

# In Preparation for the Lord's Supper

Mark 14:12-21

*Halifax & Glenholme: 1 November 2020, 10:30 AM*

## **Introduction:**

Today, we will continue our sermon series in the gospel of Mark.

- We recently began chapter 14 which brings us to the time of Jesus' priestly or sacerdotal ministry, and especially to the preparation for it.
- Last time, we looked at verses 1-11 (again, that's Mark 14:1-11) where we see those plotting and scheming about crucifying Jesus contrasted with a woman Mark leaves unnamed who shows her deep devotion to Jesus by anointing Him with costly oil—worth about a year's wages.
  - Truly, this divide illustrates the contrast between what we all are without the grace of God and what those who are redeemed are and shall be when Christ's saving work in us is complete.
  - You have on the one hand extravagant devotion and on the other unbounded hatred for God the Son who came to save sinners.
- Even Jesus' own disciples here show the incompleteness of their devotion by criticising the woman for her extravagance.
  - Jesus sharply rebukes them and commends her as doing a good work, even the work of preparing Him for His burial, recognising that He will not be with them much longer.
  - Judas responds to this by going to arrange with the chief priests and scribes to deliver Jesus to them for thirty pieces of silver.

The narrative moves rapidly to the first day of the feast of unleavened bread when the Passover lamb was killed.

- Here we have Jesus eating the Passover with His disciples and instituting the Lord's Supper.
  - This week, we will focus on the preparation for the Lord's Supper in verse 12-21.
  - Next week, Lord willing, we will look at the institution of the Supper itself.
- What we find here in the example of our Lord is instruction about this important topic of preparing ourselves to come to the Communion Table.
  - This is an important subject for us because preparation, especially the duty of self-examination, has often been grossly neglected in the church.
  - This neglect has sometimes been fostered by a misunderstanding of the need for self-examination, even in Reformed churches.

Though my preaching text is from verse 12 to verse 21, I will begin in Mark 14:10 and read to verse 31 to give you the context.

- Listen, then to the word of God—beginning in Mark 14:10:

**Mark 14:10-31: Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. <sup>11</sup> And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him. <sup>12</sup> Now on the first**

day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"<sup>13</sup> And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him.<sup>14</sup> Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "<sup>15</sup> Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us."<sup>16</sup> So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.<sup>17</sup> In the evening He came with the twelve.<sup>18</sup> Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."<sup>19</sup> And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "*Is it I?*" And another *said*, "*Is it I?*"<sup>20</sup> He answered and said to them, "*It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish.*"<sup>21</sup> The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It

would have been good for that man if he had never been born."<sup>22</sup> And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."<sup>23</sup> Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it.<sup>24</sup> And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.<sup>25</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."<sup>26</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.<sup>27</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.'<sup>28</sup> But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."<sup>29</sup> Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will not be.*"<sup>30</sup> Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, *even* this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."<sup>31</sup> But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all said likewise.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His holy word.

Following our text, we will first look at the physical preparations, then at the call to self-examination. After that I will speak about the purpose of self-examination at the table.

To understand this passage, it is essential to realise that at this meal, Jesus transformed the Old Testament Passover into the NT Passover which we call the Lord's Supper.

- There is a close relationship between the two.
- The Passover was instituted in the Old Testament on the night that the LORD redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt.
  - In order to get the Pharaoh of Egypt to release Israel from slavery, God sent ten plagues upon Egypt, each following a demand to let His people Israel go so that they might serve Him.
  - The last of the ten plagues was the one in which the LORD declared that He would kill all the first born males in Egypt if Pharaoh would not let His people go.
    - Pharaoh refused.
    - The LORD then instructed His people to kill a lamb as a sacrifice and put the blood of the lamb on the door posts and lintel of their houses, promising that when the death angel went around, he would pass over all the houses in Egypt that were marked by the blood.
- The whole idea was that the lamb was killed in place of the first born males.

- The families were instructed to gather as families under their elders in groups that were the right size to consume a lamb. They were to eat unleavened bread because they were to leave that very night and were to not to wait for the bread to become leavened.
- The LORD appointed that on the fifteenth day of Nisan, they were to have a Passover feast each year in which they sacrificed a lamb and ate it, followed by a week of eating unleavened bread.
  - This all anticipated what Christ would do—Christ who was called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
    - He would come to die in the place of guilty sinners so that they would not be destroyed in the judgment of the world and could serve God forever by His grace and strength as nourished by faith in His sacrifice.
- We see that Jesus makes this connection between Himself and the Passover in the passage we just read.
  - He takes the bread and declares it to be His body given; and He takes the wine and declares it to be His blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many.
  - Right here, He is inaugurating the New Covenant in place of the Old Covenant where He is offered once as the true sacrifice instead of animals offered repeatedly as mere ritual sacrifices.
  - His disciples knew that blood shed for others was the language of a sacrifice for sin.
    - Jesus was telling them that in the New Testament, His blood shed would replace the Old Covenant sacrifices.
- We will be looking at this more next week,
  - but I brought it up this week because I want you to understand that we can look at the preparations Jesus makes here for the Passover as also preparations for the Lord's Supper. The two can be looked at together.
  - Of course the Lord's Supper does not require nearly as much physical preparation, but as we shall see, there are many things that correspond.
    - So let's begin by looking at:

### **I. The physical preparations as they are described in verses 12-17.**

- A. You can see first of all that Jesus finds a suitable place to eat the Passover.
  1. It is a large, furnished, upper room.
    - Jesus might have eaten the Passover out of doors.
    - We know that He and His disciples were not given to luxury, but He wanted a place that would be appropriate for this special feast.
  2. But perhaps even more important is the fact that He made the arrangements in a way that would prevent an untimely arrest.
    - Jesus knew that Judas was looking for an opportunity to betray Him and He wanted to have this time with His disciples to eat the Passover and inaugurate the Lord's Supper before He suffered.

- To make sure there was no interruption, He did not tell His disciples where they would be meeting in advance.
    - Instead, He sent two of them to prepare the meal by instructing them to follow a man they would meet when they entered Jerusalem who would be carrying a pitcher of water.
    - Men ordinarily carried water in skins, so it would stand out to see a man carrying water in this way.
  - This is what Jesus said in verse 13-16: **“Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. <sup>14</sup> Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?” ’ <sup>15</sup> Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us.”**
    - That the text goes on to tell us that they found everything just as He said probably shows us that Jesus did this by remarkable divine prophetic insight that this water-carrying man would come by just as they arrived—much like the arrangement for the colt in Mark 11.
3. Jesus’ example here teaches us that we should do all we can to avoid distractions and interruptions when we gather for worship and for the Lord’s Supper.
- What we are doing presently with livestream preaching is not ideal, but until we can secure an additional preacher or things open up for more people to meet in Halifax, it is the best we have come up with.
  - The goal is to, as much as possible, attend upon the Lord and His ordinances in our meetings.
- B. We see that His disciples also prepare the meal.
1. The deacons in our church are responsible for the work of preparing the bread and the wine and for looking after our facilities.
    - When this is done well, the focus can be on the meaning of the service rather than the mechanics.
    - Of course as a minister, it is my duty to prepare the preamble for the Lord’s Supper that explains what we are doing and that directs you to partake with understanding and wisdom—and it is your duty to pay attention.
  2. On your part, it is important for you to physically prepare for worship by endeavouring to come regularly with a rested body.
    - You should arrange all of your affairs around the services of the church so that you can attend faithfully and be at your best.
      - See that you get to bed on time, and arrange your week so that you get your work done and are able to focus on the Lord all day on Sunday.
      - God promises a great blessing to those who call the Lord’s Day a delight.
      - Sometimes I hear people say that they are not coming to church because they want to be rested for work—but it is better to miss work than to miss church.
    - Our Lord has commanded us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is.

- We may note here that all twelve of Jesus' disciples came to the supper.
  - We could hardly imagine any of them missing.
- Also, be sure to take care of your needs before the service begins.
  - I know on my part, that I do not drink as much fluid on Sunday so I won't have to duck out in the middle of the service.
  - I say this, of course, recognising that some have health issues or medications, but the point is that we should all do what we can.

TRANS> But of course there is more—much more—regarding preparation than the physical arrangements—as important as these are.

## II. Jesus leads His disciples to an earnest examination of themselves at the supper.

A. He does this by dropping a bomb that that stirs them up to examine themselves.

- He had been telling them that at Jerusalem, He would be betrayed or delivered over into the hands of His enemies who would crucify Him.
  1. But now He breaks the news to them (v. 18) that “assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me”!
    - The fact that they were eating with Him makes it all the more offensive because in their culture to eat with someone was to declare friendship and good will.
    - This is a reference to Psalm 41:7 where it says: “**All who hate me whisper together against me; against me they devise my hurt.**” and then in verse 9 declares: “**even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up *his* heel against me.**”
  2. As might be expected, when the disciples hear this, they are deeply grieved and launch into self-examination.
    - Mark 14:19 says: **And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, “Is it I?” And another said, “Is it I?”**
      - They found it hard to believe that any of them would be capable of such a horrendous deed.
      - Their question, “Is it I” is a true question, but one that expects a negative answer—something like, “Surely not I, is it?”
        - It forced all of them to consider their own walk with Him and whether they were indeed capable of such a deed.
    - 3. Jesus insists again that it will be the one who is sharing the dish with Him in which they were dipping their bread.
      - Verse 20 says that Jesus **answered and said to them, “*It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish.*”**
        - That does not really tell them any more—it just drives home the reality that it will indeed be one of them.
      - And Jesus goes on to make it clear that this one will fall beyond recovery.

- **21 “The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.”**
- Even though the plan of God that Jesus be crucified will be carried through perfectly by the betrayer’s actions, that fact will do nothing to lessen his guilt.
  - The Scripture teaches this doctrine throughout its pages—that the doings of Satan and of sinners fulfill the plans and purposes of God even though they don’t mean them to.
    - The cross is the best illustration of all of this, for it was the will of wicked men that Jesus be crucified, but was also the will of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that Jesus be crucified.
    - The purpose of God was to show mercy to His sinners, but the purpose of the wicked was to eliminate Christ from the world.
  - No matter what evil the wicked commit, they only further the outworking of God’s plan, and if they never repent, they are judged not for furthering God’s purpose, but for their defiance and rebellion and their sinful acts.
- This declaration of what was to become of His betrayer made the examination of the disciples all the more critical.
  - Jesus is not talking about a temporary lapse in His betrayer, but a falling away so complete that it would have been better for him if he had never been born.
  - This is beyond deadly serious—eternal perdition is in view here.
  - Clearly, God has not purposed that all who profess faith will endure to the end—many will depart from the faith.
    - Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!
    - This is deeply concerning to anyone who truly fears God.
      - It puts them to earnest self-examination.
      - If you are not concerned, you do not fear God, and it is likely that you are one who will not endure to the end.

TRANS> God calls His saints to self-examination and He uses their self-examination to preserve them.

- B. The foundation for self-examination was already laid in the Old Testament Passover.
1. The law declared that man could not eat of the Passover unless he and his sons had been circumcised.
    - In other words, he and his household must officially be members of God’s household.
    - That’s the reason we require persons to be baptised to partake.
  2. The law also forbade anyone to partake, even if they were circumcised, if they were unclean according to the ritual requirements of the Old Testament...
    - for example, if they had come into contact with a dead body or if they were defiled on account of a flow of blood.
    - By this God was teaching them (and us) that we need to deal with sin in our lives before we dare to approach Him.

3. They also were not to come if they had sin their life that they had been disciplined for, excluding them from fellowship in the congregation.
  - Of course an honest person would recognise that if there was sin that he had not dealt with by repentance, whether it was publicly known or not, he should not come.
  - Jesus applied this principle in Matthew 5:23 when He said: **“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”**
4. Time and again we see the Lord calling His people to self-examination.
  - We read in Deuteronomy 31 where the LORD told Moses that the people would turn away from their faith in the days to come.
    - Not exactly what you want to hear at the inauguration of a new leader.
    - Moses warned them and God gave Moses a song that would be remembered by them when they did turn away.
  - Joshua, who replaced Moses, gave the same warning at the end of his life—he tells the people that they will turn from the Lord.
    - So it is with all the prophets, and time and time again, one generation after another has to be rescued, yet like Judas, many of them utterly fall away and never return.
    - Those who return are those who by God’s grace examine themselves and turn to the Lord for His forgiveness and mercy.
      - Always, there is a remnant that hears the call of God and believes.

C. This pattern of self-examination is a pattern that we are to follow.

1. So much of Jesus’ teaching calls for it in the gospels.
  - We have the parables like the parable of the sower where many profess but do not continue.
  - And here as well as in the other gospels, we have Jesus not only warning of utter ruin, just like Moses and Joshua and the prophets of old had done, but also telling them all that they will stumble.
    - If we look ahead, we see how He tells them in verse 27 that **“All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.”**
      - Not exactly what you want to hear at the Passover feast!
    - Yet, He gives them hope by telling them that He will go before them Galilee after He is raised—
      - Even though they will stumble, He will meet with them afterward.
2. This pattern of self-examination at the Lord’s Supper is taught by precept by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians.
  - We have Jesus stirring up self-examination at the supper by His bombshell declaration that one of them will betray Him and that all of them will stumble,

- but we have Paul telling us by commandment in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 that self-examination is something we ought to do when we come to the Lord's Table.
- In 1 Corinthians 10, he reminds us about how many of God's professing people who crossed the Red Sea and were baptised in Moses, who drank from the rock which was Christ and ate the manna, fell in the wilderness because of they tried to serve idols along with the Lord.
  - And then he warns us: (1 Cor 6:10-12): **Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. <sup>7</sup> And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."<sup>8</sup> Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; <sup>9</sup> nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; <sup>10</sup> nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**
  - Then, with reference to the Lord's Table, he says in verse 21: **You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.**
- And He picks it up again in 1 Cor 11:17 warning them that they are coming to the table of the Lord not for the better but for the worse.
  - He speaks of how they were treating the Lord's Supper as a common feast rather than a holy supper where they partake of Christ and declare Him as crucified.
    - Some of them were even getting drunk.
    - They were not discerning the Lord's body.
    - He tells them to do their feasting at home, but in the assembly to focus on the Lord's body as crucified that is represented by the bread and the wine.
  - In 1 Cor 11:28, he expressly calls each one to self-examination.
    - **1 Cor 11:28: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**
    - This is not an examination of the church and what the church is doing, nor is it an examination of the society in which we live...
      - but this is each one examining himself individually at the Lord's Table—this is something we are to do each time we come—it is part of coming in the right manner.
    - You are not coming to the table in the proper way unless you examine yourself.
      - Jesus established the pattern in the upper room and Paul gives us the precept that commands us to do this.

TRANS> Maintaining this practice has proved difficult for God's people through the ages. We tire of warnings and preachers tire of giving warnings.



- As one generation passes into the next, as in our day, there are even those who say that it ought not be done.
  - They refer to it as naval gazing and harmful introspection and tell us that we ought to look to Christ instead. Sounds good, but it is not good.
  - And indeed, it is hard work and it can be depressing—I am sure that Jesus’s disciples did not find it pleasant for Him to tell them that one of them would betray Him and that all of them would stumble because of Him!
    - It ruined their Passover meal.
    - They would rather that He kept things positive.
    - So we very much need to look at the purpose of self-examination.

### **III. What is the purpose of self-examination at the Lord’s Table?**

A. It is not just to make you gloomy and depressed.

1. There have been some believers who have gravitated to the attitude that holy people will always be gloomy and depressed because of their sin.
  - Yet, that is not the picture we have in the New Testament at all!
  - Rather it is a picture of saints that are suffering persecution, yet are overflowing with joy and thanksgiving from the bottom of their hearts.
  - The Bible teaches as well that when we are not in times of deprivation, we are to rejoice in the good things of this world that the Lord has given us.
    - There is nothing spiritual about being gloomy and depressed. There is rather something sinful about it. We are commanded to rejoice in the Lord.
2. Yet, there is a proper mourning that we are to have that does indeed come from self-examination.
  - Self-examination makes us aware of the sin that is in our lives, and that should make us mourn and lament.
    - To be full of sin and to have no awareness of my sin, to be frivolous about it or to deny it or to ignore it is a sign of spiritual sickness and death.
  - Self-examination will also make us aware of our weakness and our inclination to sin.
    - We will see how weak we truly are—how appealing temptation is to us, how easily we fall into self-pity, anger, pride, despair, fear, anxiety.
    - How we see ourselves as those who think we are willing to serve others, but who, when it actually comes time to do the service, make excuses to justify our refusal to help.
    - We will see our laziness, our coldness and indifference to God, our wandering minds in our worship, our refusal to bear the cross.
    - We will see how reluctant we are to face the truth about ourselves or to ever ask forgiveness of those we are wronged.
      - Obviously, such insight will not make us happy!
  - If we conduct self-examination appropriately, we will be greatly displeased with what we find in ourselves...
    - Like Paul, we will declare that in our flesh nothing good can be found and we will yearn to be delivered from this body of death.

TRANS> But proper self-examination should never end there!

B. The goal of self-examination at the Lord's Supper is make you hungry for Christ and His salvation so that you will feed on Him by faith.

1. You see Him as the one who is able to deliver you from this body of death.
  - The one who died on the cross to atone for your sin so that by faith in Him you could be completely pardoned and made acceptable to God.
  - The one who is able to transform you so that you can overcome the world because He overcame it.
  - Yes, you will see Him as the one who gives life to all who come to Him—new life—eternal life—in God's holy and perfect ways.
    - He is God's beautiful, righteous Son who has grace on His lips and who is full of love and He is able to renew you as a new creation in Him so that you put off the old man and put on the new man.
2. You come to the table to follow Him and to be fuelled by Him that you may live.
  - You come that your life will be fuelled by Him instead of by covetousness, pride, ambition, bitterness, anger, lust, self-pity, entertainment, malice, envy, disappointment, and all such.
  - True self-examination causes you to yearn for this Saviour who is offered to you at the table

C. All this shows us what is supposed to happen to us at church.

1. We are supposed to see the good way to which the Lord has called us in His holy law—the high calling we have to live according to His standard, to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.
  - We hear the word and we see that we come short of His glory.
  - We hear the word and we see that Christ is the One who has come to restore us to God.
  - We come to Him in faith and we receive grace from Him to live.
2. This coming to Him to receive grace from Him is given visible expression by ingesting the bread and the wine that represent Jesus as crucified.
  - We are commanded to eat the bread and drink the wine that represent His body sacrificed for our sin with a view to receiving new life from Him to live in God's ways.
  - We cannot come rightly without faith and understanding in which we see our need and His ability to meet our need.
  - Ingesting the bread a wine is itself only a symbol, but those who come looking to Christ will be actually and really nourished for the new life for which they hunger.
3. A great error in the modern church is to ignore self-examination.
  - Often, acceptance apart from forgiveness is emphasised—that God accepts me because there is so much good in me—a conclusion that can only be reached apart from true self-examination.

- When things are a little better, it is recognised that there is forgiveness, but sadly it often stops there.
  - These worshippers come to the table thanking the Lord for forgiveness, often focusing on their conversion,
    - but they do not come with active hunger to feed on Christ for new life even as they partake.
    - Of course we should thank Him for forgiving us, but it should not stop with that.
  - Partaking of Christ for renewal can only occur when, by self-examination, we have seen our need for His transforming grace.
    - It is then that we look to partake of Him even in the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine.
    - Self-examination makes us see our spiritual need, not to depress us, but to make us hungry for Jesus Christ who is offered to us.
      - If someone came to you promising to fix everything in your house that is broken, you would not want to hide the broken things or to deny that they were broken—you'd want to find them all!
- As we will see in future sermons, Jesus' disciples did not do very well at discovering their need of Christ when they came to the table.
  - They ended up going into that evening that saw Christ arrested and tried as those who had not come to Him hungering for grace.
  - Things would have gone much better for them if only they had.
    - And they will go much better for you if only you will.