

As we come to chapter 14, we see that members of the Sanhedrin are hatching a plot to have Jesus arrested and then put to death. And one of the twelve was ready to betray Jesus. And it was all coming to pass just as Jesus said that it would. He had predicted his betrayal and arrest while en route to Jerusalem, which will not only fulfil prophecy, but also set the stage for his death and resurrection, the means by which God will save us from our sins. After telling us of the plotting, Mark describes an event in which Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper. Keep in mind that this act of faith, devotion and gratitude by this unnamed woman stands in contrast to the actions of Judas, who is betraying Jesus. Those who objected to her actions, saw the expensive perfume as an object of great value, therefore wasted, by pouring all of it on Jesus' head. They insisted that this could have been sold and the money could then be given to the poor.

But Jesus replies quite sharply to those who objected. “The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. Jesus, knowing what lies ahead, allows himself to be anointed in preparation for his death and burial. All of those things Jesus has been predicting for some time – his betrayal, arrest, death, and resurrection – are just hours away from fruition. In a sense, we are coming to the climax of the gospel story. Not only does Jesus say that the gospel will be preached throughout the entire world, but when it is, what she has done is an example to all of us. For in this very costly yet simple act it illustrates what Jesus has done for us.

As we move into Mark 14:12-31, the scene shifts to the city of Jerusalem and the upper room. Jesus is celebrating the annual Passover, and in the midst of the solemn meal, Jesus, suddenly announced that one of their own, a close friend, whom he trusted, who shared his bread, has lifted up his heel against him. Not surprisingly, the rest of the disciples were completely taken aback by this news. As the Passover celebration unfolded, Jesus indicated that he was the true Passover lamb, whose coming death would save God's people from their sins. Jesus went on to speak of his own broken body and shed blood as the means through which God would establish a New Covenant with his people. These were remarkable words. Jesus now reinvests the Jewish Passover with an entirely new meaning.

Then when the Passover celebration ended, Jesus and his disciples went out from the city to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knows full well what is about to happen. He must drink the cup of God's wrath if he is to fulfil the Father's will. Jesus then told the disciples that, God will strike the shepherd for the purpose of saving his people. And he makes it clear that his approaching death is not the end. Jesus explains that he will be stricken of God and his disciples will stumble, but then, he tells them, the scattered flock of which they are part, will be regathered in Galilee. But at this point, the disciples' focus is on the talk of Jesus dying. They still don't grasp the promise of the resurrection. Now having heard him declare that all the rest of the disciples will fall away, Peter will have none of it. Peter insisted that, ‘even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you and all the others said the same.’ But Jesus knows otherwise, and despite all the protests, within hours, Jesus' words will come true.

Then as we move to Mark 14: 32 – 42, now late in the evening, Jesus and his disciples are now in the garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus seeks a place to pray. That critical moment has now come when Jesus will either do the Father's will, or else walk away and give in to temptation. Jesus was not afraid of the pain. Jesus was not afraid of the suffering. Jesus was certainly afraid of bearing in his own body the wrath of God because the guilt of our sins will be laid on him and he will become the object of his Father's wrath. Jesus will take the wrath of God rightfully meant for us. The very thought of this rejection by his Father nearly overwhelms him. Mark tells us, Jesus is filled with fear, dread and sorrow. But since the cup will not be taken away, Jesus prays. "Not what I will, but what you will."

With these words his fate is sealed, and our salvation is secured. Mark then tells us that while Jesus is going through this heartbreaking agony, his disciples meanwhile are nowhere to be seen. These men had been with Jesus from the beginning, and now when he needs them most, they are sound asleep. This shows more than anything else that the disciples still do not grasp the significance of what is about to happen. And so, Jesus commits himself again and again to the will of his Father. Jesus has repeatedly warned the disciples to be vigilant. He knows that he is to be arrested. He is worried about the welfare of the disciples. But instead of watching and preparing themselves, they are sound asleep. Soon they will be overwhelmed with fear and dread.

As we close this first section of Mark 14, let us be reminded that we are just like the disciples. We may affirm numerous times that we will never stumble or fall, but each one of us will do exactly what the disciples did, unless the grace of God enables us to stand firm. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is very weak. We are just like Peter, or James, or John. Jesus commands us to be diligent, and we fall asleep. Jesus communes with us through prayer, and we lose focus and we fall asleep. Never, ever, overestimate ourselves. We should always be grateful for God's grace and Spirit.

May the grace and peace of God be with us all,

Bobby