

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

The Gospel According to Mark (Part 6)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

Mark 14 & 15 cover the last few days of Jesus' earthly life. The heat was turned up. Jesus was anointed for his impending burial. He ate with his closest disciples. He was also betrayed by one of them. He prayed with them at Gethsemane. He was arrested by the Romans, tried by the Sanhedrin, disowned by one of his closest disciples, suffered under Pontius Pilate, mocked by the Romans soldiers, was crucified, died and buried...

The ending of the Gospel according to Mark was packed with actions and emotions. Can you visualise them? Can you feel them? More importantly, what have all these to do with us forever?

Thank God that there is a Mark 16 – “The Resurrection” to answer to all these actions and emotions. So as we study the March's lessons, let us not be driven by mere emotions that some pious Lenten practices seem to promote. Rather, let the actions and emotions drive us towards greater Gospel vision and gratitude to God in Christ.

1 Mar

A Beautiful Thing

Mark 14:1-11

8 Mar

Famous Last Words

Mark 14:12-31

15 Mar Youth Sunday

22 Mar

Pray or Betray!

Mark 14:32-52

29 Mar

Deceit & Denial

Mark 14:53-72 & 15:1-15

A Beautiful Thing

MARK 14:1-11

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

This portion of the Gospel deals with a few very personal events leading to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot. The focus is on Mary (John 12:3) and what she did for Jesus in preparation for His burial. Clearly the disciples were all eyes on her and had no clue as to the significance of her actions. Let's not be carried away by the price of her perfume. Rather, let us recognise the price of Jesus' death for us which we benefitted for free. What would you do for Jesus even if it should cost you greatly?

For Study and Discussion

1. Read the passage Mark 14:1-11 and also the parallel paragraph from John 12:1-8.
 - a. Image you were one of them disciples – what are the various reactions that you could see around you as the action of Jesus' anointing unfolds?

 - b. For each reaction (approval, shock, etc.) what does it tell us about their inner motives and beliefs?

2. The key character seems to be Mary (Mark didn't tell us who she. John revealed her in his Gospel account plus some contextual information, such as location and what Judas Iscariot said). What did Jesus pronounce on Mary and her action? (v9)
 - a. One denarius is about a day's wage. What significance can you deduce from Mary's action of taking about a year's wage of perfume to anoint Jesus?

 - b. If you were Mary how would you feel in the face of disapprovals from some of the disciples?

 - c. What do you find surprising in Jesus' response to their disapprovals? (Vv6-9). Why?

d. If you were one of the disciples hearing Jesus pronounced his own death and burial, what would you be thinking about this “Son of God”?

3. Read verses Mark 14:10-11

a. Why did they need Judas to betray Jesus?

b. Why were the chief priests glad to have Judas on their side?

c. Judas watched for an opportunity to betray Jesus. What does the word “watch” tell us about the condition of his heart and the danger surrounding Jesus and his disciples?

Similarly, how is Christianity and Christians being “watched” today?

Discipleship Pointers

- Reflect – The world’s praise versus God’s praise – what would you prefer? Mary was scorned by the disciples, but she was praised by Jesus. As we focus our work for God, there will be similar instances when we will be scorned by the peoples of this world – yet we should know our eternal reward from God and stay firm in serving him.
- There are plenty of enemies to the Gospel, then and now that we ought to be warned and beware. What do these enemies look like today? Where should our focus be?
- For Jesus, Mary’s action was “a beautiful thing” done (v6). What acts of service to our Lord Jesus Christ have you hold back from offering for fear of ridicule or disapproval?
- What Mary did for Jesus is recorded and being read by generations of Christians in memory of her (v9). What an honour to her! God does honour those who honour him.

Family/Group Moments

- Pray for wisdom to know where God’s praise lies even when the path is laid with scorn from others.
- Even in church there are huge amount of activities – the times to reflect and just be with the Lord are precious. Think of how you could nurture more such moments in your own walk with God and take action to protect them.

Famous Last Words

MARK 14:12-31

GENERAL SURVEY

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Introduction

All the ceremony concerning the killing of the lamb, the protecting power of the blood, and the eating of the flesh of the lamb, was deliberately ordered by God. For the Israelites in bondage, it may seem an incredulous command handed down by Moses (Exodus 12). Yet those who believed, and obeyed were saved! All these point us to the true significance and fulfillment in the death of Christ for our sins. Jesus used the symbols of God's old Covenant with his people to point to the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28). For Christians, the sacrament we call "Holy Communion" substituted the Jewish Passover Feast because "Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed." (1 Cor 5:7b)

For Study and Discussion

1. The Passover & its Significance (Mark 14:12-21; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:7-13)
 - a. Read Exodus 12:1-30 for the background to the Jewish feast that Jesus and his disciples were to celebrate. What does the Passover commemorate?
 - b. What did the blood of the lamb do for those who would believe and obey? What did the flesh of the lamb provide for those who would be delivered out of slavery and bondage in Egypt?
 - c. How does Jesus fulfil the purposes of the Passover?
2. The Holy Communion & its Purpose (Mark 14:22-26; Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:18-20)
 - a. Jesus ordered his disciples to prepare the Passover meal. That took a good amount of efforts on their part to prepare. How do you prepare for the Holy Communion?
 - b. "Listen in" to Jesus' conversation with his disciples. What level of closeness did Jesus desire with them? What distracts you from God who desires a loving, honest, and constructive conversation with you? How can you better relate with God?
 - c. What do "this is my body" and "this is my blood of the covenant" mean? Honestly, what goes on in your heart and mind when you participate in the Holy Communion? (Meditate on Jn 6:51-63; 1 Cor 11:23-26; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:24; 1 Jn 1:7)

- d. Jesus tells us “Do this in remembrance of me.” Why do you think Jesus sees it necessary to remind us? What does history show about the tendency of God’s people? What exactly does Jesus want us to remember and commemorate constantly until he comes again? What do Jesus’ last words point us forward to?
3. Peter’s Declaration (Mark 14:27-31; Matthew 26:31-35; Luke 22:31-38)
 - a. How is it that Peter could be so confident of his love for Jesus? Was he the only one? What attitude can put us in similar danger?
 - b. Read Luke 22:31-32.
 - i. Who is the ultimate tempter? Who is the one in ultimate control? What did Jesus say he would do for Peter? What is Jesus doing for us today? (Cf. Heb 7:24-25)
 - ii. What positive instructions did Jesus give to Peter after he had repented? What can we learn from this about God’s purpose for allowing trying situations in our lives?

Discipleship Pointers *Extracted from D.A. Carson, “For the Love of God”*

1. It is imperative to note that Jesus wants his own words and actions to be understood in the light of the earlier traditional feast. The Passover celebrated not only the release of the Israelites from bondage, but the way it was accomplished. In God’s plan, the angel of death “passed over” the homes protected by the sacrificial blood, while all the other homes in Egypt lost their firstborn. This miraculous exodus set the stage for the inauguration of the Sinai covenant.
2. When Jesus takes bread at a Passover meal, he sees his own death, the shedding of his own blood as the God-provided sacrifice which averts the wrath of God. He himself is the Passover Lamb of God par excellence, and his death establishes a new covenant with the people of God by releasing them from a far darker and deeper slavery – sin and death.
3. It would seem shocking that a commemorative rite like the Passover should have been necessary. But history shows how quickly the people of God drift toward peripheral matters and end up ignoring or denying what is of central importance. By a simple rite, Jesus wants his followers to come back to his death, his shed blood, his broken body, again and again and again. It is also an anticipatory rite that looks forward to the consummated kingdom, when commemoration and proclamation will be swallowed up by the bliss of His presence forever.
4. Just as the death (blood) of the lamb provided every Israelite household deliverance from the judgement of God, and the eating of its flesh provided sustenance for their journey out of slavery & bondage, Jesus’ death (& blood) deliver us from the judgment of sin and His life (& Word) in us gives power to walk in the newness of life in Him.
5. Peter’s confidence in his own devotion and courage puts him in danger of being sifted by Satan. He did not yet realise his weakness. Jesus told him he would be praying for him, that his faith would not fail. Peter’s failure resulted in his true conversion where he no longer trusted in himself but in Christ completely. God’s agenda for us in allowing us to be tested is not that we might fail but that new and true faith in the living Christ might be born in us.

Family/Group Moment

Share an experience of failure you have encountered that affected your relationship with God. What lessons did you learn from it? How have you been drawn into deeper faith in Christ?

Pray or Betray!

MARK 14:32-52

GENERAL SURVEY

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Disciple: Saint Peter, what was your prayer life like during the Lord's earthly ministry?

Peter: I learned from Him how to pray. I experienced some high points, but also some very embarrassing, humbling moments I'd rather not share.

Disciple: But perhaps your testimony could help me in my prayer journey here?

Peter: Ah, yes, you are right in that! You will have much to benefit from the Lord and...er... learned a thing or two from me and my buddies.

Disciple: Thank you! How shall we start? Day One? The high point?

Peter: Let's start rather at the low point, on Maundy Thursday. Come with me to Gethsemane.

For Study and Discussion

1. Falling Asleep

a. What danger did Jesus forewarn his disciples? How did they respond? (vv27, 29-31)

b. In light of their responses, how was Jesus' remark "the spirit is willing but the body (or flesh) is weak" true of them? What did he urge them to do and why? (vv37-38)

2. Falling to the Ground

a. What do "the hour" and "the cup" refer to? (Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; cf. Mk 10:38)

b. What do "the hour" and "the cup" suggest about the deepest agony and pain which even Jesus in his humanity dreaded and recoiled at?

c. What temptation did Jesus face in this final hour? How did he feel? How did he resist it? (Mk 14:36; Lk 22:43-44; Heb 5:7).

d. What can we learn from Jesus' example in prayer?

3. Falling Away

a. How did Jesus face up to his arresters? (cf. Jn 18:4-8) By contrast, how did the disciples react? (vv47, 50)

b. While Judas was singled out as the betrayer (vv42, 44) who despicably used a kiss that customarily denoted respect and affection, how did the other 11 disciples "betray" Jesus in their own ways? (vv47, 50, 72)

c. In 11:9-10, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, hailed by a triumphant crowd, fulfilled the Scriptures.

i. Now alone, betrayed by his confidants and arrested, how did this also fulfill the Scriptures? (14:27; Ps 22:16-18; Isa 53:7-10a).

ii. If the Scriptures reveal God's will for Jesus, what does this tell us about Jesus' attitude towards the Scriptures?

Discipleship Pointers

STRAY: Times of pressure or pleasure tend to expose our vulnerabilities. We can stray into temptations. Sin easily entices and entangles (Heb12:1). We can over-estimate our strength to resist temptation, or under-estimate temptation's magnetic lure, and fall like faithful men in times past (e.g. Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Peter).

BETRAY: "Judas was the ancestor of all who wear the double mask of allegiance and treason. Many who would scorn Judas' betrayal for thirty pieces of silver betray Christ daily for less." (Calvin Miller, Once Upon A Tree, Howard Books, 2004)

It doesn't have to be outright apostasy. We deny, desert, or disown Jesus when we are ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17), love self, others or things more than Him (Matt 10:37-39; 2 Tim 4:10), depart from Biblical truths (2 Tim 2:17-18; 1 Jn 2:22). Minor unfaithfulness can slide down a path towards a hardened spirit and major compromises.

PRAY: Jesus' command and his own example in prayer teach us that:

- Even in his perfect humanity, he needed divine strength to drink the cup of wrath on sinners' behalf.
- A spirit that desires to be faithful and a nature that easily strays are brought before God in prayer. We neither trust in our ability, nor despair in our feebleness. We seek to trust only in Christ as our salvation and strength to meet every trial.
- Prayer not only prepares us for the ordeals ahead, but is itself part of the very battle we wage against the sinful nature and the darts of the evil one (Eph 6:18). Jesus' Passion battle was fought at Gethsemane even before it was fought at Calvary.

- We can enlist the support of others in prayer and in being there for us. Conversely, God enlists us to be that support for others in their “Gethsemanes”.
- We can be very open with God and one another about our emotions, desires, anxieties (“overwhelmed with sorrow”; “if it be possible”; “my will in this matter is...”).
- We pray not to persuade God to fulfill our wills but for courage to fulfill His. Jesus’ every action or inaction revealed a determination and delight to fulfill what the Scriptures said about him (Heb 10:7).
- Jesus prays for and protects us, his sheep (Lk 22:31-32; Jn 18:9; Rom 8:34). Our own feeble prayers rest on a more solid foundation - his loving intercession for us (Heb 7:24-25).

STAY: Stay vigilant to our own spiritual health, and to the spiritual climate and challenges of the times. Stay aligned to God’s purpose and promise. Stay with Christ no matter what the costs may be.

Family / Group Moments

1. What spiritual dangers and temptations are you susceptible to? What weakness do they reveal?
2. Our prayer life is often a good gauge of our spiritual vitality and sensitivity. The oft-given lament is “Wish I could pray more frequently or fervently”.
 - Is prayer your constant resource and weapon to stand up under trials? Is it your first response or your last resort?
 - Do you complain about or criticize others / situations more than you pray for them?
 - Are there “Gethsemane” moments where and when you can settle unhurriedly and quietly to pray for matters of vital concern to you, small group, church or the world?
3. “I will pray for you”; “I will pray for the church”. Do you promise your prayer support for others only to forget conveniently and unconsciously? Could you be counted to support others in their concerns and trials?

Deceit & Denial

MARK 14:53-72 & 15:1-15

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

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Introduction

Deserted by all his beloved ones, Jesus walked the last hours of his life on earth alone. He appeared before the “highest powers” of his arch-opponents – the Sanhedrin and the Roman governor. What a seemingly defeating end for a great Messiah – “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One” (Mk 14:61).

He was unjustly sentenced by the Sanhedrin (14:57-58), even by Peter (his very own; 14:71), and by Pontius Pilate (15:14). It was a three-fold sham, a total miscarriage of truth and justice that led to Jesus’ crucifixion. The Jews further traded their freedom in the Messiah for the freedom of a murderer. Deceit and denial of Christ and his Gospel is costly... WE CAN’T PAY! That’s why Jesus PAID IT ALL for us!

For Study and Discussion

1. The Sanhedrin's Deceit (14:53-65)
 - a. The chief priests the whole Sanhedrin looked for evidence against Jesus to put him to death. What kind of “evidence” did they consistently find? (Vv56-59)

 - b. In the human court of law, these accusers would have committed perjury – the wilful giving of false testimony under oath, before a competent tribunal, upon a point material to a legal inquiry. Before God, they would have violated the ninth Commandment in Exodus 20:16. How was Jesus’ response in verse 61a surprising?

 - c. At the end of the inquisition, they all condemned Jesus as worthy of death on the ground blasphemy (v64). What was the blasphemy? What do you think?

 - d. Jesus’ only response in this unjust trial is found in verse 62 which echoes Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13-14 (cf. Matt 24:30-31). Examine the Scriptural contexts of both passages. What strong message of truth and warning was Jesus telling them?

2. Peter's Denial (14:66-72)

True to his promise to Jesus (Mk 14:29), Peter followed at a distance in to the courtyard of the high priest. Twice he was flagged by the high priest's servant girl as a follower of Jesus, and on a third time, he was flagged by others around him.

- a. What was Peter's defence in the first two instances?

- b. What was Peter's defence in the third instance?

- c. Why did Peter broke down and wept upon hearing the rooster's crows? What did that confirm about Jesus, about Peter himself, about their relationship, and about the gravity of that occasion?

3. Pilate's Dismissal (15:1-15)

The Sanhedrin had no authority to enforce a death sentence within a Roman province. Only the Roman governor had authority to do so. Therefore, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate. Each question that Pilate asked brought Jesus a step closer to death, and the Sanhedrin a step closer to their objective (Mk 14:53).

- a. "Are you the king of the Jews?" (v2) What does Jesus' affirmative reply and selective silence as before tell us about his single-minded focus?

- b. "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" (v9) Why did Pilate ask the chief priests this question?

- c. What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" (v12) What did the crowd demand? Did Pilate have a clear legal ground and moral conscience to accede to their demand?

- d. "Why? What crime has he committed?" (v14) Why then did Pilate accede to the crowd's demand?

Discipleship Pointers

DECEIT: It was exceedingly clear that many spoke falsely against Jesus (v56) and even erroneously turned Jesus' words against him (v58). Yet, in either way, "their statements/testimony did not agree." (vv56&59) There was clearly no ground at all for the Sanhedrin to pass judgement on Jesus. Jesus was prosecuted by his own clear confession that he is "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One." (vv61&62) So who is speaking the truth – God or the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law? The verdict is exceedingly clear.

The Bible is the Word of God. It tells us vital truths concerning sin, faith, and duty of humanity that God himself has revealed to us. Centrally, it reveals to us the identity of Jesus who is the Christ, the Son of God (Mk 1:1). All human objections against this central truth are essentially deceitful, however logical they may sound. Be careful to listen to the clear words of God, rather than to sophisticated human reasoning.

Over the years, various sources have sought to undermine the integrity, reliability and validity of Christ and the Gospel. The Da Vinci Code by writer Dan Brown is a good example of such a threat. Do we listen to God in the Bible, or do we listen to people like Dan Brown in his bestseller book?

DENIAL: When God's truth exposes and expels all human deceit. The only way to reject truth is to blatantly deny it. Peter was a classic example of how one who loved the Lord Jesus could deny knowing him out of the need for personal security. Similarly, we can deny Jesus when our need for personal security is valued above our need for security in Christ. Do we dilute our Christian values or mask our Christian witness at work to avoid attention, or at home since no one is looking? We can shrink into a hypocritical denial of Christ to avoid being seen by others or when we are not seen by others. The former is a denial out of shame [of Christ]; the latter is a denial out of sham [i.e. fake Christianity]. Meditate on Matthew 6:33 – What do you seek?

DISMISSAL: Do we stand up for fellow Christians in the world? Or do we take the attitude of Cain: “Am I my brother's keeper?” (Ge 4:9b), which is another way of saying, “Am I responsible to look out for him? Do I care?” We cannot trust the world, even where freedom of religious worship/practice is guaranteed by Constitution to “look out” for the welfare of fellow Christians. Pontius Pilate was a powerful Roman governor. Yet he was swayed by public pressure to please the majority and to save his own skin. We must trust God alone and entrust God's people to him in prayer. God alone is our “Shepherd and Overseer” (1 Pe 2:25). He will never leave us, nor forsake us (Jn 10:28; Heb 13:5). What a wonderful God in whom we can trust and entrust ourselves fully!

Family/Group Moment

- Have you had an experience of being deceived by someone or suffered a painful betrayal of trust by a close friend or even loved one? What is it that made those experiences hurtful and painful?
- Think of our Lord Jesus in his last days with his last “friends”, plus a betrayal and a denial in tow. What has Jesus done for you? How have you lived for him that does not betray and deny his love for you?
- God's will and purpose is greater than human betrayal and denial of Christ. If it hadn't been so, salvation would not have been possible. Thank God that the end of all who betray and deny Christ and the Gospel will be dismissed from his presence. Pray for God' mercy instead for them.