

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 19: The Night Before the Cross -- Mark 14:1–52

Picture the house at Bethany. The lamps are lit. The smell of cooking lingers in the air. Jesus is reclining at the table with a small group of close friends. A woman approaches with an alabaster flask of nard, breaks it open, and pours the ointment over His head. The fragrance fills the room. Some of those at the table are indignant. “Why was the ointment wasted like that?” (14:4). Jesus stops them. “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me... She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And 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” (14:6–9). It is the last quiet act of love before the storm.

Meanwhile, Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests and agrees to betray Him for thirty silver coins. The same chapter, in the next paragraph. A woman pours out love that will be remembered forever. A friend bargains the price of a slave for the body of the Master. Mark lets the contrast do its work.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, the disciples prepare a Passover meal in an upper room a friend has lent them. Jesus and the Twelve recline at the table. He tells them one of them will betray Him. Each one says, “Is it I?” (14:19). Then He takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to them: “Take; this is my body.” He takes a cup, gives thanks, gives it to them: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (14:22–24). The Lord’s Supper is established. The church will share this same meal across two thousand years and every nation under heaven.

They go out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus tells them they will all fall away. Peter protests. Then they come to a garden called Gethsemane, where Jesus prays with sweat and tears, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (14:36). The disciples cannot stay awake. Judas arrives with a crowd. The kiss of betrayal lands on the cheek of the Christ. Mark 14:1–52 is the night before the cross. Anointing, betrayal, the Lord’s Supper instituted, sweat in the garden, sleepy disciples, an arrest in the dark, and a final note about a young man who flees naked into the night. This week we sit with our Lord in the hours that changed everything.

Group Discussion: Mark 14:1–52 holds together some of the most contrasting scenes in the Gospel: the worshipful anointing at Bethany, the calculated betrayal of Judas, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the agony of Gethsemane, and the sleeping disciples. Each scene reveals something different about the heart of Christ and the hearts of those around Him. Where do you see yourself in these scenes (in worship like the woman, in calculation like Judas, in

surrender like Christ, in honest weakness like the disciples), and what is the Lord teaching each of us through them?

Personal Reflection: In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “Not what I will, but what you will” (14:36), while sweating in agony before the cup He was about to drink. Where in your own life right now is the Lord asking you to pray, with whatever sweat and tears it takes, that same surrendered prayer, and what would actually praying it this week look like?

Read Mark 14:1–52

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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)?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 24:1–11, the blood of the covenant sprinkled on the people and the meal on the mountain; Jeremiah 31:31–34, the promise of the new covenant in which sins are remembered no more; 1 Corinthians 11:23–34, Paul’s instructions about the Lord’s Supper in the assembled church; Hebrews 5:7–10, Christ’s loud cries and tears in the days of His flesh and His learned obedience; Hebrews 12:1–4, the Christ who endured the cross for the joy set before Him.