

**Sermon for Sunday, February 26, 2012**  
**Dr. Dan Doriani**  
**With Jesus at the Lord's Supper**  
**Mark 14:12-25**

*14:12 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. 14 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?' 15 He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. 17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 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." 19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?" ... 20 "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 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." ... 22 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." 23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. 25 "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."*

In our culture a ring, fourth finger, left hand, is a symbol. It says, "I'm married." A wedding ring is a sign and a seal of wedding vows. A signature is a symbol. By signing a document, we bind ourselves to its words. What the page says, we say.

Symbols can be positive or negative. The thumbs-up is a sign of approval, praise, encouragement. The index finger in the air is a claim of supremacy: "We are #1!" Other fingers can mean other things. The word "OK" is known through the world, but the OK sign is OK in some places, an insult in others.

In Mark 14, Jesus institutes one of the great symbols of the faith - the Lord's Supper. Like all symbols, it can be misunderstood. Today we ask what communion means in the context of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

It was a tense moment. The chief priests and scribes were looking to seize and kill Jesus in secret. People were choosing sides. A devoted woman anointed Jesus with perfume worth more than a year's wages. But Judas went to the chief priests to arrange to deliver Jesus into their hands. Jesus prepared for his death. But first, he will share a final meal with his disciples, before his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

### **1. Faithful disciples prepare to feast with Jesus (Mark 14:12-16)**

Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, was Israel's principal celebration of redemption. Like Christmas it had a public celebration at the temple and a private celebration, a meal with family or friends. The head of the household led the meal. He gave thanks for the feast, which included the lamb, wine, bitter herbs and bread without yeast unleavened. A child then asked what everything meant and a father explained it. So what did it mean?

The Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites and started to kill their baby boys. The Lord intervened and sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to say, "Let my people go or face my wrath." Pharaoh refused and hardened his heart until at last the Lord struck the first-born of Egypt's family. The Lord passed over the houses of Egypt. If the blood of a lamb were smeared on the doors, God would "pass over" that house without judgment; no one would die (Exod 12:12-13).

In Jesus' day Passover required extensive preparation, so the disciples asked, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" (14:12b). Jesus wanted a quiet evening with his disciples, so he arranged to meet in a safe house.

So Jesus "sent two of his disciples, telling them, 'Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him'" (14:13). That sounds simple. But tradition dictated that men carried water in skins and women carried it in jars. To direct them to a man carrying a water jar is like saying "Go to the mall and look for a man carrying a red Louis Vuitton purse." The disciples will see the man, follow him, meet the owner and say:

"The Teacher asks, 'Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" Jesus continues, "He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there" (14:14-15). The disciples "went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them [and] prepared the Passover" (14:16).

As a faithful Israelite, Jesus celebrated the Passover, to celebrate the liberation of Israel. At the same time, he inaugurated a new meal, the Lord's Supper, to mark the liberation of God's people in all the nations – God's family.

Earlier Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me" and we see that here. Today, we would call Jesus a polarizing figure. Think of Tim Tebow; people love him or hate him. But Tebow is as polarizing as milk compared to Jesus. His own leaders want to kill him and one of his friends says, "Let me help."

On the other hand, eleven of the disciples love Jesus dearly. Thomas and Peter say they're ready to die for Jesus (John 12:16, Luke 22:33). But Mark shows that *all sorts of people* are willing to stand with Jesus, whatever it costs. A woman spent a year's wages to anoint Jesus before his death. And a man walks through Jerusalem carrying a water jar – a red purse – as a pre-arranged sign, even if everyone laughs at him.

Jesus used this signal because there was an arrest warrant out for him. The water jar makes it possible for the disciples and the man to "exchange [no] words in the street." And "the owner of the house was a man of courage who had determined to shelter" Jesus.<sup>1</sup> He owns a large house, with a big guest room. If he shelters Jesus, a condemned man, he could lose everything.

What about you? Are you for Jesus or against him? How do you let it show? The disciples are willing to die for Jesus. The woman is willing to give generously to Jesus. The man with the jar looks like a fool for Jesus. The house-owner risks legal troubles for Jesus. *None of them is even named!*

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<sup>1</sup> Lane, Mark, 499-500

Mark knew their names, but left them unnamed so they are like you and me. They represent all the people who have a small but vital role – offering perfume, a room, carrying a message, willing to make a fool of ourselves – for God's cause! Let's play our part, great or small, in God's drama as we travel to the feast w Jesus.

## 2. A false disciple is willing to betray Jesus (14:17-21)

"When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were... eating, he said, 'I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me'" (14:17-18). With that terrible truth in the air, Jesus led the Passover. The first topic was the coming betrayal. The disciples didn't leap to accuse Judas; he had hidden his plans. Instead, they all became sad and "one by one they said to him, 'Surely not I?'" (14.19).

The disciples were alarmed that *one of them* would betray Jesus. The phrase "Surely not I" suggests they were horrified to think he might be the one to betray Jesus. The Greek shows that the disciples expected Jesus to say, "No, it's not you." But they still had to ask, had to hear Jesus assure them. They suspect that the capacity to fail lay within them.

Jesus didn't make it easy for them. He warns, "It is one of the twelve" (14:20). So it *is* one of them. This was hardly reassuring, but Jesus let the disciples endure anxiety. The disciples fear their own worst tendencies – and rightly so. When Judas and the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, nine of them fled. Peter stayed close, but lost his courage and denied that he knows Jesus.

It is good for all disciples to face our worst tendencies. We can fail and we are wise to admit it. If the Father sent the Spirit to fill Jesus, even Jesus, at the start of his ministry, how much more do we need God's Spirit and strength daily.

### The mystery of sin

Matthew 26:25 says Judas also asks, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" This surprises us. We assume Judas knew his own mind. Maybe he vacillated in his dark plan, even as the other disciples wavered in their faithfulness. This gives us a moment to consider God's sovereignty and our responsibility.

The prophets foretold Jesus' betrayal and death. But they didn't just predict it, they said it had to happen, according to God's plan of redemption – a plan that predates human history. John calls Jesus "The Lamb that was slain from the [foundation] of the world" (Rev 13:8). Paul says this was God's will and purpose (Eph 1:9-10). Jesus said he had to be "delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again... and then enter his glory"(Luke 24:7, 26).

None of this excuses Judas. God has his purposes, but Judas was a responsible moral agent. Even as he planned to betray Jesus, he asks, "Is it me?" Jesus warns him "woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (14:21). Eternal punishment awaited Judas, yet he went ahead.

Hebrews says, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people" (Heb 9:27-28). Judas rejected the one through whom we can face judgment day without fear. Because he rejected Jesus, Judas comes to judgment day naked and alone, holding his terrible sin in his hands. If Judas rejects Jesus who offers forgiveness, how can he be forgiven?

But you don't need to come alone. You don't have to hope that you've done enough good deeds or any such nonsense. Give up the stupid dream of your virtue. Of course, we should do good and work hard to follow Jesus. But you will never do enough good to earn heaven. Jesus did and he *gives* that to his followers.

People ask how God can punish Judas for doing what God ordained that he do. How can his action be free if it fulfills the plan of God? A scene from family life may help. Parents of active young children become students of this vital question: How do we get our little beans into bed in peace?

Wise parents don't ask "Do you want to go to bed?" They ask, "Would you like me to read you the story about the bunny or the one about the monkey before we go to sleep?" The child chooses a story before bed even as the parent predestines a story before bed. Parents predestine and children choose. If we can both predestine and allow choice, surely the wise and Sovereign Lord can too.

The Bible affirms both truths. God plans and humans freely, responsibly choose. The Lord's control is so perfect that he can accomplish his purposes while granting us freedom. Peter said this about those who killed Jesus: Jesus "was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). The crucifixion fulfilled God's plan, yet those who killed him acted as they chose to act.

All of us are like this. Godly impulses and foolish impulses course through us, side by side. That may be why all of the disciples said, "Please tell me it is not I." They craved the assurance, "No, it's not you." As much as each disciple was horrified at the thought, each wondered if *he could* betray Jesus. In each of us the potential for unfaithfulness dwells in every disciple – even today.

That's why Jesus had to go to the cross. His teaching would never be enough to rescue us from our failure and sin. The wage of sin is death (Rom 6:23). We all sin – not just Judas. All are liable to death. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to show the weakness of the men at the meal established the need for the meal. The sins of the men at the meal required the death of the host of the meal, for our redemption.

### **3. Jesus meets his disciples in the Lord's Supper (14:22-25)**

The Passover celebrated Israel's escape from Egypt, the land of bondage. Now the Lord's Supper celebrates our escape from bondage to sin. In the Passover, the blood of a lamb symbolically covered Israel's sin. But a lamb's blood cannot truly make us right with God Heb (10:4).

Debts must be paid in kind. If I owe a bank \$10,000, my banker will not accept a home cooked meal in lieu of payment. He will not accept a poem dedicated to my favorite banker. He will not accept a pen and ink sketch of his children, nor should he do so. If humanity owes God a debt, then humanity must pay that debt. Jesus came to do that very thing. He is the true man, come to shed a man's blood, to redeem mankind. The sacrificial lambs of Passover pointed to *his* sacrifice.

Since this was an epochal event, Jesus created a new symbol to replace the old one. "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, he said..." (14:22-24).

There are three views of the words "This is my body." *Transubstantiation* says Jesus transforms the substance of the bread and wine so that they become the actual body and blood of Jesus each time we observe the sacrament. The elements look and taste the same, this theory says, but they change into Jesus' flesh. Communion is then a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice.

We believe it's better to take the words, "This is my body" as metaphor. Why? Jesus likes metaphors. He says, "I am the vine" but no one expects to pluck grapes from his ears. He says "I am the door" but no one looks for a knob on his chest. He means I am like a vine in that I nourish. I am like a door in that I offer access.

"This is my body" means "this represents my body." The Passover liturgy had this line: "*This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate when they came from the land of Egypt.*" But no one thought they were literally eating the same bread that Moses' people ate centuries earlier.<sup>2</sup> The disciples' ears were attuned to metaphor, from listening to Jesus and from their past Passovers.

Some people think that communion brings automatic benefits to any who partake, since the elements become the real body of Jesus. They say a person can benefit from the sacrament even if they hardly know what they're doing. But that is magical thinking. The proof lies with Judas. He took the sacrament from Jesus' hand, but it did him no good because he had no faith.

The sacraments are not magical. Someone said, "A sacrament is an outward sign by which the Lord seals... the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith." It is "a testimony of divine grace toward us," received by faith.<sup>3</sup>

A second view says communion is a memorial, a sign to help us remember Jesus' death and its meaning. Jesus did say, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1Cor 11:24-25). But if communion is a mere memorial, then we're simply stirring up our faith by a mental discipline. There is more.

We say Jesus is really present, not physically, but spiritually, with his people through the Lord's Supper. When we partake of the bread and fruit of vine, in faith, Jesus grants his real, spiritual presence. So the Lord is with us. The meal is a sign and seal of Jesus' blessings (Rom 4:11). They are yours for the claiming.

#### **4. Cardinal truths presented**

As Jesus explains the Lord's Supper, he presents cardinal truths, life-giving doctrines. The first doctrine is substitutionary atonement. The Passover meal was a sign that God would cover the sins of his people. It sealed his commitment to protect his people, who became his nation at Sinai.

At Sinai, Israel heard the laws of the covenant. The laws declared how they must live in covenant loyalty. The people listened to the law and then swore, "We will do everything the Lord has said." Moses then sprinkled blood on the people saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you" (Ex. 24:7-8). The oath meant "I pledge, in blood, to obey. My blood is forfeit if I violate my pledge."

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<sup>2</sup> Stauffer, 1960, 117

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, Institutes, 2:1277 (4.14.1)

Sadly Israel violated their pledge over and over. Because they shattered the covenant, they were liable to the stated punishment. Blood guilt was upon them.

But God but didn't abandon his people to guilt. He commissioned prophets to promise a new covenant which Jesus inaugurated (Jer 31, Ezek 36). The new covenant still involved blood, but it was Jesus' blood, not the blood of lambs or guilty men and women. Jesus shed his blood. He shed his blood for ours, his life for ours. By this act he atoned for our sins and gave us peace with God. Then by his resurrection, he grants us life eternal.

The second doctrine is the forgiveness of sins. When we do something wrong, our first thought is to make amends. If we break a dish, we want to replace it. If we drop a pass or miss a shot in a game, we want to "redeem ourselves" by doing something heroic later in the game. Our first thought is "I will atone for my error."

But the Lord thinks of forgiveness first. Jesus said, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (14:24, Matt. 26:28). He doesn't demand reparations, he provides forgiveness.

God does not look at us and demand reparations. We may demand it of ourselves. If so, we impose the burden. We need to ask for forgiveness and rest in it. The only burden is that we live like forgiven people – forgiving ourselves and forgiving others. If God demands nothing of us, we should not demand of others.

Imagine a counseling scenario that may make the point. Suppose a couple visits a counselor, wearing years of misery like a mask. They have visited counselors before. They come prepared to disgorge their sad history. Their first remarks are full of pride and blaming. Before they can hit full stride, the counselor interrupts: "I see that both of you have suffered in this marriage, but if you hope to recover, you must say one thing and mean it: I take full responsibility for everything that's gone wrong. I repent of my sins, my errors. I refuse to blame my spouse."

Both husband and wife agree to this and say, "Yes, I repent of my sins. I'm responsible for my problems. I'll stop blaming my spouse." Yet it may be hard to keep this commitment. They still want to say, "It's not my fault." The way out of this excusing and blaming, I believe, is to stop trying to defend, exonerate, excuse yourself. Why? Because everything that is your fault is your fault. And Jesus has forgiven you for it. There you are, free man, free woman. Move on. Stop worrying about guilt and blame. Jesus took all of it. Move forward. You're free.

The third doctrine is the security of believers. If Jesus paid for our sins, we can't lose his blessing or favor. Believers are secure in him. The Pittsburgh Steelers won six Super Bowls; the San Francisco 49ers and Dallas Cowboys won five. But eventually the players retire and dynasties end. Loyal fans moan about this in the mediocre years, but after a defeat, they can say: "Nothing can take away the glory years and those Super Bowl rings." Nothing can undo a past triumph. Present follies cannot corrupt past victories.

If this is true in sports, it's more true in the spiritual realm. No present sin can reverse Jesus' past action. He completely atones for those who believe in him, so we have security in him. Nothing we do today can undo his past achievement.

So Jesus can say, "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God" 14:25. That is a promise for all disciples. Jesus doesn't say that he hopes to drink or that

he may drink with us if things turn out well. He promises that he will drink. Nothing that the disciples did then, nothing that disciples do now, can annul that promise.

Let us take that to heart, with joy, even now as we partake of the Lord's Supper, and share the benefits of the new covenant.