

Mark 14:1-25

The Passover

Introduction

A few weeks ago, in chapter 11, we began the Passion Week with the triumphal entry (Palm Sunday). Today, we continue through the major events leading up to the cross as we look at the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his 12 apostles. Our passage opens with the imminent threat of the religious leaders' plot to kill Jesus and his knowledge that these things must happen. As we approach his crucifixion, we see Judas' plan to betray him, the faith of a woman who anoints him, and his institution of the Lord's Supper, which commemorates the New Covenant.

Commentary

- **1-2 - The Plot to Kill Jesus**

- The book of Mark obviously follows primarily the events and words of Jesus' ministry, but 14 opens with a glimpse into the thinking of the chief priests and scribes, who we have been told multiple times in Mark are looking for a way to destroy Jesus.
- Jesus is in Jerusalem, and they want to take this opportunity to arrest and kill him. Since so many people are in town for the Passover, though, including many of Jesus' followers from Galilee and the other regions where he has ministered, they know that they will need to do this with stealth and not in a way or at a time that will cause an uproar.
- The text seems to just leave the statement hanging then return here in verse 10 when Judas betrays Jesus to the chief priests. That these verses surround the account of a woman anointing Jesus, though, is a purposeful arrangement by Mark to highlight her faith as opposed to Judas' faithlessness and betrayal.

- **Women in Mark**

- In fact, the theme of the faith of women has appeared already in Mark and will continue to become an even more prominent theme.
- Through faith, a woman with a bleeding problem boldly sought to touch even the edge of Jesus' clothes, knowing that he could heal her, even though it would have been against the holiness code and social order for her to do this.
- Through faith, the Syrophenician woman is the only person in the gospel of Mark who he presents as successfully giving a counter-argument to Jesus, demonstrating her faith that the blessings of Jesus' kingdom are for all.
- Starting in our text today and continuing until the resurrection, the faith of women will be set in purposeful parallel to the faithlessness of his own male disciples, which would have been quite a statement in the culture, where the testimony of a woman wasn't even admitted in court and women were largely viewed as morally and spiritually less disciplined than men, since women were the "weaker sex."
- With Jesus' statement that the woman in today's text anointed his body for burial, her action is presented as the closest human understanding of his identity and mission prior to his birth, set immediately against the betrayal by Judas.
- There are two many parallels between verses 3-9 here and John 12:1-8 for them to not be most likely talking about the same event, which means that Mark purposefully told about

her faith slightly out of chronological order (4 days) to purposefully set her faith against Judas' lack of faith.

- It seems strange that Mark and Matthew both include Jesus' statement that what she has done will be told in memory of her without actually including her name, while John doesn't include the statement but does include her name.
- In doing so, they are likely making the point of opposing faith/faithlessness even more clear by setting a prominent, named apostle (Judas) in opposition to an unnamed woman.
- **The work of God's kingdom is done not by those seeking fame but by those showing faith, no matter who they are or how humble their work.**
- **3-9 - A Woman Anoints Jesus at Bethany**
 - While Jesus was in Bethany, a town very near Jerusalem where many pilgrims would spend the night, he was having a feast at the house of Simon the Leper, who may have been someone that Jesus healed, but we are not told if this is the case or not.
 - He obviously did not still have his skin disease, though, as people would not have feasted at his house if he did.
 - While Jesus is reclining at the table, a woman anoints his head with very costly ointment.
 - Some who were there grew indignant at what they viewed as a waste, since the ointment was very expensive and could have been used to help the poor instead.
 - Jesus rebuked them by saying that they always have an opportunity to help the poor, but he is only with them now and is leaving soon. She did the most gracious thing she had the opportunity to do and used her costly gift (likely one of if not the most expensive thing she owned) and anointed his body for burial. Jesus, therefore, proclaims that her service should be always remembered, not scolded.
 - In John's account, we learn that this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Jesus had just recently raised Lazarus from the dead (not included in Mark), and this is likely a way that Mary is showing her gratitude and devotion to Jesus.
 - At a feast, it was a common practice to anoint the head of important guests with olive oil, but Mary takes this practice and raises it to the nth degree by using ointment that was worth about a year's wages and was most likely an heirloom in her family that likely would have served as a status symbol.
 - If this is true, there is another layer to her action that says, "rather than finding status in any treasure, I find my status as one who is devoted to you."
 - John also adds the details that she also anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, an act that makes the anointing an even greater sign of devotion and humility, as feet were normally just washed with water, and hair was not normally used.
 - Jesus in his answer does not downplay giving to the poor but rather seeks to elevate what she has done.
- **10-11 - Judas Seeks to Betray Jesus**
 - Immediately after this sign of devotion and anointing for his death, we read that Judas, one of the 12, goes to the chief priests and tells them that he will betray Jesus to them.
 - In John's telling, we learn that Judas was one of those who were indignant about her seeming waste, but mostly because he, being the group treasurer, wanted to steal a cut of what they would have gotten from the sale of that ointment.

- We aren't ever told of Judas' motivations, but he obviously didn't believe that Jesus was who he said he was, and this seeming waste and offensive display by one who Judas likely believed to be a false Messiah may have been the final straw.
- In our culture still today, but especially in that culture, a betrayal by one's own disciple, especially one given the trusted position of being the treasurer, would have been a great shame to Jesus.
- **12-25 - The Passover**
 - On the Passover, which was also the first Day of Unleavened Bread, the disciples asked Jesus where they should prepare for the Passover meal, which had to be eaten within Jerusalem's walls.
 - In answer, Jesus sends two of them into the city, telling them that a man carrying a jar of water will meet them and that they are to follow him to his house. When they get there, they are to say to the master of the house, "The Teacher says, 'Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" The master of the house will then show them a large upper room furnished and ready.
 - There are some theories about these strange instructions that are similar to the instructions about getting a donkey prior to the triumphal entry, but the specific wording as the context of the book of Mark may shed some light on this.
 - The instructions aren't necessarily framed like a miracle, more like arrangements made ahead of time. The man carrying water was unusual, as this was normally done by women, but it was a fairly standard practice for wealthy homes that could afford a furnished upper room and male servants to have them get water.
 - This wealthy home may even have been the home of Mark himself or someone else connected to Jesus or his disciples, and, if this was all prearranged, we are simply not given the names to protect those involved, as this was a gospel that was circulating while the church was being actively persecuted by Rome.
 - Whatever the explanation, the two disciples went into the city, found things exactly as Jesus had said, and prepared the Passover meal.
 - When it was evening, or time for the meal, Jesus and the rest of the disciples arrived, and, as they were eating, Jesus told them that one of them is about to betray him.
 - To erase any doubt that it is one of his own apostles, he clarifies that it is one of the 12 and one who is even there sharing the meal with them.
 - They each start to ask if it is them, but, instead of giving more details, he just says, "the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."
 - Jesus knows what he has come to do and that he will be betrayed and killed, but that does not mean that the one who betrays him is still not morally responsible for that choice.
 - Prophecy of sin, betrayal, and murder does not eliminate or excuse the sin that causes the prophecy to come true. Like a chess grandmaster, God can use even the sinful actions of people and the schemes of the Devil to accomplish his purposes instead of theirs. God is more powerful than the evil that others intend.

- The phrase “it would have been better for that man if he had not been born” is a phrase also used elsewhere in the Bible and indicates a statement of extreme judgment. It would have been better to not be born than face the judgment they are due.
- As they eat, Jesus takes the bread and the wine and uses them to institute what we now call the “Lord’s Supper” or communion, which commemorates the New Covenant.
 - To fully understand what is happening, I will explain a bit about the Passover meal and the institution of the old covenant in Exodus as we go.
 - We should also note that covenants were often renewed when the parties or terms had changed, so it may be more accurate to call it the “renewed covenant,” but, whether “new” or “renewed,” Christ’s work changes everything.
- First, “he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’”
 - The bread that he gives to them is known as the bread of affliction and the bread of freedom (both terms apply to it).
 - It remembers the affliction in Egypt but also recognizes the suffering, need, and bondage endured by God’s people throughout time until today.
 - It also, though, remembers the deliverance and freedom that came after the affliction of Egypt and points forward to the hope of the final deliverance and the end that God will bring to all suffering.
 - For Jesus to take this bread and say “this is my body” was to say that he will be what the bread pointed to. Through his suffering, a way of freedom, of forgiveness and deliverance will be made possible.
- Next, “he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”
 - In the Passover meal, there were 4 cups that were drunk to represent the 4 promises of deliverance given by God in Ex. 6:6-7 that God told Moses to tell to the people in promise of their coming deliverance from Egypt:
 - “I am the Lord, and (1) I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and (2) I will deliver you from slavery to them, and (3) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. (4) I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
 - Jesus, the Messiah who is about to bring the greater deliverance, now takes the role of fulfilling the promises of deliverance in an even greater way.
 - Through his death—his blood “poured out for many”—and his resurrection, a greater deliverance will be provided.
 - The phrase “this is the blood of the covenant” also directly quotes Ex. 24:8, which reads, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

- When God gave the people the Law at Mt. Sinai, he also had them enter into a covenant with him. As part of the covenant ceremony, Moses sprinkled blood on an altar and on the people (represented by 12 pillars for the 12 tribes), to picture the covenant made between God and the people.
- Now, in the new covenant, God the Son has the 12 apostles drink wine that represents his blood, poured out for many in a new covenant sacrifice.
- The wine represents his blood, his death, and the apostles are to drink it, to accept it and believe what it means, to join the new covenant through his death and what it accomplishes.
- In the old covenant, the blood was sprinkled *on* the people to symbolize that they had been cleansed to be near God and in covenant with him, but also that they needed to keep their end of the covenant.
- Now, the symbolic blood is drunk by his people, to go not *on* but *in* them. God the Son sacrificed himself, shed his blood, knowing that people can never fully keep the covenant.
- He did the work himself and offered to cleanse us from the inside out so that we can not just get *near* sacred space but can ourselves *be* sacred space, with God the Spirit dwelling inside of us.
 - His suffering brings freedom (bread) and his blood makes the new covenant, the greater deliverance, possible (cup). In Christ, the hope of the Passover has come.
- Jesus closes by saying, “Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”
 - Most people take this to refer to the Messianic Banquet or Marriage Supper of the Lamb mentioned in Is. 25 & 55 and Rev. 19 where all of God’s people from all of time will feast with him together in the renewed creation.
 - Another possible layer to the imagery of the cups that many argue for here is that Jesus proclaimed the new covenant on the 3rd cup, which represents the promise of God “I will redeem you.” He then chose to abstain from the 4th cup, which represents the 4th promise: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.” He abstains from that cup until he can drink it in its full reality.
 - He knew that the cup he must drink first is the bitter cup of wrath and take the Father’s punishment for the sins of the world.

Conclusion & Application

Just as Jesus had told them many times already, he knew what he had come to do. He knew that he was going to be betrayed and be killed. Mary may or may not have been explicitly anointing him for burial, but that is how Jesus took and blessed her sacrifice. He then instituted a covenant ceremony to remember what he was about to do, firmly resolved to submit to the will of the Father and take the wrath that we deserved. I don’t think there is any more appropriate application and response than simply, “Jesus, thank you.”

His willing sacrifice gives us a hope we could not have without him and gives us every reason to demonstrate our faith and love for him, whether or not it ever leads to fame or reward, for our greatest reward is to be with him forever and drink the 4th cup with him and all his people from all of time.