

The King Prepares to Die

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[0 : 0 0] to come. Amen. Let me pray. Father, we pray that you would help us understand your word today. We pray that you'd help us to live in a way that pleases you as a result. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, friends, I want to start today by showing you a short video clip, and I hope everything will work, but it should. Now, I want to tell you that I like Alfred Hitchcock movies, and if you know Hitchcock movies, you'll know that often he inserts himself into the movie, and I'm just going to give you a little clip.

We won't play the whole lot, but a little clip, and you can see how... see if you can spot him. We'll be right back.

We'll be right back.

You can watch the whole lot later on if you like. Now, friends, I've shown you this for a reason. The first reason is that there is a possibility that Mark has done something very similar. That is, there is a chance within this chapter of Mark's Gospel that we're looking at today that Mark has done something very Hitchcockian. He has put himself into the text, as it were. So you can... I'm going to refer to that later on, but you can see if you can spot it before we get there. There is, however, another reason for showing you these clips, and that is, you see, Alfred Hitchcock was a very skilled director, and Mark is a very skilled author. That is, what Mark has done is he has carefully weaved various themes into his story. And unless we're on the lookout, we will miss them.

[2 : 5 1] Let me tell you about three of them. The first theme is one that I've mentioned a number of times in the last few weeks, and that theme is the theme of the disciples and their lack of understanding.

That theme begins as early as Mark chapter 4 verse 13, where the disciples listen to Jesus teaching in parables, and they fail to understand. Then we find a little bit later when they're on the sea in a boat with Jesus in Mark chapter 8, he tells them, Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. And they misunderstand and think that he's talking about physical bread. Jesus rebukes them for their lack of understanding and their hard hearts.

Then in chapter 8, Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ. However, very soon after, Jesus predicts his own death. And Peter clearly doesn't get it because he rebukes Jesus.

In chapter 9, Jesus predicts his death for a second time. Mark tells us that they didn't understand that, and they react by arguing amongst themselves as to which one is the greatest.

The third time Jesus predicts his death, James and John come and ask Jesus about seats of honour for themselves. In chapters 11 to 13, Mark tells us repeatedly that they clearly see, they clearly hear, but he implies they clearly don't understand. So that's theme number one, the misunderstanding or the lack of comprehension by the disciples. The second one. The second theme is the conflict with the religious leaders. Now we've looked at that, at this for the last couple of weeks, but it starts all the way back in chapter 2. You see, in chapter 2, the religious authorities hear Jesus forgiving the sins of a paralysed man. Among themselves, they question the authority of Jesus. Within a chapter, that's chapter 3, he heals a man on a Sabbath day, and the Pharisees and Herodians, seeing this, begin to plot as to how they might kill him. In the last three chapters, Jesus has entered into

[4 : 58] Jerusalem, and we've seen this theme begin to be heightened. Unlike the disciples, they appear to understand some of what Jesus is saying and some of its implications. They can see what's going on, and they're threatened by it. And today we see how that threat causes them to act toward him.

Did you hear it in our Bible reading today? Keep an eye out for it today, because we're going to look at it some more. Watch for it. See if you can spot it in the text. Third theme. Mark highlights the issue of the temple. We've seen this going on for the last three chapters. Once Jesus entered into Jerusalem, this theme comes to the forefront. You see, Jesus has cleansed the temple. He has prophesied concerning the events before its demise. He's indicated where God is, that God is going to replace the temple, and that somehow he's going to be connected with the replacement. Now again, I want you to keep your eyes open on this today, for this theme is going to occur again. Keep your eyes peeled. With that in mind, let's get started. And my approach today is I'm just going to take a quick run through the text with you. I'm going to point out some things that help you understand what Mark is doing.

Let's get underway. So have a look. You should have that little outline there. Have a look at it and have it in front of you so that you can keep up with me. Let's look at verses one to two. Now we don't know how much time has passed between chapter 13 and what happens here, but what we do know is that time has now come for the feast of the Passover and of unleavened bread. Now that feast celebrates the redemption of God's people from Egypt. And in the first century, heaps of people came from throughout the dispersion of the Jews. They piled into Jerusalem for this particular feast.

Estimates of the number of pilgrims that were present ranged from an extra 85,000 in the city to 300,000. And as you can imagine, with these sorts of people piled into the city, there was enormous potential for political unrest. The Romans felt invariably nervous at this particular point. The religious authorities are nervous. The people would be excited. And you combined crowds, religious fervor, and anything might happen. Anything might set off the crowd. And let's not forget what's been going on.

You see, just prior to this, Jesus has been speaking out against the temple. He's been speaking out against the religious authorities. And the results are what we see in verses one and two. Antagonism by religious authorities toward Jesus is sharp. Planning is underway by them. They want to rid themselves of Jesus, and they're going to do it by arranging for his killing. But they can't do it now.

[7 : 51] They know that the feast is not a suitable moment to put their plan into action. They know that many people love Jesus. They've come to respect him. They know that this could incite riots. They know it's risky. So, Mark has told us what is going on with the religious authorities. He's also told us the timing of the events that are about to take place, the events around the Passover. And then he tells us of another particular incident. He takes us away from the crowds and into a private dwelling. We find ourselves in the house of Simon the leper. That in itself is rather extraordinary because here is a deeply religious man in the house of a man unclean, a leper. Here is a nameless woman. She has a jar of perfume worth about a year of a worker's wages. With profound insight, she anoints the Jesus destined for death with this fragrant oil. And I can imagine it being not only clearly visible what she does, but it would have assaulted the nostrils of everyone present. And for some, it smelt offensive.

Not because of the actual smell, but it was extravagant beyond belief, especially at a time such as the Passover when you were meant to take particular interest in the poor. Now, we're not told exactly who the offended are. However, it is probably the disciples. Throughout the gospel, Jesus has constantly pointed out how they failed to comprehend. Jesus told them about his coming death time and time again, and it hasn't sunk in. And they are acting as though life would just go on as usual. They don't understand. They don't believe the predictions of Jesus. They don't see the religious leaders plotting in the preceding verses. He's urged them to understand, but they don't.

But this woman, she does. She perceives this man's days are numbered. She anoints him for his burial and her insight and her prophetic act will be remembered even if her name is not. Let's move to the next verses. So have a look at verses 10 and 11. The plans of the religious leaders, the prophetic insight of this woman, are given a kick along in these verses. You see, when this unnamed outsider anoints Jesus for burial, a named and loved insider plots to betray him. He joins with religious leaders.

We're not told why. We're just told the leaders are pleased. This woman donated her money toward the burial of Jesus and Jesus receives money to send him to that death. Verses 12 to 25. The story is straightforward. Verse 12 tells us that the day was one when the lambs were being sacrificed. All such lambs would have to be sacrificed in the temple. In verse 13, and then people would bring their, the lambs home for the meal. In verse 13, Jesus sends two disciples to prepare for the Passover. We get the hint that it's all that being done in secret. Preparations are made. Jesus eats a meal with his disciples. And in verse 18, he announces that one of his disciples will betray him. In verse 22, Jesus takes bread. He talks about it as being as his body. In verses 23 and 24, he takes a cup and he talks about it as being blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Now the language, that particular language has only been used one other place in scripture. And that is in Exodus 24. And what is happening is it is clear that he's talking about his own blood being spilt as a covenant sacrifice for the atonement of sins so that people might be related to God. He has spoken about the end of the temple. This will mean the end of the sacrificial system. And here he is announcing a new sacrifice, a new sacrificial system, which only has one sacrifice in it. One sacrifice that will surpass and replace the old sacrificial system. No more dead animals, no more meals eaten afterwards in fellowship. Now only one sacrifice offered for all time, a sacrifice that will be the death of this man.

His blood will be shed for many. The nations who had been shut out of the temple or their courtyard, which had been treated badly, these nations will now have access through Jesus to God. And together they will, until the end of time, share in this meal in fellowship and remembrance until the day they will share it with him in his kingdom. Let's move on to the next section, verses 26 to 31.

[12 : 37] They sing a hymn. They walk out to the Mount of Olives. They talk. Jesus prophesies that they will desert him. Peter categorically, and he prophesies that Peter will deny him. Peter categorically denies it. He promises that even if he has to die with him, he will never disown him. And all the others say the same things. Then we turn to verses 32 to 42. Now we're in a place called Gethsemane and Jesus turns to prayer. He is deeply, deeply distressed. He knows his future. He knows what is coming.

He is incredibly grieved. He opens up to his disciples in verse 34. He had urged his disciples in chapter 13 to watch. Now he urges them to watch. In chapter 11, he told his disciples that wherever they, whatever they prayed for in faith would be given to them. Here in verse 36, he does a prayer himself. He acknowledges that all is possible for God, but not everything is God's will. And he asks that not his own will, but his father's will be done. He returns to the disciples. They are not watching.

They are sleeping. That's precisely what he warned them against just in that earlier chapter 13. So as we see their failure, what is, what is happening here is Mark is urging us, do not sleep before the final coming of Jesus. Rather watch and pray just like he told us in chapter 13.

Anyway, Jesus retreats to be on his own again. He prays the same thing. He returns to his disciples. Again, they are sleeping. The third time he returns, he announces his time has come. The son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners and his betrayer is at hand. Verses 43 to 52.

Jesus betrays Jesus. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. Swords are raised. Scripture is to be fulfilled. Jesus's own words are to be fulfilled. The disciples desert and flee him just as he prophesied.

[14 : 48] And finally, in verse 15, a young man makes his cameo appearance. And perhaps, just perhaps, it is John Mark. So there is a story and overview. I wonder if we can now turn to the meal that Jesus instituted. Let's have a closer look at it. Let's dig a bit deeper. First, I want you to ask yourself, what is this meal really all about? It's set in the context of the Passover. The Passover is about solidarity, brotherhood, fellowship, trust, remembrance of God's redemption, the celebration of God's redemption. And in the midst of this context, Jesus does this amazing thing. He takes a meal, this Jewish meal, this redemptive meal, and he transforms it. He says, it is my death, a new sacrifice offered to God. It is his blood that is the blood of the new covenant that is that brings people into fellowship with God. His death, his spilling of blood will make a new beginning, a new redemption, a new covenant, a new temple, a new way of relating to God. Friends, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, as we're going to do today, that is what we are remembering. The hopes of the Bible for reconciled relationship with God are realized. The hopes of the Bible for a sacrifice that will be for all are realized. Fellowship with God is now possible. The consummation of all the hopes and promises of God are met. It is a remarkable thing. Please remember this as we remember that as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. See, the Lord's Supper is not just about, as we Anglicans tend to make it, this private little thing that we come forward for, this private little celebration, intimate encounter between us and God. No, it is a declaration, a public declaration by God that his purposes are accomplished. This meal says his blood has been shed. His blood is available for all.

His blood is available for me and for you and for all nations. It is a celebration of God's yes and amen to all his promises. But I want to turn to my next point. Do you remember those themes I mentioned earlier on? Do you remember the antagonism of the religious leaders, the lack of understanding by the disciples? Well, look at verse 32. The disciples have watched Jesus heal. They have watched him challenge religious authorities. They have watched him in Jerusalem. They have watched the tensions mount.

They have seen him act out his death in the Lord's Supper. They have heard him spell it out to them clearly. They have seen his anguish in the garden. And here in the garden, it is clear that they still have not really grasped the consequences of what is happening. I mean, can you imagine Jesus at this point?

His last meal is tainted by with his disciples. He's tainted by his betrayer, dipping his food in the same bowl.

Now his disciples don't understand. They cannot force themselves to stay awake as the eternal son of God faces death on their behalf and agonizes over it. It is a lonely, desperate, torturous moment.

[18 : 32] Betrayed by his disciples. Beginning to be deserted by his friends. Soon to be denied by his closest friend. Eventually to be left hanging in the darkness on his own.

Isolated from his father. These are desperate hours and agonized moments. I want you to notice something. For two chapters now we have been told. Watch. Watch. Watch.

Keep awake. Here in these verses we see what Jesus means. We hear his voice to us. Be ready. Be prepared. Do not be ignorant, uncomprehending, unaware. Don't be ignorant of what God is doing in his world. Watch.

Friends, these are words for us. You see the disciples are us. And we are them and like them. We are so often so uncomprehending.

We are often so thick. We are often so absorbed in our own petty worlds that we don't notice what God is doing in his. We snooze on. And we don't work at understanding what God's purposes are in his world and in his son.

[19 : 48] And we don't realize that his purposes are being realized through his son. Friends, in these last days, for those are the days we are in, hear the words of Jesus. Hear them. Think about them. Watch. Remember. Pray.

Hear. Think. Watch. Remember. And pray. Finally, I want to close in a similar manner to the way I've closed the last couple of weeks.

I highlighted women the last couple of weeks and I don't want to stop. I want to highlight women again. Do you remember the woman at the beginning of our passage? We remembered her last week. We'll remember her this week.

She brings some oil. She anoints Jesus. She prepares him for burial. And does so at great sacrifice. Notice verse 8 in our passage. Our version says that she did what she could.

A literal, more wooden translation would be this. What she had, she did. What she had, she did.

[20 : 52] That is, she sees Jesus and she gives all. We've seen other women like this, haven't we? We've seen the woman with the two coins. The woman with the hemorrhage who just believes Jesus can do it.

We'll see them again. We'll see them at the cross. We'll see women at the tomb. And the women in Mark often stand in stark contrast to the male disciples. The men are insiders.

They're of the twelve. They have inside knowledge. They get inside interpretation. They hear. They see. They miss the significance of what is being said.

Some deny. Some betray. They can't stay awake. The women, on the other hand, seem on the periphery. They're distanced from those conversations. But they too hear.

They see. And they grasp the significance. And some take risks. Some pay huge amounts of money to show that they understand. Some believe.

[21 : 54] Some prepare Jesus for burial. Some are extravagant with what they have. Look at Peter here. Peter promises all, but fails to deliver.

The woman here promises nothing, but simply gives her all. Now, friends, Mark is not the only person to notice these things.

If you look carefully in the Old Testament, you'll find it there as well. Sure, the first woman, Eve, didn't do too well, but neither did her husband. What about some of the others? What about Tamar?

Midwives of Egypt. Hagar. Deborah. Ruth. Hannah. Abigail. Huldah.

And a host of others. In many cases, these women get it right when the men that surround them get it wrong. They stand up when men are not standing up.

[22 : 55] What's more, it's there in the New Testament as well. We've just seen it. In the history of Christian mission, there are similar sorts of stories. You see, women were often the ones in the 19th century who raised the funds for Christian mission.

They were often a majority on the mission field in Protestant 19th century mission. They went. They worked. They gave their all. They gave their lives in the service of Christ.

They often stepped in and did the tasks that men should have but weren't doing. And it doesn't stop there. You see, in our churches today, there are women.

And not so many men. And it is often the women in our churches who serve sacrificially. It is often the women who teach, who offer to teach the faith in our schools and in our Sunday schools.

It is often the women who dominate our prayer meetings. It is often the women who sustain ministry and pray faithfully. It is often the women who tell me at the door that they have been praying for me.

[24 : 02] However, please don't mishear me because we have congregations full of godly men. There are many Christian men in our congregation who are active and godly.

However, I wonder if I could have a word to us men just for a moment. So the main applications to the men, you women can turn off for a moment if you like or you can listen in. Guys, the man we see here heading toward the cross, toward his death, toward a horrendous death, is a model man.

He is a man who gives his all for God. He is a man who is not afraid to speak out against corruption. Not afraid to love his father. Not afraid to die for his friends.

Not afraid to be religious. He prays. He studies the scriptures rigorously. He goes where they lead him. He shapes his life by them.

He gives his life for what God says. Hear his words today. Hear him and watch. And give your all for him.

[25 : 18] For there is none greater. And there is no cause or service better. Let us pray. Father, we pray.

Thanking you. For your son. We thank you for the celebration of his death that we can share together today in the Lord's Supper. Father, we thank you for the people.

We thank you also for his model of what it means to serve you. Father, we pray for two groups of people.

Father, we thank you for the women that we see in this passage and preceding passages. Thank you for their understanding of you. Father, we pray for the church in Australia.

Father, we pray that you'd raise up good and godly men as well. We thank you for those here. But Father, we pray that you'd raise up more.

[26 : 21] Father, we pray that more men might take up the call to follow the Lord Jesus. Father, we pray for the Lord Jesus. And to be examples in their families and in their churches and in their workplaces.

Father, we pray this because it is a lack within our society. We pray that they might clearly and decisively and actively follow the Lord Jesus. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.