Small Group Guide

A Courtyard, A Courtroom, and a Cross | Mark 14-15

BEFORE YOU MEET

Encourage group members to read Mark chapters 14 and 15 in full before gathering. Come ready to discuss what stood out, what confused you, and what moved you.

WELCOME AND OPENING

Take a few minutes to check in with one another. Then open with this question to get the conversation started:

Have you ever experienced a time when you were hesitant to be associated with Jesus or as a follower of Jesus?

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE SERMON

Use these points as anchors throughout your discussion:

- Mark weaves together the story of Jesus and the story of Peter deliberately, placing two interrogations side by side to show two very different responses under pressure.
- Jesus, knowing the full cost, chose the cross. He was not a passive victim. He was a King who willingly gave up his crown for others.
- The tearing of the temple curtain from top to bottom signaled that God himself opened the way to his presence. We did not climb up to him. He came down to us.
- Peter's failure was not the end of his story, and the resurrection message specifically named him: "Go tell the disciples…and Peter."
- The gospel is not "try harder." It is "trust him." His faithfulness, not our performance, gets the last word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Work through as many of these as time allows. You do not need to cover every question. Let the conversation breathe.

Getting Into the Story

1. The sermon describes two interrogations happening almost simultaneously -- Jesus being asked if he is the Messiah, and Peter being asked if he is one of Jesus's followers. What do you notice when you hold those two scenes next to each other?
2. Peter had made a bold, sincere promise to Jesus just hours before he denied him. Have you ever made a commitment to God with total sincerity and then found yourself breaking it? What did that feel like?
3. Pastor Mike pointed out that Peter kept himself at a safe distance -- close enough to watch, far enough to escape if necessary. In what areas of life are Christians today tempted to follow Jesus “from a safe distance”?

Going Deeper

4. The sermon described Jesus as "the King who made the one move that no king would make." What does it mean to you personally that Jesus chose the cross willingly when He had the power to escape it?
5. The tearing of the temple curtain is described as God tearing it from the top down -- making the move toward us rather than waiting for us to climb up to him. How does that image change or shape the way you think about your relationship with God?
6. Pastor Mike said: "The enemy wants you and I to be identified by our scars and our failures, but the gospel means we will instead be identified by Jesus’ scars." Where do you most struggle to believe that your failures do not define you before God?
7. The resurrection message said "go tell the disciples…and Peter." Before Peter had done anything to make things right, his name was already in the message. What does that tell us about how God's grace actually works?

Personal Reflection

8. Pastor Mike described a false inner story that many people carry: "If I do the right things, God is happy with me. When I fail, God is mad and distant." How much has that story shaped the way you relate to God? Where did it come from for you?

9. The sermon closed with two practical steps: Receive *him* and tell *them*. Which of those feels harder for you right now, and why?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Choose one or two of these to commit to before your next meeting:

- **Read the story in full.** Sit with Mark chapters 14 and 15 this week. Read slowly. Notice what details stand out. Bring one observation back to the group.
- **Name the distance.** Honestly identify one area of your life where you have been following Jesus from a safe distance. Bring it to God in prayer and ask him to draw you closer.
- **Replace the false story.** Write down the inner narrative you have been telling yourself about how God sees you when you fail. Then write beside it what the gospel actually says. Keep it somewhere visible this week.
- **Tell someone.** Think of one person in your life who needs to hear that their failures are not final. You do not have to preach a sermon. You can simply share what this passage meant to you and let them know God has not written them off.
- **Receive it again.** If you have been carrying a broken promise or a season of spiritual failure, take time this week to receive the grace of the cross -- not for the first time necessarily, but as if for the first time.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Before you close in prayer, give each person a moment to answer this question:

Based on today's discussion, what is one thing you want to carry with you into this week?

CLOSING PRAYER

Close by praying together. If it is helpful, use this as a guide:

Thank God for the cross and for what it cost Jesus to say "I am" when it mattered most. Confess any ways your group has been following at a safe distance. Ask for courage to receive his grace fully and to tell others what he has done. Pray by name for anyone in your circles who needs to hear that God has not given up on them.

LOOKING AHEAD

Next week the sermon will move into the resurrection account. Consider reading Mark chapter 16 and reflecting on what it means that the story did not end at the tomb.