

The Journey to the Cross, Part 14

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 14, and we're going to read the first 26 verses. Let's hear from God in his word. Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.

But not during the feast, they said, or the people may riot. While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume made of pure nard.

She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor, and they rebuked her harshly.

Leave her alone, said Jesus. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them anytime you want.

But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth.

[1 : 17] Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, The teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?

He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there. The disciples left, went into the city, and found things just as Jesus had told them.

So they prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

[2 : 42] They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, Surely not I. It is one of the twelve, he replied, one who dips bread into the bowl with me.

The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man. It would be better for him if he had not been born.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take it, this is my body.

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, he said to them.

I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.

[3 : 43] When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Now, we're going to consider together Jesus' story of sacrifice and our story within that.

I want to begin by recognizing that there are events and stories that shape our lives. So this week, on the 6th, is the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landings, the Allied invasion of German-occupied France via the Normandy beaches.

And that day is of huge significance, and it reminds us that our freedom came at a significant and a violent cost.

So as a nation, every year it is right and proper to have a day of remembrance, to say we will remember them with gratitude.

And perhaps for some of us, and certainly for us still as a nation, our stories are shaped by that great sacrifice made during the Second World War.

[5 : 03] And in a sense, that mirrors for us the central message of Christianity, which tells us of Jesus, the Son of God, who has come into the world that he created on his own rescue mission.

He is the one who comes to save us from our slavery to sin leading to death. And again, he frees us through costly sacrifice.

We speak about salvation as a gift of God's grace. To us, it comes free. We receive it by faith in the Lord Jesus, but it comes at great cost to God in the giving of his one and only Son, Jesus.

So here in Mark chapter 14, we are being prepared for this, as it were, decisive battle that's to take place on the cross. Jesus is once again preparing his disciples for that moment.

So I want us this morning to consider together Jesus' sacrifice. And to do that, asking whether his cost of the cross, whether that shapes your life and mine, whether the significance of that sacrifice impacts our life, our day-to-day reality.

[6 : 28] To ask ourselves, do we remember him? Do we honor Jesus for his love and his sacrifice with our lives?

So we're going to do that by looking at three stories of sacrifice that we find here in Mark 14, beginning with Jesus' story of sacrifice and salvation. If you look at verses 1 and 2, and then verse 12 as well, we're reminded of the context where all this takes place.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are just a couple of days away, reminding us that as we think about the journey theme in the second half of Mark's gospel, we're coming to the climax.

We're coming close to the cross. But we need to think about what is this Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread? Well, in history, as we find it in the Old Testament, from the time of the Exodus, it was a celebration of God's redemption of his people who were slaves, setting them free so they might become the people of God.

And so every year, the people would gather together for a festival to remember to have a sense of thanksgiving to God. So at this moment, as we come to Mark 14, this is a time when the population in Jerusalem expands and explodes because so many people are coming to worship God for this festival.

[7 : 56] We see this in Edinburgh with our own festivals where the population swells hugely. It's a time of joy and expectation. It's also a time of asking the question, will God deliver us once again?

Maybe this year. Will this be the day he sets us free from our enemies so we can become the people of God and enjoy freedom in our own land? Now, how does Jesus fit into this story?

And how does Jesus fit into those hopes that the people had? Well, he makes clear that he comes to fulfill God's rescue.

He is the final act in God's great drama of redemption. And he comes to reinterpret God's story to make clear that he is central in God's plan of salvation and rescue for his people.

So let's look at verse 13 to 15. So the disciples have just asked, where do you want us to go and make preparations? And what becomes clear in that little section is both that Jesus desires to share the Passover with his disciples, and also he's made plans, he's made preparations.

[9 : 17] So there's the signal, look for the man carrying the jar of water, and the upper room is already ready for them. Jesus has his timetable. There is plots going on behind the scenes, but Jesus is making sure that he can share this Passover so he can explain the significance of the Passover in light of the cross.

He's eager to fill in the blanks for the disciples to see how he fits into God's great plan of salvation.

He is, in a sense, the last chapter. I borrowed an Agatha Christie audiobook a few weeks ago from the library.

And if you borrow a book, an audiobook from the library, you get 21 days to listen and not a second more. So those 21 days came and went when I was literally just about to listen to the last chapter.

So if you imagine, there's been really complex plot. I also questioned who might have done it, and all of a sudden, the story's just got this big gap for me. So I had to go and find a copy for resolution.

[10 : 29] Without the last chapter, it just didn't tie together. It didn't make sense. Well, Jesus is going to say to us that he is God's final chapter in the great story of rescue and salvation that began in the Garden of Eden through the Exodus all the way to where we are here.

Jesus is how all the different threads, all the different promises that we find in the Old Testament come together. He is the hero in this story of God's story of sacrificial love.

How does he make that clear to his disciples here two days before the cross? He makes it clear by reinterpreting for them the Passover meal.

So while families used to eat the Passover and it would be a chance for them to retell the story of the Exodus and they would use the symbols of bread and wine as a way to tell the story, Jesus now uses that meal to speak about the cross.

Those symbols that used to tell of God's past saving grace are now used to talk about God's future saving act of grace as Jesus will shortly die on the cross.

[11 : 43] So let's read together in verse 22 and following where we read, while they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, take it, this is my body.

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, he said to them.

I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God. Now I want to just draw our attention to three things that Jesus is saying about the cross in light of the Passover.

First, he's speaking, looking forward to the costly sacrifice of the cross. So the bread and wine of the Passover meal were a reminder of that first Passover lamb.

That lamb that was killed and his blood sprinkled so that the judgment of God could pass over his people so that they might be set free to meet with God in Mount Sinai to become the people of God.

[13 : 03] And then you think about John the Baptist's words early in Jesus' ministry when he said, Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And Jesus is saying exactly that here.

He's saying, the costly sacrifice of that lamb points forward to the costly sacrifice that I'm about to make in dying on the cross, in my body being broken, and my blood being shed so that the judgment of God might pass from you because it falls on me so that you might be set free because of my sacrifice.

Jesus is also reinterpreting the Passover to speak of covenant love to us. So remember, Israel was set free to enter into that wonderful covenant where God said, I will be your God and you will be my people.

But for that to happen, whenever there was covenants made in the Old Testament, we'd be thinking about it on Sunday evenings, there needed to be sacrifice. There needed to be sprinkling.

There needed to be washing from sin. There needed to be cleansing and forgiveness. And that's what the cross also speaks to us about.

[14 : 24] Jesus says, this is my blood of the covenant. This is the blood of the new covenant. And the new covenant that's promised in Jeremiah 31 is again, that I will be your God.

And it's a promise, I will forgive your sin and your wickedness and remember them no more. And Jesus is saying, I'm going to die so that can be true for anybody who puts their faith in me.

And he also uses the Passover to speak of his complete salvation. Especially we see that in verse 25. So he's told them many times he's about to die and he said that he's going to be given as a sacrifice.

But then he says, I won't drink it again. I won't drink again of the fruit of vine until the day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God. What's he saying? He's saying, I'm going to die, but that's not going to be the end of the story. Jesus approaches the cross confident of victory and vindication and resurrection.

And here he is drawing on this picture that we find in the Bible of the kingdom of God as a great feast. And Jesus is the one who is the entry for us into that feast, the pathway into true joy.

[15 : 40] And Jesus is saying, just as I am assured of victory and vindication and new life beyond death, so too for anybody who puts their trust in Jesus, we have that same confidence of life beyond death.

This feast in the presence of God can be ours and it's secured for us by the cross of Jesus. So here is Jesus and he's contemplating his death.

He knows it is close. And he's going there to conquer sin and death by his death and his resurrection. And that reminds us that in Jesus we have a Savior that we can trust.

It reminds us that we have a Savior who loves us and loves us deeply. It's a reminder that we have someone who we can trust both in our life and with our death.

Here is Jesus, the one who's come as Lord and King. But notice that he's never self-serving. Notice that he's never about his own interests.

[16 : 50] Rather, he is the servant king. He is the loving king. The king who saves by sacrificing himself. You know, we admire, don't we, the self-sacrifice of others.

We admire those soldiers who gave their lives for our peace and for our freedom. And those are incredible acts. They're just small expressions of Jesus and his life and his blood poured out for many.

And what we need today is to see that loving sacrifice and to receive it and to let that sacrifice work itself into our hearts so that it would transform the story of our lives.

So we've seen Jesus' story of salvation by sacrifice. Let's now look at Judas' story in this. Judas' story of tragic sacrifice.

So in light of what Jesus is saying he's about to do, in light of his supreme sacrifice, the story of Judas stands for us as a tragic one, doesn't it? He wanted treasure but the treasure that he pursued turned out to be fool's gold.

[18 : 15] Let's think about what Judas had at this point in the story. Verse 10, we're told Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve. He was in Jesus' inner circle.

He had friendship with the Son of God. He had been with Jesus hearing his teaching, witnessing his miracles, being part of serving alongside Jesus.

Jesus. He heard Jesus predict that he would go to the cross to give his life as a ransom for many. And then look at verses 18 and 19.

So here they are at the Passover and while they're reclining at the table eating, Jesus said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

They were saddened and one by one they said to him, surely not I. Now here's the remarkable thing. There is no sense in which Judas stands out as the black sheep among the disciples.

[19 : 29] There is no sense that he is the odd one out, treated differently. So when Jesus said someone's going to betray me, every eye turned to Judas. No, he was treated as a friend. He was invited in by Jesus.

He even had his feet washed. That same evening. What did Judas have? He had the love and the friendship of the Son of God. But what did he pursue?

What did he give up? He gave up friendship with Jesus in exchange for cash. Verse 10, Judas, one of the twelve, went to the chief priest to betray Jesus to them.

They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. you. So Judas is going to get some money for betraying Jesus, but he's also going to receive judgment.

Verse 21, the Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man, the judgment of God on the man who betrays Jesus.

[20 : 39] What a tragic exchange, what a tragic sacrifice. Judas has made. In the book of Romans, in chapter one, Paul takes us to the nature and the heart of sin, where we choose to worship created things rather than our creator, God.

Here is Judas choosing to live for, to value supremely, money over love and friendship of Jesus, the Son of God.

God. I think it's a helpful question for us to reflect on. What do I think is worth sacrificing everything for?

And we may have one answer, but do our lives and that answer line up? What do I think is worth sacrificing everything for? Are we putting our job, leisure and entertainment, family, security, approval from others ahead of Jesus?

How does the Bible answer that question? What's worth sacrificing everything for? Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the priceless treasure.

[21 : 54] That's the one thing worth devoting all our heart and life to. And so Judas stands for us as a warning of the consequence of getting that answer wrong.

Jesus said, you can gain the whole world and yet lose your eternal soul. We need to learn to think long term. I read a great piece of parenting advice a couple of months ago.

It said in those moments where your kids are driving you crazy, to ask yourself the question before you yourself go crazy, will this thing matter in five years?

In other words, try and take the long-term view and deal with it in that perspective. That's something we need to do with our own life decisions and priorities and directions. That thing that we are living for, that thing that is driving us to know, will it matter in five years, in 50 years, in 5,000 years when we are dead and we're either in heaven or hell?

Will that thing that we are tempted to put in front of Jesus, will it matter? Will it be worth it? you and I, we need to weigh our gods, as it were, in the balance, to reflect for ourselves on the relative worth of our idols versus the absolute worth of the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 21] Because we see from Judas that he gave up the prospect of forgiveness and eternal life and friendship with God and joy with God and the feast of God for some silver coins.

Jesus had said, and Judas was there, greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for my friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. Judas was offered this greatest of all loves, but he gave the tragic response, I don't want your friendship.

I don't want you. I choose another God to live for. We say don't let that be your story here today.

Ask God to make the glory of Jesus, to make the wonder of Jesus' salvation shine so brightly in your life that everything else takes its proper place.

sacrifice. So that Jesus has first and best. So that we would never let Jesus costly and loving sacrifice mean nothing to us.

[24 : 36] So there's Judas' story of sacrifice. But then we get ourselves to the beginning of Mark 14, we come to the woman's story of beautiful sacrifice.

So before the Passover meal that Jesus shares with the disciples, there is this other meal taking place at the home of Simon the leper. And there at this meal we see too a display of costly sacrifice.

Verse 3, while he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume made of pure nard.

She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. So this jar was probably some kind of valuable family heirloom passed down through the generations of extreme worth, but she smashes it there and then in order to anoint Jesus with this sweet smelling perfume.

Well, some people are shocked and angered. We see that in verse 4 and 5. They think our actions are so extreme, so over the top to waste this perfume on Jesus.

[25 : 54] And so they rebuke her. But what does Jesus do? Jesus defends her and he defends her because of the beautiful thing that she has done, the beautiful sacrifice that she has made.

They accuse her of not caring for the poor. Jesus in verse 7 is in effect saying, she's caring for the poor when she cares for me. You know, all through the Psalms we have the picture of the poor but righteous sufferer.

And that perfectly captures who Jesus is, particularly through his suffering and death. Jesus, the poor, righteous sufferer of the Psalms, is cared for by this woman and her sacrifice.

And so she is blessed for her act of devotion to her vision. Verse 8, she did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

She honors Jesus and she prepares his body for burial. Whether she realized it or not, it's not clear from the text. But what is clear is that her actions perfectly line up with God's timing and God's will.

[27 : 10] Unlike that of Judas, this woman has a right vision of Jesus, a right estimation of his value. Jesus will shortly die the Passover to deliver salvation and freedom to the people and Jesus is prepared by this anointing for his burial.

This story takes place in between the plots of the teachers of law and the chief priests and the betrayal of Judas in verse 10. And it stands as a really striking and beautiful contrast to their acts.

And Jesus gives an amazing approval to this woman in verse 9. I tell you the truth, whatever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

That this act of hers will become part of the gospel storyline. It will help to reveal something of God's good news. And so Mark and Matthew both record this act and this setting.

So what does her sacrifice reveal about the gospel? Well, let me suggest at least this. Again, in Romans, Paul says in chapter 12, verse 1, I urge you in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

[28 : 39] This woman's sacrifice shows us what happens when God's mercy and grace works itself into a heart and into a life, where a person is able to see, to truly see the value, the worth, the beauty, the glory of Jesus.

Because her perfume is poured out as devotion, it's poured out as worship, and it anticipates the fact that just a couple of days later, Jesus' blood will be poured out for her to bring her to God.

So we see Judas. Judas was blind, he was cold to Jesus' sacrifice, but this woman, in striking contrast, has been captured by God's great love in the sending of Jesus.

Friends, again, let me suggest that what we need to do is we need to look on his sacrifice. We need to look and keep looking to the glory of our salvation as we see it at the cross, till it leads us to love like this woman, till it leads us to wholehearted worship like this woman, till it leads us to that kind of devotion that she showed.

It's seeing God's mercy at the cross that fuels our worship, that fuels our sense of grateful, loving response.

[30 : 08] That's what motivates the Christian life. A sense of duty won't do it. What we need is to see God's glory as revealed at the cross. So we need to ask the Spirit to work it into our hearts, because we need this for ourselves.

We need this to sustain our faith and our hope and our joy, but we also need it for our witness, because this is what's going to make our Christian community attractive. That when we're so captured by Jesus' sacrifice, that we will make sacrifices ourselves.

That we will sacrifice our honor to serve others with humility. That we'll sacrifice our comfort in order to welcome outsiders in our communities and in our churches.

It's as we see all that Jesus has sacrificed for us that will cause us to be glad to be able to sacrifice our time to walk with someone else through pain and suffering.

So with God's help, our stories will point to the great gospel story. That our small sacrifices will cause people to pay attention to Jesus' great sacrifice.

[31 : 26] Because we're called to live in the light of Jesus' beautiful, self-giving sacrifice to reflect it in our worship and in our mission.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.