

Promises, Promises, Promises

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[0 : 00] Well, it's been a very busy week. Thursday was the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension. Today, of course, is Mother's Day, and Tuesday there's an election.

Now, I'm not going to preach on the Ascension, though one staff noted this past week that probably Ascension is the most under-celebrated major feast in the church, but someone will also have to preach on that.

And Mother's Day, well, there are some churches that do preach a kind of a Mother's Day sermon, don't they? And Proverbs 31 is probably a natural text for that. That's not the one that I've been given today. That'll have to be left for another time, perhaps a series on Proverbs.

And then, well, there's the election on Tuesday, and I don't know how one would preach on that.

But you have noticed that my sermon title is, or if you haven't, now you will, called Promises, Promises, Promises.

And I want you to know I am not cynical about our political system and our government. If I'm cynical about anything, I'm cynical about myself. And I'm very thankful for those who give their time and their energy to our ruling, our governing, our leading of this province.

[1 : 18] And so, I do want to look at this text that we have before us today from Mark chapter 14. And there actually are three, at least, promises in this.

And I've headed the three sections of this text like this. First is that of no empty promises. The second one is purposeful promises.

And the third one, then, is actually promises fulfilled. So, there are promises, promises, promises all the way along in this. And you might have picked that up from what Isaiah said earlier.

So, let's just look at Mark chapter 14. Turn with me if you're not there already. And this section begins back at the beginning of chapter 14, the first verse. It is the longest chapter in the Gospel of Mark.

And the first verse of chapter 14 reads, It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And that's the context of this. After that, there's this great anointing of Jesus by this unnamed woman in the house of Thomas the leper, when Jesus says that she has done what she could.

[2 : 26] After that, there is the prediction, or not, actually, there's the beginnings of the betrayal of Jesus, where we read in verse 11, that, and when they heard it, they were glad, that is, those to whom Judas went to about this matter, and promised to give him money, followed by the Passover itself, where Jesus talks about this new covenant that would come, this celebration of the Passover, and as he talks about, and as we heard about last week, about Jesus' table, this table that's a grace, and it's a table about the future.

And then we come to today's text in verse 26. And we learn about Jesus' foretelling of the denial, followed by Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and then finally, the betrayal, that fulfillment of what was foretold by Jesus, the betrayal of Jesus at the hands of Judas and others. Following from that, which was in our text today, verses 51 and 52, don't get sidetracked on that. Many Bible studies have gone in a different direction than they were intended, trying to identify exactly who was this man who had lost his linen cloth, and very well may be John Mark, the author of the Gospel of Mark, and having maybe hosted the 12 disciples in the upper room for that last supper.

And then Jesus goes on, and he's in the council of the chief priests, teachers of the law, and others where he's on trial, and then finally Peter denies Jesus to round out chapter 14.

But we're just going to look at these three sections in this. And again, the first one, I'm calling no empty promises. As I go through this, I just want to do three things in each one of these three

pictures.

[4 : 17] And that is, first, look at what Jesus does. Secondly, listen to what he says. And thirdly, learn from what he's saying, or what he means by what he's done and what he says.

So here we go. Chapter 14, beginning at the 26th verse. It says that, and they had sung a hymn after they enjoyed this Passover meal with Jesus.

And they go out to the Mount of Olives. And the first thing that we notice about what Jesus does is that he's not really interested in playing it safely. You know, they've gone into the city of Jerusalem where he's had this great meal with his disciples, telling them about the things that are to come and the way that they'll actually come.

But he leaves the city and he goes to the Mount of Olives. And he's out, actually, in the open now. It might have been safer to stay behind closed doors. And in fact, we know the disciples, after Jesus' death, go behind closed doors where it's safe.

But not Jesus. He's out in the open. Granted, it's night. We know that it's probably a very clear night, a full moon. It's the Passover, right? A very cold night, because later we know that Jesus and Peter, at some stage, are by fireside.

[5 : 33] So they had to light a fire on this clear and cold night. But nevertheless, Jesus is out in the open. There aren't the city lights, but there's the light of the moon. So he's out in the open, not playing it safe.

In some ways, in some respects, a very dangerous place to be. He could have played it even more safely by staying home. I can just hear, not necessarily his mother, not any of you who are mothers, but maybe my mother would have said to him, look, Jesus, tomorrow you're going to have a really big day.

Why don't you just stay home tonight and get some rest? Right? But no, he goes out. And then listen to what Jesus says straight away, right? He says to his disciples, you will all fall away.

Right? It's just this general statement of fact. It's not an accusation. It's not an accusation. He's just stating plainly what's going to happen. It's descriptive. He said to them, you will all fall away.

And if they doubted that, which we know that they do, and deny it, then Jesus backs it up. He backs it up by going to Zechariah chapter 14, verse 7, and he says, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

[6 : 46] So it's hard to doubt, isn't it? It's hard to deny when Jesus backs up what he's going to say by quoting the scriptures from Zechariah. And it's a little bit like, if you can imagine this, those of you who may be teachers, or even parents who prepare your students, your children, for exams.

But it would be a little bit like a student being told by his teacher that, look, you're going to fail the final exam. Right? You're just going to, you're going to come to it, and you're going to fail.

The disciples, yes, you've gone on some missions, two at least. You've done really well. Some of you have been to some very significant places with me. You've heard my sermons. You've seen the miracles. But at the end of the day, at this point, you're going to fail.

That's what he's saying. The shepherd will be struck. The sheep will be scattered. They will utterly abandon him. But Jesus goes on and gives a marvelous promise.

And he says, and after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Just kind of hold on to that a second. But that's the good news in the midst of this.

[7 : 56] This is the promise that Jesus gives to his disciples after the resurrection. He will go before them, and implicitly, they will follow him. So his death and their scattering isn't the end of the day.

But Jesus then gives explicit detail to actually the way this is going to unfold when Peter denies that he will actually do this. It's really wonderful, isn't it?

Jesus says, truly I tell you, this very night, Peter, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. It's very compassionate, I think.

It's very gracious that he gives this detail to him. We live in a world, don't we, where we think that the devil is in the details. Right? But I don't think, as we read the gospel, that that's necessarily true, that God is actually in the details.

He knows the details of our life. And graciously and compassionately, he spells out for Peter exactly what's going to happen. Not condemning him, condoning what he's going to do, but nevertheless making it plain.

[9 : 00] Jesus makes no empty promises when he spells this out and tells them what he'll do after the resurrection. That he will go before them and even Peter, who will deny him three times, will

follow him to where he goes after his death and resurrection.

The disciples' promises are without a doubt very empty because it's not only Peter who denies that he won't deny him, but I didn't see this until preparing for this. But as you know, in verse 31 it says, and they all said the same.

Every one of them will die. So what do we learn from Jesus in this? And I think Jesus is showing us that he's the shepherd. It's interesting though, isn't it? Because usually, someone will actually go after the sheep.

Is it a wolf? Or is it some thief? You know, or is it a hireling that lets the thief in? But in this case, it's the shepherd that is struck. It's not the sheep.

Jesus shows us what kind of shepherd he is, that he'll take this kind of hit and he'll do it for the sake of salvation, for saving them. Jesus also shows the error in this of Peter in really all our ways.

[10:17] And here's the interesting thing about this then, I think. As Peter says that he won't deny him and then Jesus shows him that in fact he will deny him. What's important to take home from this, I think, is that it's not only that Peter won't deny him and follow him and die with him as he suggests he will, but actually Peter can't die with him.

That's significant because Jesus' death for Peter, the disciples, and every one of us is a vicarious death. They won't die for him and they can't die for him.

He has to die for them and for us and us only. And so God will vindicate himself in this vicarious death of Jesus Christ because it's only one man's death that can save us because it was through one man that sin came into the world.

He vindicates himself, I say, because up until this point God has just kind of passed over sin and death and evil in the world. Right? There's a cost to those who've been given this symbolic sacrifice, be it bulls or lambs or goats or doves.

Right? But now Jesus' death that costs the Father, the Trinity, dearly is the one that fully pays the penalty for our sin and the death that's the consequence of that and now the death of Jesus Christ pays that penalty and saves us.

[11:53] That's the first thing. No empty promises from Jesus. Second second is purposeful promises and of course this is about Jesus then going into the Garden of Gethsemane.

So from the city to the Mount of Olives and now the Garden of Gethsemane. There's a purposeful promise in this in the midst of these prayers that Jesus offers. And so Jesus takes along with him his twelve disciples, sits them down and then selects out three of them, James and John and Peter to go further with him.

It looks very similar to the Mount of Transfiguration, doesn't it? But this time there's no Moses, there's no Elijah, there's no voice from heaven that they actually hear of course because they're asleep. Right?

But he picks these three. You have James and John who are motivated and they want to sit at the right and the left hand of Jesus and Peter who is the rock and there they are with him falling asleep. Jesus becomes distressed and he's troubled unto death. It just shows the weight of the responsibility on Jesus' shoulders. And here's the interesting thing about this, isn't it?

[13:01] It just shows the beautiful humanity of Jesus. He's not at all like Socrates who laughs in the face of his death. He's not at all like Buddha who says, well, you know, if you just kind of lower your expectations then you won't suffer so much.

That's the cause of suffering that you just have the wrong expectations. No. Jesus is clear about what's going to happen. He heads straight into it, isn't it? He doesn't laugh about it.

No. His full humanity comes to bear. He's distressed. He's troubled. All of the weight of this is upon him. So much so that Jesus then falls to the ground praying, prostrate, not just on his knees but flat out before his father.

It's like the spiritual gravity just pulls him down to the earth and he prays three times the same thing. At the same time there are James and John and Peter, right?

Jesus says to them, watch and pray. He tells them this because it's for their own good. He doesn't want them to enter into some kind of temptation but they don't take his word.

[14:11] They were told that on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is my beloved son with whom I'm well. Please listen to him but they couldn't listen to him. They were pulled down too and fast asleep.

So what does Jesus say? Verse 34 we read that he says that he's sorrowful unto death. He isn't sick unto death. No. There's a kind of a spiritual component here.

It's not a natural condition that he's dying at the moment but spiritually it's just so burdensome, just so heavy upon him. And the meaning of his death is coming upon the weight of his soul.

Verse 36 is the key verse then. Here's his actual prayer. He starts out by saying Abba, Father. He addresses his Father. Sounds very similar doesn't it?

To the prayer that he taught his disciples. Our Father who art in heaven but the who art in heaven actually isn't here. It's just Abba, Father. He is with the Father.

[15:15] The Father is with him. Right? And then he acknowledges that all things are possible with you, Father. That's what the Father can do.

That's who he is. The Father of all possibilities. And then he makes his petition. Remove this cup. Take it away from me.

Not my will but thine be done. There's a man who practices what he teaches. Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done. That's what he wants. He wants to do the Father's will. He only wants what the Father wants. So Jesus is showing us that he's not some kind of lone ranger.

He's not a hero. He's not a star. He's not an MVP. He's not some kind of self-made man. Right? In this world in which we live. No. His Father and his will and the Father's will are one.

[16:18] Which is what he wants more than anything else. Well then we come to verses 41-42 and Jesus says something that's very short but very kind of arresting.

He says it is enough. After praying this prayer three times in a row coming back three times and finding the disciples fast asleep he says it is enough. And what do you think he's saying?

Right? Do you think he's saying well enough with you? Or he's saying well I've had it with you. No. I don't think that that's what he's saying to his disciples. No. He's saying I've done all that I can and I have my answer to the prayer.

Now let's move forward. And then his betrayer actually approaches him. And he says the son of man must be betrayed into the hands of sinners. And this of course is Jesus' favorite messianic title from Ezekiel.

He is the anointed one of God. The betrayer comes to betray him to the hands of those who will take his life. And so what do we learn from Jesus then? As we listen to him as we look at what he does.

[17:21] And here we see that Jesus I think is not a victim of circumstances. He is in complete control and aware of what's transpiring what's coming about.

The father's will has been promised to him. This is what the father wants for him and he will fulfill and follow the promise of the father. He's completely aware of what's going on as this has been revealed.

And so I think it's showing this that Jesus' death for us was absolutely voluntary. He wanted to do this. No one was tying his hands behind his back.

Some thugs didn't come along and say if you don't do this I'm going to break your legs. In fact, they went to break his legs and when they did he was already dead. Right?

But no, Jesus' death is absolutely voluntary. He's doing this because he wants to because it's what the father wants him to do and that's how he dies for you and I.

[18:25] Finally then, the betrayal and the arrest of Jesus. This is the promise fulfilled and look at what Jesus does now. He remains calm it says now the pace was slowing down as we knew from last week but now it picks up again, verse 33 and immediately there's that word again.

While he was still speaking Judas, of course, comes upon him and Jesus is calm. He's betrayed by a kiss and notice it's not just some kind of nice peck on the cheek.

It's this affectionate warm kiss of a pupil to his teacher. That's what the original language shows actually. Right? He's just not coming up and pecking him and then kind of running away as it were.

Now, he completely betrays Jesus. Jesus is then of course defended by his disciples in this scene, right?

I don't know what to make of this. His disciple is really great aim or really bad aim, right? He cuts off his ear. It's really bad aim if he was trying to cut off his head.

[19:36] Really good aim if he wasn't trying to do that for some reason. I don't know why he would try to cut off his ear. But nevertheless, he doesn't need this at all, Jesus. But for some reason his

disciple thinks that he needs to defend Jesus when really what's happening is Jesus is on his way to delivering and defending disciples and all those who are sinners and would come to him and repent.

Jesus isn't ticked off. We learn from another gospel account that Jesus picks up the ear, puts it back onto the man, and he is healed. That's what Jesus does.

But listen to what Jesus says. Jesus interrogates the crowd that are coming to with him swords and all manner of weapons.

And he says, am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? In other words, Jesus is saying, well, who do you think I am?

Am I some kind of physical threat to you? Is that what I've been showing all this time in the temple? Teaching? Jesus uses these two words, capture and seize.

[20 : 46] Seize is used three times. It suggests, of course, that as they come to him, they're treating him as some kind of criminal. Right? If so, what kind of crime did he commit?

This crowd is overarmed for this confrontation. Jesus is really innocent, since, as we can see from the text, they give no answer to his question at all.

They've just been sent to arrest him. Finally, Jesus says, let the scriptures be fulfilled, and after that we read, everyone deserted and fled.

Foretelling and promises here are being fulfilled in Jesus' words, in Jesus' action, Jesus' life. Jesus himself is fulfilling the prophecy of Moses and of the wisdom literature and of the prophets.

There's more to come. More scripture will be fulfilled, but here at this point, the promises of God are being fulfilled and carried out in the person of Jesus Christ. Right?

[21 : 54] So what do we learn from then this scene of the betrayal of Jesus? Sorry, of Jesus. Well, again, I think we see here that Jesus, again, is not a victim of circumstance.

And in the midst of this, I think it points to Jesus' innocence. Right? The capturing of Jesus by night for fear of the Jews points to Jesus being innocent.

Jesus' innocence is going to come out through the trial that's going to follow. His innocence will be on the lips of a soldier at the foot of the cross, and his disciples will testify to his innocence as well, and especially Peter in his own letters.

Jesus is innocent. Right? He's pure. He's holy. He's without fault. He's perfect.

And he is the only one that can die for his disciples and for you and for me. So here we have these promises. We have no empty promises from our Lord.

[23 : 03] We have promises with great purpose and we have promises that are fulfilled and only can be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Right? Let me think through with you then just a few things to take away then.

Implications of this passage. The first thing I think is that it's important that we accept our disposition to deny our own Lord and even to deny the fact that we deny him.

Peter's failure was to think that he could die with Jesus. I don't think that we think that we could die with Jesus. But Peter's failure was that Jesus told him that he was to take up his own cross and follow him, not to take up Jesus' cross.

So it's important that we all accept Jesus' death in our place to cover, to keep us from sinning as we take up our cross and follow him. The second thing is to accept Jesus' desire and will for us.

He wanted to die for us. It's hard to believe, I know, isn't it? But he chose this death. He was the one who wanted to die in our place and for us.

[24 : 20] And the only thing about that we can do is to watch and pray. One disciple tried to take matters into his own hands. That was Peter.

Often we try to do the same in our life, in our will. Take matters into our own hands. Sometimes take them out of Jesus' hands and assert our own will. But God has a will for us and a desire for us.

And as we watch and pray, we don't need to take any kind of weapons that we have at our disposal and defend Jesus. but really like Jesus, submit and obey the Lord as we watch and pray.

And finally, then I think, this passage calls us to accept Jesus' full and complete humanity and innocence as he went to the cross for us.

Jesus' innocence, and as we think of that word, we think of it being somewhat childish, don't we?

But actually, it's what it means to be fully mature. Jesus' innocence or purity, then, makes us pure in God's sight.

[25 : 25] And he expects us to live out that innocency and purity as he died for us on the cross. Let me pray for us. God, will you give us an increase of your grace?

We would hear your word to us, we would see what you have done, and all that it actually means and is brought to bear in our life. deny ourselves, as it were, and pick up our cross and follow you. We give you thanks for your grace and your spirit that you can do in us, I think, what seems impossible, because you, Lord, are the God of possibilities, the possibility of glorifying yourself in this world and on the cross and through our lives.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.