for authors to include some personal information within a written piece, and if we were looking for Mark's 'presence' within the Gospel, this is the most likely place!

What these two verses (51 and 52) do, whatever the explanation and whoever it was, is to give the reader the information that someone associated with the disciples was indeed present to witness what happened to Jesus, even though the disciples had fled (14:50). Personal testimony was highly valued in the early church, and the person concerned, if it was not Mark, could well have been known in the early church as a reliable witness to the betrayal of Christ, despite the trauma of what he experienced!

### Application

In my study I have a print of the famous Caravaggio masterpiece 'the betrayal of Christ'. It portrays in the artist's own matchless style the arresting crowd, the kiss of Judas, the painful anguish on Jesus' face and the young man fleeing the scene. And in the same way that the words of Mark's Gospel allow the reader to look into this shocking scene with the perspective he gives us by his writing, Caravaggio painted an anonymous figure (perhaps himself) in the right hand corner, holding a lantern and looking in with a curious expression of amazement at the cruel scene captured at the moment of Judas' kiss. Caravaggio's masterpiece is compelling, but this great masterpiece would not exist without the Gospel of Mark which inspired it; and just as you can look into Caravaggio's painting for hours and continue to see new things, you can dwell on this story in Mark for hours and still find something new.

Our study has only covered a few significant and important details of the text, but as we read it there is far more for us to think about. The religious authorities hired out their dirty work to a mob and a betrayer; what does that say about them? Judas appears eager to greet Jesus and does so with affection; what does that say about Judas and what must it have meant to Jesus? Jesus said 'so let the scriptures be fulfilled ...' (14:49) yet this passage has no text of the Old Testament which it can fulfil; what does this mean? Everyone deserted Jesus and fled; we understand this meant the disciples, but what about the women who appear later at Jesus' crucifixion? The questions about the betrayal of Jesus by Judas will always continue, but many of them cannot be answered. One of Jesus' close followers betrayed Him to the authorities, and the world would never be the same again. That is the truth of the matter, and it reveals the true state of fallen humanity.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss the way in which greeting with a kiss can mean a wide variety of different things in our culture today. What helps us understand this text?
2. Why was Judas necessary to the story of Jesus' death? Why could the authorities not have just come and found Him?
3. How important is it to have 'evidence' for Jesus' life provided by eye-witnesses, and how can they be regarded as 'reliable'?

### Discipleship

*Those who are following the series of discipleship suggestions in Lent are writing a series of reflections on what Jesus felt as He came closer to Easter.*

It does not take much for us to begin to imagine what Jesus may have thought about as He was betrayed. Take time, however, to make sure that what you write is true to the Lord Jesus you have come to know through the whole of Mark's Gospel; for example, He was a friend and a servant rather than a rabbi or master ...

### Final Prayer

God of glory, rescue my life, totally;  
God of glory, change my soul utterly;  
God of glory, transform my mind completely;  
God of glory, alter my destiny entirely;  
For I love You, God of glory, utterly. AMEN

### Prayer

Thank You Lord, for the joy of having other people to love;  
Thank You Lord, for the privilege of caring for others in need;  
Thank You Lord, for the freedom we have to express our faith;  
And may we use all we have, all of the time, to give glory to You;  
The Lord and Creator of our life, and the Saviour of our souls. AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Peace

Pray today for peace amongst God's people. Sometimes, we mistake zeal for what is right for a vain presumption that we alone are right about various doctrinal matters and everyone else is wrong. This can lead to terrible animosities developing between individual Christians and also churches. Pray for God's people to be humble before the Lord, and so be at peace with each other.

### Meditation

We each need a greater perspective, a touch of the Spirit  
On the things with which we are involved.  
We need to see more of You and the wider truths of our faith,  
And not just what we hear on Sundays:  
We need to know more about what happens in the world,  
And not just what we read in newspapers:  
We need to hear more from people about what they really think,  
And not be satisfied with mere pleasantries:  
We need to accept that we can never know everything ourselves,  
And not be consumed by our own opinions:  
We need to be prepared to go anywhere as led by God's Spirit:  
And not be confined to the place where we are:  
For we will then find that God has given us a greater gift of life:  
And we have not yet begun to use it fully.

### Bible Study - Mark 14:43-52

<sup>43</sup> Then just as He was still speaking, Judas arrived (one of the twelve) and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. <sup>44</sup> Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.' <sup>45</sup> So when he came, he immediately went up to Jesus, said, 'Rabbi!' and kissed Him. <sup>46</sup> At this they took hold of Him and arrested Him. <sup>47</sup> Then one of those who stood nearby drew his sword and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. <sup>48</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to catch me like an insurrectionist? <sup>49</sup> Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple courts, but you did not arrest me. So let the scriptures now be fulfilled.' <sup>50</sup> Then everyone deserted Him and fled. <sup>51</sup> A young man was following Jesus who was wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They took hold of him, <sup>52</sup> but he ran off naked, leaving the linen cloth behind.

### Review

This passage hits us suddenly and hard. All the way through Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been at the heart of the story; teaching, healing, disputing with the authorities and even predicting that in the end, the religious leaders would come and take Him away to be executed (see 8:31, 9:31  
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etc.). Yet how easy it is to listen to this and not take it all in? The stories of Jesus and the disciples which Mark has included in his Gospel are wonderful and sometimes very powerful, and we would be happy to hear a great deal more. We feel that we are only beginning to get to know Jesus as a man, and appreciate the amazing spiritual task God had given Him. But now there are no more stories of His life to tell, and as with all the four Gospels, which in other ways are so very different, the betrayal of Christ begins the awful and sickening story of Jesus' final hours. Every Gospel describes Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:47f., Mark 14:43f., Luke 22:47f. John 18:1f.), and all the Gospels follow a similar format for this story from this point through His trial, condemnation and crucifixion, and there is therefore little doubt that we are reading a single story which was uniquely preserved by the early church as profoundly sacred.

Jesus knew the end had come as He rose from speaking to the sleeping disciples (14:42,43). He was awake and knew what was happening around Him whereas the disciples had failed, yet again, to do what had been asked of them, which was to 'watch out' and pray (14:32-42). But Jesus did not really expect any outcome other than what happened, as He did not protest about the fact of His arrest, but the incongruous manner of it which did not reflect reality. Jesus was not a man who needed to be arrested by 'swords and clubs' (14:48), He was a man of peace and would have put up no fight. The only words Jesus said during His arrest were to complain that He was treated like 'an insurrectionist' (14:48), or perhaps today we might say 'terrorist'.

Much has been written about Jesus' arrest. Some people find it difficult to believe that this was necessary, precisely because of what Jesus said about Himself, that He was freely available. But we need to see this from the point of view of the high priests and religious authorities, for whom this man was dangerous and could rouse public emotions very quickly and also destroy them in any public argument (as in the incidents recorded in Mark 12). They needed to whisk Jesus away quietly without public disturbance, and the combination of a night arrest, a betrayer who could identify Jesus in the dark and a hired mob met the need. All manner of things happened around Jerusalem on the nights of major festivals when the size of the city population was grossly multiplied several times over, and little would have been noticed of a minor scuffle on the hillside and a small band of men forcing someone to come with them. That is how the authorities wanted it to be.

The awful event itself is held in our minds by the image of Judas' kiss. It was perfectly normal for the disciple of a rabbi to embrace his master in traditional fashion, but Judas merely did what he was paid to do for reasons he alone knew. In the main part of the study we will run through the different possibilities for Judas' motives, ranging from pure evil and greed, to misplaced trust and Zionism. But this is not a passage which we can merely analyse. It is a passage which paints a stunning picture of betrayal, and it brought the ministry of Jesus to a halt, setting Him on a path to the Cross. The world was changed forever because of the consequences of Judas' kiss, and by the mercy of God, it did not change as Judas may have hoped, but it changed according to God's eternal plan of salvation. So despite the tragedy, we can still glorify God for this with thanks and awe.

### Going Deeper

We will now study the passage in more details so that we can gain a greater understanding of what happened, and what it meant. We will also need to explore the possible reasons for Judas' actions. Not least, what was a young man doing, running away naked from the scene? It seems a strange inclusion (and is found only in Mark's Gospel), but it tempts us to think of a number of intriguing possibilities.

#### ***The arrival of the crowd and the betrayer***

It is sometimes said that the whole event of Jesus' arrest must have been a staged fiasco because everyone would have known who Jesus was, but this can hardly have been the case. Large numbers of people were in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover and we cannot assume that all the hundreds of thousands of people around there knew about Him just because of the incident in the Temple or His entry to the city on a donkey, for example. He had certainly created a stir, but there is little we can assume because of this. We have to take Mark's account as it is, and the arresting group clearly needed a betrayer who could identify Jesus quickly in the dark.

The chief priests and religious authorities had put together a band to capture Jesus. In Mark's Gospel there is no hint of any military involvement, only a crowd with 'swords and clubs'. In John's Gospel there is a mention of 'soldiers and police' (John 18:3), but in the darkness of the night, are we really to think that everyone was absolutely clear about the details? We should expect a degree of confusion, and it is impossible for us to say who was really there. One thing is very clear however, which is that at the moment of His arrest, Jesus stood alone. Someone, and Mark does not care to say who, attempted to put up a fight by attacking one of the arresting party (14:47), but although other Gospel writers make much of this (see John 18:10f. where Peter is identified as the assailant), Mark mentions this as if in passing. It reads like something of an embarrassment to Jesus.

#### ***The betrayal***

Mark emphasises Judas' betrayal of Jesus by first telling us what he arranged in advance (14:44), and then describing how this worked out in practice (14:45). The effect is to heighten the drama of the occasion and let us know that what Judas did was most certainly premeditated. Interestingly, the word Mark used for Judas' infamous kiss of Jesus ('kataphileo') is slightly different from the word usually used in the New Testament for a kiss (as in the Christian greetings sent by Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:12, and in 1 Thessalonians 5:26). It is possible that the word used here indicates some degree of affection, and this makes what Judas did appear all the more incomprehensible and heinous.

People have tried for centuries to work out why Judas betrayed Jesus, but there are no clear conclusions to this old debate. John's Gospel suggests that Judas was greedy and may therefore have done the deed purely for money (John 12:6); other people have suggested that Judas was a name which came from the south of Israel (similar to 'Judah'), and as the rest of the disciples were all from the North he felt the odd one out, and did what he did to gain attention, innocently hoping that Jesus would rise above any perils which might come as a consequence. Yet another explanation which is strongly favoured by many is that Judas thought Jesus was indeed the Messiah, but thought that when He came to Jerusalem and was exposed as the long awaited hope for all Israel, He would act with military authority and power to liberate Israel from her enemies, especially the Romans. If this was the case, then he had most certainly not seen and heard in Jesus the same things as everyone else! Lastly, some suggest that Judas' actions were a form of desperation on his part, because he felt that Jesus was not meeting the real needs of the people, and he tried to force Jesus to show His hand as Messiah. All of these raise within us feelings ranging from sympathy with Judas to revulsion at him, and given the complex nature of humanity it is quite possible that more than one of these reasons could have featured in Judas' thoughts. We do not know for sure.

All the disciples failed Jesus; Judas failed Him by betraying Him, and the others failed by not standing with Him at His moment of need. The big difference between Judas and the other disciples is that Judas would never discover that the love of God was capable of overcoming all sin. Judas could not live with Himself after what he had done and killed himself (Acts 1:18,19), but the other disciples found the love of Christ sufficient for their forgiveness and salvation (see Matthew 28:16-20, John 20:19f.)

#### ***The witness***

The last two verses of our passage describe a young man who was 'following Jesus' (14:50). This young man was wearing a 'linen cloth', an item of clothing which would have been regarded as something somewhat luxurious, but also rather inadequate for the cold night air of spring time in Jerusalem. The story does not appear in any of the other Gospels, but it is here in Mark, and it does not really tell us anything central to the story because; 'they took hold of him, but he ran off naked, leaving the linen cloth behind.'

Speculation has been rife since the days of the early church concerning who this young man might be. The most popular suggestion is that this is Mark himself, and that the Last Supper was held in the house of his family (which is specifically mentioned as a meeting place in Jerusalem in Acts 12:12). Moreover, it is suggested that Mark overheard a rumour about the arrest of Jesus and ran out to where he knew Jesus was, only to be apprehended and forced to run home naked! It is possible, but the evidence for this is slim at most, but it was common