

The Gospel of Mark, Teacher's Guide

Week 19: The Night Before the Cross

Mark 14:1–52

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Mark 14:1–52 covers the events of the night before the cross, from the anointing at Bethany through the institution of the Lord's Supper to the agony of Gethsemane and the arrest of Christ. Doctrinally, the teacher will need to handle several large themes. The extravagant love of true devotion, defended by Christ Himself. The slow descent of unrepented sin into final betrayal in the life of Judas. The establishment of the Lord's Supper as the new covenant meal of the church, with implications for our weekly observance on the first day of the week. The full humanity of Christ in His Gethsemane prayer, His perfect submission to the Father, and the model of surrendered prayer for every disciple. And the honest weakness of the disciples, met not with rejection but with the patience of Christ who went forward to the cross on their behalf and on ours.

At the same time, this chapter is one of the most personal in the Gospel. Every reader sees themselves somewhere in it. The honest worshiper at Bethany. The disciple who has been making small accommodations to sin and risks ending up where Judas ended. The believer at the Lord's table whose heart needs preparation. The disciple in their own Gethsemane, praying with sweat and tears. The sleeping believer whose spirit is willing but whose flesh is weak. The young man who fled naked. The lesson should walk students slowly through each scene and help them name where the Lord is meeting them.

Build the heaviest doctrinal weight at the institution of the Lord's Supper. This is the night Christ inaugurated the meal His church has shared every first day of the week since Pentecost. Use the question to ground the teaching: the bread is His body broken for us, the cup is His blood of the new covenant poured out for many, and the meal is the church's recurring proclamation of His death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). Connect to Acts 20:7 and the New Testament pattern of weekly observance on the first day of the week. Then help students see that this is not symbolism without substance. It is a real meeting with the risen Christ at His table, week by week, in His church.

Question 1

Student Question:

In verses 3–9 a woman pours out a flask of pure nard worth a year's wages over Jesus's head, and He defends her against those who call it waste, saying, "She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial" (14:8). What is Christ teaching about extravagant love for Him, the priority of devotion to Him over apparent practicality, the way His coming

death gives meaning to acts of love offered before they are fully understood, and the kind of acts He will remember forever (compare 1 Corinthians 15:58)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The woman at Bethany (identified in John 12:1–8 as Mary the sister of Lazarus) does something extraordinary. She brings an alabaster flask of pure nard, perfume worth about three hundred denarii (a full year of a laborer’s wages), breaks the flask, and pours it over Jesus’s head. The fragrance fills the house. The gift is shocking in its size and finality. The flask is broken; there is no putting it back. The perfume is on Jesus, not on something more obviously useful.

The observers in the room are indignant. “Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor” (14:4–5). Their math is correct. There were many poor people who could have benefited. But Jesus does not let the rebuke stand. “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial” (14:6–8). And then Jesus does something else striking. He says, “Truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (14:9). Two thousand years later, we are doing exactly that.

Several truths emerge from this scene. First, Christ welcomes lavish love. Not because He needs the perfume, but because the love behind the gift is the kind of devotion that delights Him. Mary saw something the others missed. She acted on it with the full weight of what she could give. The Lord defended her against more religious-sounding voices.

Second, devotion to Christ takes priority over apparent practicality. The objection “this could have been used for something better” sounds reasonable, but it can become a way of postponing every concrete act of love for Christ in favor of generalities that never materialize. The poor are always with us, and we serve them faithfully (Galatians 2:10). But Christ is also among us, and the worship and devotion offered to Him is never waste.

Third, His coming death gave meaning to her act in ways she may not have fully understood. She had anointed Him for burial. Within days His body would be in a tomb, and the women who came to anoint Him after death would find the tomb empty. Mary’s act would turn out to be the closest thing to a burial anointing He received. Acts of love offered to Christ have meaning beyond what we can see at the moment of offering. The Lord weaves them into His larger purposes.

Fourth, certain acts of devotion are remembered forever. “Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (14:9). The math of the kingdom is not the math of this world. The widow’s coins. The woman at the well. The thief on the cross. Mary at Bethany. Small or large in the world’s eyes, these acts of devotion live on in the memory of Christ and in the testimony of His church.

For students, this scene presses on what we are doing with what we have. The Lord still receives lavish love. The Lord still defends the worshipper against the calculating voices. The Lord still remembers the acts of devotion the world dismisses.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Lavish love for Christ as something He defends and delights in (Mark 14:6–9)
- Worship of Christ as the disciple's highest priority, not in opposition to but in proper relation to caring for the poor (Matthew 22:37–40)
- Acts of devotion to Christ as never wasted (1 Corinthians 15:58)
- The Lord's memory of small and great acts of love (Hebrews 6:10; Mark 14:9)
- The continuing relationship between Christ's coming death and the meaningfulness of His people's love for Him
- The dignity of worship offered with the full weight of what we have, however small or large it appears to others

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus defend Mary against her critics?
- What kind of devotion to Christ does this scene commend to His disciples today?
- How does the gospel's memory of Mary's act encourage you about your own offerings of love?

Question 2

Student Question:

It is easy to be more like the indignant observers than the worshiping woman, calculating the "better use" of resources rather than offering them lavishly to Christ. Where in your own life have you been holding something back from Christ in the name of being practical, and what would the kind of extravagant love the woman offered look like for you this season?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Many of us are more like the indignant observers than like Mary. We have an instinct for the calculation. "If I gave that much, I would be reckless." "If I served that lavishly, I would be inefficient." "If I prioritized worship over productivity, I would be wasteful." The math always seems to favor restraint when it comes to lavish devotion to Christ.

Help students name where they have been holding something back in the name of being practical. The giving that has been calculated for safety rather than offered in faith. The time set aside for the Lord that has been the leftover, not the firstfruits. The hospitality that has been measured to the convenient. The act of service that has been weighed for cost. The worship that has been kept brief because Sunday afternoon was busy.

None of this is automatically wrong. Wisdom and stewardship are real. But for most of us, the deeper issue is not wisdom. It is the quiet refusal to offer Christ the kind of extravagant love that breaks the alabaster flask. We tell ourselves the others are the wasteful ones. The Lord tells us that some kinds of restraint, by the measure of love, are themselves a poverty.

What does the kind of extravagant love Mary offered look like for you this season? It will be different for each person. For some, it is a generous gift far beyond the percentage we typically calculate. For some, it is an act of service that costs significant time and effort. For some, it is the gift of attention to a relationship that requires more than the easy minimum. For some, it is the surrender of an ambition that has been competing with Christ for the deepest devotion of the heart. For some, it is the hospitality that opens the home wide.

Encourage one specific act of lavish love this week. Not someone else's. Yours. The check that would be larger than safety allows. The visit that would cost a Saturday. The meal that would welcome someone usually overlooked. The honest words of devotion offered in worship. The hours surrendered to the Lord without ledger-keeping. The Lord will not forget such acts. The chapter ends with the promise that Mary's love is being remembered in this very lesson.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Extravagant love for Christ as a recurring fruit of grace, not a one-time emotional act
- The danger of letting calculation displace devotion (2 Corinthians 9:6–11; James 4:13–17)
- Stewardship that includes lavish worship of Christ, not only careful management of resources
- Hospitality, generosity, attention, and service as concrete forms of lavish love
- The Lord's remembrance of every act offered to Him in love (Mark 14:9; Hebrews 6:10)

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life have you been holding something back from Christ in the name of being practical?
- What would lavish love offered to Christ look like for you this season?
- What one act of devotion could you offer Him this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

In verses 10–11 (and again at 14:43–46) Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests to betray Jesus, accepting money to do it. Connecting this with John 12:4–6 (Judas as treasurer who pilfered the bag), Luke 22:3 (Satan entering Judas), Matthew 27:3–5 (Judas's remorse), and 1 Timothy 6:9–10 (the love of money), what does Scripture teach about the slow descent that produced Judas's final act, the seriousness of unrepented sin in a close follower of Christ, the role of human

responsibility alongside the deeper work of evil, and the sober warning Judas stands as for every disciple?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Judas Iscariot is one of the most haunting figures in the New Testament. He was one of the Twelve. He had walked with Jesus for years. He had heard the teaching, witnessed the miracles, eaten the meals, kept the bag of money, and stood with the others in the inner circle. And he became a betrayer.

Scripture gives us several windows into the slow descent that produced his final act. John 12:4–6 records that Judas was the treasurer of the group and used to pilfer from the money bag. The love of money had been quietly at work in him for some time. Luke 22:3 says that “Satan entered into Judas” as the betrayal approached. There was a real spiritual dimension to his choice; he was not merely making a bad calculation. Matthew 27:3–5 records his remorse after the fact, his return of the silver, and his suicide. He recognized too late what he had done.

Judas did not arrive at the betrayal in a single afternoon. He arrived through years of small, unrepented accommodations to sin. The pilfering that he never confessed. The greed that he allowed to remain. The growing distance from the Master he was supposedly following. The hardening that came with every refusal of the convictions the Spirit was probably bringing through Jesus’s teaching. The desire to use the kingdom for his own ends rather than to be used by it. When the opportunity to betray finally came, the heart that received it was already prepared by long erosion.

This stands as a sober warning for every close follower of Christ. Judas was not an outsider. He was an insider. He had heard the great teachings. He had been entrusted with responsibility in the group. And he was lost. The warning is not that we will all become Judases. It is that closeness to Christ does not, by itself, guarantee faithful endurance. Hebrews repeats this warning. “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:12–13). “It is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened... and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance” (Hebrews 6:4–6). Paul writes, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

At the same time, Scripture holds together human responsibility and the deeper work of evil without flattening either. Judas was responsible. He chose his betrayal. Satan’s entering did not coerce a heart that was unwilling; it gave devastating opportunity to a heart that had long since stopped resisting. “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14–15). The slow growth of unrepented greed and pride in Judas conceived. It eventually gave birth to the kiss in the garden.

For students, this is a warning for every long-tenured disciple. The small accommodations to sin we are tolerating now are the soil in which something much worse can grow if not pulled up. The love of money. The hidden pride. The dishonesty in small things. The quiet drift of priorities. The unforgiveness we have not released. The habit we have not confessed. None of these things looks like a betrayal of Christ in its early stages. Each of them, untended, can grow into one.

The corrective is honest, ongoing repentance. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The disciple who is in the habit of bringing small sins out into the open before Christ is the disciple least likely to drift into bigger ones. Judas’s story is also a reason for the community of faith to be honest with one another. “Exhort one another every day” (Hebrews 3:13). The brother or sister who notices a small drift and helps us name it may save us from a far worse place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The slow descent of unrepented sin into devastating final acts (James 1:14–15; Romans 6:23)
- The reality of falling away even from close discipleship (Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 2 Peter 2:20–22)
- The love of money as a root of many evils (1 Timothy 6:9–10)
- Human responsibility and the activity of evil held together without either being reduced (Luke 22:3–6; James 1:13–15)
- Ongoing confession of sin as a vital habit of Christian life (1 John 1:9; James 5:16)
- The role of brothers and sisters in honest exhortation against drift (Hebrews 3:13; Galatians 6:1–2)
- Christ’s patience with His disciples even in their weakness, contrasted with Judas’s settled refusal
- Repentance and the recovery of fellowship as the gift held out even to the wandering (1 John 1:7–9)

Discussion Prompts

- What does Scripture tell us about the long path that produced Judas’s betrayal?
- Why is Judas’s story a warning to every close disciple of Christ?
- How does honest, ongoing confession of sin guard against the kind of slow descent he illustrates?

Question 4

Student Question:

Judas did not become a betrayer in a single afternoon. He arrived at the kiss in the garden through years of quiet accommodations to sin he never confessed. Where in your own walk are

you tolerating a small accommodation to sin that, left untended, would eventually shape something far worse, and what specific repentance is the Lord calling for this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The honest application of Judas's story is not to imagine that we are at risk of selling Christ for thirty pieces of silver tomorrow. It is to notice that we may be tolerating small accommodations that, untended, would shape us in directions we do not yet imagine.

Help students examine specifically. The small dishonesty in business or speech that has become normal. The greed that quietly justifies overspending or under-giving. The pride that gets gently massaged in conversation. The lust we keep just under the surface. The unforgiveness we have nursed for years. The contempt for a brother or sister we have kept in our heart. The hidden envy. The willingness to speak unkindly about people we do not like. The drift of priorities from kingdom toward career. The growing distance between what we say in worship and how we live the rest of the week.

None of these is a betrayal. All of them are soil. The Lord is not asking us to whip ourselves into a panic about whether we will end up like Judas. He is asking us to bring the soil into the light and let Him pull what is growing in it.

What does specific repentance look like? It looks like confession of the specific sin, not vague general religion. It looks like concrete change. The money put back. The speech adjusted. The relationship sought out for honest conversation. The forgiveness offered. The habit broken. The accountability requested. The renewed dependence on the Spirit. "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

For some students, this will require a willingness to be specific with another person, not only with God. James 5:16 is plain. "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." The disciple who has been hiding a particular sin for years is often unable to break free until it is brought into the light of trustworthy Christian fellowship. Elders, mature Christian friends, or a faithful brother or sister of the same gender are appropriate companions in this kind of confession.

Encourage one specific act of repentance this week. The small accommodation that should be named and forsaken. The relationship to mend. The honest conversation. The renewed obedience. The gospel's power is not only at the moment of conversion. It is at every moment we walk in the light, confessing our sins, and being cleansed (1 John 1:7–9). The disciple who repents in small things consistently is the disciple least likely to end up in a Judas-shaped story.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as ongoing rather than one-time (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30)
- The need for specific, concrete confession rather than vague general religion (1 John 1:9)
- Fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8; Luke 19:8)

- Confession to one another as part of Christian healing (James 5:16)
- The role of elders and faithful brothers and sisters in honest accountability (Galatians 6:1–2; James 5:14–16)
- The continuing power of the gospel to cleanse and restore the repentant disciple (1 John 1:7–9)

Discussion Prompts

- What small accommodation to sin in your life right now is the Lord calling for honest repentance about?
- What concrete act of repentance would put that confession into practice this week?
- Who could you trust with the honesty of that struggle?

Question 5

Student Question:

At the Passover meal Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, gives it to the disciples and says, “Take; this is my body.” He takes a cup, gives thanks, and they all drink. He says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (14:22–24). Connecting this scene with Exodus 24:8, Jeremiah 31:31–34, 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, Acts 20:7, and Hebrews 9:11–28, what is Christ establishing in the Lord’s Supper, what does the bread and the cup actually mean for the church, what is the proper place of this meal as the church’s weekly observance on the first day of the week, and how should believers come to it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The institution of the Lord’s Supper is one of the most important moments in the Gospel. At the Passover meal in the upper room, Jesus deliberately reshapes the bread and the cup to point not back to the exodus from Egypt, but forward to His own coming death and the new covenant He was about to inaugurate.

He takes bread, gives thanks (the Greek is ‘eulogesas’, blessed), breaks it, gives it to the disciples, and says, “Take; this is my body” (14:22). The bread is identified with His body. The breaking is part of the act, not incidental. His body will be broken on the cross. The bread He shares is meant to be received as a participation in that broken body, with thanksgiving.

He takes a cup, gives thanks, gives it to them, and they all drink of it. He says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (14:24). The cup is identified with His blood, the blood that will be shed on the cross to inaugurate the new covenant promised by Jeremiah 31:31–34. The Old Testament background is Exodus 24:8, where Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” The Old Covenant was inaugurated with the

blood of bulls and goats. The new covenant is inaugurated with the blood of the Christ Himself, poured out for many.

Then He adds the eschatological note. “Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (14:25). The Lord’s Supper points back to His death, present in the gathered church each week, and forward to the great wedding feast of the Lamb at the end of the age (Revelation 19:6–9). Every observance is a rehearsal of the past, a meeting in the present, and an anticipation of the future.

Paul fills out this teaching for the church in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The church is to keep doing this. It is the recurring meal of the New Covenant people of God.

What does the bread and the cup actually mean for the church? Several things. First, communion (literally ‘sharing,’ ‘participation’). “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:16–17). At the table we share in the body and blood of Christ in a real (though not crudely literal) way. Second, proclamation. “You proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Third, examination. “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). Fourth, unity. The one bread is shared by the one body, the local congregation gathered as one people of Christ. Fifth, anticipation. We wait for His coming.

The New Testament pattern is clear that this meal is observed by the church on the first day of every week. “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them” (Acts 20:7). 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 ties the gathered church to the first day. Revelation 1:10 names it “the Lord’s Day.” The first day of the week was set apart by the resurrection of Christ (Mark 16:9; John 20:1, 19, 26) and confirmed by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Old Covenant Sabbath was a sign given specifically to Israel (Exodus 31:13–17) and has been fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17). The Lord’s Day is not a “Christian Sabbath.” It is the New Covenant day on which the church gathers to break bread, hear the Word, sing, pray, give, and worship.

How should believers come to the table? Several things, taken together. First, with faith. Believing that the Christ who died and rose is present in His Spirit and is meeting His people in the meal. Second, with examination. Confessing known sin (1 Corinthians 11:28). Third, with thanksgiving. Receiving with gladness what He has provided. Fourth, with the body. Conscious of

being one loaf with the saints in the room and the saints across the world. Fifth, with anticipation. Looking forward to His return.

For students, this teaching should sharpen the Sunday meeting at the table. The Supper is not a private moment. It is the central act of the gathered church. It is the place where the church most concentratedly proclaims and receives the gospel each week. The disciple who comes attentively to the table is being shaped, every Sunday, by the very center of the Christian story.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord's Supper instituted by Christ Himself on the night of His betrayal (Mark 14:22–25; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26)
- The new covenant inaugurated in Christ's blood (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8–10; Luke 22:20)
- The Supper as communion (participation) in the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)
- The Supper as proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- Weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week as the New Testament pattern (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10)
- The Lord's Day distinguished from the Old Covenant Sabbath, which has been fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:6–13)
- The Supper as a meal of unity in the one body, examination of self, thanksgiving, and anticipation of the wedding feast of the Lamb (1 Corinthians 11:23–29; Revelation 19:6–9)
- The Supper as a real meeting with the risen Christ, not empty symbolism

Discussion Prompts

- What is Christ establishing in the Lord's Supper, and how does the bread and the cup speak of His sacrifice?
- Why is weekly observance on the first day of the week the New Testament pattern?
- How should a believer come to the Lord's table?

Question 6

Student Question:

Many believers participate in the Lord's Supper each Sunday without fully engaging it. How does Mark 14:22–25 (read alongside 1 Corinthians 11:23–29) shape the way you should come to the table this Sunday, and what specific preparation of heart would help you receive the bread and the cup as a real meeting with the Christ who was broken and poured out for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Long-tenured Christians can come to the Lord's table week after week with hearts that have grown distracted, dull, or routine. The bread is taken. The cup is passed. The pattern is

observed. But the heart engagement has thinned. The Supper has become something we do rather than someone we meet.

Mark 14:22–25 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 together press for a different posture. Several practices help.

First, preparation before Sunday. Spend some time on Saturday evening or Sunday morning reading the Last Supper account. Read 1 Corinthians 11. Pray for an attentive heart. Examine yourself honestly. Confess specific sin. Forgive those who have wronged you. Come to the assembly carrying yourself with intentional readiness, not the leftovers of a hurried morning.

Second, deliberate attention during the Supper. As the bread is being passed, think specifically of the body of Christ broken for you. Picture the scene. Receive the bread as from His hand. As the cup is passed, think specifically of the blood of the new covenant poured out for many, including you. Let the truth land afresh. Refuse to let your mind drift to the to-do list.

Third, awareness of the body. Look around at the people gathered. They are the body. The one loaf is being shared by the one body. Some of them have walked with you for decades. Some are visitors. Some are struggling. Some are flourishing. All are bound together with you in Christ. The Supper is not a private moment between you and Jesus. It is the church meeting her Lord.

Fourth, thanksgiving. The very word “eucharist” means thanksgiving. Christ gave thanks over the bread and the cup. We receive with thanks. Even on the worst Sunday, when the week has been hard and the heart is weary, the bread and cup are gifts to be received with gratitude. The gospel is true. Christ died. Christ is risen. Christ is coming again. We give thanks.

Fifth, anticipation. Christ said He would not drink the fruit of the vine again until He drank it new in the kingdom of God. Every Supper is a small foretaste of the great wedding feast of the Lamb. We are eating with our King now. We will eat with Him face to face then. The Supper is not nostalgia. It is hope in concentrated form.

For students, encourage one specific change in preparation this week. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 on Saturday night. Pray a specific prayer of preparation Sunday morning. Come to worship a few minutes early to settle the heart. Take the bread and the cup with deliberate attention. Look at your brothers and sisters as you partake. Receive the meal as a real meeting with the Christ who died, is risen, and is coming again.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination before the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27–32)
- The Supper as a real meeting with the risen Christ, not a mere memorial
- The body of believers gathered as one in the Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)
- Thanksgiving as central to the meal (Mark 14:23)
- Anticipation of the wedding feast of the Lamb (Mark 14:25; Revelation 19:6–9)

- The Lord's Supper as the church's weekly meal with her Lord on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)

Discussion Prompts

- What does honest self-examination before the Supper look like?
- What specific change in preparation would help you come to the table more attentively this Sunday?
- How does the Supper bind you to the rest of the body gathered in the room?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Gethsemane Jesus tells His disciples, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (14:34), and prays three times, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). What is Mark revealing about the genuine humanity of Christ, the weight of the cup He was about to drink, the perfect submission of His will to the Father, and the kind of prayer He has taught every disciple to pray in their own hour of need (compare Hebrews 5:7–9; Philippians 2:8)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gethsemane is one of the most piercing scenes in the Gospels. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John deeper into the garden than the others, and tells them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch" (14:34). He goes a little farther, falls on the ground, and prays. "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (14:36). He prays this prayer three times. He sweats. He weeps. The disciples sleep. The hour of His arrest approaches.

This scene reveals several deep truths. First, the genuine humanity of Christ. The weight of what He was about to face was unimaginable. He did not face it as if it were nothing. He faced it as a man, with sorrow "even to death," with strong cries and tears (Hebrews 5:7), with the honest desire that the cup might pass. His full humanity is not a theological abstraction. It is on display in this garden. He sweated. He wept. He bled, even before the cross, in the agony of anticipation. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

Second, the weight of the cup. The 'cup' in Old Testament prophetic language is often the cup of God's wrath against sin (Isaiah 51:17, 22; Jeremiah 25:15–29). Jesus was about to drink that cup on behalf of His people. He was about to take into Himself the just judgment of God against the sin of the world. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What He was facing was not merely physical pain (although that was real and horrible). It was the bearing of sin and the wrath against it on behalf of those He came to save. No other person could face that.

Third, perfect submission of His will to the Father. “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” This is the heart of the Gethsemane prayer. He desired that the cup might pass, and He surrendered that desire to the Father’s will. He did not pretend He did not feel the weight. He brought it honestly to His Father. And He yielded. This is the prayer of perfect Sonship. Philippians 2:8 describes it: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Hebrews 5:8–9 adds: “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”

Fourth, the model of surrendered prayer for every disciple. We will not face anything Christ has not faced first, in a more concentrated way. When we face our own hard providences, the question is not whether we will feel the weight (we will) but whether we will be willing to pray, with the honesty of Christ, “Father, not what I will, but what you will.” That prayer is not stoicism. It is not denial of the desire. It is the honest bringing of the desire to the Father, and the deliberate yielding of it to His good and wise will.

For students, Gethsemane is meant to give them both a Savior who knows what they are walking through and a model for their own prayer. Christ has walked this road. He is not asking us to walk where He has not. And He is not asking us to walk it alone. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The genuine humanity of Christ revealed in His Gethsemane agony (Hebrews 5:7–9; Mark 14:33–36)
- The weight of the cup of God’s wrath against sin that Christ drank for His people (Isaiah 51:17, 22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24)
- Perfect submission of the Son’s will to the Father’s will (Mark 14:36; Philippians 2:8)
- Christ as the model of surrendered prayer for every disciple (Hebrews 12:1–4)
- The full deity and full humanity of Christ united in one person, both displayed in the garden
- Christ as the great High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:14–16)
- The Father’s good and wise will as the disciple’s anchor in every cup we are asked to drink

Discussion Prompts

- What does Gethsemane reveal about the full humanity of Christ?
- What was the “cup” Jesus was facing, and why was it so heavy?
- How does Christ’s Gethsemane prayer model the prayer of every disciple in hard providence?

Question 8

Student Question:

Most disciples have at least one "Gethsemane" situation: a hard providence, a costly obedience, a cup we did not choose. Where is yours right now, and what would the prayer "Not what I will, but what you will" look like in that specific situation if you were willing to pray it honestly this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Most students have, somewhere in their lives, a 'Gethsemane' situation. A diagnosis received. A loved one walking through a hard road. A door closed that we deeply wanted open. A providence we did not choose. A loss that does not lift. A long obedience that costs more than we expected. A grief that does not finish. A cup of some kind held out to us.

Help students name theirs honestly. Be specific. The honest naming is part of bringing the cup to the Father. "Father, this is the cup. This is what I am facing. I would rather not face it. I am afraid. I am tired. I am wounded." The Christian is not required to pretend the cup is light. Christ Himself did not pretend.

Then, in the same honest prayer, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." This is the surrender that opens the way to peace. It does not mean we no longer ask for what we deeply long for. Jesus asked. "Remove this cup from me." The petition is real. But the surrender is also real. "Yet not what I will, but what you will."

What does this prayer look like in your specific situation? Concretely. If the cup is grief, it is the willingness to walk through grief with the Father instead of being mastered by it. If the cup is illness, it is bringing the body honestly to Him and trusting His good purposes even if healing does not come on our timetable. If the cup is a wayward family member, it is steady, faithful, prayerful love over years without bitterness, leaving the timing of their return in His hands. If the cup is a costly obedience, it is the willingness to obey even when the cost is real.

Help students see that this prayer is not made once and finished. It is made again and again, sometimes daily, sometimes hourly, in the cup the Lord has placed in their hands. Christ prayed it three times in Gethsemane. We may pray it a thousand times in our seasons of testing. Each prayer deepens the yielding. Each prayer matures the soul.

And the Christ who prayed in the garden walks with us as we pray. He is not an absent High Priest. He stands beside His own with the very strength of the obedience He has already offered. "Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Encourage students to actually pray this prayer this week in their specific situation. Out loud if possible. With sweat and tears if necessary. With trusted brothers or sisters if helpful. The lesson is not finished until the cup has been brought to the Father honestly and the surrender has been offered.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest prayer that brings real desire to the Father (Mark 14:36; Hebrews 5:7)
- Surrender of our will to the Father's will as the heart of mature Christian prayer (James 4:13–15; 1 John 5:14)
- Christ as the present, sympathizing High Priest in every cup we are asked to drink (Hebrews 4:14–16; 2:18)
- The role of brothers and sisters in supporting one another in seasons of testing (Galatians 6:2; James 5:13–16)
- The means of grace (Word, prayer, the Lord's Supper, the assembly) as the channels of strength for the disciple in their own Gethsemane
- The peace that comes through surrender, even when circumstances do not immediately change (Philippians 4:6–7)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the cup the Lord is asking you to drink right now?
- What would the honest Gethsemane prayer look like for you this week?
- Who could pray with you and walk with you in that season?

Question 9

Student Question:

While Jesus prays, Peter, James, and John fall asleep. He returns three times and finds them asleep. He says, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (14:38). When Judas arrives and Jesus is arrested, all the disciples flee, and a young man who had followed Him slips out of his linen garment and runs away naked (14:50–52). What is Mark teaching about the weakness of even close disciples in the hour of testing, the call to watch and pray as a means of resisting failure, the Lord's patient understanding of His people's frailty, and the encouragement that the same Christ went forward alone to bear the very weakness His disciples were displaying?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

While Christ prayed in agony, His three closest disciples slept. Three times He came back. Three times He found them asleep. The third time He said with weary tenderness, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand" (14:41–42). And then the kiss of Judas. And then the arrest. And the disciples scatter. Mark adds the famous and curious detail: "And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked" (14:51–52). It is one of the saddest pictures in the Gospel. The disciples are gone. The young man is fleeing. Christ goes forward to the cross alone.

What is Mark teaching? Several truths.

First, the weakness of even close disciples in the hour of testing. Peter had just promised that even if all the others fell away, he never would (14:29, 31). The honest reality, on his knees in the garden, was that he could not even stay awake while Jesus prayed. The promises of disciples often outrun their actual strength. We need to be sober about ourselves. The first step in resisting our own collapse is to refuse to think too highly of our endurance.

Second, the necessity of watching and praying as a means of resisting failure. “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (14:38). This is a tender and weighty sentence. The disciples wanted to be faithful. Peter wanted to stay awake. The will was real. The flesh was weak. The remedy was prayer. The disciple who is alert and prayerful goes into the hour of testing differently from the disciple who is sleepy and unprayed. Many of the failures of the Christian life come not in the moment of the test itself but in the long unprepared run-up to it.

Third, the Lord’s patient understanding of His people’s frailty. He does not abandon the sleeping disciples. He wakes them. He keeps walking with them. He goes forward to the cross to bear the very weakness they are displaying. “Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13–14). The Christ in the garden is not surprised by His disciples’ weakness. He knows what is in man (John 2:25). He still loves them. He goes forward for them.

Fourth, the great encouragement: Christ went forward alone so that we might never have to. The disciples scattered. The young man fled. Christ stayed. He stayed when no one else would. He stayed all the way to the cross. He stayed in our place, taking the punishment we deserved, drinking the cup we could not drink, dying the death that would have destroyed us. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). The disciples’ failure on this night is not the end of their story. They will run, and they will be brought back. Christ’s endurance is what saves them, and what saves us.

For students, this scene speaks both warning and comfort. Warning, because we are no stronger than they were. We must watch and pray. We must take honest stock of our own weakness. We must not assume that good intentions will hold under pressure. Comfort, because the Christ who walked forward to the cross alone walked there for sleepy, scattering, fleeing disciples like us. His sufficient endurance is the foundation of our salvation, and His patient gathering of His failed disciples is the pattern of His mercy toward us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The genuine weakness of disciples even in the closest circle to Christ (Mark 14:32–42, 50–52)
- The necessity of watching and praying as a means of resisting temptation (Mark 14:38; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Peter 5:8)

- The Spirit-willing-but-flesh-weak tension in every disciple (Romans 7:18–25; Galatians 5:17)
- The patient mercy of Christ toward His failing disciples (Psalm 103:13–14; John 13:1)
- Christ enduring to the cross alone on behalf of His scattered people (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- The continuing restoration of failed disciples by the risen Christ (John 21:15–19; Mark 16:7)
- The need for sober self-knowledge in every Christian's walk

Discussion Prompts

- What does the disciples' sleeping in Gethsemane reveal about our own frailty?
- What does Christ teach about watching and praying as the disciple's preparation for the hour of testing?
- How does Christ's walking forward alone to the cross encourage you about your own failures?

Question 10

Student Question:

As you close this lesson and look back across the chapter, picture yourself in the scenes: at the table at Bethany, at the Passover meal, in the garden, in the arresting crowd. Where is the Lord most pointing your heart for change this week (toward more lavish love like the woman, toward more honest repentance like Peter would soon need, toward deeper surrender like Christ in the garden, toward more watchful prayer like the sleeping disciples), and what one specific step would put that change into motion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the closing question of the lesson, and it is meant to be deeply personal. Mark 14:1–52 has placed several very different figures in front of us. The woman at Bethany whose lavish love is being remembered to this day. Judas the betrayer whose slow accommodations to sin produced the kiss in the garden. The Twelve at the Last Supper, hearing Christ's body and blood given for them in the bread and the cup. Christ Himself in Gethsemane, surrendered to the Father. The sleeping disciples whose spirit was willing and flesh weak. The young man who fled naked into the night.

Most of us are not only one of these figures. We are a mixture of several, depending on the season and the area of life. We have moments of lavish worship and moments of calculating self-protection. We have areas where we are walking in steady surrender to Christ and areas where small accommodations are slowly shaping us in dangerous directions. We have times of attentive presence at the Lord's table and times of sleepy distraction. We have moments of faithful watching and moments of fleeing.

Where is the Lord most pointing your heart for change this week? Help students name it specifically.

For some, the answer is toward more lavish love. The Lord is calling them out of restrained calculation into the kind of devotion the woman offered. The check that is larger. The hour given that costs. The gift offered without measuring.

For some, the answer is toward more honest repentance. The Lord is putting His finger on a small accommodation to sin that, untended, could grow into something far worse. The conversation that needs to happen. The pattern that needs to be broken. The confession that needs to be made.

For some, the answer is toward deeper surrender like Christ in the garden. The Lord is asking them to pray, honestly and persistently, “Not what I will, but what you will” in a hard providence they did not choose.

For some, the answer is toward more watchful prayer like the sleeping disciples needed. The Lord is calling them to renewed alertness, renewed time in the Word, renewed habits of dependence, so that when the hour of testing comes they are not unprepared.

For some, the answer is toward more attentive engagement at the Lord’s table. The Lord is calling them to come to the bread and the cup this Sunday with their whole heart, hearing again the words, “Take; this is my body... This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

Help students name their place of change and the specific step that puts it into motion. Encourage one act of obedience this week. The chapter ends with Christ walking forward to the cross. The lesson should end with each disciple walking forward in their specific obedience, in His strength, by His grace.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian life as a daily working out of confession in obedience (Philippians 2:12–13)
- The means of grace (Word, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, the assembly, faithful brothers and sisters) as the steady channels by which Christ shapes us
- Christ as the model and the strength of every disciple’s growth
- The patience of Christ with disciples in every stage of their formation
- The local congregation as the community in which the lessons of Mark 14 are actually walked out together

Discussion Prompts

- In which scene of Mark 14 do you most see yourself this week?
- What is the specific change the Lord is calling you to?
- What one step of obedience would put that change into motion?