

# **First Serve**

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Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 14:43-52

Topic

As Jesus is being led away from Gethsemane, the arresting authorities attempt to grab a young man who is following, only to be left holding his linen robe as he flees naked

Title

*"Naked Run 14:52"*

## Introduction

I think what I like best about the Marvel superhero movies is the cameo appearances by comic book icon Stan Lee.

It's a cinematic tradition that stretches back to the 1980s.

One cameo you might not be aware of was his very first, and it happened on the small-screen. Stan Lee appeared on TV in 1989 as the jury foreman in *The Trial of the Incredible Hulk*.

Another little-known cameo was in the 2014 animated film, *Big Hero 6*. It's based on a Marvel comic of the same name. Stan Lee makes his cameo in the post credits scene, as an animation.

The 93 year-old has also appeared in a few small screen and off-screen cameos over the years:

- He is part of the *Amazing SpiderMan* ride at Universal's Islands of Adventure.
- In Netflix's *Daredevil*, his picture hangs on the wall of the local police station, where he appears to be a cop.
- In Marvel's *Agent Carter*, he's glimpsed receiving a shoe shine next to Howard Stark.
- He also appeared in Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* as a passenger on a train

(BTW: There are over a dozen modern-era Marvel movies that do not feature Stan Lee, as well as many older projects).

I got to thinking about cameos because, since at least the thirteenth century, many competent Bible teachers and scholars have argued that Mark *makes a cameo appearance in his Gospel*.

They say that Mark is the "young man" following Jesus who runs away naked when the authorities try to grab him.

Is it Mark in a cameo? Maybe, but it's doubtful. Which leaves us to ponder why Mark includes this odd incident.

I hope to show you it is incredibly significant, rich with a simple symbolism used elsewhere in God's Word to describe the work of Jesus, in an illustration we can immediately relate to.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 With *Your* Clothes On, You Are Naked Before Jesus, and #2 With *His* Clothes On, You Are Covered By Jesus.

## #1 With *Your* Clothes On, You Are Naked Before Jesus

(v43-50)

Justin Timberlake first used the term "wardrobe malfunction" referring to the Super Bowl Thirty-eight halftime show snafu. The phrase has since entered pop culture to describe all sorts of clothing problems.

Long before Janet Jackson, an unnamed young man had an epic wardrobe malfunction, recorded in the Bible.

Before we get to him, we pick-up the story where we left-off - in Gethsemane. Jesus had just finished praying, and had announced to His disciples that His enemies were arriving.

Mar 14:43 And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

From the other accounts we gather that the "multitude" may have been an entire cohort of soldiers, numbering 600 or more, not counting the Jewish Temple policemen. If it seems like overkill, it was; but they wanted no trouble from crowds sympathetic to Jesus.

- "Swords" were the weapons of the Roman soldiers who were dispatched to arrest Jesus.
- "Clubs" were the weapons that the Temple police were allowed, by Rome, to carry.

If there was ever trouble between the ruling Roman soldiers, and the subjected Jewish Temple police, they would always be bringing clubs to a sword fight.

"The chief priests and the scribes and the elders" meant this was an officially sanctioned action by the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. Think of them as issuing the arrest warrant that was being served.

Mar 14:44 Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely."

We've all seen depictions of undercover operatives. There's always some kind of signal - a key word or phrase, or some gesture.

It was customary for a disciple to greet his teacher with a kiss. It could be on the cheek, or the forehead, or on the hand. It would be natural for Judas, who left during dinner and had been gone for several hours, to return and greet Jesus with a kiss.

Jesus was not all that recognizable. He needed to be positively identified to the arresting authorities by someone familiar with Him.

Judas didn't say, "He'll be the one with the halo"; or, "He'll be the one glowing in the dark"; or, "He'll be the tall, European-looking guy, with blond hair and blue eyes, speaking with a British accent."

Jesus was an average-looking Jew. The Contemporary English Version of Isaiah 53:2 reads, "He wasn't some handsome king. Nothing about the way he looked made him attractive to us."

I've explained to you before, based on skeletal evidence, that the average height for Roman soldiers in the first century was 5' 5".

Jesus may have been much shorter. One researcher (a Christian BTW) writes, "From an analysis of skeletal remains, archeologists have firmly established that the average build of a [Jewish] male at the time of Jesus was 5' 1", with an average weight of about 110 pounds."

You've heard of the Shroud of Turin. It is purported to be the actual burial robe of Jesus, with His image inexplicably burned on the cloth. Scientists, both Christian and nonChristian, remain divided about its authenticity. There are a lot of unanswered questions. Something to ponder is that the man depicted in the shroud would be close to 6' tall. It's possible Jesus was 6' tall, but then He'd have stood out from most everyone else, making it hard to see how Isaiah's description would fit.

"Seize Him and lead Him away safely." They needed Jesus alive, to stand accused in a series of rigged trials in order to pull-off their illegal and immoral scheme to murder Him.

Mar 14:45 As soon as he had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

"Rabbi" means *teacher*. For three-and-one-half years, Judas had followed Jesus, and sat under His teaching. He had even performed signs and wonders in Jesus' Name. But he never believed; he never was saved.

Mar 14:46 Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him.

Jesus was placed under arrest. So far, Judas' plan had gone-off without a hiccup. That was all about to change.

Mar 14:47 And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

Among the disciples, there were a couple of swords. Two of them, at least, had CCW permits.

It was not uncommon for travelers to arm themselves, for self defense against robbers. As far as the record in the Bible, this was the only time a disciple exercised his right to bear arms, and defend himself; and it didn't really go too well.

It was Peter who wielded the sword in Gethsemane. Mark doesn't tell us, but John rats him out in his Gospel.

John and Peter must have had some kind of competition. In addition to telling us that it was Peter who cut-off the ear, John let's us know that he outran Peter to the empty tomb on the first Easter morning.

It must have been a friendly competition, because they were often ministering together.

The arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane isn't the best context to mention this, but it's OK to have fun as Christians, serving the Lord together. Loosen up a little.

With perhaps 600 Roman soldiers, and numerous Temple policeman, to strike, Peter went after an unarmed man. He was "servant of the high priest," there to observe - not a combatant.

It might have ended very badly for Peter and the other ten disciples had it not been for Jesus. Mark omits it, but we know from the other accounts that Jesus reached out and healed the ear of the servant.

Let's stop there and point out something about the Bible.

I've already mentioned two or three things that happened in Gethsemane which Mark does not report. When we get to the naked young man, we'll see that story is something reported only by Mark.

Why are the various Gospel accounts different and selective? I ran across a fascinating illustration in a scholarly journal article I was reading. It's a little long, but I think it's worth our effort as listeners.

While the events behind the text may be revelatory, they are not inspired and thus not expressly “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (Second Timothy 3:16–17).

That, of course, is not to claim that the events so described in the biblical text did not happen, but simply that it is the Holy Spirit’s accounts of the events that are to be attended to for life transformation, *not* the re-creation... of those behind-the-text events themselves.

All this to say that the text is not merely **a plain glass window** that the reader can look through (to discern some event behind it). Rather, the narrative is **a stained glass window** that the reader must look at. A stained glass window is carefully designed by the craftsman in accordance with a particular theme, style, location in the building, size and structure of window, nature and availability of glass, demands of patron, expertise of artist, etc. The glass, the stains, the lead, the copper, and everything else that goes into its production are meticulously planned for the appropriate effect, to tell a particular story.

So, too, with narratives [in the Bible]. The interpreter must, therefore, pay close attention to the text, not just to what is being said, but also *how* it is being said and *why*, in order that the agenda of the author may be discerned.

Mark has something to say beyond the reporting of the events themselves. He includes, or excludes, information on purpose, according to the spiritual message he is wanting to convey - a message that is different from the ones the other Gospel's convey.

Mar 14:48 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me?"

Jesus was not resisting arrest. He let them seize Him. If He wasn't resisting, then why the comment about robbers, swords, and clubs?

There are probably lots of reasons we could suggest; I'll highlight one. Jesus was not a revolutionary leading a political party. He was not attempting to force the Kingdom of God upon nonbelievers. He wasn't pushing *reform*, but rather offering *regeneration*.

That adds another wrinkle to Peter's misguided swordplay. Peter's actions were the exact opposite of what Jesus was about in His first coming.

There **will** be a Second Coming; and it will be totally different. Jesus Himself is described as wielding a unique sword in His Second Coming. Maybe it would be better if I just read it to you.



Rev 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

Rev 19:12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.

Rev 19:13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

Rev 19:14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Rev 19:15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Rev 19:16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The Cross must precede His Second Coming, crowned; so Jesus submitted Himself for arrest.

Mar 14:49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

All the prior week, Jesus had been available for arrest. He was highlighting the sinister nature of their actions - using the cover of night to keep their illegal acts out of the public eye.

What "Scriptures must be fulfilled?" **All of the ones about the suffering and death and resurrection of the Savior.**

Most of you have heard some breakdown of this before; but that doesn't make it any less fantastic. A guy by the name of Peter Stoner calculated the mathematical probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight of the Messianic prophecies.

(Stoner was chairman of the mathematics and astronomy departments at Pasadena City College until 1953 when he moved to Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. There he served as chairman of the science division).

The probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight of the prophecies is 1 in 10 to the 17th power; or 1 with seventeen zeros after it. *That's one in one hundred quadrillion.*

***Jesus fulfilled at least 108 prophecies.*** I'm not sure it's a probability that can even be calculated.

One particular prophecy that was being fulfilled *right then* is Zechariah 13:7. Jesus had quoted it earlier that evening; it's in verse forty-seven, where Jesus said, "for it is written: 'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SCATTERED.' "

[Mar 14:50](#) Then they all forsook Him and fled.

Check that one off the list of 108. They scattered, as prophesied.

Jesus had also told them they'd be stumbled. Expecting the Lord to set-up the Kingdom of God, when He surrendered Himself to the authorities, and would not allow any resistance, their Messianic hopes were dashed. This amazing Person, Who commanded diseases to leave, and demons to flee, was definitely not going to set up the Kingdom; and they were stumbled by it.

Have your hopes been dashed on some rocky shore of trouble? Sure they have. I've been stumbled by what I thought Jesus would do in my situation, when it seemed as though He let me down. His perceived inaction can stumble us.

O, how faithful He is, to love me when I feel He has failed me, when I am the one constantly falling short.

#2 With His Clothes On,  
You Are Covered By Jesus

(v51-52)

I haven't talked about "clothes" yet, but I will now that we have arrived at verses fifty-one and fifty-two. Let's read them:

Mar 14:51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him,

Mar 14:52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

The place to start talking about this is the only thing *everyone* agrees upon: **We are nowhere told who this "young man" is.** Any suggestion is unsupported speculation.

There are quite a number of theories, including that he is the apostle John, or Jesus' friend Lazarus, or the man who would later prep Jesus' body for burial, Joseph of Arimathea.

By far the most widely held guess is that it was none other than Mark himself, making his cameo.

It is speculated that Jesus and the disciples celebrated Passover in the upper room at the house Mark's family owned. In that scenario, Judas first led the arrest party to the house. Not finding Jesus still there, they headed off to Gethsemane.

Mark, aroused from his sleep, threw on a robe, and ran to warn Jesus. Alas, he was too late; Jesus had already been taken.

Mark then decided to follow Jesus. When the authorities saw him, they tried to grab him, but they only got a handful of his robe, and he fled naked.

Maybe; but probably not, and it is all conjecture.

If we quit looking through the glass asking "Who?" and instead ask "Why?," we just might see the stained glass.

We don't need to be Greek scholars to read what Greek scholars have discovered about these verses in the larger context of the Gospel of Mark.

We don't even need to rely on Greek scholars, because we can find what they've discovered for ourselves. **It has to do with the repetition of certain unique words.**

The Greek word for "linen" (σινδών) occurs twice in Mark 14:51-52. **There is only one other place in the Gospel of Mark where the word is found, and it occurs twice there, too.** It is when Mark describes the burial shroud of Jesus.

Mar 15:46 Then [Joseph of Arimathea] bought fine **linen**, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the **linen**. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

If you are reading Mark carefully, especially in the original language, you will make a connection between the double use of "linen" with regards to the young man's discarded robe, and with regards to Jesus' burial robe.

While the "linen" robe left behind by the fleeing young man was certainly *not* the same "linen" robe that shrouded Jesus in the tomb, Mark intends for us to make a *spiritual* connection between the two.

**Mark intends for us to see that Jesus, in His death, took upon Himself our robe.**

If you think that's a stretch, it's not. There are other passages in the Bible that illustrate what Jesus did on the Cross in terms of clothing. He takes upon Himself our filthy rags of sin and self-righteousness in order to die in our place, for our sins.

But that's not all. In taking upon Himself our clothing, the Lord doesn't leave us naked. **He exchanges our filthy rags for His own robe of righteousness.**

One of the passages that highlights this exchange is found in the Old Testament, in Zechariah 3:1-5.

Zec 3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD...

Zec 3:3 ... Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

Zec 3:4 Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

Zec 3:5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

Mark calls our attention to Jesus wearing our robe - our "filthy garments" - by his use of the word "linen."

Mark further calls attention to the exchange of our filthy garments for a robe of righteousness by his use of two additional unique words.

The single Greek word for "young man (γυμνός) occurs twice in Mark 14:51–52. The only other time it appears in Mark is at the empty tomb of Jesus:

Mar 16:5 And entering the tomb, they saw a **young man** clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

We know from the other Gospels that this "young man" was none other than an angel. By calling the angel a "young man," Mark goes way out of his way to try to connect these two "young men" spiritually, in our minds.

What is Mark trying to show us? What is the connection between the naked "young man" and the clothed "young man" in the tomb?

The "young man" at the tomb is described as wearing a "white robe." The adjective, "white," is another unique word, found in only one other passage in Mark's Gospel. It described Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration:

Mar 9:2 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.

Mar 9:3 His clothes became shining, exceedingly **white**, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

The disciples saw Jesus glorified, the way He'd look after He rose from the dead.

We can apply Mark's literary clues this way:

- Before Jesus died on the Cross, a "young man" was naked.
- After Jesus rose from the dead, a "young man" was clothed in a glorious white robe.

Jesus went to the Cross and took our robe - our filthy rags - upon Himself. But we are not left naked. He rose from the dead, emerging from the Tomb, glorified. When you believe in Him, Jesus clothes you with a robe of righteousness.

This interpretation is consistent with what we read elsewhere in God's Word about our nakedness, and the Lord clothing us. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Lord says to the Laodiceans,

Rev 3:17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and **naked** -

Rev 3:18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and **white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed**; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

A moment ago I quoted the verses that describe Jesus' Second Coming. If you were listening carefully, you heard the church described as "clothed in fine **linen, white** and clean" (19:14).

Have you ever gone somewhere and been inappropriately dressed? Or better yet, have you ever been turned-away from an establishment because you failed to meet their dress code?

There are still a handful of restaurants in the US, mostly in New York or Chicago, that require men wear a sport coat. No coat, no meal.

To accommodate you, the restaurant has coats they can provide you.

The entire human race is invited to Heaven. But to get in, you need the appropriate spiritual clothing. Your best efforts - your good works - amount to a robe of filthy rags. On your own, you are dressed inappropriately for Heaven, and entrance there will be refused

God must provide you a robe of righteousness. It is given to you as a gift, by grace, when you have faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

- With **your** clothes on, you are naked before Jesus. You need to be clothed with His righteousness.
- With **His** clothes on, you are covered by Jesus. He gives you His glorious robe of righteousness.

Who was the young man who ran away naked? **It was you,** spiritually speaking.

- If you've received the Lord as your Savior, then you're like Joshua the high priest, having been outfitted for Heaven.
- If you have not received the Lord... Don't run away naked in the shame of your sin.