

DAY 7: SACRIFICE AND COWARDICE: THE MESSIAH AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Mark 14

CONSECRATION IN THE MIDST OF BETRAYAL (MARK 14:1-11) Huge crowds are arriving in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. *“The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest [Jesus] by stealth and kill Him”* (14:1), but do nothing for fear of inciting a riot. Jesus has stopped in the nearby village of Bethany to visit Simon the Leper, presumably a well-known man whom Jesus healed. At a dinner honoring Him, a devoted woman comes to Jesus. Taking an alabaster vial of precious perfume, the woman anoints Jesus’ head. Some of the dinner guests are scandalized because her extravagance seems so wasteful, especially in light of the needs of the poor. The response of Jesus—*“You always have the poor with you ... but you will not always have Me”* (14:7)—cannot be taken as a lack of concern for the poor. Jesus consistently stressed the importance of caring for those in need. Jesus affirms her, not so much for her sacrifice, but for being the first individual to grasp that the gospel demanded His death.

Mark’s brief note on Judas leaves us with two inescapable facts. First, the betrayal of Jesus is at the hands of one of His closest confidants. Second, Judas’ treachery, fulfills what had already been divinely ordained (14:41).

THE PASSOVER PREPARATION (MARK 14:12-21) To prepare for the Passover feast, Jesus sends Peter and John into Jerusalem where a man leads them to *“a large upper room furnished and ready.”* There Jesus will celebrate the Passover with His disciples. The traditional meal begins by reciting Psalms 113–114 and consists of four parts: (1) the blessing; (2) food is served and the deliverance from Egypt recounted; (3) Jesus, as the acting head of the household, breaks the bread, which is eaten with the herbs, fruit, greens, and lamb; (4) the feast ends near midnight with the singing of Psalms 115–118. On this night, Jesus says, *“Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me, one who is eating with Me.”*

THE LORD’S SUPPER (MARK 14:22-31) *“As they were eating, [Jesus] took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them.”* Jesus says, *“Take; this is My body.”* Jesus’ gift to the disciples and to us is Himself. After the main meal has been eaten, Jesus takes the cup and says, *“This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”* The cup signifies Jesus’ crucifixion, by which God institutes a new covenant sealed by the blood of the Son. The disciples sing a final psalm, then leave for the Mount of Olives.

THINK ABOUT how the disciples would not understand until after the Resurrection what Jesus meant when He proclaimed, *“This is My body,”* and *“This is My blood of the covenant.”* Then they would realize that Jesus, by His sacrificial death, had become the Passover offering. The old ceremonies were no longer needed. Believers would henceforth celebrate the Lord’s Supper. You and I—if we have accepted His sacrifice on our behalf—are people of the new covenant. When we eat the bread we acknowledge that His body was broken for us. When we drink of the cup, we remember His sacrificial death for us.

En route to Gethsemane, Jesus predicts the disciples’ defection and quotes Zechariah 13:7: *“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”* Peter objects—the others may fall away, but he will not! Jesus jolts Peter back to reality: *“Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times”* (Mark 14:30). Peter protests emphatically, *“If I must die with You, I will not deny You.”* Heroic words indeed! And the other disciples *“all said the same.”*



THE PRAYING MASTER AND THE SLEEPING DISCIPLES (MARK 14:32-42) In Gethsemane, Jesus separates Himself from the group, taking Peter, James, and John to be alone with Him. Jesus *“began to be greatly distressed and troubled.”* Three times Jesus retreats into solitude with His Father and returns to find the disciples asleep. Alone, He wrestles with His fate before the Father, begging to be spared from *“the hour”* and *“this cup.”* In praying to avoid *“this cup”* to be

removed from Him, Jesus may be asking if He can obey the Father without going to the Cross. But Jesus avows, “*Yet not what I will, but what You will.*” His acceptance of the Father’s will consigns Him to the darkness and loneliness of bearing “*the sin of many.*” Becoming the object of God’s wrath against sin overwhelms His soul.

THE ARREST AND TRIAL (MARK 14:43-65) A delegation sent from the Sanhedrin arrives in the garden to arrest Jesus. Jesus surrenders without resistance. The climax of the arrest comes when “*they all left Him and fled*” (14:50); thus Mark emphasizes Jesus’ abandonment. Jesus is taken immediately to the high priest Caiaphas and “*the whole council*” (Sanhedrin). The proceedings violate Jewish rules, for the Sanhedrin could not meet at night or on Passover. They violate all their own laws about acquiring evidence, hearing witnesses, and observing a waiting period before execution. The Sanhedrin “*were seeking testimony against Jesus to put Him to death.*” The prisoner’s character and life, however, provide them with no evidence against Him. “*Many bore false witness against Him, but their testimony did not agree*” (14:56).

To all charges, Jesus remains silent. There is no longer any reason to defend or interpret what He has done. The high priest rails, “*Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*” (meaning *God’s Son*). Not only does Jesus affirm the statement, “*I am,*” He presumes to occupy the place of God, “*seated at the right hand of Power [God].*” In response the high priest tears his garments, charging Jesus with blasphemy, while the Sanhedrin deride, strike, and spit on Him in abhorrence. These and other details of the trial fulfill ancient prophecy, for the treatment of Jesus had been foreseen in the suffering servant portrayed in Isaiah 53:3-7.

THE FALL (MARK 14:66-72) As Peter waits out the trial in the high priest’s courtyard, a servant girl twice accuses him of being one of Jesus’ followers. Each time he denies it. When some people standing nearby, alerted by his Galilean accent, make the same accusation, Peter “*began to ... swear*” that he doesn’t know the man they are talking about. Immediately, the rooster crows a second time. Peter remembers Jesus’ prediction, and “*he broke down and wept.*”

PERSONALIZE this lesson. All of us, sooner or later, face circumstances in our lives that we desperately want to change. Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane provides a model for how to face those times: (1) He acknowledges God’s power. (2) He asks God to take away the painful situation. (3) He submits His will to whatever God chooses to do. Think of a current struggle in your life and bring it before God in prayer. Worship God, and acknowledge His power. Feel free to ask Him to take away the struggle. But also tell Him that you accept whatever He, in His wisdom, decides to do in your life, and ask Him for faith to trust Him.

REVIEW: SACRIFICE AND COWARDICE: THE MESSIAH AND HIS FOLLOWERS

12. As you did your study, listened to the teaching, and read the Commentary, what thought will really stay with you? What has deepened your love for Jesus? What was a personal challenge to be applied in your life?