

Setting Our Face To Go To Jerusalem Week 4

The Countdown

Turn with me to Mark 14 as we continue our Lenten series. As I studied this week I began to see these events almost like chapter headings or snapshots, events frozen in time for us to consider. So I want to share several highlights on the countdown to the cross from Mark 14. As we begin, I want to acknowledge again two particular sources that have been helpful in my study for this series. I've mentioned both of these books before as resources I think you would enjoy. *Reliving the Passion* by Walter Wangerin Jr. *King's Cross* by Timothy Keller.

Look with me now:

Fixed In Time

“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.” Mark 14:1 It's interesting that for thirteen chapters Mark has been very unspecific or vague as to time. “During those days...” he writes. What days? We don't know. “After six days...” “As he was leaving” or “Immediately” or “when evening came.” But nothing specific until now. Now it is “Two days before the Passover.” Now the story is locked into time and history. Now we know where Jesus is and what is happening around him at this moment because prior to this, everything has been preparatory, it has been a preface to what the real story has been about all along. Jesus has come to give his life on the cross as our Savior and Redeemer. Get ready. This is the fullness of time.

Threats

What a sad thing, to realize that these leaders of God's people, the chief priests and teachers of the law, were conspiring to have an innocent man arrested and put to death. Notice the verse tells us they didn't want to try to have him killed during the feast of Passover for fear that the people might riot. Understand their fear was related to their desire to maintain positions of power and influence. The chief priests held their positions at the discretion of the Roman authorities and it was a tense relationship. Because the city of Jerusalem grew from approximately 75,000 people to estimates of 250,000 during Passover, the heightened Jewish nationalism and the risk of revolt by the crowds was always increased at this time. If the chief priests didn't control their people, they might be blamed for any uprising and would lose their

position and their favor with the Romans. Consequently, they were going to try to sneak around and find an opportune time to trap Jesus and have him killed. It might not be a good time to be considered a close friend or associate or follower of Jesus. The threat was growing.

Movement

We talked last week about the woman who came to Simon the Leper's house and poured expensive perfume on Jesus. We mentioned the extravagant love that was shown as **"...a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume...She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head."** While this woman was moving openly and boldly toward Jesus in love and worship, another figure moved in the shadows away from Jesus. The next verse following this account states, **"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."** Mark 14:10

The woman was moving toward him while Judas, one of the Twelve, was moving away. It is sad to watch people begin the movement away from Jesus. People who once were so close, slowly compromising, making choices that draw them farther and farther away from Christ and his life and his love until they make that final break and step completely away.

Two extraordinary acts of love are shown in Mark 14. The woman pouring perfume on Jesus, anointing him, the other a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane. One is sincere, the other, a sign and signal of betrayal. The kiss of death.

Reasons for Betrayal

Mark gives us no reason for Judas' act of treachery. Some say it was out of greed. He did it for the money as one of the gospel writers points out Judas had been guilty of stealing money out of the treasury. Others suggest Judas was a Zealot and was simply trying to force Jesus to declare his Messiahship and take up the cause against Rome. The truth is, it doesn't matter. The motive of Judas – the motive behind any of us and our sin – it really doesn't matter. Our motive can't justify us or excuse our sin. Only the mercy and grace of Christ can forgive us of our sins. Judas should have cried out to Christ for forgiveness. I believe he would have found plenty of mercy available. Mark is right in giving us no reason for the betrayal. There is no excuse for Judas that could justify him or any of us for our sins. All of us have sinned and missed the mark. All of us need salvation that comes through Christ alone.

Loyal Friends

I mentioned before the threat of the chief priests and teachers of the law who wanted to find a way to kill Jesus. It made being his friend at this moment rather risky business. One could easily be accused of aiding and abetting a criminal. So when the disciples ask Jesus in verse 12 where he wants them to prepare the Passover meal, Jesus is somewhat cryptic in his answer.

It seemed awfully clandestine. **“Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him.”** Men didn’t usually draw water, the women did. This would have been a bit unusual and it would have been easy to spot this guy and to follow him. Jesus tells them to follow him and when he goes into a house, **“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.”**

What a testimony to these unnamed and loyal friends of Jesus. They weren’t part of the twelve. We know nothing about them other than here was another of those faithful, unnamed, unheralded supporters, those loyal friends of Jesus who were willing to say, “I need no credit or acclaim but whatever you need Lord, if I have it, it’s yours.” In the midst of the stress of this Passion week, when the Twelve seemed to be lost and stumbling about, what a blessing these unnamed lovers of Jesus prove to be.

Bitter Herbs And A Bitter Announcement

Verse 17 tells us, **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.” 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.”**

Have you wondered why Jesus said this? Was he just trying to “out” Judas? “Look around boys. You can’t trust anyone because one of you is a low-down, dirty rotten, conniving traitor.” That wasn’t what was happening at all. Instead, perhaps Jesus is saying this out of love and mercy for Judas, giving him an opportunity to reconsider his treacherous decision.

In *Reliving the Passion*, Walter Wangerin suggests that Jesus is giving Judas three important gifts at this moment. **1. Knowledge.** “He knows now the moral quality and the consequence of the deed.” This isn’t just forcing someone’s hand. This is betrayal. This is

wrong! **2. Free will.** “Knowledge frees him both from ignorance and from the unconscious compulsion.” He can’t say he didn’t realize what he was doing. He is making a conscious choice to betray Jesus and he could still refuse to do this terrible thing. **3. Sole responsibility.** “If he proceeds with it, then, he alone shall own the deed.” He can’t blame anyone else. He is responsible.

At this point in the Passover meal, after the second cup of wine, Jesus breaks the unleavened bread and dips it into bitter herbs and then into a sweet mixture. This traditionally would symbolize the bitterness of Israel’s suffering, but now perhaps they also symbolize the bitterness of the betrayal by Judas. Quoting Wangerin again, he writes of Judas, “If he does not stop, he shall become the cause of bitter suffering! He shall be to Jesus what Egypt was to Israel.”

Jesus said in verse 21. **“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.”**

Judas! You see what you are doing! You know the sin you are committing and the dread consequences of your actions. Stop! Stop while you still can. Stop and say, “Jesus, it’s me. I’m the one and I’m sorry. I can’t do it. Forgive me. Have mercy on me.” The Son of Man will still die upon a cross, but it doesn’t have to be at the betrayal of Judas.

Bitter herbs and bitter announcements. The bitterness of sin. “Oh, Jesus, thanks for warning us of our sinful intentions, of our potential missteps. Grant us the wisdom and the humility of heart to admit what Judas couldn’t, “It’s me. It’s my hand that dips bread into the bowl with you. Forgive me. Have mercy on me. Today and always. Amen.”

The Night In Which He Was Betrayed

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.” Mark 14:22-24

The words of institution – this is my body broken for you – take and eat. This is my blood, poured out for you. Take of the cup and drink. Amazing words. In the context of the Passover meal it was revolutionary. Generation after generation had said the same words, had

kept to the same script, but this night as Jesus holds up the bread, at the moment when he should be explaining about Israel's bread of affliction, he tells them "This is the bread of my affliction, the bread of my suffering. I'm offering my body to bring to you the ultimate exodus. A deliverance far beyond setting you free from slavery in a foreign land. No, I've come to set you free from your slavery to sin and lead you to a land of promise beyond anything you could imagine.

But consider these words as Paul shares them in 1 Corinthians 11:23. These are the words I typically read before communion. "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23-24

We read and hear it frequently, but consider again the context. Sure, it was during the Passover meal. But think about the words again. **"The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you, do this in remembrance of me."** On the night he was betrayed – by one of his friends, his trusted followers. On that very night he took bread and said to them, "this represents my body which I am going to give to the soldiers to beat and whip and bludgeon and tear apart on your behalf." How could you express such love on the very night of the betrayal, at the very hour of betrayal. How do you explain such love, such compassion, such mercy for sinners? For betrayers? It reminds us once again of the extraordinary, extravagant love of Jesus.

Walter Wangerin wrote **"...the love of Jesus is utterly unaccountable – except that he is God and God is love. It has no cause in us. It reacts to, or repays, or rewards just nothing in us. It is beyond human measure, beyond human comprehension. It takes my breath away. ...Walter Wangerin Jr.**

When did Jesus choose to lay down his life for us? When we finally got it all together? When we stopped our sinning and our pettiness? When we finally made ourselves worthy of his love and goodness and grace? No, it was when we were guilty of betrayal, just like Judas. When we were selfish and scheming. The apostle Paul said it like this. **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But**

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:6-8

I Will Not Drink Again Until....I Guarantee

After Jesus gave them the bread, **“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.’” Mark 14:25.**

That has always been something of a puzzling statement to me. I’ve understood it to be a promise of sorts, that Jesus would indeed finish the work he came to do. A promise that he would be with them again in the coming of the fullness of his kingdom. And I think that is accurate. But Timothy Keller suggests this to be an even more forceful promise from Jesus. “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine” is an oath.

Let me give you another example. In Acts 23:12 the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem are so angry at Paul that the bible says they **“...[they] formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.” Acts 23:12** “We won’t eat or drink until we see this accomplished.” It’s like saying, “I’m going to do this if it kills me.”

Jesus makes this statement that the cup represents his blood being poured out, the basis of a new covenant, a new relationship between God and us. And then he takes this oath, a commitment of his intentions, a guarantee from our Savior. Keller suggests, “When [Jesus] announces that he will not eat or drink until he meets us in the kingdom of God, Jesus is promising that he is unconditionally committed to us: ‘I am going to bring you into the Father’s arms. I’m going to bring you to the feast of the King.’”

Jesus in essence is saying I am going to do this if it kills me! And it will. It must. For when Jesus says “this is my body, this is my blood,” he is telling us that all the other sacrifices, all the lambs offered at Passover, they were all pointing to himself. Jesus was the perfect lamb, the once and for all, ultimate sacrifice slain for us, his blood poured out for us and it is a guarantee. “I won’t drink of the cup again until I have secured your redemption, until I have made a way for you to be presented to the Father, holy, clean, pure, transformed, a new creation. And I will do it. On my oath, I guarantee.”

I should tell you that in the Passover Seder there are four cups of wine served. The first a

cup of blessing or sanctification, the second the cup of deliverance, the third the cup of redemption. This is the cup Jesus handed to his disciples and told them to drink. This is the cup representing his blood poured out. Then there was a fourth and final cup, the cup of consummation, but Jesus stopped with the third cup, the cup of redemption and then made that promise to them, that oath, that he would not drink the fourth cup until that day when he drank it anew in the kingdom of God.

And there is a day coming. When in every sense of the word, we will be saved, and whole, and pure, and clean, and safe, and home. He has done and will do exactly what he promised and we will sit down in his kingdom and sharing in his glory we will drink that fourth and final cup with him and then we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever. Amen.

It's not yet, but it could be soon for any one of us. Don't be afraid. Don't let your heart be troubled. We have his guarantee.

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!”
Guaranteed! Amen.”