

## The Sacrifice of Faith Mark 14

Exodus 12:1-20

1 Corinthians 13

Responsive Psalm 116:1-9

This morning we are going to begin a new chapter in our study through the book of Mark, we will be looking at the first few verses of Mark chapter 14. We only have 2 more chapters left in this book so we are getting toward the end. This study in Mark has been an interesting one for me at least, at first it proved to be a challenge because up until this point the books that I have preached through have been instructional letters written to churches dealing with specific issues in the Christian faith. This book being a gospel book serves a different purpose and it was a struggle at first to figure out how to preach through a book that is a summary of the history, and life of Jesus and his ministry.

The challenge was how to find things that could apply to us today, but as we worked through it it became apparent that just like in the other books, there is so much here that can apply to us today. The issues and questions that the disciples faced are often times many that we face today. And with Marks fast paced narrative, his favor toward a quick summary over the events helps to not get bogged down in one area but rather to see the entire narrative through Jesus ministry. For instance one thing that stands out is the opposition of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus, and as we kept going through the chapters we can see this opposition grow from disagreement, to an attempt to discredit and turn the people against him, to what we see mentioned in the first part of 14 today, a plot to kill him.

So let us start this morning by reading starting in verse 1, and going to verse 11. Throughout Jesus ministry he has told his disciples of his coming death, warning them that he would be taken and killed. It was a progressive revelation, which was always met with doubt, and even arguments from the disciples, but in chapter 10 Jesus laid out a more detailed foretelling of his death, verse 32 “Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then he took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to him. Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes and the will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles and the will mock him, and scourge him, and spit on him and kill him and the 3<sup>rd</sup> day he will rise again.

All of Jesus ministry was leading up to this point, his death, burial and resurrection is the culmination of his ministry, it was the purpose that he had come because it is only through the cross can redemption be applied to God's people. So here in chapter 14, is the beginning of the events and the account leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. This chapter is the longest chapter in the book of Mark, and as we go through it in the next few weeks we will see that the overarching theme in this chapter is the abandonment of Jesus. In the first few verses here we see that Jesus and his disciples are gathered together observing the passover feast and we see the chief priests and scribes beginning to plot how they can kill him. They have given up trying to discredit, or best him in theological discussion, but they have this problem that people are following him, listening to his teaching, and he is teaching against them, against the temple, its practices and their traditions. He is claiming that he is the way, and the truth, and that it is through him that one enters the kingdom of heaven. Not through the temple worship and practices but in him, and through him only.

So as we can see the motive of these chief priests and scribes is very clear. Jesus is a threat to their authority, to their livelihood, to their way of life. They have not been able to turn the people against him, and in fact it seems no matter how hard they try they are the ones that end up looking the fools. So now, they have resorted to plot to have him killed. This is rather interesting if we take a moment to meditate on this for a minute. In the church there has always been this debate, this issue of trying to figure out how man's will, and God's sovereign will work. Often times leading to people to fall out to far on one side or the other, putting too much weight in the ability of man's will, while others take God's sovereignty to a point that they believe they don't have to do anything. And I think here we see a perfect picture of man's will, falling in line with God's sovereign plan with the plotting to have Jesus killed, and God's purpose and plan for redemption of man.

We read in verse 10, a very detailed description of what would be happening to Jesus, he would be mocked, spit upon, and killed. Even in the old testament there is references to the Messiah being lifted up, dying on the tree, and as this time gets closer this foretelling becomes more in depth, more detailed. So here is something that has been set, since the foundation of the world, that the Messiah, Jesus would be born, of a virgin, would gather his disciples and have his time of ministry, and ultimately die on the Cross. There is no derailing or changing of this sovereign plan, yet throughout the generations mankind has made decisions and done things that brings us to this very point that God ordained. These chief priests, and scribes were not hearing a message from God telling them to kill Jesus, they were doing exactly what they wanted, they were acting upon their will, plotting to do exactly what they wanted. Yet, it was through their free will decisions and plotting that God's sovereign will was done.

Who can orchestrate all of this? Who can know the will of man generations before they were even born? Only a sovereign God, who created this world for that purpose, for his glory, for his purpose, and for his will. Before the temple, before the nation of Israel, before the law and the commandments Abraham, offers his son on an altar as a sacrifice to God, knowing and believing that God is able to raise even his only son, the son of promise from the dead. And it is this faith in God that justifies, Abraham, it is his faith, not tradition, not temple worship, or to apply it today, not the church, not the pope, not your works and good deeds, but it is faith in God alone. The story of Abraham and Isaac is a picture, a foretelling of this greater story, of one Greater than Abraham, offering his son, one greater than Isaac as an atoning sacrifice. Once again, we see God's sovereign will and purpose played out in the will's of mankind.

I personally find much comfort in this truth, for there is no surprise to God, there is no event, in the world, or in our lives for that matter that God does not already know, and has already determined to work for his glory. This is a comfort as we confront difficulties in our lives, we make decisions, we live or lives, sometimes suffering from the decision we make, but through that suffering comes reliance upon God, comes a seeking out God for strength, for help and often times repentance as we recognize that we had sinned, or rebelled against him. It is all a very beautiful weaving, a tapestry of life, of faith, of God's purpose, plan, and protection of us as we go through our days making decisions. I remember Vic likening the difference between our lives, and God's plan. In our perspective it seems like a mess of decisions are made, not knowing the outcomes, not knowing what the future holds, constantly struggling, failing, being picked back up to do it all over again. Our lives are a mess, they look to be a wreck and haphazard like the back of a rug, or tapestry where you see all the knots, all the strings running from one end to the other, all disorganized and confused.

But the other side, is God's view, he sees the tapestry of our lives complete, and with it has woven a beautiful picture that honors and glorifies him. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the birth, life, and death of Jesus in God's view has both happened already, and has not happened yet. It is so determined as such that nothing will change it, it is God's purpose, and his plan. We see this unfold over time and mark events, such as the birth of Jesus, and the death of Jesus has 2 separate events, but to God it is one, it is the redemptive plan of his people. I find it fascinating when we can look at such a thing, God's will clearing being completed, through mankind doing exactly what they want to do. In their pride, and arrogance and lust for power they seek to have the Messiah who was promised them, who the law, the temple, the feasts, and all their traditions were teaching them about, which pointed all to Christ yet in their anger they seek to have him killed.

So we see in our passage this morning, a beginning of a new narrative in Mark's record. The beginning of the sufferings of Christ, the beginning of the things that he had told his disciples were to come. In the first verse, Mark gives us the exact day that this event happens. They were gathering for the feast of unleavened bread and the coming observance of the Passover celebration which goes back to the account in the book of exodus of the sacrifice of the unblemished lamb or goat, and putting the blood on the mantle and door posts so when the angel of death came upon Egypt that night, he would pass over any households covered by the blood of that unspotted lamb. Even this is a foretelling, a picture of Christ, the sinless lamb of God, sacrificed on the cross for us, whose blood applied to us covering our sins so we may be passed over in the judgment, having our righteousness found in Christ. Also Mark mentions the feast of the unleavened bread, which was instituted in a remembrance of day of fleeing the Egyptian captivity. For there was not time to allow for preparation. It is during this time we see that the Chief priests and Scribes are plotting to kill Jesus, but notice that when Mark identifies those who are plotting against Jesus, he calls out the leaders of the Sanhedrin, it isn't the Jews themselves, in fact he doesn't even list the pharisee's but rather it is the religious authority, the Sanhedrin who is plotting. This decision to kill Jesus was not one of the populous of Jerusalem, it was a decision made by a few men who were in power.

Already in this plot against Jesus we can see a connection with the Passover as I had mentioned already, the redemption that will come by the sacrifice of the lamb of God, is not unlike that of Israel being freed from the Egyptian captivity, at the cost of the death of the First born. Jesus Christ, is the first born of God's children, the first fruits of God's children, which is all of of us who believe. Christ's death saves us from the captivity of sin, and redeems us from sin to, free's us from captivity to be a new nation of faith in Christ, under God, redeemed by the blood of the lamb. In the following verses here, Mark takes a moment, away from the narrative of the plotting of Jesus death and as Mark often does, sandwiches in another event, in this case it is about a woman who comes and anoints Jesus' feet with precious oils. Who we find out from the other gospel accounts is Mary, the sister of Martha, and Lazarus and it is mentioned that they have all gathered at Simon the lepers house, who many scholars believe is the father of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

As a general rule, it was a breach of Jewish etiquette for a a women to interrupt a gathering of Jewish men unless they were serving food. Understanding that helps to understand I think why the disciples reacted in such a way to what Mary was doing. But just as we have seen as we have worked through this book, often times Jesus stands against the societal norms of Jewish tradition, and that their societal values are not necessarily the same as Jesus'. But not only that, we see that the cost of this precious oil was upward to 300 denarii. To put the cost of this oil into perspective, the average wage given to a worker was was 1 denarii, so basically the price of this oil, was a full years wages.

Women in that society were excluded from such careers that would afford them to be able to purchase something of such value, so it is believed that this oil, was more than likely an heirloom, something passed down, or given to her as a gift. Making this gesture more than the financial cost, but also an emotional one, and also notice, in verse 3 that she did not just open and pour some, she broke the vessel which means it could never be used again symbolizing the totality of the gift given. In the following verses' unsurprisingly we see the response of the Disciples, who respond in anger at the wastefulness of this gift. The greek word used here, for rebuking her sharply is *embrimaesthai*, which is meaning, to flare ones nostrils in anger. They were not just stunned, or shocked, but rather angered by her actions. They regard this gift as a waste and it could have better served by selling it to feed the poor. Their condemnation of her actions demeans her, and her gift but by doing so they are demeaning Jesus as well for they do not regard him worthy of such a gift.

As we see Jesus does not enter into a debate with his disciples about the values of charitable giving, or whether such a thing could be better served elsewhere but rather he defends her, and her willingness to give such a gift. We see that Jesus judges things by a different standard, the disciples here are judging by appearance, this action appears to be a waste and it could be used for what they believed to be a greater good, but Jesus judges not by the action itself, but by the motive. He says, in verse 8, She has done what she could, these are the same words spoken previously by Jesus in reference to the widow in the temple who gave all that she had, her pair of the smallest denomination of coin. It isn't about the act itself, but rather the motive of the heart, and that is the entire point of good works. It is not that good works that we do causes any merit before God, it is rather good works are done because of our love of God. In God's eyes, no gift is too small if given in faith, out of love for him. And as we see here with Mary and the expensive oil, no large gift is wasted if given out of love for him either.

In verse 7 Jesus makes a statement that sounds as if he is indifferent to the poor. The disciples are ridiculing Mary that she would have been better off selling the oil and using the money to feed the poor, but Jesus says, "The poor will be with you always, and whenever you wish you can do them good, but me you do not always have." Throughout scripture we see admonitions to take care of the poor, to provide for the poor and needy and the widows and those who are sick. We are told to love our neighbors as our self and this is the chief command of scripture, to put others before ourselves. And it would seem that Jesus is violating this in his statement. But that is not really what is being said here, Jesus is not turning his back to the poor, but rather standing in defense of this woman against the disciples' ridicule. And in doing so also establishes his pre-eminence over all. The sacrifice of this extravagant, expensive gift shows that she understood the un-measurable worth of Jesus and despite all that have seen and done with Jesus during his ministry, the disciples still did not fully understand.

And further more she not only seems to understand Jesus' priceless value, but in verse 8 he says, She has done what she could, she has come beforehand to anoint my body for the burial." It would seem that despite all Jesus had taught the disciples, and even plainly explaining his death to them, they still did not seem to understand, yet this woman, who so scandalously comes into the meeting place of this group of men, not bringing food which would have been acceptable in that society, but rather bringing a gift to express her love toward Jesus. And it is because of this act of selfless love, and her understanding of Jesus' worth, he says in verse 9 "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.

Jesus promises that her gift will never be forgotten, and she is forever held up as an example of discipleship, faith, and love. Amidst the ridicule, anger and scorn of the disciples, Jesus not only silences them with the acceptance of this precious gift, but further puts them in their place by elevating this woman's show of faith and love and her understanding above their own. When I read through this I think of Jesus standing in defense in our defense, in the face of anger and judgment from God for sins. Jesus stands in the gap, Jesus has given himself and the wrath of God for our sins has been poured out upon him. It is he who has given us the greatest gift of all, it is he who laid down his life for us so that we may stand before God and inherit eternal life in the promised land and not incur the wrath of God in an eternity of torment in hell. Just as Jesus stood against his own disciples in defense of this woman and her sacrificial show of love, he also stands between us and the wrath of God on our sins, but he is both the gift giver, and our defendant for we who are in Him, have been cleansed by his selfless sacrifice on the cross for he has taken our sin, and paid the price already. What a wonderful savior we serve.

In the last few verses we are looking at today, Mark returns back to the plot at hand, which is the coming arrest and death of Jesus. Look at these last 2 verses here this morning. "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray him." The chief priests did not seek out Judas, they did not bribe him, he went to them. Now we don't know his motives and purpose for doing so, some speculate that he was a spy from the Sanhedrin from the beginning, and others speculate he was a Zealot who believed that Jesus was here to free Israel from Roman rule and may have been trying to force his hand. But the reality is we do not know why Judas did what he did, but we do know that it was he who acted on his own, it was his decision that he made. And again in closing here, we see this example of this tapestry of man's choices, and God's sovereignty. Even the freely chosen evil acts of man, does not thwart his divine plans and purpose. God's divine grace, even uses human evil for his saving purpose and plan. What a God we serve!